

# Literary analysis of slaughterhouse-five by kurt vonnegut

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut explains his own encounters as prisoner of war from the Germans. The novel illustrates Vonnegut's efforts to adjust with his individual war encounters. For instance, like Vonnegut, the protagonist Billy Pilgrim, is taken hostage by the Germans and shipped to Dresden, where he witnesses the demolition of the city by the American firebombers.

*Slaughterhouse-Five*, is written mainly from the point of view of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim, and is introduced through the omniscient narration of the author. The novel's structure is nonlinear and is frequently exchanges between different time periods. Although the author attempted a linear narrative, Vonnegut believed the only sufficient way to narrate the story was to shift around through different time periods. In the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* the author, Kurt Vonnegut, touches on many themes, such as the destruction of war, the unhappiness of alienation, and the question of free will, within the novel's unique structure.

Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, deals with numerous different messages, but most of all, it's a novel about the catastrophe of war. The author believes that war is not a mission for glory, but is a disaster, and anyone who seeks glory in war is a fool. Despite the fact that World War II is considered by most as a justified conflict that defeated Nazi Germany, Vonnegut views the hardships from victims on all sides. For example, the author describes an "American soldier executed by the Germans for looting to the 135, 000 German civilians killed in the Dresden firebombing". This conveys how the writer isn't biased, and realizes how war has an effect on

everyone involved. The terrors of war are so dramatic and traumatizing that “Vonnegut doubts his ability to write about them”. Within the first chapter of the novel, Vonnegut mentions that Slaughterhouse-Five is “so short and jumbled and jangled, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre”. The only answer to the destruction of war, is a deep isolation and withdraw from others. Alienation may be interpreted as, being incapable of socializing with other individuals and with society. In that case, Billy is an extremely isolated individual. Billy Pilgrim is unable to bond with other individuals, because Billy is living from one minute of his life to another. Instead of living life day to day. This prevents Billy from constructing the constant set of exposure with others, which would have aided him into forming relationships with other individuals. The protagonist is a very alienated individual because of the horrific experiences during his imprisonment by the Germans. Although the protagonist position is accurate in a way of being a fictional time machine, however, Billy is legitimately passing through different time periods. This is also an example of a metaphor in that being isolated and alienated comes from the effects of war. The catastrophe of war is a major key source on why Billy Pilgrim is so isolated from society.

Possibly the closest friendship the protagonist has in Slaughterhouse-Five is with Kilgore Trout. Mr. Trout is an isolated individual as well, and wrote novels about people experiencing time travel. Which led Billy to relate his problems with him. Kurt Vonnegut introduces the idea of free will through the Tralfamadorians. One of the main important messages of

Slaughterhouse-Five is the mention of free will. This idea is expressed from the traditions of the Tralfamadorians, for them “time is not a linear progression of events, but a constant condition”. The Tralfamadorians have a feeling that all periods of time have already happened. The author describes that “All beings exist in each moment of time like bugs in amber” a statement that not a thing can change. The Tralfamadorians can exchange from different time periods, like the protagonist. The Tralfamadorians don’t believe death is very meaning or impactful. They believe that when someone dies, they’re alive in the past since they can travel back in time. The Tralfamadorians answer to someone’s passing is “so it goes” which is “a phrase Vonnegut writes at every point in the novel where death is mentioned”. The aliens recommend that the protagonist should “concentrate on the happy moments of life, and to ignore the unhappy ones”. The Tralfamadorians advise Billy this because they believe that you cannot change the time. That Billy should accept his fate, and that he is defenseless to change it.

One of the most distinguished concepts about Slaughterhouse-Five is its unusual structure. Slaughterhouse-Five’s main character, Billy Pilgrim, has experienced a major airplane accident, and is “unstuck in time”. At any moment during his life, Billy travels through different time periods of his life. That Slaughterhouse-Five, is a “masterpiece of storytelling technique, a blend of first person and limited-omniscient narratives in which the author easily manipulates four levels of time and full of characters at once”. Vonnegut, as both the storyteller, and author is able to describe his own

opinions and reflections through the structure of the novel. He writes about his own experiences when “ he relates the saga of an American soldier captured during the Battle of the Bulge, and the imprisoned by the Germans in Dresden”. The unusual structure is represented through the protagonist alienating himself from society. Billy Pilgrim’s experiences of war are mostly told in a chronological order. However these experiences are constantly being broken by the protagonist traveling to different moment of his life. In this case, the structure features the similarity of Billy Pilgrim’s prisoner experiences to his life, and the deep isolation the protagonist feels after Dresden.

Slaughterhouse-Five relates to many different themes. With the destruction of war, Vonnegut experiences a massacre. The author has witnessed the death of many innocent people. Kurt Vonnegut doesn’t just feel for one side of the war, but for everyone because he realizes that war is a disaster for everyone involved. He believes that war isn’t a mission for fame, but is a disaster for everyone. The author experiences the same exact things Billy Pilgrim had. Kurt Vonnegut was “ captured by the Germans in the Battle of Bulge” just like the protagonist did. Kurt Vonnegut describes how Slaughterhouse-Five, is his anti-war novel. To convey that war has a major effect on people. Which would cause people isolate themselves from society. Which is another main message in the novel. The protagonist is a very alienated individual because of the horrific experiences during his imprisonment by the Germans. Which causes Billy Pilgrim to travel to different moments of his life. Traveling in time damages his ability to build

relationships with other individuals. The protagonist travels in time to prevent him from remembering the destruction of Dresden. The Tralfamadorians believe that time cannot be changed. The aliens try to persuade Billy to only focus on the good times because there is nothing to do about the bad ones. Kurt Vonnegut describes how there is no such thing as free will. That all periods of time have already happened, and that your fate is destined. All of these messages are all tied into the novel's unique structure. The experiences of the war are told in a chronological order, however, these experiences are constantly being interrupted by Billy traveling through different parts of his life. The first chapter of the novel is told by the author. He expresses how he came up with the idea of writing this anti-war novel. Although the rest of the novel is told by Billy Pilgrim. Through this, Vonnegut writes his own opinions and ideas through the structure of the novel. Traveling through different moments in the structure has caused Billy to not have built relationships with others. This has caused him to feel isolated and neglected from society.

The novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, covers many different themes. However, the main ones are the catastrophe of war, the sadness of being isolated, and realization of no free will, which all ties into the novel's unique structure.