RESEARCH ARTICLE

TIME TRAVEL AS A TOOL OF SATIRIC DYSTOPIA IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines science fiction is Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The study will mainly focus on dystopia as created by social defects depicted in the novel. It attempts to unravel the reasons behind the presence of political corrupt practices that lead the society to the verge of dystopian retardation. Therefore, one science fictional devices are going to emphasized. Time travel will be interpreted as an authorial function that exposes the political corruption and military race. Furthermore, it will be identified as the authentic embodiment of the influence of politics upon people' lives. Being so, time travel will be explored as the authorial device to traduce politicians' destructive agendas. For this reason, the study will focus on the narrative point of view as a means of conveying the author's critique of corrupt politics. In this regard, it is going to demonstrate the narrative point of view as a satiric tone revealing politics and its creation of dystopian society. As such, satire is going to accentuated as the implicit critique of politics and how it could be decreased. The narrator's voice is going to be investigated as the vehicle of satire. Dystopia, accordingly, will not be tackled as a replacement of utopia. It will be explored as a mode of reducing the social deteriorated status quo. Thus, science fiction will be applied as the comprehensive conceptual framework; and time travel will be used as a sole mode of science fiction unraveling the defects of corrupt politics. Such narrative point of views will be limited to satire.

Keywords: Dystopia, Satire, Science Fiction, Time Travel, Vonnegut

1. Introduction

Science fiction is often considered as a literary genre or speculative fiction. It tackles intricate, and possible, futuristic events, such as time travel parallel universe space invasion and the like. Such genre provides amble conceptualization of the future but in an imaginative mode. In its broader sense, science fiction deals with events that take place in extraterrestrial life (Campbell, 2018, p.20). However, the critical insights of science fiction depend, to a great extent, on the scientific discoveries and experiments which inspired science fictional writers. Being so, science fiction, as a literary genre, takes its most complex subjects form the pre-existing scientific constants. Imagination, therefore, is the most conspicuous token of science fiction. Yet, imagination comes after some scientific innovations that serve as foundation premise for fertile literary science fictional imagination (Jones, 2018, p.62).

In *Design and Debris*, Joseph Conte (2002) argues that science fiction, especially when treated from literary perspectives, relates to some postmodern notions. Notwithstanding, Conte (2002) limits these notions to the themes of order and disorder. As such, science becomes a typical paradigm between the representation of order and disorder (p.7). In essence, Conte (2002) approaches the philosophical implication of science fiction as a genre. But he (2002) is deeply concerned with the ability of science fiction to provide proper solutions to the complex relations between order and disorder in postmodern era. The complexity of science fiction emanates from the fact that postmodernism abounds with scientific discoveries, like relativism, the fragmentation of reality and indeterminacy (p.7).

Science fiction is diverse. It deals with various subjects and themes. This is due to the fact that it exposes the development of science and its influence on the human imagination (Abu Jweid and Termizi, 2015a, p.132). Such imagination extends out the limits of the planet Earth. It travels out to the extra limitation of the human existence even in the whole galaxies. Yet, it has another significant indication. It tries to convey the authorial concern with the probability of the human potential. That is, how human beings could pursue scientific discoveries to the extreme limits of their imagination. Moreover, it might relate to politics of human ideal life. Consequently, they could exalt their national identity (Abu Jweid, 2016, p.45).

The ideal, or perfect life, refers to the ultimate form of life needed by humanity. Tony Burns (2010), in *Political Theory, Science Fiction, and Utopian Literature*, claims that the ideal life exemplifies "utopia" in science fiction. In this sense, science fictional literary work, says Burns (2010), critique the utopian societies by depicting dystopian social milieus within their fictional peripheries (pp.22-23). Dystopia is, thereupon, encompasses the negative features of the society. Being so, science fiction approaches dystopia as the trivial products of any society. It does not restore the whole society. Neither does it attempt to replace dystopia with utopia. Instead, it offers practical solutions to the problems in order to mitigate the social deterioration (Abu Jweid *et al*., 2015b, p.17).

Science fiction, therefore, is a genre dealing with intricate issues including the politics and dystopian subjects. Critics emphasize satire as mode of science fiction. Satire functions as a way of conveying the author's implied objection of a political fact. Accordingly, authors use satiric tones to unravel the defects of a certain political parties. As such, science fiction comprises several devices which render a literary work specific science fiction peculiarity. Time travel is an obtrusive example of the most conspicuous science fictional devices. Time travel is used by the author to express his or her views concerning a specific problem. The aim of this study is, therefore, to examine Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a dystopian novel. It will analyze its satiric tones that employ time travel as a fictional amendment of dystopia problems.

2. Literature Review

In "Postmodern Narrative in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*," Abdalhadi Abu Jweid *et al*. (2015) argue that Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* critiques modernism's literary modes (p.72). They contend that the novel is written in a postmodern experimental style that is completely different from the modern literary forms. Being so, the novel is a "critique" of modern literary modes" that imitate and simulate previous literary fashions (p.72). Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with the notion of reality and its argumentation within postmodern context. This reality is "relative"; i.e., it is perceived differently by people in postmodernism. For this reason, Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) discuss one aspect of postmodern literary styles, namely, literary experimentation (p.72). Such experimentation lies at the heart of the novel's literary components. Yet, Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) only choose narrator setting, and characters for the analysis (p.72).

These fictional components, according to Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015), are innovative. That is Vonnegut utilizes and experimental writing style in order to "critique" the issue of literary "exhaustion" dominating the fictional atmosphere of modernism's novel's writing (p.72). The reason of this experimentation is to provide a literary "remedy" for such exhaustion that is prevalent in modern novel fictional manners (p.72). In essence, Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) refer to this "remedy" as literary "replenishment" to the sense of modernism's literary exhaustion (p.72). Just so, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a postmodern literary "replenishment" of modernism literary "exhaustion." This replenishment is carried out through fictional experimentation with the

narrator, setting and characters (p.72). As such, Abu Jweid *et al*. (2015) maintain that postmodern experimentation is used interchangeably with postmodern literary replenishment.

Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) further contend that the author's implied presence in the novel is the core of literary experimentation (p.72). The author (Vonnegut) enters his fictional world through metafiction. At this point, the author's "metafictional intrusion" into his narrative action is the authentic exemplification of postmodern experimentation (p.72). To analyze this authorial intrusion into the text, Jweid*et al*. (2015) use a narrative theory. They (2015) analyze the narrator, setting and characters by using Patricia Waugh's notions of metafiction, Gérard Genette's modes of the fictional narrator and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of fictional discourse. Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) use this narrative theory in order to "examine" Vonnegut's technical experimentation with thenarrator, setting and characters. They are manipulated by Vonnegut for the sake of uttering his voice through *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut's implied voice, say Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015), portrays the real "suffering" of American people in the ensuing era of the World War II (p.72).

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the fictional "dialogues" are the implicit voice of the author (Vonnegut) who attempts to use the narrator's perspective. The narrator's perception and telling of the events is conducted through narrative "focalization" (Abu Jweid*et al*., 2015, p.72). The picture of the author (Vonnegut) in the novel is discussed through the charters position in the novel. In this manner, the author utters his voice through the contextual implication of the plot. Vonnegut does not appear in the direct characterization of his personal attitudes. He enters into his narrative world via the characters. Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) scrutinize the authorial position in the plot by tackling the implicit authorial presence.

The authorial presence is conducted through authorial self-reflexivity (Abu Jweid*et al*., 2015, p.73). Vonnegut writes in a postmodern experimental technique by utilizing fictional "parody" as "defamiliarization" of modernism literary modes (p.73). Being so, defamiliarization is the appropriate literary vehicle to write experimental works as innovative "transformation" of modern literary modes (p.73). To explain, the defamiliarization is the departure point between modern and postmodern fiction. In modernism, authors relied on the previous literary modes. They followed the same literary techniques in the previous eras. But, in postmodernism, authors; like Vonnegut tried to write in an experimental technique to avoid repeating the same literary modes. Therefore, the modern literary exhaustion might be avoided by resorting to creative literary experimentation (p.73).

The author's disposition is conveyed in terms of the implicit appears in the narrative's action (Abu Jweid and GhadaSasa, 2020, 338). Vonnegut's indirect character intersects the narrative world in the form of parody (p.73). This parody is the essential incarnation of authorial "self-reflexivity" (Abu Jweid *et al*., 2015, p.73). In other words, the authorial self-reflexivity gives the reader an all-encompassing impression of the authors' voice in the text. The reader feels that he/she is engaged with the text that is invaded by the author. In like fashion, the present could provide his ideas to the reader. This authorial self-reflexivity is the metafictional (p.73).

The metafictional token of the author's presence in the text provides the reader with the fictional clues that are directed towards the world outside the text. Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) claim that these clues are the "critique" of reality (p.73). As a postmodern novelist, Vonnegut uses the authorial self-reflexivity in the novel (p.73). Moreover, the author "self-consciously" appears in the narrative events to comment on the modern exhausted literary modes (p.73). This authorial intrusion lies at the essence of Vonnegut's literary experimentation (p.73).

Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015), furthermore, apply the concept of the focalization factor (p.75). In fact, the focalization factor is the narrative point of view. The narrator tells the event from a focalized perspective that recounts the events for the reading audience. The focalization factor is "the point of view" from the reader can trace the development of the actions (p.75). The focalization factor is the author's means of his comments on his work. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut endorses his narrative actions with narrative focalization. The function of this focalization is to impart his comments on modern used-up literary modes (p.75). These comments are proclaimed by his authorial self-reflexivity. Being so, Vonnegut manipulates the position of the

narrator in the text. He places the narrator (Billy Pilgrim) in his authorial stance. Such stance is the "ventriloquism effect" i.e., the implied latent authorial tone in the plot (p.75).

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the narrator tells the events that happened in Dresden during the World War II. These events really occurred. Abu Jweid*et al*. (2015) approach these events are the thematic side of the study. However, the main focus is on the technical sides of the novel that holds an experimental focalization. The experimental focalization is divided into the "internal" and the "external" focalization (p.75). The external focalization comprises the plot's events that are told from the narrator's point of view. This includes the events and experiences underwent by the narrator that happened during the war. Here, we have a panoramic view of the events as being recounted by the narrator. The internal focalization, on the other hand, includes the novel's setting where the war events took place (p.75). The description of the time and place of the plot's events are underscored in the light of internal focalization (p.75).

The narrative discourse in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is also tackled in Abu Jweid *et al*.'s (2015) study. The author, Vonnegut, is symbolically introduced into the narrative fabric. Vonnegut utilizes the metafictional self-reflexivity as a fictional allusion to his voice in the novel (p.76). Vonnegut's voice and vision are directed towards the reality of the war. Both the characters and the setting are the authentic "manifestation" of the Vonnegut's implied fictional discourse. Vonnegut had personally endured hardships during the war. Yet, he resents telling these hardships outright, he, rather, utters his voice through the characters dialogues. The novel's setting, therefore, serves as the field of war events in which Vonnegut was participating in military missions in Dresden (p.76).

Abu Jweid *et al*. (2015) handle the author's discourse - or implied voice - by applying Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic voice. In discourse studies, the dialogic voice is synonymously described as the polyphonic voice (p.76). The fictional discourse is inherently divided into the monologic and the polyphonic voices. The monologic voice is the author's abstract ideology. This ideology is made tangible by the polyphonic voice. This is the fictional category of "double-voiced discourse"; whereby the author articulates his/her monologic voice by the means of polyphonic voice. Vonnegut, similarly, employs the novel's dialogic voice to recounts the plot's "textual scenario" (p.76). Vonnegut' abstract ideology is, accordingly, the experimental "postmodern fiction" (p.77).

3. Analysis and Discussion

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* hinges on the atrocities of War World II. The protagonist is Billy Pilgrim. He undergoes harsh experiences during the war. He works as an American soldier. The novel' typical setting is Dresden; a German state firebombed by the Allies forces. Billy is taken as imprisoned. He survives the accident. The Allies' attack upon Dresden resembles an event that occurred during the life of Vonnegut when he participated in the war in Europe. On that account, the novel is sometimes considered as an autobiography recounting the author's tragic life. This is because the novel includes some metafictional elements which make it self-reflexive i.e., it tells the author's life in a quasi-real milieu. The novel deals with many complexes in the life of the protagonist. At the end of the novel, he dies in a bizarre situation when he, during delivering a speech, predicts his death.

As I have argued in the previous section, Vonnegut writes in the mode of postmodern science fiction. His novels represent the first phases of science fiction. He approaches the science fictional qualities in his novels intentionally. Again, in the previous section, it has been stated that postmodern fiction does not predict future scientific inventions of discoveries. This is because there have been already scientific discoveries in modernism. Being that so, modernism treats science fiction in terms of entertainment (Abu Jweid and Termizi, 2014, p.185). Nevertheless, postmodernism offers functions to be taken into consideration in literary works. These functions might be modified in the form of literary amendment in fictional works (Toner, 2011, p.52). Vonnegut, in this sense has a profound literary function in his novel. He tries to amend the mistake done by corrupt politics during World War II. He also uses science fiction as a function of exposing the atrocities of war at occurrence. He writes in several scientific modes. This section, however, will focus on three examples of his

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utilization of science fiction modes. They are mainly time travel, space invasion and technological advancement.

Time travel is traced in several novels by Vonnegut. There is an obvious and direct allusion to scientific elements in his novels. The scientific features in his novels are inspired by his comprehensive knowledge of scientific discoveries in at his time. Time is argued intensively in the contemporary physics (Pesic, 2003, p.126). Vonnegut was aware of the scientific appropriation of time within astrophysics in the first part of the twentieth century. Time has been tackled in the field of relativity (p.126). Albert Einstein' physical argumentations about time and its relativity in the universe resulted in groundbreaking and unprecedented visualization of the universe. But the physical treatise is what concerns this research. Time, in the light of astrophysics, could transform in different dimensions (p.127). Accordingly, time could affect the physical entities. One of the authentic ideas about time is the issue of time travel (Abu Jweid and Kaur, 2018, p.5).

Time travel could transport people or places form one place to another. More surprisingly, time could transport people or place from one time era to another one (Jenkins, 2007, p.211). In the light of this argumentation, person who lives in the twenty first century might be transport to live in the twenty second century. This is incredible imagination of time. People who believe in this time visualization could rarely persuade the public of their opinions (p.211). Vonnegut was one of those people who intimately believed in such physical theories. He already knows about science and its miracles (p.212). Therefore, he projects some of these ideas in his novels. He could formulate initial and primary notions about time travel and its ability to transport people from one time or place to another tome or place (p.213). This physical correspondence is called displacement i.e., to talk about things or persons who are displaced far away in time and place. Vonnegut was indulged in this deep conceptualization of time travel. He provides scientific insights about this conceptualization in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

In this novel, Vonnegut's narrator tells the story of Billy Pilgrim. This protagonist is a subject of time travel. He lives in Germany during World War II. He meets harsh and destructive events during the war. He was a participant in the American fronts in Germany. He is imprisoned by the Nazi forces. Later on, he is set free. When the war ended, he returned back to America. Upon his settlement in his homeland, he meets new people. He also meets the writer Kilgore Trout. At the end of the novel, he loses his wife and spends some of his time alone in his house. At this stage, time travel comes into the scene. He time travel to Germany where he participated and served during the war. Vonnegut gives us a live picture and narrative of how Billy Pilgrim could travels back to you when he was fighting in the world. The first impression of this time travel could not be imagined, but are caught and bewilderment and amusement when we recognize the function of this science fictional toke. This function of this science fictional event, as will be argued later in the research's seventh chapter, is to critique the bloody destruction of War World War II and it negative impact upon hum psyche.

These changing ideas about reality have been played out in postmodern literature, and they reflect shifting narrative concerns towards experimental fictional genres. However, in modernism, traditional literary techniques and styles were characteristic of reality in fictional texts. However, postmodernism celebrates literary departure towards technical experimentation. Stuart Sim (2012), in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, discusses the experimental strategies utilized by postmodern authors to break away with the conventional construction of literary texts (p.127). Thus, modern literary modes are challenged in postmodern fiction. This postmodern fictional experimentation results in avant-garde genres, such as postmodern science fiction. The disappearance of literary realism perpetuates the artistic quality of experimental narrative in postmodern fiction (p.127). This experimentation is touted as the postmodern avant-garde. The author can enter the narrative world of his/her story through postmodern narrative experimentation. Vonnegut, in like manner, enters his narrative lines through science fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he implicitly portrays his real story through the character of Billy Pilgrim who time travels to Dresden, Germany. In fact, the story holds some real life events because Vonnegut underwent that experience; and he fictionalizes it in the novel in a science fictional mode.

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Furthermore, Julian Wolfrey*set al.* (2016), in *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*, approach the stylistic nature of discourse. Dialogism involves the authorial voice in the text. This voice could be indirectly expressed by the author's narrative insights in the text. On the other hand, it can be directly expressed in the fictional works through the characters' discourse. Here, the core implementation of the authoritative fictional voice is uttered by the fictional characters who actually execute the dialogic discourse. By the same token, Vonnegut's authorial voice is uttered by his fictional characters. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, recalls his tragic experience in war: "all this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true" (p.1). In essence, it is Vonnegut who implicitly recalls this experience through Billy's discourse.

Another characteristic of postmodern reality is the discourse by which the author's revelation of his/her "identity" as the creator of the work. In the course of events, the author appears on the narrative level. The author appearance is manifested in the discourse initiated by the fictional characters he/she creates. In addition, he/she uses his own works implicitly through the characters' discourse and interlocutions. In this way, the discourse reveals the authorial identity as the writer of the story. Another remark on the narrative feature of discourse is the author as a mediator between fiction and reality. The author's role in postmodern works is vital because it imitates the "figurative" aspects of the story which is conveyed to the reader by the work's "spatial" or "temporal" forms (Waugh, 1984, p.44). In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, furthermore, Vonnegut exposes himself as the creator of his novel. He appears as the novelist Kilgore Trout in the course of the plot: "Billy was certain that he had made a mistake. 'There's a writer named Kilgore Trout" (p.77).

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it is directly noticed that war is destructive component upon the psychology of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim (Bloom, 2009, p.2). This protagonist embodies Vonnegut's own experiences in war. The protagonist is hardly hurt in the military confrontation during the war. Accordingly, the author's personality is projected in the narrative text; whereby Vonnegut offers us with a panoramic vision of war when it was spreading throughout Europe and the rest of the world (p.2). Here, Vonnegut writes in a self-conscious literary manner that corresponds to the readers' perception of war. The reading audience can have meticulous impression about the war and the political agendas at that time (p.2).

Billy Pilgrim, at this point, incarnates the archetypal model of military confrontations and the combatants in the war's battles. Through Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut puts forth the malignant effect of ruthless politics at hand. We could feel and interact with war events and deduce it's the implied essence of its harshness within literary context (Bloom, 2009, p.2). In essence, Vonnegut was caught by the Germans in the Battle of Bulge in which he was a participant. He was taken to imprisonment soon afterwards. The German city, Dresden, was his imprisonment place. As the way outburst in different German regions, it had reached Dresden. It was firebombed in one of the most strident attacks (p.1). The deadly attack devastated the lives of many German civilians and soldiers. However, Vonnegut had survived that military accident. Hence, it had been the foregrounding bleak memorial for the rest of his life. It had been authentically the source of his psychic melancholy (p.3).

War aftermath had been intensively scrutinized because it is of paramount importance for understanding the biographical life projected in Vonnegut's fiction (Tomedi, 2004, p.58). He depicted the fatal accidents in the war and how it mitigated people's hope of salvation form war destruction. He intersects with his narrative plots to tell us about the children's cries and mothers' mourning upon losing their most beloved families. Being so, his fiction carries out the real life of those people who did not find peace available on their homeland demarcations. The majority of his works holds a bleak and grim portrayal of nations being demolished by bloodshed hostility and bitter enemies combating against each other (p.71).

Time travel carries out the sense of satire. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, corrupt politics is highly critiqued. The narrator describes his bitter experience at the hands of corrupt German and American politicians: "It was a report on the behavior in Germany of American enlisted men as prisoners of war. It was written by a former American who had risen high in the German Ministry of Propaganda" (p.57). Vonnegut implicitly exposes the apathetic American politicians during the war: "The guards told the Americans to form in ranks of four, which they did. Then they had them march back to the hog barn which had, been their home" (p.80). Hence,

Vonnegut provides us with a vivid picture of war influenced the lives of people, especially soldiers, who were the casualties of war. Through his narrator, he precisely recounts a story that truly happened. This story includes some of his personal experiences. In other words, he wants to put an end to the war that destructed the lives of many; or as the narrator says: "The idea was to hasten the end of the war" (p.80). Thus, the novel unravels the barbarity of military arsenal: "And every day my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam" (p.93).

4. Conclusion

This paper has studied science fiction in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It has focused on the satiric representations of science fiction in order to discuss the issue corrupt politics depicted in the novel. The study has focused on one science fictional device i.e. time travel. This device has been interpreted to reveal Vonnegut's critique of corrupt politics and how it affects the lives of people. The novel deals with intricate political problems, such as military arsenal and war which devasted the lives of many people. The discussion of war and military arsenals has concentrated on the influence of war upon people's peaceful life. Furthermore, the utilization of science fiction for the interpretation has been chosen as an appropriate conceptual framework for the analysis. In the course of the analysis, the device of time travel has been elaborated for the sake of accentuating the authorial deliberate utilization of science fiction to muckrake political corruption in the plot.

The study has also accentuated time travel as a function used to the author to unravel the atrocities of war and military arsenal. For this reason, the narrative point of view has been analyzed to specify the function of time travel. That is, time travel depicted in the novel simulates the real arm race that resulted in the appearance of corrupt political regimes and destructive military arsenals. In so doing, the study has demonstrated the symbolic function of time travel through analyzing the narrative point of view. Moreover, the discussion of time travel has been sustained by the dissuasion of satire. The analysis of satiric situation has been vital to reinforce the study's argument. In other words, the study has discovered the author's implied vision of corrupt politics and destructive military arsenal. In the long run, the study has identified science fiction as a way of critiquing politics via satiric narrative as well as the device of time travel.

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