

Slaughterhouse five

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Research Paper on Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five" by Stephanie Gill

Outline I. Introduction and Name a) "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade (1969)" b) Most famous work about the bombing of Dresden c) "Vonnegut's telegraphic, schizophrenic" style II. Background a) Vonnegut joined the Army b) Vonnegut's capture c) Vonnegut's experiences in Dresden III. Plot Summary a) Idea of the book b) Dedication of the book c) Billy Pilgrim as main character IV. Analysis a) Glorification and romanticization b) Largely autobiographical c) Composition d) Views V. Adaptation a) Turning novel into a film b) Theatrical adaptation c) Operatic adaptation VI. Conclusion a) Public and social significance b) Literary value c) Short summary of novel d) Young American lives "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade" (1969) is one of Kurt Vonnegut's most famous autobiographical works about the bombing of Dresden during World War II. Kurt Vonnegut was an American writer, satirist and painter who was honored to be called "a writer of New York" in 2001-2003. The novel is written in the so-called "Vonnegut's" "telegraphic, schizophrenic" style. It combines a strong narrative plot and philosophy, science fiction and the grotesque, burlesque and lampoon. After the bombing of the port Pearl Harbor, Kurt Vonnegut, voluntarily joined the U. S. armed forces and participated in World War II. In 1944 he was captured during the Ardennes counter-offensive operation of the German troops and was sent to Dresden, where he and other prisoners worked at a factory that produced malt syrup with vitamins for pregnant women. And it was Dresden, where Vonnegut was destined to obtain his most terrible war experience. On the 13th and 14th of February 1945, he witnessed the firebombing of Dresden by aircraft of allied troops. Kurt Vonnegut was among seven

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American POWs who survived that day in Dresden. Prisoners were locked for the night in a Broken City slaughterhouse number 5, and during the bombing were taken away to the basement, which contained meat carcasses. There were almost no real shelters in the city, because Dresden was not strategically an important goal. Narrowly escaping from being killed by their own aircraft, Vonnegut had fully known the horror of war, when together with other prisoners, had to dismantle the ruins and pulled out a thousand corpses from under the debris. Vonnegut was freed by the Red Army in May 1945. According to the writer, the bombing of Dresden was not caused by military necessity. Most of those killed in that operation were civilians; residential areas and monuments were destroyed. Vonnegut, being against fascism, does not recognize that the destruction of Dresden was a “punishment” for the crimes of the Nazis. The novel was censored in the U. S.; it was listed as a “harmful” book and taken out of libraries. Slaughterhouse is a “powerful and popular work that is sure to attract many listeners” (Rasmussen 2004). At the beginning of the novel there is described the idea of the book is about the bombing of Dresden. The author complains that he cannot think of the right words for this book, which he thought to be his main work. To make the plan of his future book, he met with his brother-soldier Bernard O’Hare. O’Hare’s wife Mary was very angry after learning about the idea of the book about the war, because all those books contained an element of glorification of war - a cynical lie, supporting new wars. The conversation of Vonnegut and Mary is a key episode in the beginning of the novel; he explains why the book about Dresden came out such a strange, short, and confused work, that does not prevent it from being anti-war. Also

from this dialogue, it becomes clear where the second title of the novel came from. As a result, the novel was dedicated to Mary O'Hare (and the Dresden taxi driver Gerhard Mueller) and written in the "telegraphic schizophrenic-style", as Vonnegut expressed himself. The book includes the close interrogation of realism, grotesque, fantastic elements of insanity, cruel satire and irony. As David Peck writes, "at the center of this blackly humorous work of science fiction about time travel and interplanetary travel is a deadly serious novel about the wastes of war" (Peck 2003). The main character is an American soldier Billy Pilgrim, an odd, shy, disoriented, fatalistic, ill-trained and apathetic person. By the way, the protagonist of Slaughterhouse-Five is named Billy Pilgrim for a purpose. As a contemporary mutation of the "Puritan saints of early New England, he is a representative of their particular capitalist legacy, while his story takes the forms of both English and New England Puritan captivity and conversion narratives" (Hinchcliffe 2001). The book describes the adventures of Billy at war and the bombing of Dresden, which has left an indelible imprint on the mental state of Pilgrim. Vonnegut introduced a fantastic element into the novel: the life events of the protagonist are considered through the prism of post-traumatic stress disorder - a syndrome peculiar to war veterans, who mutilated the perception of a hero. As a result, comic "story about the aliens" grows into a coherent philosophical system. Aliens from the planet Tralfamador take Billy Pilgrim to their planet and tell him that the time does not really "flow", there is no casual gradual transition from one event to another - a world and time are given once and forever and it is to know everything that happened and will happen. On someone else's death, tralfalmadors just say: "Such cases".

It is impossible to say why or why something happened - this was " the structure of the moment. " So artistic way explains the composition of the novel — it is not the story of successive events, going in order, but a set of Pilgrim's life episodes happening without any order. He learned from the aliens how to travel forward and backward in time, and each episode is such a journey. Here are some of the moments in which Pilgrim was sent with the stream of time: - Childhood psychological trauma (fear from the Grand Canyon, the first bad experience of swimming). - Long trip on winter forest with several other soldiers. Fighting off competition from the squad, they are forced to wander in unfamiliar places. It is an autobiographical moment. - Captivity and the events in the British POW camp. - The work in Dresden, a settlement on Slaughterhouse 5, and the bombing that destroyed the city in one night. Fine artistic progress - further developments, such as meeting with aliens, can be explained from the standpoint that Billy just went crazy - the numerous emotional upsets, the largest of which is the moment of the bombing, which had accumulated in the hero in the end, after many years have resulted a lowering of consciousness (Reed 1996). - Events after the war - a quiet measured life with the ugly but kind and sympathetic wife. Wealth that Pilgrim didn't want came to him from the sphere of ophthalmic medicine. -A meeting with aliens - flight to Traftamador and exhibiting of Billy Pilgrim as a resident of the zoo for the amusement of the aliens. There he was paired with former film star Montana Uayldbek. - Mental hospital. There Billy became acquainted with Eliot Rosewater and Kilgore Trout books. - Death of Pilgrim from sniper's bullet after a Pilgrim's seminar, where he spreads the ideas, learned from tralfamadors. As a traveler in time, Billy

many times saw his own death, and predicted it in every detail. So, the protagonist of Kurt Vonnegut's book "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade" is an American soldier Billy Pilgrim, a survivor of the bombing of Dresden and who turned out to be an unwitting traveler in the time of his own life. His long post-war fate was divided into endless trips in time; in a result a picture of his life, the meaning of death and awareness of the person's fate and humanity were seen by him in unusual form. Living his dashed destiny, he understands why God is silent, looking at the greatest atrocities of some people and tortures of others, why he is silent and does not interfere, and what is the meaning of this silence (Mustazza 1994). In addition to Billy Pilgrim in the novel, there are a number of specific characters and elements that together make up the universe or mythology of Vonnegut. It is a science-fiction writer Kilgore Trout, in which the author portrays himself using ironic tone; Eliot Rosewater - a millionaire, with a hypertrophied conscience; Tralfamadors - creatures that live in four dimensions. Separate books are devoted to these creatures, but somehow the mention of them is present in most novels of Vonnegut. Written in 1969, the novel of Kurt Vonnegut "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade" was supposed to be the principal book of the author. But it did not happen - there are a lot of Vonnegut's more powerful works, but it is "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade" that will forever remain the book of great importance. In the process of its creation, he was filled with so much feeling and emotion that he simply couldn't bring all of them to the reader. But even the facts that were included in the novel deserve close interest, at least because "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade"

is the book based on Vonnegut's own biography. The author participated in World War II, joining the ranks of the military after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. One of the highlights of his career in the army was the bombing of Dresden by American troops. Almost dying from the hands of his own liberators, Vonnegut devoted "Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade" to the raid on that town. The idea of the novel was hatched and could not take shape for several years. This happened only after a conversation with his brother-soldier's wife, who insisted that even the anti-militarist literature provokes mankind to the new war, massacre of young men. In "Slaughterhouse Five" there is no hint of glorification and romanticization of the soldier image - instead, the reader sees tired people, crippled mentally and physically to the limit, who really do not understand, what for is a battle. Even the most courageous, brave soldiers Vonnegut shows as reckless madmen whose determination raised a grotesque degree. Nothing, except the curve grins, such characters do not cause. By the way, it was accounted that the "oblique manner of Vonnegut's retelling has also confused leaders in identifying the authorial persona in the book" (O'Sullivan 1976). The plot, as it was mentioned above, is largely autobiographical. Through the eyes of his hero, Vonnegut once again looks at the events that happened to him during World War II. This hero is an emotionally unstable American soldier, whose psyche completely undermines the very bombing of Dresden. Subsequently, he finds himself in a psychiatric hospital. The composition of the "Slaughterhouse Five" deserves special attention. Vonnegut does not give the reader a story that would have developed more or less consistently. Instead, he offers a new concept of time flow. According

to the story, the hero turns out to be in contact with the aliens who explain to him that the linear flow of time does not exist. There is only this moment, which is static and does not flow into the next. Respectively, moving in time is not an attempt to swim faster in the river stream or turn toward it, but just jumping from one moment to another. That is how the main character travels, and these movements invite the reader to follow. Thus, the novel is a collection of time slices, which, moreover, are in random order. However, this only exacerbates the perception of the book, which, *inter alia* sustained in the "original" style of Kurt Vonnegut - impeccable style, a bit of irony and good humor. The novel has some anti-militarist views, the author shows the weakness of man in front of the infinite and the heartless world of evil and violence, suffering and senseless victims (an idea of the absence of any free will once and forever). It is worth mentioning that the novel is written with the use of an "aesthetic and moral system" (Merrill 1990). Stereotypes of "real men", "tough guys", and "heroes," usually found in books about the war, in Vonnegut's absurdly are perverted and are represented in parody images of captured British and Roland Weary, causing a crooked smile. There is no division into "our army" and "enemies" - the Germans are shown as ordinary people, incredibly tired of the war, the same as Americans. Although the bombing of Dresden in the novel is not shown, the author says that the whole book is about it. Even the consequences of the bombing are described very blurry. The impression is that Vonnegut pulls a conversation about it, and is drowning in his preface episodes. In fact, he just has nothing to say. War in general and the bombing of Dresden in particular are seen by the author as a monstrous absurdity that cannot even be

adequately described. Vonnegut is unable to comprehend the disease of mankind, leading to wars, and his book solidifies on the stage of design. The bombing of Dresden is shown in the novel as it was - a black hole, emptiness. Dressed in a word, emptiness would lose its status (Bloom 2001). In 1972, the American director George Roy Hill directed the movie "Slaughterhouse Five," which was an exact adaptation of the novel. The film changed some events from the novel, and not all characters of the novel are included in the film. So, the film doesn't include Kilgore Trout, the science fiction writer who appears in three Vonnegut novels (Nelson 1973). After all, the film won the Prix du Jury at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival, as well as a Hugo Award, and a Saturn Award. In an interview to the magazine Film Comment in 1985, Kurt Vonnegut said: "I am very grateful to George Roy Hill and company Universal Pictures, which created a flawless adaptation of my novel "Slaughterhouse Five". Every time I watch this film, I drool and giggle with joy because it is unusually harmonious with the feelings that I experienced when I wrote this novel." For the most part, the script by Steven Heller almost completely corresponds to the source, and the thematic focus of the film adaptation is close to perfection, despite some omissions and discrepancies with the book. In 1996, a theatrical adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's novel was premiered at the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, IL. It was written and directed by Eric Simonson. The play has been performed in several other theaters including a January 2008 New York premiere production at the Godlight Theatre Company. The operatic adaptation made by Hans-Jürgen von Bose, and premiered in July 1996 at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. The book "Slaughterhouse-Five or The

"Children's Crusade" is the best novel of a remarkable American writer named Kurt Vonnegut. Moreover, it is not about artistic merits of the works, and its public and social significance for American society and the role of the text in the creative destiny of the author. As to its literary value, so it is rather an unusual story, and there is no doubt it deserves attention of all who are interested in science fiction, postmodernism and literature about war. Such a wonderful combination of styles is reflected in the "telegraph-schizophrenic" manner of presentation, allowing the author to distance himself from the scene, speaking at the same time as one of the characters. Kurt Vonnegut's novel "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade" is written like an impressionist painting, that consists of microscopic smear-points, sparing as telegrams, folding into a coherent and penetrating picture only at a distance. This removal of the reader from the text and the author from the novel indicates the main idea of the work: any event and the state, any reversal of fortune, from birth to death, any happiness or misery is just one of the peaks in the endless chain of mountains of time. It is this top that always has been, is and always will be. The only problem is that our one-dimensional thinking doesn't allow us to see not only the mountain range, but even one of its top, e. g. present moment. We do not live, but only peek in on a tiny particle of life through the keyhole, in the full conviction that this is real life. On this philosophical context, a fantastic plot of Kurt Vonnegut's novel "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade" is built. The plot of the novel "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade" is directly linked to its title. During World War II, Kurt Vonnegut was in German captivity and witnessed the greatest disaster of the era. In February 1945 he experienced the

bombing of the German city Dresden. During just a few hours, more than 100, 000 civilians were killed in front of him. This is more than claimed at Hiroshima. At the time of the bombing, captured Americans were locked in the basement of the Dresden massacre, number 5, and it saved their lives. And after that they were forced to rake the debris. Those soldiers were boys, almost children. And there was not any heroism, bravado, a feat of humor, honor and conscience on that war. There was fear, death, blood, dirt, tears, groans, cruelty, and bestialization. And the mountain of corpses, stinking, bloated, burning funeral pyre in all areas, the mountains of dead men and women, boys and girls, old men and women, mountains of bodies collected by crying and dying beardless boys. Because any war — in such its extreme manifestations or in each fired bullet - it is a war of children who are sent to it by intelligent adults to kill each other. The novel " Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade" was released at the height of antiwar sentiment, becoming the literary manifesto of American society in the fight against the Vietnam War. Due to this coincidence, the book became a cultural icon of its time, touching many young Americans. Works Cited Bloom, Harold. Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five. Moraru, Christian. Utopian Studies. 12. 2. (2001): 269. JSTOR. www. jstor. org . Web. 9 Oct. 2010. Hinchcliffe, Richard. " Would'st thou be in a dream": John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress and Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five. European Journal of American Culture. 20. 3. (2001): 183. Academic Search Complete. Web. 9 Oct. 2010. Mustazza, Leonard. The critical response to Kurt Vonnegut. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994. p. 256. Nelson, Joyce. Slaughterhouse-Five: Novel and Film. Literature/Film Quarterly. 1. 2. (1973): 150. Academic Search Complete.

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