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THE REAL AND THE FANTASTIC
WORLDS IN VONNEGUT'S
SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

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A meu marido, meus filhos e meus pais.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* from the standpoint of the subversion of reality by the elements of the fantastic in the text. We propose to demonstrate how a consideration of those elements can provide information and analyses that lead to a better understanding of the author's worldview and of his narrative process, as well as to an encompassing perspective of his divergent critical categorization.

In the introductory chapter, besides stating our objectives, we make a quick survey of the author's divergent tendencies which have resulted in his categorization as a science fictionist, a black humorist, a satirist, and a novelist of the absurd.

Chapter Two reviews the main points of the theory of the fantastic devised by Eric Rabkin, the primary embasement for our research, and makes references to other studies used to expand and complement our main guideline.

Starting from the basic viewpoint that the fantastic creates alternative worlds by reversing the ground rules of normative reality, our analysis contraposes the real and the fantastic worlds of *Slaughterhouse-Five* from Chapter Three onwards. That chapter treats of the new ground rules, both of structural and aesthetic nature, established by Vonnegut's narrative process.

Chapter Four examines the constitution of characters by means of the different roles they fulfill and their con-

sequent multiplication of personality.

Chapter Five traces Billy Pilgrim's erratic swinging through time by means of a chart that registers his numerous shifts. From this chart we have deduced the novel's major temporal streams and different levels of time, which include its autobiographical frame.

Chapter Six foregrounds the juxtaposition of the real sites of the author's experiences to fictional locations and to an imaginary planet, emphasizing the interpenetration of reality and fantasy.

Chapter Seven, finally divides the action into two narrative lines. The Vonnegut plot examines the development of the author's process of composition, his search for new means of expression. The analysis of the Billy Pilgrim plot follows the steps of the monomythical hero quest pattern.

The Conclusion evidences how Vonnegut's divergent tendencies can be subordinated to the fantastic by virtue of their dependence on structural reversals. The author's peculiar narrative manner and his worldview are also shown to be profitably illuminated by a consideration of the fantastic.

RESUMO

Esta tese analisa o romance *Slaughterhouse-Five*, de Kurt Vonnegut, através da óptica da subversão da realidade pelos elementos do fantástico contidos no texto. Propomo-nos a demonstrar como a ponderação desses elementos pode fornecer subsídios para uma compreensão mais nítida da cosmovisão do autor e do seu processo narrativo, bem como para uma perspectiva que abranja a diversidade de sua categorização crítica.

No capítulo introdutório, além de estabelecer nossos objetivos, apresentamos uma rápida revisão das tendências divergentes do autor que levaram à classificação de sua obra como ficção científica, humor negro, sátira e novela do absurdo.

O segundo capítulo, revisa os pontos principais da teoria do fantástico elaborada por Eric Rabkin, embasamento primário de nossa pesquisa, e faz referência a outros estudos, utilizados para expandir e complementar nossa linha principal.

Partindo do ponto de vista básico de que o fantástico cria mundos alternativos, através da reversão das regras fundamentais da realidade normativa, nossa análise contrapõe, a partir do terceiro capítulo, o mundo real e o mundo fantástico de *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Este capítulo examina as novas regras básicas, tanto de natureza estrutural como estética, estabelecidas pela narração de Vonnegut.

O quarto capítulo examina a constituição das personagens principais através dos diferentes papéis que desempenham e sua conseqüente multiplicação de personalidade.

O capítulo quinto acompanha o movimento errático do herói, Billy Pilgrim, através do tempo, por meio de um gráfico que registra seus inúmeros deslocamentos. Deste gráfico deduzimos as correntes temporais do romance e os diferentes níveis de tempo, que incluem sua moldura autobiográfica.

O capítulo sexto enfatiza a justaposição dos locais da experiência do autor a outros fictícios e a um planeta imaginário, pondo em relevo a interpenetração da realidade e da fantasia.

Finalmente, o capítulo sétimo divide a ação em duas linhas narrativas. O enredo de Vonnegut examina o desenvolvimento do processo narrativo do autor, em busca de novos meios de expressão. A análise das peregrinações de Billy Pilgrim segue o esquema das aventuras do herói monomítico.

A conclusão evidencia que as diversas tendências de Vonnegut podem ser subordinadas ao fantástico, uma vez que todas se baseiam em reversões estruturais. Desse exame também se depreende que a maneira narrativa peculiar do autor e sua cosmovisão podem ser iluminadas pela análise através do fantástico.

1 INTRODUCTION

Kurt Vonnegut¹ has proved to be a controversial literary figure. A writer since 1949, his first books *Player Piano* (1952) and *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) were issued as paperbacks and cataloged as science-fiction titles. Though the first edition of the latter was quickly out of print, his popularity had several ups and downs through the publication of *Mother Night* (1961), *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965). The science-fiction label was then found to be inadequate to classify an author whose subject matters included Nazi Germany, the destruction of the world and the reconstitution of society. In the year following *Rosewater*, 1966, all his works were reissued in paperback, his popularity grew steadily and Vonnegut became a hero of college youth. In spite of his then wide public acceptance, or probably because of it, Vonnegut was largely ignored by the critics until the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in 1969.²

Like the publishers, the critics were also baffled by the divergent tendencies observed in Vonnegut's works, which resulted in his being variously categorized as a science-fictionist, a black-humorist, a satirist, and a novelist of the absurd. Mark Hillegas includes him alongside H.G. Wells in his study about the anti-utopians.³ Jerome Klinkowitz, on the other hand, contends that Vonnegut's science-orientated stories and his use of technology in some novels, depart from conventional science-fiction in that they consider the effect of innovation on contemporary culture.⁴ Vonnegut himself has

protested vehemently against the science-fiction label:

I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled 'science-fiction' ever since, and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a tall white fixture in a comfort station.⁵

However, the author's objections may sound as intentional fallacy when we consider his contribution to various science-fiction periodicals. Also guilty of the literary sin of having written countless stories for the slick magazines, Vonnegut holds that he was merely buying time for the writing of his novels.⁶ Leslie Fiedler takes an in-between stand when he observes that "in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut moves uneasily away from his science-fiction beginnings, ironically playing with the form he once quite simply practised."⁷ Paradoxically, the appreciation of Vonnegut's work by science-fiction standards is also dubious, for *Player Piano* was considered an inferior imitation of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley⁸ and *The Sirens of Titan*, a plethora of "extravagances (....) and boyish vulgarity (....) as smooth as gravel pudding."⁹ The label "black-humorist", on the other hand, was part of the incipient process of Vonnegut's critical recognition and resulted from his inclusion in Bruce Jay Friedman's anthology *Black Humor*.¹⁰ Benjamin DeMott's article "Vonnegut's Otherworldly Laughter", also a favorable assessment of his characteristics, emphasizes Vonnegut's qualities as a "potent satirist, with a fine eye for the self-deceit built into mod vocabularies of altruism."¹¹ Those views are contradicted by Robert Scholes for whom Vonnegut's work is not satire because "it has none of the scorn, resignation or hope of reform that accompanies satire,"¹² and by

Charles Harris who points out its lack of "ridicule and invective."¹³ Harris classifies Vonnegut as "a novelist of the absurd" alongside with Heller, Barth and Pynchon, taking into consideration his treatment of absurdist themes with absurdist characteristics. To this day, however, some serious critics have been reluctant to recognize Vonnegut's position as an important mainstream writer, perhaps, as Robert Scholes suggests, because he is "both too funny and too intelligible for many, who confuse muddled earnestness with profundity."¹⁴

Personally, we were first attracted to Vonnegut's work by the humor and the terse colloquialism of his style. As we progressed through the entire catalogue of his novels, however, we became gradually aware of the author's complex view of the universe, disguised under the deceptive simplicity of his prose, as well as of the diversity of tendencies, already pointed out by the critics. Underlying the widely diverse characteristics of Vonnegut's work, nevertheless, we observed a consistent unifying trait, namely, his use of the fantastic, features of which are displayed in all of his novels to a greater or a lesser degree. Starting a research on the nature of the fantastic, as developed by different theorists, we realized it offered an appropriate guideline for an encompassing analysis of the author we have chosen as the subject of this thesis. Consideration of the fantastic can yield information and analyses that complement the normal study of worldview, which is very important for a study of Vonnegut's work, where much is implied, rather than openly stated. Moreover, consideration of the fantastic can also provide a solution for the controversy on Vonnegut's categorization as a science-fictionist, a satirist and a black humorist.

It was our intention at first to draw comparisons among those of Vonnegut's novels where the fantastic is foregrounded: *Player Piano*, which depicts a machine-dominated so-

ciety, run by a superior electronic mentality, Epicac; The Sirens of Titan, whose very title brings together mythological beings and an imaginary planet, and which includes extraterrestrial trips, an invasion of the Earth by Martians, intestinal breathing, and so on, in an evident satire of the genre of science-fiction; Cat's Cradle, which deals with the end of the world brought about by ice-nine, a substance which freezes life on earth; Slaughterhouse-Five, whose protagonist travels erratically in time, as well as to outer space; and Slapstick which, professing to be an autobiography, tells the story of the final President of the United States, after the country has been entirely destroyed by the mysterious Albanian flu and by the Green Death, the latter resulting from the inhalation or ingestion of microscopic Chinese microorganisms.

We were irresistibly drawn, however, by the peculiar alignment of fact and fantasy in Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, where the author's actual experiences in wartime Germany are fictionalized and fantasized. Besides, the great majority of the Ph.D. dissertations and longer critical works written on Vonnegut's novels deal with them as a whole, from Player Piano to his latest book, Slapstick.¹⁵ Although the diacronic perspective is the best means to give us an outlook on the Vonnegut canon in general, and on his development as a writer, we have chosen a somewhat different approach and decided to concentrate on Slaughterhouse-Five where the contrast between the real and the fantastic can be better observed. Even though Slaughterhouse-Five is the best known of Vonnegut's novels to this day, and has been the subject of uncountable studies and dissertations, it has not, to our knowledge, been analysed in depth from the point of view of its fantastic traits, least of all in the way we propose to develop our analysis, by applying a theory of the fantastic

to the text. We intend, therefore, to start from textual criticism and, in order to achieve a deeper comprehension of the factual aspects of Vonnegut's war novel, to draw some argument from his biography. We hope that our findings in relation to the author's parallel use of fact and fantasy will provide helpful elements for the interpretation of his whole work. Our brief summary of Vonnegut's achievements has shown him to be a highly original author who employs literary genres, techniques and fictional elements in a very unorthodox manner, to suit his own needs of expression. We believe that our analysis will reveal how, under Vonnegut's authorship, the fantastic acquires new perspectives when adapted to his narrative world.

Moreover, our choice of subject is consistent with contemporary trends, both in literature and in everyday life, where the fantastic is familiar as it never was before. Nuclear weapons, rocketry, moon trips, robots, computers, which used to belong to the realm of science-fiction, are now part of modern man's world. On the other hand, mass media vehicles pour a daily avalanche of reports of mass destruction, environmental poisoning, weird biological experiments and bizarre examples of human behavior, all this counterpointed by the ever-present menace of atomic annihilation, which put in check our ideas of the impossible. If fantasy is "the game of the impossible",¹⁶ then our actual current world is indeed fantastic, making any invented fictional world look negligible by comparison. In this respect, Philip Roth observes that

The American writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's

own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.¹⁷

Since real life has become more fantastic than fiction, it is understandable that a considerable number of modern novelists deal in the fantastic, in an attempt to balance the incongruousness of the real world and to find appropriate responses for its challenges. In this aspect, Vonnegut is not alone, since there are signs, according to William Irwin, that "a new age of fantasy is about to begin," a fact evidenced by the growing engagement with the fantastic shown by such widely different American and English novelists, as "John Barth, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip Roth, John Updike, Samuel Beckett, John Hawkes, James Purdy, and Thomas Pynchon, among others."¹⁸

Having established the relevance of our chosen approach, the next step in our project was the selection of a theory of the fantastic which fitted Vonnegut's factual/fantastic context. An examination of the works written by Eric S. Rabkin¹⁹ on the uses of the fantastic in literature - *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales and Stories*, and *The Fantastic in Literature* - showed them to provide valuable tools for the kind of textual analysis we aimed at, and consequently, for an interpretation of the fantastic elements in literature in general and in Kurt Vonnegut's oeuvre, in particular. Hence our decision to use Rabkin's work as a primary theoretical em-
 basement for our research. In order to illuminate specific aspects of the narrative world of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vladimir Propp's seminal work *Morphology of the Folktale*²⁰ will also be used as a reference point. Works of yet other critics, used either to corroborate or expand the basic viewpoints expressed by Rabkin will be included and referred to when the occasion arises, in the development of this thesis.

NOTES

¹According to information provided by Jerome Klinkowitz, the author has dropped the 'Jr' from his name since the publication of *Slapstick*, in 1976. See KLINKOWITZ, J. *Kurt Vonnegut*. London, Methuen, 1982. p.93.

²Jerome Klinkowitz informs us that except for a piece by Vonnegut's friend Robert Scholes, no scholarly articles on his work appeared in American journals until 1971. KLINKOWITZ, J. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: *The Canary in a Cathouse*. In: _____ & SOMER, J., ed. *The Vonnegut Statement*. St. Albans, Granada, 1975. p.21.

³HILLEGAS, M. *The Future as Nightmare; H.G.Wells and the Anti-Utopians*. Quoted by HARRIS, C. *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd*. New Haven, College and University Press, 1971. p.139.

⁴KLINKOWITZ, J. Why They Read Vonnegut. In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.28.

⁵VONNEGUT JR., K. Science Fiction. *New York Times Book Review*, Sept.5, 1965. p.2.

⁶Quoted by KLINKOWITZ, *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.19.

⁷FIEDLER, L.A. The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut. *Esquire*, 74:199, Sept. 1970.

⁸Cf. BELLAMY, J.D. Kurt Vonnegut for President: the Making of an Academic Reputation. In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.80.

⁹KNIGHT, D. *In Search of Wonder; critical essays on modern science fiction*. Chicago, Advent, 1971. p.236.

¹⁰The references to Vonnegut's inclusion in the *Black Humor* anthology were taken from Robert SCHOLE'S A Talk with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.99-100.

¹¹DEMOTT, B. Vonnegut's Otherworldly Laughter. *Saturday Review*, 54:38, May 1, 1971

¹²SCHOLE'S, R. *The Fabulators*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1967. p.40. Quoted by FESTA, C. Vonnegut's Satire. In: KLINKOWITZ, J. & LAWLER, D., ed. *Vonnegut in America*. New York, Delta, 1977. p.136.

¹³HARRIS, p. 29.

¹⁴SCHOLE'S, R. *Fabulation and Metafiction*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1979. p.205.

¹⁵Cf. SCHAFTT, S. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* Boston, Twayne, 1976. SCHOLE'S, R. & RABKIN, E. *Science Fiction*. London, Oxford University Press, 1977. OLDERMAN, R. *Beyond the Wasteland*. New Haven, Yale Univer-

sity Press, 1972. KLINKOWITZ, J. *Kurt Vonnegut*. REED, P.J. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* New York, Warner, 1972.

¹⁶*The Game of the Impossible* is the title of William IRWIN's book in which he characterizes fantasy and examines its various aspects in contemporary literature. (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976).

¹⁷ROTH, P. Writing American Fiction. In: KLEIN, M. ed. *The American Novel Since World War II*. Greenwich, Fawcett, 1969. p. 144.

¹⁸IRWIN, p. 185-6.

¹⁹RABKIN, E.S., ed. *Fantastic Worlds; myths, tales and stories*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977.

²⁰PROPP, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*. 2.ed. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979.

2 FANTASY AND THE FANTASTIC: THEORETICAL APPROACH

As a first and indispensable step, we deem it important to define the key concepts of fantasy and fantastic. Webster's Third New International Dictionary presents "fantasy" as synonymous with "hallucination", "desire", "inclination"; "an imagined fulfillment of a desire"; "a creation of the imaginary faculty, whether conceived (as in the mind) or expressed (as in a work of art)."¹ In modern literary practice and criticism, fantasy has come to mean a literary genre which "includes in the action, the characters or the setting things that are impossible under ordinary conditions, or in the normal course of human events."² The term "fantastic" is derived from the Latin "phantasticus" (imaginary), which is from the Greek "phantastikos" (able to produce a mental image) from "phantazein" (to make visible). Hence its meaning that which is made visible, visionary, unreal. The meanings listed under "fantastic" or "fantastical" by Webster's include: "so extreme as to challenge belief;" "given to or marked by extravagant fantasy, unrestrained imagination or extreme individuality and deviation from some accepted norm."³

For a specific characterization of the fantastic in literature, the outstanding points in the above definition are a "challenge to belief" and "deviation from some accepted norm". We are aware that all literature is based on the premise of "willing suspension of disbelief" that allows us to accept the fictive worlds created by the artist, but in no other genre is it so requisite as in the case of fantasy, which

represents an extreme challenge to belief. The second point, "deviation from some accepted norm", is in fact, the main constituent of the concept of "fantastic" developed by Eric Rabkin, and which we will expound below.

The key words in Rabkin's concept of the fantastic are "alternative" and "reversal". The presentation of an alternative to our factual everyday world, by reversing its ground rules, is the main effect of the fantastic. In one sense, all literature is fantastic, as in fictional worlds, artistic constructs built and peopled by the creative genius of the writer, certain ordering patterns prevail, which give shape to the otherwise random experiences of reality. Fantastic worlds, however, are not merely different from our own, they are alternative to our own, as they reverse the perspectives of the experiential world. The creation of alternative worlds which reverse or contradict reality differentiates fantastic from non-fantastic literature.

Reversal implies reconfiguration, contradiction of perspectives, whether perspectives of the real world which Rabkin calls "the armchair world"⁴—or perspectives legitimized by the internal ground rules which are set up by every work of art. To make this point clear, Rabkin gives an example from *Through the Looking Glass* where Alice, addressing herself to a flower says "I wish you could talk," and was reduced to astonished silence when the flower did talk to her. Talking flowers contradict the perspectives of Alice's world as the underscored wish plainly shows. But, as Rabkin points out, and the mere following up of current developments demonstrates, in the twentieth-century our notions of the impossible are assaulted every day. Fifty years ago, a trip to the moon was an utterly fantastic occurrence, possible only in the imagination of the creators of so-called scientific Romances, whereas today it is part of our empirical reality.

Likewise, communication with plants may be accomplished at some point in the future. But even for a reader of a hypothetical future age, when plants are talkative, *Through the Looking Glass* will still be a fantasy, because talking flowers represent a reversal of the prevailing perspectives at that time (1872) which are incorporated as part of the ground rules of Carroll's narrative world. Therefore, the fantastic though generally definable in relation to "our" world, actually must be defined in terms of the world outside the text, as it is represented, possibly transformed, by the text itself. Fantastic worlds, then, are defined against outside and inside realities.

Outside reality corresponds to the worldly experience of the reader and reflects to a large extent "the state of the cultures that view themselves as inhabiting that outside reality."⁵ Inside reality, on the other hand, emerges from an examination of the reading process. The text trains us to perceive reality - and shifting reality - in certain ways, as the example from Carroll illustrates. As Scholes and Rabkin point out "the mark of the fantastic is the thrill of seeing the believed unreal become real. This is so regardless of what, in the world outside the fiction might be real."⁶

The reader's reaction, then, characterizes the fantastic. It may be considered a parallel of Alice's astonishment, when the operative ground rules are reversed. Whether those rules come from our projection of the outside reality or are established by the inside reality of the text, the fantastic is the affect⁷ generated as we read by the direct reversal of the ground rules of the narrative world. It is convenient to quote Rabkin directly, to sum up the quality of reversal of fantastic literature:

It is important that we recognize that the fantastic comes not from mere violation of the "real world" but from offering an alternative to the real world: not from an alternative to some real world of immutable and universal law, but to a real world which our life and education have trained us to project as expectable as the context for a given text: and not to the projected real world in the fullness of its infinite and often conflicting elements, but in the particular real world which conforms to the world inside the text itself.⁸

The structure of diametrical reversal of the ground rules of a narrative world, which is the hallmark of the fantastic, can be detected in much fiction to a greater or lesser degree. However, the particular genre which makes the fantastic its central quality is Fantasy. Rabkin uses capitalized fantasy to differ this kind of narrative - which is marked by continuous reversals occurring either in plot, thematic development, and style or in some and even in all four of these levels - from fantasy, uncapitalized, the lay definition, which includes the psychologists' ideas about wish-fulfillment and so on.

A fantastic occurrence, therefore, is not merely unexpected in the narrative world, but anti-expected⁹, because it forces the ground rules of this world to make a 180° reversal. Between unexpected and anti-expected events, Rabkin places the dis-expected, occurrences which result in a less complete reversal, such as the punch line of a joke or, as exemplified by the author, the highly improbable survival of a character who had been scalped. He estimates their effect of reversal as a mere 90° or 120° turnabout. Although dis-expected events produce the characteristic effects of the fantastic - surprise, delight, shock, fear, and so on - they are not themselves fantastic because they are in keeping with

the ground rules of the narrative.

In order to make clear his assertion that individual narratives can be more or less fantastic, Rabkin conceives of a continuum of the fantastic, stretching from cardinal point 1 on the left - Realism - to point 10 on the right - Fantasy, along which narratives are arranged according to their degree of fantasticality. He gives examples to illustrate this:¹⁰

1. Henry James, <i>The Ambassadors</i>	}	Realism
2. Émile Zola, <i>Germinal</i>		
3. Jane Austen	}	Realistic literature
4. Charles Dickens		
5. <i>Tales of the Great Detective</i>	}	Fantastic literature
6. "The Magic Swan Geese"		
7. "The Tale of Cosmo"		
8. "The Black Cat"		
9. "The Royal Banquet"	}	Fantasy
10. <i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		

From realism the scale rises to realistic literature - points 3 and 4 - narratives which depend on many lucky coincidences and, as in the case of Dickens, indulge omnipotence of thought;¹¹ the division fantastic literature ranges from tales of the Great Detective which present a world of clearly defined conventions - guilt is systematically uncovered and crime punished, to fairy tales which are truly fantastic literature, but offer a highly conventionalized alternative to the real world: once this alternative world is established, one experiences no more fantastic reversals. Works which use more continual reversals are placed further left on the scale, until its maximum point is occupied by true Fantasy, a genre which uses the fantastic exhaustively. In short, continual reversals of ground rules make a narrative world more fantastic. In the example "Once upon a time there was an extremely fair princess and she fell desperately in love with a plumber named Sid," the anti-expected introduction of the commonly ordinary

is a fantastic occurrence, which leads to the conclusion that an event is not inherently fantastic, but becomes so when it reverses the ground rules of a narrative world.

In respect to the generic classification of fantastic works, Rabkin says that "the wide range of works which we call, in one degree or another, fantastic, is large, much too large to constitute a single genre. (It includes) whole conventional genres, such as fairy tale, detective story, and Fantasy."¹² Also included are horror fiction and science fiction as can be inferred from the continuum of the fantastic above. Traditional fairy tales, ghost stories, detective fiction are moderately fantastic worlds which can be recognized by the inventory of elements within them, such as fairy godmothers, family curses, uncovering of guilt. These works can approach Fantasy, however, when their ground rules are continually reversed. Thus a work can be simultaneously horror fiction and Fantasy, science fiction and Fantasy, and so on. We can conclude, then, that in Rabkin's conception the fantastic is a quality stemming from reversal which can extend to various classes of work, whereas Fantasy is the genre marked by continual reversals.¹³

A question arises, however: How are we to recognize those reversals for what they are? Rabkin lists some signals which must be observed:

- a) reaction of characters
- b) statement of narrators
- c) signals of the implied author

Reaction of characters, such as Alice's astonishment at the talking flower has already been considered, when we discussed the surprise element. An example of the second kind of sign is the narrator's assertion that "What had started as make-believe was now very real,"¹⁴ which reverses the perspectives of the context. The signals of the implied author depend

on diametrical reversal of purely structural ground rules, and are the most important in the interpretation of the fantastic. Each class of signals can be properly interpreted only by reference to the ground rules of the narrative world, rules which result from a reader's whole life's training in the reading of literature, as well as from his own culture, his life experience, and from his assumptions about the culture of the text. The culture of the text is largely determined by its language, by its grapholect.¹⁵ Once we are aware of the particular time, place and social group from which a certain grapholect emerges, we can decide whether the text contradicts the perspectives which its language had led us to expect.

In the matter of language, another aspect to be considered is style. Fairy tales and heroic fantasies, for example, are told with great sobriety, while more fantastic works rely on the quick linguistic reversals typical of puns, or self-reflexivity or oxymoron. The antinomical structure of fantastic texts is also put into relief by other critics, such as Rosemary Jackson.¹⁶ Self-reflexivity is the language of the narrative referring to itself and intimately associated with contemporary fiction which is constructed largely upon the process of what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh calls a "baring of literary devices: unmasking narrative conventions and turning them into counterconventions in order to shatter the illusion of reality which is the aesthetic foundation of the totalizing novel."¹⁷

The device of self-reflection by virtue of highlighting the narrative situation, has the same fantastic effect of the entrance into a fairy tale of an incongruous element, such as a plumber named Sid.

Having chosen Rabkin's theory of the fantastic as a starting point for our analysis, we found it necessary to seek complementary information in some aspects, especially in re-

lation with the topicality of the fantastic and a classification of its themes. This complementation was found mainly in Tzvetan Todorov's fundamental work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*.¹⁸ Although Todorov defines the fantastic based on an interpretation of phenomena by the implied reader, a point also stressed by Rabkin, the two author's concepts of fantastic diverge widely. For Todorov, the fantastic "is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event."¹⁹ Thus, a really fantastic text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. That is the first condition of the fantastic. The second one is that this hesitation may also be experienced by a character: thus the reader's role is entrusted to a character, the hesitation is represented, becoming one of the themes of the work. Thirdly, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as poetic interpretations. Faced with apparently supernatural elements in a tale, the reader can either decide for a logical explanation, in which case we would have the uncanny or a supernatural one, which would give us the marvelous. The possibility of hesitation between the two creates the effect of the fantastic, an evanescent genre that lasts only as long as the protagonist and/or the reader hesitate between two contrasting explanations. Absolute faith or complete incredulity are not compatible with the fantastic. This brief summary of Todorov's theory will provide the foundation for the references to his work. Specific details having to do with the themes of the fantastic and other structural traits will be introduced in the text of this thesis when demanded by the analysis.

In relation to the concept of fantastic, the position

of other critics, such as William Irwin and Rosemary Jackson, approaches either Rabkin's or Todorov's theories. Irwin's concepts are very similar to Rabkin's in considering a matter to be within the range of the fantastic if it is judged, whether on the basis of knowledge or of convention, to be not only outside "reality" but also in knowing contravention of "reality".²⁰ Rosemary Jackson, who expands Todorov's theory, singles out the fantastic as a literary mode between the marvelous and the mimetic.²¹ She agrees, nevertheless, that the main characteristic of the fantastic is "to subvert (overturn, upset, undermine) rules and conventions taken to be normative" in artistic representation and in literature's reproduction of the "real".²²

One point is still left for consideration - the functions of the fantastic for writer and reader alike. In the first place, fantastic worlds are intrinsically related to the world of reality to whose problems they generally present a compensatory alternative. Thus, a seemingly irrelevant marvelous tale of a marauding dragon is, in fact, a dramatization of a real world problem: infertility in agriculture. The slaying of the dragon by the prince, who wins and weds the princess, as a reward, symbolizes restoration of fertility: the simple solution of the story poses a satisfying alternative to the complexity of the real world. Fantastic worlds, therefore, by offering us stability and safety, stand as alternatives to the real world of fluctuations and growth. A fantastic narrative always ends by reasserting order to show us that, despite its fearful dragons, or the awe-inspiring elements of horror fiction, or of science-fiction, the world of fantasy is a safe one. The fantastic, then, responds to human needs, by confronting as it does issues that are often hidden in the real world. This need is in the root of ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance

which have, in turn, originated modern forms of fantastic literature. Myth is the primary form of these narratives and provides either answers to man's ultimate questions, or explanations to the more immediate problems of natural phenomena. As human cultures become more civilized and sophisticated these primitive narratives are given conscious shape and they lose their sacred character to become entertainment rather than explanations. In this way, myth gives rise to folktales. Fairy tales occupy a third degree of development on this sliding scale - myth, folktale, fairy tale, romance - along which the stories become more conventionalized, the truth value more symbolic and less literal. Though myths have become less and less important as explanations, they have become more and more embedded in the roots of our cultural tradition and of all world literature.²³

The fantastic worlds created by those primitive narratives are highly conventionalized. As a result of the mutability of modern life and of the inadequacy of traditional solutions to the problems of man, however, newer fantastic worlds emerge as alternatives to the older ones. We perceive, then, that modern fantasists do not use the conventions of fantasy in traditional ways, but in their own peculiar manner. We intend to show that this is also true in Vonnegut's case.

Another human need which can be fulfilled by fantastic literature is the need to escape the confining ground rules of the extra-textual world. The term escape, as employed by Rabkin in relation to fantastic literature, does not mean evasion of responsibility on the part of the reader or surrender to chaos, but the replacement of those rules, which are seen as a restraint on the human spirit by a diametrically opposed set of ground rules that define fantastic worlds.²⁴ For the literature of the fantastic, escape is a means of

"exploration of an unknown land, a land which is the underside of the mind of man."²⁵ This comes very close to Nathaniel Hawthorne's idea that the fantastic is a means for the writer to reveal "the truth of the human heart," under circumstances of his own creation.²⁶

Moreover, fantastic worlds are constant reminders of the world diametrically escaped from, which means that by examining the alternative world created by the writer we can draw conclusions about his normative world and, consequently, about his worldview.

Although Rabkin's theory has been expounded at some length, for clarity's sake, his topics will be used according to the demands of the text. Of paramount importance for our study are his definitions of the key terms, fantastic, fantasy, and Fantasy, as well as the structural principles he singles out for a recognition of the fantastic.

Let us now examine how Vonnegut uses the fantastic in the various aspects of his narrative world. Starting with "a glimpse of the real and the fantastic worlds in Slaughterhouse-Five," which examines the initial ground rules of Vonnegut's narrative world, we shall proceed to the analysis of its characterization, setting, time structure, and plot.

NOTES

¹WEBSTER'S Third New International Dictionary of the English Language. Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1971. v.1, p. 823.

²SHIPLEY, J.T., ed. *Dictionary of World Literary Terms*. London, Allen & Unwin, 1970. p. 117.

³WEBSTER'S..., v. 1, p. 823.

⁴RABKIN, E.S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁵RABKIN, E.S. ed. *Fantastic Worlds; myths, tales and stories*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. p.17.

⁶SCHOLES, R. & RABKIN, E.S. *Science Fiction*. London, Oxford University Press, 1977. p. 169-70.

⁷RABKIN employs the term "affect" in the psychological sense of the noun. *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. ix.

⁸RABKIN, *Fantastic Worlds*, p. 19-20.

⁹The occurrence of the anti-expected can be fantastic even if it takes place in a work that is not itself a fantasy. In VOLTAIRE's *Candide*, for example, the appearance of Cunegonde's brother in Chapter 14, after she had claimed to have witnessed the murder of her entire family by the Bulgarians, produces a characteristic fantastic affect, marked by reactions of astonishment. (New York, Hanover House, Garden City, 1959.)

¹⁰RABKIN, ed. *Fantastic Worlds*, p. 165.

¹¹Omnipotence of thought is the name Freud gives to the fantasy that, should one think something, it will come to pass. Quoted by RABKIN, *Fantastic Worlds*, p. 30.

¹²RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. 117-8.

¹³RABKIN does not restrain the fantastic to the world of narrative, but rather extends it to all manifestations in the artistic field - drama, poetry, painting, music, film - and even to other sectors of human enterprise. Innovation is a reversal of conventions or of perspectives and since our perspectives on science, poetry, politics, architecture, are as subject to reversal as are our perspectives of the ground rules of a narrative world, the fantastic can be said to occur in these fields. To Rabkin the fantastic is "a basic mode of human knowing." *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. 189.

¹⁴JUSTER, N. *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York, Random House, 1967. p. 9. Cited by RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. 24.

¹⁵"Grapholect" is the word used by English-speaking linguists to translate the idea of *écriture*, conceived by Roland Barthes. It is a written subset of language which marks the writing "voice" as coming from a particular time, place and social group. RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p.20.

¹⁶Rosemary JACKSON posits that formalist theories of literary structure, identifying different narrative kinds as corresponding to different linguistic tropes, can be applied to the fantastic. Systematic observation of fantastic texts makes clear that its characteristic trope is oxymoron, "a figure of speech which holds together contradictions, and sustains them in an impossible unity, without progressing towards synthesis." *Fantasy; the literature of subversion*. London, Methuen, 1981. p. 21.

¹⁷ZAVARZADEH, M. *The Mythopoeic Reality*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976. p.38.

¹⁸TODOROV, T. *The Fantastic; a structural approach to a literary genre*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973.

¹⁹The summary of the basic points of Todorov's theory condenses his exposition from pages 25 to 40.

²⁰William Irwin establishes a *difference* between fantastic and fantasy which is parallel to Rabkin's. The fantastic, that is, the factitious existence of the antireal, is actually *material*. It is not of itself a literary form and its presence, even preponderance in a narrative does not necessarily make it a fantasy. "Whatever the material, extravagant or seemingly commonplace, a narrative is a *fantasy* if it presents the persuasive establishment and development of an *impossibility*, an arbitrary construct of the mind with all under the control of logic and rethoric." Characters, action and setting must appear *more credible than the accepted norm they displace*. IRWIN, W. *The Game of the Impossible*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976. p.8-10.

²¹Rosemary Jackson finds it more helpful to define the fantastic as a literary *mode* rather than a genre, and place it between the opposite modes of the marvelous and the mimetic. The marvellous comprehends the world of fairy story, romance, magic, supernaturalism. The mimetic includes narratives which claim to imitate an external reality, which are mimetic (imitating) and also distance experience by shaping it into meaningful patterns and sequences. Fantastic narratives confound elements of both the marvelous and the mimetic. They assert that what they are telling is real relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so - and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what - within those terms - is manifestly unreal. They pull the reader from the apparent familiarity and security of the known and everyday world into something more strange, into a world whose improbabilities are closer to the realm normally associated with the marvellous. JACKSON, p. 32-4.

²²JACKSON, p. 14.

²³In this respect, W.R. Irwin stresses the striving for an adequate mythology that some critics consider as the major effort of twentieth-century novelists. Many modern fantasists have been myth seekers, "either by using inherited mythologies, or by creating their own, sometimes

by reworking the traditional materials." Cf. IRWIN, p.159-60.

²⁴Robert Scholes calls this function of fiction sublimation, that is, the ability of relieving anxiety, of turning our concerns into satisfying shape. He dismisses the label "escapism" often given this function and claims that fiction takes our worst fears and tames them by organizing them in a form charged with meaning and value. "The flimsiest fairy-tale plays with our fears of death and failure by offering us triumph over both of these terrors." SCHOLES, R. *Fabulation and Metafiction*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1979. p.213.

²⁵RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p.45.

²⁶HAWTHORNE, N. Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. In: _____ . *The Portable Hawthorne*. New York, Viking Press, 1971. p. 562.

3 A GLIMPSE OF THE REAL AND THE FANTASTIC WORLDS OF SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

It is in keeping with the subject of our work to begin this chapter with an instance of make-believe: to imagine a reader who is unaware of the critical assessment of Vonnegut as a science-fiction writer and, stretching the limits of the probable a bit farther, who has not started a reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* by a previous examination of the often suggestive commentaries on the covers of the paperback editions. The backcover notes of the Triad/Granada paperback edition of the novel, which we have used in this study, for example, expand on the lurid details of Billy Pilgrim's kidnapping by "the small green inhabitants of the planet Tralfamadore" and his being subsequently "displayed naked in a zoo and publicly mated with the beautiful Earthling movie star, Montana Wildhack."¹

Such comments would inevitably lead our reader to label the novel as science-fiction, a class of prose narrative "which treats of a situation that could not arise in the world as we know it, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extraterrestrial."²

Granted this first assumption, our imaginary reader would then turn to the title page of the book, where Vonnegut makes his humorous self-presentation as a "fourth generation German-American now living in easy circumstances" who, as a soldier and as a prisoner of war "witnessed the fire-bombing of Dresden and survived to tell the tale" (p.3). In spite of

the facetious language, the reader would assume from this opening that the author meant to relate his own experiences, in a work with autobiographical characteristics. The next paragraph, however, which mentions an alien planet and flying saucers, would cause the reader to doubt his first conclusion and to wonder whether the book is not in fact fantastic.

A mere examination of the title page, then, surely signals the fantastic in *Slaughterhouse Five*, whether we consider Rabkin's or Todorov's concepts, mentioned in the introduction. We notice a complete reversal of perspectives, which according to the first is the central characteristic of the fantastic, from fact to fantasy, from the reality of the historical world to the unreality of an imaginary one. A further reversal of an aesthetic nature is evident: the novel is purported to be written "somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore" (p.3). This statement makes clear Vonnegut's intention of reversing the technique of novel writing departing from the conventional realistic manner of composition to a "schizophrenic" one. Although at this point we do not know what "schizophrenic" means as applied to Vonnegut's fiction, the use of a term borrowed from psychiatry promises unheard of developments which will surely disrupt the orderly world of conventional narrative. Moreover, the ambiguity produced by the text, which causes the reader to hesitate between reality and fantasy, between the natural and the supernatural, marks the fantastic, according to Todorov's concept.

If we could put ourselves in the position of this naive reader, who is unaware of Vonnegut's reputation as a science-fictionist, and partake of his feelings of surprise and hesitation at the reversals created by the text both in aesthetic and generic perspectives, we would be more acutely conscious of the presence of the fantastic, at this early point in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. As it is, Vonnegut provides

inequivocal signs of his intention of making extensive use of the fantastic in a book which claims to be also autobiographical. Signals of the implied author are, in fact, one of the means indicated by Rabkin for a recognition of the fantastic in a given text.³

Having established this initial premise - that Slaughterhouse-Five contains elements of the fantastic, understood as a reversal of accepted norms, we feel free to develop our proposed objective of observing the contrast between the real and the fantastic in Vonnegut's narrative world.

Slaughterhouse-Five is, in fact, a mixture of fact and fantasy, a continuous shift between the two opposing planes that make up Vonnegut's narrative world, the inside reality of the text and the alternative world of Tralfamadore. "All this happened more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true" (p.9),⁴ the opening sentences of the novel, confirm Vonnegut's intention of presenting his actual experiences in an imaginary frame.

Chapters One and Ten fictionalize some facts of Vonnegut's life, functioning as a frame for the Billy Pilgrim plot, which narrates the adventures of Billy Pilgrim and occupies the central chapters. Vonnegut begins musing about himself - his love for his dog, his personal habits of staying up late smoking his "Pall Malls", drinking and telephoning long lost friends. He recalls details of his college life as a student of Anthropology, of his work as a police reporter and as a public relations man for General Electric, and of his marriage. The focus of Chapter One, however, is on Vonnegut's harrowing experiences in World War II and his various attempts to organize them into a story of the destruction of Dresden, a goal which he achieves only after twenty-three years of frustrated efforts. The novel's subtitle, *The Children's Crusade*, is accounted for as the

fulfilment of a promise made to Mary O'Hare, the wife of his war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare. Vonnegut's book, rather than glorifying war, would present it in its true colors, a ruthless destructive force crushing the lives of innocent soldiers who, like the author himself and O'Hare, were just "foolish virgins (....) right at the end of childhood" (p.17) at the time of the war.

The Billy Pilgrim plot retells the story of an awkward young chaplain's assistant - Billy Pilgrim - who returns from World War II to Ilium, New York, where he marries the fat unattractive daughter of a wealthy optometrist. Billy himself becomes a wealthy optometrist with two children. After a plane crash that nearly kills him, Billy begins writing letters to local newspapers and talking on radio programs about his experiences on an alien planet, Tralfamadore, where he learns that all moments in a person's life exist simultaneously and that the best philosophy is to enjoy the good moments and to ignore the bad ones. The Tralfamadorian philosophy also deprives death of its finality for it affirms that a person only appears to die, as he still is very much alive in other moments. All moments past, present and future, always have existed always will exist. Vonnegut's protagonist, moreover, has no control over time, and without warning he is frequently hurled through time and space away from his Ilium surroundings to the desolate German front or to Tralfamadore, so that the narrative does not follow the linear development, which we have used in this summary. Billy's experiences in the war extend from 1944, when he becomes lost in Luxembourg after the Battle of the Bulge, to 1945 in Dresden, where he witnesses the destruction of the city by allied bombers. Billy is shown wandering aimlessly behind the German lines, tagging along behind two experienced scouts and goaded into moving ahead by the brutality of Roland Weary, a fellow sol-

dier, who kicks and shoves Billy out of his apathy. Eventually, they are captured by the Germans and jammed into boxcars which take them to a camp for Russian POW's. Weary dies on the way not before eliciting from his companions, among them the car thief Paul Lazzaro, the promise to avenge his death, which he believed to be Billy's fault. From the camp, the Americans are taken to Dresden and housed in a slaughterhouse numbered five. They survive the air bombing, in a deep storage area, while 135,000 people are killed above.

Back in Ilium, Billy commits himself to a mental hospital, where he shares a ward with Eliot Rosewater, who introduces him to Kilgore Trout's science-fiction. Billy continues to time travel and by 1967, he seldom seems to know whether he is here or there - or now or then. On the night of his daughter's wedding, he is kidnapped, as he knows he will be, by Tralfamadorian robots who take him via flying saucer to their planet. Billy's later attempts to transmit the Tralfamadorian concepts of time and death convince his daughter Barbara that he is, at 46, senile.

Billy can also see the future: he becomes something of a celebrity, speaking to large crowds about flying saucers, time and the insignificance of death. Billy is shot to death on February 13, 1976, by a gunman hired by the aged but still revengeful Paul Lazzaro. He is dead only for a few moments, however, and he swings back into life, back to a period in 1944.

In Chapter Ten, Vonnegut resumes the description of events in the factual world, such as the deaths of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and of his own father, and the weekly carnage in Vietnam. He tells about his and O'Hare's trip back to Dresden in 1967, which is paralleled by the narration of Billy Pilgrim's return to the city, after it was bombed. It was spring time, the Second World War was

over in Europe, but only the birds had anything to say about the massacre, which was, 'Poo-tee-weet?' (p.143). This is the final phrase in the novel.

Even this summary is sufficient to show that Slaughterhouse-Five combines fact, fiction and the fantastic. Vonnegut comments on contemporary events. Billy Pilgrim travels in time and sojourns in an alien planet, but, on the other hand, he lives some very "real" experiences as a prisoner of war in Dresden, which are the fictional parallels of the events of Vonnegut's life. Thus we notice from the start that reality and fantasy are closely related, portrayed side by side, as if both were equally fantastic and equally real.

A first principle of Rabkin's theory is the definition of the fantastic against a real background: a work can reverse the ground rules of the experiential world outside the text or/and the ground rules of an inside reality created by the text itself. It is important, therefore, to establish the relationship between the "real" and the fantastic, to determine the points where the text reverses the perspectives of our everyday world, in order to set its own ground rules. Our first step, then, in our analysis will be to deduct from the text the rules which affect its entire development.

The fantastic characteristics of Billy Pilgrim, which permeate the whole novel, become evident in the opening lines of the narration of his adventures:

Listen:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the

events in between.

He says.

Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next (p.23).

The paragraphs above constitute a microcosm of the narrative world of Slaughterhouse-Five and contain a series of assumptions that reverse the perspectives of the world outside the text in order to create the world inside the text. The first and most important assumption is that Billy is unstuck in time. Mobility in time is not part of our outside shared reality, the set of perspectives that we develop in our everyday living. That being so, the very first line of Billy's story brings about a diametrical reversal by creating a hero who is free of the restrictions of punctual time. We are asked to suspend our disbelief and accept mobility in time as a first ground rule of this particular narrative world for, as Rabkin points out, in order to enjoy the reading of a fantastic work, one must participate sympathetically in the ground rules of its narrative world. Otherwise, "no occurrence in that world can make sense - or even nonsense."⁵

The text indicates further that Billy is mobile in time not only backward into the past, but forward in direction of the future. There is nothing particularly surprising about remembering past events (Billy's time travels could be mere recollections of the past), though Billy's memory of the past includes the pre-birth period. But his capacity of "seeing" the future, the fact that he has already lived certain events which are placed will into the future in relation to the present of the narrative, 1968,⁶ such as his death in 1976, reverse diametrically an accepted pattern of "our"

world. Therefore, a second rule may be deducted from the text: that Billy is endowed with forward memory, as a direct consequence of his erratic time-traveling.

A third rule deductible from the passage is that Billy lives the same episodes more than once. The consistent use of the present tense and of the present perfect tense, plus the adverbial phrase "many times", indicate that Billy's experiences recur again and again in an endless cyclical pattern, from pre-birth to death.

The fact that Billy never knows what part of his life he is going to live next gives us a fourth rule. Though he is aware of what is going to happen, he does not know when it is going to happen.

Evidently, the four basic ground rules we have presented so far were deducted from the analysis of a short passage which, nevertheless, contains the main elements of the narrative. A further analysis of the text may disclose other ruling patterns, which will be added to the four initial ones.

Concerning the construction of the novel itself, an aesthetic reversal is evident, as we have already stated. Vonnegut substitutes the Tralfamadorian schizophrenic manner for the rules of conventional realistic novel writing.⁷ The exact implications of such a process of composition become clear in Chapter Five, when Billy asks for something to read during his trip to Tralfamadore, and a voice explains how Tralfamadorian books, the only reading material available, are laid out, "in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars":

... 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 mes-

sages, 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 (p. 62-3).

The passage above, which can be considered as a summary of Vonnegut's technique, is not presented till halfway through the novel, whereas ever since the beginning of Billy Pilgrim's story we become aware that Vonnegut moves away not only from the factual world but from realistic conventions of narrative order and character presentation. Though the action in the Billy Pilgrim plot actually begins in a period in 1968, with a scene between Billy and his daughter, it immediately shifts to 1944. Moreover, the peculiar structure of the novel, which derives from the characteristics of its time-traveling hero, juxtaposes incomplete scenes from different periods of Billy's life. There is no perceptible development to a culminating point. The narrative might have started and ended anywhere, since there is no chronological presentation of events. The fantastic reversals brought about by use of this cyclical pattern, which departs from the conventional and the realistic, are in keeping with the fantastic qualities of the whole novel. This reversal of structure fits a work where reality and fantasy co-exist.

A last point to be mentioned in connection with this "contamination of reality by dream", as Jorge Luiz Borges calls it, is its effect on the reader: it reminds us of the "fictitious aspects of our own existence."⁸ Some devices help to bring about the contamination of reality by dream, such as the regressus in infinitum, i.e. the pattern of recurrence, and the introduction of the writer into his own

fiction. Both devices are foregrounded in Vonnegut's work. In the opening pages of the novel, in which a nostalgic Vonnegut goes over his repeated and fruitless attempts to write his Dresden book, he says that he is reminded of a particular song when he thinks of "how useless the Dresden part of (his) memory has been and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about":

My name is Yon Yonson,
 I work in Wisconsin,
 I work in a lumbermill there,
 The people I meet when I walk down the street,
 They say 'What's your name?'
 And I say,
 'My name is Yon Yonson,
 I work in Wisconsin...'
 And so on to infinity. (p.9-10)

The Yon Yonson song foreshadows the regressus in infinitum structural pattern of the body of the novel, which retells Billy Pilgrim's story.

In this first part of our study, we have established as a starting point the presence of the fantastic in the fundamental reversal of the concept of time which determines the characteristics of Billy Pilgrim and around which the regressus in infinitum structure is constructed. We have also examined selected passages which furnished some of the ground rules both of the narrative world created by the text, and of its process of composition, a knowledge of which is important for the attainment of our objective.

Those two categories of rules have one point in common: they negate the concept of chronological time, through time travel. The handling of time and the function of time travel in achieving the deviation from punctual time are relevant elements in the structure of the novel and will be

examined at length later on. Since the most obvious fantastic reversals in the novel center around the figure of Billy Pilgrim, the analysis of the novel's hero will be our next concern in the development of our work.

NOTES

¹All further quotations will be taken from the Triad/Granada 1980 edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, its page numbers indicated in parentheses.

²AMIS, K. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science-Fiction*. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1960. p.18.

³Cf. Theoretical Approach, p. 14-15.

⁴The italics are mine.

⁵RABKIN, E. S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977. p.4.

⁶See chapter on time.

⁷Max Schulz stresses the point that twentieth-century novelists consistently reject the tenets of the nineteenth-century novel, which was characterized by place, time and value system. Today's writers create "a different kind of fiction more in keeping with current chaotic times, in which they reject time-honored moral and epistemological formulations." These have given way to fictive models "honestly owned and avowed by their authors." SCHULZ, M. *Characters in the Contemporary Novel*. In: HALPERIN, J., ed. *The Theory of the Novel*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1974. p. 141-42.

⁸Quoted by John BARTH. *The Literature of Exhaustion*. In: KLEIN, M., ed. *The American Novel since World War II*. Greenwich, Fawcett, 1969. p. 267-79.

4 MULTIPLICATION OF SELF

As mentioned previously,¹ an important signal of the fantastic is a character's reaction of astonishment, surprise, shock or fear, when placed in extraordinary situations. A careful analysis of character, then, is of paramount importance in the detection of the fantastic in a given text.

Character study in *Slaughterhouse-Five* presents a problem from the start. Should we consider the novel as merely Billy Pilgrim's story and Billy its sole protagonist? This is, in fact, the reading given the novel by the majority of critics. The extension of the narrative dedicated to Billy's adventures - eight out of ten chapters, plus a part of the tenth - furnishes a solid basis for this interpretation.

However, such interpretation leaves out two relevant aspects of the novel:

a) the fact that Billy does not even appear in Chapter One - an inherent part of the narrative and not a mere foreword or prologue - which describes the personal experiences of the author;

b) the frequent intrusions of the author throughout the novel, referring to himself in the first person and sometimes taking part in the action. These two aspects plus the reappearance of the author in Chapter Ten, making comments about current events and about family matters, led us to conclude that there are two narrative lines in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, each with its own protagonist, though both are intimately connected. Our assumption was strengthened by the reading

of an essay by Charles Harris, which presents an illuminating analysis of the character structure in the novel. Harris stresses the importance of recognizing that the Vonnegut who appears in Chapter One is, indeed, a character in Slaughterhouse-Five. For although he shares the characteristics and the same experiences of Vonnegut the author, he remains nonetheless the "author-as-character".²

Thus, as a starting point we will consider the existence of two protagonists in the novel: the author-as-character who represents "fact", though it is fact modified by its introduction into a fictional medium, and Billy Pilgrim who inhabits the world of illusion. The contrast between "fact" and illusion, between the real and the fantastic, offers us a useful perspective for examining the constitution of characters in Slaughterhouse-Five, which is entirely consistent with our main objective. Character analysis will not include other people who take part in the narrative, but who are not fully developed. Rather than being characters, they fulfill certain functions and as such they will be considered under plot.

We will begin this chapter by scanning the characteristics of the author-as-character or Vonnegut-as-character,³ who brings external reality into the context.

4.1. A CHARACTER FROM THE WORLD OF FACT

Chapter One provides a physical and mental profile of the author-as-character, depicting the artist as an aging man "an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons full grown" (p.9)

The report of Vonnegut's activities from the time of his return to the United States after the war up to the present, which is the time of the completion of his Dresden

books, adds other elements to his portrait. He undergoes a series of metamorphoses - from a scrawny boy in the Children's Crusade to an equally scrawny veteran working as a PR man for General Electric in Schenectady, to a free-lance writer and, finally to the middle-aged artist who worries about the passage of time. Like Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut-as-character is an actor, whose different roles demand diametrical changes of personality and environment. This aspect of his characterization is particularly relevant for contrasting the world of fact and the world of the fantastic, since the change of roles establishes clear parallels between Vonnegut-as-character's and Billy's personalities. The only difference between them is that Vonnegut's metamorphoses are irreversible, whereas Billy keeps shuttling back and forth indefinitely from one to the other of his various parts, as we shall see below.

If Kurt Vonnegut suffers drastic metamorphoses in the world of fact, with much more reason we can say that Vonnegut-as-character assumes different personalities in the world of fiction, changing roles as the narrative progresses.

First role: Vonnegut-as-character, the writer.

Vonnegut's present role, as he tells us of the difficulties he had over the past twenty-three years in writing his Dresden book and recalls past events of his life, is that of a writer, "a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspenses and confrontations" (p.11). The main trait of his mental profile to be drawn from a reading of Chapter One is his obsession with time and death. Death in itself, particularly meaningless mass death resulting from senseless wars, inspires him to write his book. But death also worries him as the final consequence of the fugacity of time. This will become clear later on in our analysis of the time element, but the initial

chapter furnishes some unequivocal signs of the author's preoccupation with time, such as the passage he quotes from Ferdinand Céline's ⁴ *Death on the Installment Plan*, where Céline wants to stop the bustling of a street crowd: "Make them stop ... don't let them move anymore at all ... There, make them freeze ... once and for all ... So that they won't disappear anymore!" (p.21).

Vonnegut's preoccupation with time and death spurs him into creating fantastic worlds where these concepts are reversed. In the alternative world of Tralfamadore, which he creates for Billy Pilgrim, time and death have diametrically opposite meanings from those they have in the real world, but the process of change is foreshadowed in the factual world of Chapter One, by an incident involving the author-as-character. The particular event we refer to occurred on Vonnegut's trip to Dresden in 1967, when he was forced to spend a night in Boston between planes. Stranded in the Boston fog for a whole night, waiting for a plane that does not come, the author himself becomes "unstuck in time." He feels suspended in time, a "non person" in a strange town for a "non night", when he should have been somewhere else. A night that does not exist, persons who become "non persons" negate fundamental notions of the human world, and, therefore, can be considered as fantastic. The relationship between the real and the fantastic is foregrounded by the interpretation Vonnegut-as-character gives to the incident: "And so I became a non-person in the Boston Fog ... for a non-night" (p.20). Indeed, fantastic worlds are nothing more nor less than a reversal of the real world. In other words, the factual world is present in fantastic worlds by negation. It is what Joanna Russ calls "negative subjunctivity."⁵ That means fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it. Fantasy is what could not have happened, what cannot exist. The

negative subjunctivity, the cannot or could not, constitutes in fact the chief pleasure of fantasy.

Moreover, the use of the term Earthling for the first time in the book, when Vonnegut asserts that as an Earthling he is a prisoner of time, further adds to the atmosphere of fantasticality which matches the non-natural characteristics of Billy Pilgrim's story.

When the narration of Billy's adventures, or misadventures, begins in Chapter Two, Vonnegut-as-character disappears in the telling to re-emerge in the last chapter. We are kept aware of his presence, however. It is implied by some events which link the narrative to the first chapter. For example, in Chapter Four, Billy Pilgrim receives a misdialed phone call from a drunk and we are told that he could almost "smell his breath - mustard gas and roses" (p.53). Could that be Vonnegut himself? His late-night telephoning to long-lost friends and the mustard-gas-and-roses smell of his breath when he gets drunk, which are foregrounded in Chapter One, could justify this assumption. His presence is also felt in the authorial voice which is superposed on the narrator's. This aspect will be discussed along with the characteristics of the narrator.

Those examples show that Vonnegut-as-character intervenes indirectly in the Billy Pilgrim plot. But by far the most effective signs of his presence are his several first-person interventions in the narrative, when he recounts his participation in the action. In consequence, he steps directly into the role of a character in Billy's story.

The various first-person statements which signal the direct intervention of the author-as-character in his fiction occur at climactic moments of the narrative. We have ranged them according to their order of occurrence in the plot:

- a) The American POW's gathered in a railroad yard,

waiting for the trains that will take them into Germany's interior, witness the delirious ramblings of Wild Bob, a commander who had led his troops to disaster and lost his regiment - "about forty-five hundred men - a lot of them children, actually" (p.49) and who is himself close to death from double pneumonia. In his delirium, he believes to be addressing his soldiers: "If you're ever in Cody, Wyoming, just ask for Wild Bob!" are his closing words. As if drawn by the poignancy of the memory, Vonnegut-as-character comes to the foreground to state: "I was there. So was my old war buddy Bernard V. O'Hare" (p.50).⁶ The mention of his friend Bernard V. O'Hare, whom we meet in the autobiographical chapters, is one of the many links between the first character in the novel and this voice we hear now.

b) In Chapter Three, the author-as-character participates again in the Billy Pilgrim plot when he proclaims that the "crazy thought" that Billy has when Valencia tries to make him talk about the war - "Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt" would make a "good epitaph for Billy Pilgrim and for me, too" (p.83,84).⁷

c) A little further on in the same chapter, Vonnegut takes part in the action as one of the American POW's who were terribly sick after the welcome feast prepared by the British officers. After the narrator recounts how this soldier wailed that he had excreted everything including his brains, Vonnegut steps in to declare: "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (p.86).⁸ As if the first-person references were not sufficient to identify himself as a character in the story, the author-as-character openly states his double role as creator and creature.

d) Vonnegut's next participation in the Billy Pilgrim plot takes place in Chapter Six, on the arrival of the American POW's at Dresden. Both the author and Billy Pilgrim

are enchanted by "the loveliest city that most of the Americans had ever seen." At the sight of the fabulous Dresden skyline, the narrator's voice gives way to Vonnegut's: "Somebody behind him (Billy) in the boxcar said, 'Oz'. That was I. That was me. The only other city I'd ever seen was Indianapolis, Indiana" (p.100). Again the author openly identifies himself with a character in the plot, this time by referring also to his home town.

e) In Chapter Ten, which closes the novel's autobiographical frame, the first character we met in the novel re-emerges clearly. After relating some details of his and O'Hare's trip back to Dresden, in 1967, Vonnegut reverts to an account of Billy's trip back to Dresden in 1945. In preparation for a description of the Dresden "corpse mines", probably the most painful in a host of painful memories, the author-as-character not only refers to himself in the first person but shifts for the first time in the novel to first person plural:

Now Billy and the rest were being marched into the ruins by their guards. I was there. O'Hare was there. We had spent the past two nights in the blind innkeeper's stable. Authorities had found us there. They told us what to do. We were to borrow picks and shovels and crowbars and wheelbarrows from our neighbors. We were to march with these implements to such and such a place in the ruins, ready to go to work (p.141).¹⁰

Analysing the first-person references listed above we realize that they fall into two categories, to which we have attributed distinct functions:

- a) to assure the author a part in Billy's war experiences;
- b) to identify Vonnegut-as-character and Billy.

The first category includes the first-person references which we have numbered 1, 3, 4, and 5, and indicates that the story being told is not only Billy Pilgrim's but Vonnegut-as-character's as well. They are two characters in the same plot, sharing the same painful war experiences. Vonnegut's recurring statements - "I was there" "That was me" - show his intention of establishing beyond doubt the fact that he was also there, side by side with Billy Pilgrim, as another innocent pawn in the cruel game of war. Thus, our first assumption is reinforced: Vonnegut is indeed a character in his own novel, the character who writes the book and who, on the other hand, takes a minor role in Billy's story.

Second role: Vonnegut as Billy Pilgrim

The second category of functions we have ascribed to the author's first person interventions in Billy's story leads us to his next role on the stage of Slaughterhouse-Five.

We have included in the second category number 2 and again number 1. These interventions of Vonnegut-as-character may be interpreted as a device to identify himself and Billy Pilgrim. Their shared epitaph (number 2) evidences that they have similar attitudes toward life. They are following the Tralfamadorian advice of looking only at the pleasant moments of life. Number 1, which is already included in the first category, is repeated here because we judge it to have a function of identification besides that of acknowledging the presence of the author as a character in the central plot of the novel. The phrase "I was there" uttered by Vonnegut-as-character is repeated twice by Billy Pilgrim in Chapter Nine (p.127, 129) when he tries to convince the skeptical Bertram Copeland Rumfoord, the Harvard historian, that he had been present at the Dresden fire-bombing.

Another identifying link between the author-as-character

and Billy Pilgrim, stemming from the same scene which prompted the author to utter his first "I was there," is Wild Bob's speech "If you're ever in Cody, Wyoming just ask for Wild Bob." This same statement is echoed twice by Billy Pilgrim in Chapter Nine: while he was unconscious in hospital, after the plane crash on Sugarbush Mountain (p.125); in the moments that preceded Billy's broadcast about the wonderful things he had learned in Tralfamadore, when he nervously repeats it to himself (p.137). The next occurrence of the statement in Chapter Ten (p.141) no longer signals a quick intervention of the author in Billy's misadventures, but is part of Vonnegut's fictional autobiography. When he and his "old war buddy O'Hare" (p.140) are flying over East Germany, in 1967, Vonnegut is reminded of bombings during the war, in contrast with his and O'Hare's current "easy circumstances." "If you're ever in Cody, Wyoming," he says lazily, "just ask for Wild Bob" (p.141). The repetition of exactly the same words by different characters at various points of the narrative stretches coincidence beyond the limits of probability. A structure built on such coincidences is itself fantastic, and, therefore, a signal of the author himself that he intends to create a fantastic narrative. On the other hand, it is clearly an identifying device, which can lead us to conclude either that Vonnegut-as-character and Billy Pilgrim are merely different aspects of the same character or that Billy is a persona, a mask for his creator. The second alternative seems to us to be the more probable as it fits with the structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which the Billy Pilgrim plot constitutes a story within another story, whose action reproduces "more or less" (p.9) what happened to Vonnegut himself during the war.

The identification of the two characters is emphasized by the fact that many of the author's autobiographical de-

tails both in Chapter One and Chapter Ten coincide with those of Billy's biography scattered throughout the novel. Both Billy and Vonnegut-as-character had fathers who hunted; they are tall; both participated in the war, were captured by the Germans and were kept prisoners in "Schlachthof-fünf" at the time of the Dresden air-raid; both survived the holocaust and helped dig up the corpses; they were discharged from the Army in 1945, returned to college, and were married soon afterwards. They share, moreover, some personal preferences, such as their love for dogs. Vonnegut's Sandy does not mind the "smell of mustard gas and roses" on his breath; Billy misses his dog Spot, which he had "liked a lot (p.47). Their war souvenir is also identical - a Luftwaffe saber.

These facts, which can be verified in the text, coupled with biographical information available on Kurt Vonnegut¹¹ extend Billy's and Vonnegut's identification beyond the character Vonnegut to the author himself: they share the same birth date, 1922; they were captured in Luxembourg, during the Battle of the Bulge and were put out as contract labor to a factory that made malt-syrup for pregnant women. As Charles Harris points out, this double identification means we can consider Billy as a mask both for Vonnegut-as-character as well as for Kurt Vonnegut, the American writer.¹²

We know from Vonnegut's observations in Chapter One and from other biographical sources that he had been trying unsuccessfully for twenty-three years to tell his story of Dresden. The means he devised to do it, at last, was to create an alter ego who would live his painful experiences. And then, Vonnegut did not choose any ordinary character, but an obviously imaginary protagonist, who indulges in time travel and who befriends the little green creatures from Tralfamadore. In order to interpose distance between himself and his grievous memories, Vonnegut had not a merely fictional

character live them but a special being, who escapes his unbearable experiences by means of time travel. Through Billy Pilgrim's fantastic characteristics, Vonnegut himself escapes the grimness of the extra textual world. As mentioned before¹³ the vision of escape is the most common of the marks by which we can recognize a work that makes use of the fantastic. By creating a character who is able to time travel away from the cruelest moments of his life, Vonnegut's narrative world reverses the ground rules of the extra-textual world, in this case, the world of fire and destruction and death, the vision of Hell which he only manages to escape by giving it a different shape through his fictional art. Thus, the creation of a narrative world, in which the Dresden incident is seen through the eyes of a semi-fantastic character provides Vonnegut with much needed psychological escape.

We have proposed so far that Vonnegut assumes two different roles in his Dresden book:

1) he is the character who writes the novel and who makes sporadic appearances in its inner story;

2) he identifies himself with Billy Pilgrim.

We do not believe those to be the only manifestations of Vonnegut in the text. It is necessary, for instance, to establish the relationship between Vonnegut and another important element in the novel - the narrator - who has full command of the Billy Pilgrim's story from the beginning of Chapter Two onwards. We argue that the role of narrator is another of Vonnegut's metamorphoses in the context of Slaughterhouse-Five.

Third role: Vonnegut as narrator.

Vonnegut-as-character is unmistakably the narrator of the autobiographical part of the novel. His position as narrator of the novel's fictive nucleus, however, requires

some examination. Several elements in Slaughterhouse-Five speak in favor of this hypothesis which is accepted by some critics.¹⁴

Firstly, we must consider the fact that the storyteller is omniscient. He not only has full knowledge of Billy's past, present, and future actions, but also penetrates the hero's mind in order to relay his thoughts. Moreover, like a creator judging his creatures, he criticizes the actions and attitudes of the characters in the story. Billy Pilgrim's daughter, for example, is labeled a "bitchy flibbertigibbet" because she believes it to be her responsibility to run the life and the affairs of a supposedly senile Billy. Billy Pilgrim does not fare much better: he is a valet to a preacher, "with a meek faith in a loving Jesus that the other soldiers found putrid" (p.27); as a middle-aged man Billy has no real interest in his profession, though he tries "to hang on to his dignity, to persuade Barbara and the others that he was far from senile" (p.26). He knows that Billy did not want to marry ugly Valencia and that he would survive the war.

Another element of identification is the ironic and ambivalent language, which is an ingrained Vonnegutian trait. Speaking of Billy, the narrator says that he never got mad at anything. "He was wonderful that way" (p.27). The reader is left wondering, nevertheless, as to the narrator's real opinion of Billy's passiveness.

The narrator's voice at times becomes clearly that of Vonnegut's, setting the rules of his alternative world. Thus, Billy's dream that he is ice-skating in "dry, warm, white sweat socks" while he is actually standing on the ice of a frozen creek, is emphatically declared to be mere "hallucination", "the craziness of a dying young man with his shoes full of snow" and not time - travel because it "had never happened never would happen" (p.38).

On the other hand, a wide gap separates Vonnegut and the narrator, where their attitudes and beliefs are concerned. Their diverse reactions to the Tralfamadorian philosophy of acceptance aptly illustrate the differences between them. The detailed analysis of the Tralfamadorian ideas, which is the subject of a later chapter, is not called for at this point. Only its basic points interest us now. The Tralfamadorians, robots devoid of all human feeling of love and compassion, believe that events are structured to happen and cannot be changed. Moreover, their concept of simultaneous time reduces death to a transitory event: people are dead in one moment, but they are alive in another. Hence their detached and cold "so it goes" uttered in the face of death.

On a first reading, it seems that Vonnegut himself accepts the Tralfamadorian concepts. After all, he is the first to use the cold refrain "so it goes", in Chapter One. He also apparently accepts the Tralfamadorian philosophy of indifference when he declares to be in agreement with Billy's thought "everything was beautiful and nothing hurt." He consistently repudiates Tralfamadorianism, nonetheless, in several instances of the initial and of the final chapters. He has told his sons they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres or to work for companies which make massacre machinery. "If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes be", says Vonnegut-as-character in the last chapter, "I am not overjoyed" (p.140). Both attitudes disagree with the Tralfamadorian deterministic belief that since nothing can be done to prevent things from happening one must accept them and with their concept of transient death. Besides, Vonnegut makes clear all through the book, that he is not content to excuse either the fire-bombing of Dresden or the Vietnam war as fate beyond the

control of human free will. Like Lot's wife, Vonnegut turns to look back at the past with love and compassion even though doing so means being transformed into a pillar of salt. And this is definitely an "untralfamadorian" behavior.

On the other hand, there are no ambivalences in the narrator's attitudes. He accepts the Tralfamadorian philosophy wholeheartedly. His cold and resigned "so it goes", repeated at short intervals, becomes irritating. He asserts even in the most gruesome situations that "everything is all right with Billy Pilgrim."¹⁵ He cannot understand the reason for Billy's fits of weeping either, for he adopts the Tralfamadorian philosophy of "ignoring unpleasant times and concentrating on the good ones" (p.78). He shares the Tralfamadorian view that all human beings are machines (p.104) and that events are structured to happen one way or another. "The plane took off without incident. The moment was structured that way", he says in the moments that preceded the crash which would kill all the passengers, but Billy and the copilot (p.104-5).

In short, the narrator is sufficiently similar to Vonnegut for us to say that he is Vonnegut, whereas their differences may lead us to conclude that he is not. The solution we propose is to consider the narrator as another of Vonnegut's personas in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Decomposition of personality is a phenomenon commonly acknowledged both in psychoanalysis and in literature. As Scott Fitzgerald remarks in connection with the multifaceted nature of the artist: "There never was...a good biography of a good novelist. There couldn't be. He's too many people if he's any good."¹⁶ There are many facets to Vonnegut, and the narrator of Billy Pilgrim's story can be interpreted as that part of the author which attempts to forget Dresden and all other examples of man's bestial cruelty. After all, Vonnegut does try to apply

the refrain "so it goes" and so put into practice the principle of acceptance. It is also significant that it took him twenty-three years to write his Dresden book, which may show that at times he did try to ignore that awful moment.

Having established our position in relation to Vonnegut and the narrator, we now propose to examine the latter's role in order to detect instances of the fantastic in the text. As one of Vonnegut's masks, the narrator is in a privileged position to furnish some clues of the fantastic, which is not restricted to the presence of supernatural elements (robots, flying saucers, etc.) in a given work, but results from more subtly indicated reversals of reality. Statement of narrators and, above all, signals of the implied author are of paramount importance for a detection of the fantastic.¹⁷ In *Slaughterhouse-Five* both types of signal can be examined through an analysis of the narrator's role, which reconciles, in a way, the parts of both the author and the narrator proper. One of these signals of the implied author is language. We shall start, therefore, by examining some important aspects of language.

As a starting point, the narrator emphasizes the fact that he functions as a mediator between Billy Pilgrim and the reader, and that as such he is reporting merely what he heard from Billy. Hence, the recurring "he says" following his reports of Billy's words.

(....) He has seen his birth and death many times, he says and pays random visits to all the events in between.

He says.

Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next (....)
(p.23)¹⁸

The passage above is part of the microcosm of the novel's

narrative world which was presented earlier.¹⁹ We are asked to accept Billy's mobility in time, his capacity for crossing thresholds into disconnected periods of time, reversing diametrically our perspectives as readers and inhabitants of a real world. All of a sudden we stumble upon two he says, the first of which may be taken solely as an indicator that somebody else's words are being reported. The emphasis given the second one, however - conspicuously isolated in a paragraph - implies that the narrator is dubious of Billy's story and that the reader should be also. The narrator's doubt, then, signals another fantastic reversal: we are back at a real world where Billy's adventures are the effect of craziness. The repetition of he says, he said, when the narrator recounts Billy's first public statements has a similar effect, transforming naturalness into doubt:

The saucer was from the planet Tralfamadore, he said. He was taken to Tralfamadore, where he was displayed naked in a zoo, he said (p.24).

When first used in a paragraph, he says or he said functions as indicators of reported speech. It is insistent repetition that results in irony and doubt. Besides, this connotation is enhanced by the cumulative effect of the utterances examined above, which occur all on pages twenty-three and twenty-four:

Billy insisted mildly that everything he had said was true. He said he had been kidnapped by the Tralfamadoreans on the night of his daughter's wedding. He hadn't been missed, he said, because the Tralfamadoreans had taken him through a time warp... (p. 24).

The pattern repeats itself at other points in the novel where the narrator reports Billy's stories of his Tralfama-

dorian experiences, or the application of his Tralfamadorian ideas. The first he says sounds natural, whereas the second or third ones have obvious ironic connotations arousing doubt about the truthfulness of Billy's story

Billy Pilgrim says now that this really is the way he is going to die, too. As a time-traveler, he has seen his own death many times, has described it to a tape recorder. The tape is locked up with his will and some other valuables in his safe-deposit box at the Ilium Merchants National Bank and Trust, he says (p.96).

Billy's death, followed by rebirth (he has seen his own death many times) arouses the narrator's doubt, and through him, the reader's. Are we to accept it as a "fact" in the contextual world of Slaughterhouse-Five or consider it as hallucination? The next quotation is equally marked by ambiguity:

Billy says that the Universe does not look like a lot of bright little dots to the creatures from Tralfamadore (...) the heavens are filled with rarefied, luminous spaghetti. And Tralfamadorians don't see human beings as two-legged creatures, either. They see them as great millipedes - 'with babies' legs at one end and old people's legs at the other, says Billy Pilgrim (p.62).

The luminous spaghetti the Tralfamadorians see in the heavens is not difficult to accept. But the absurd notion of human beings seen as millipedes, followed by the ever-present he says, not only stirs doubt but indicates the author's intention to ridicule his own creation. Vonnegut-as-narrator is poking fun at the Tralfamadorian world and at its views²⁰ in this and in other references to Tralfamadorian ideas.²¹ Again behind the narrator's matter-of-fact rendition of the ridi-

culous Tralfamadorian notions, Vonnegut's voice is perceived. These instances of playful humor seem to justify Vonnegut's affirmative, when speaking of Slaughterhouse-Five, that the science-fiction elements in the novel are comparable to the clowns in Shakespeare:

When Shakespeare figured the audience had had enough of the heavy stuff; he'd let up a little, bring on a clown or a foolish innkeeper or something like that, before he'd become serious again. And trips to other planets, science fiction of an obviously kidding sort, is equivalent to bringing on the clowns every so often to lighten things up.²²

The mock description of some Tralfamadorian notions, which the statement above apparently explains, causes the reader to hesitate: is Slaughterhouse-Five actually the story of a mentally deranged Billy Pilgrim, whose extraterrestrial adventures are but the equivalent to the clowns in Shakespeare, to "lighten things up" in a bleak story of death and destruction? At other points, nevertheless, the truthfulness of Billy's time travels is emphasized. This hesitation between a natural and a marvelous explanation is indeed the effect of the fantastic according to Todorov's theory.²³

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that a character's reaction of surprise, shock, or fear, is also relevant to signal the fantastic. No display of surprise has been registered by our analysis. In our view, the explanation is simple: as facets of their creator - Kurt Vonnegut - neither Vonnegut-as-character nor the narrator are likely to be surprised by the development of their joint creation, Slaughterhouse-Five. Furthermore, we must consider the formal characteristics of the narrator of Billy's story. He is the typical deadpan talltale narrator who maintains an

aloof attitude and a farcical tone throughout the narration of the most preposterously funny or ghastly events. The continued tension between the detached and indifferent tone and the painful or funny material is increased by the repetition of some phrases - "he says", "so it goes". The narrator utters the Tralfamadorian refrain at every mention or instance of death: "Poor Valencia was unconscious, overcome by carbon monoxide. She was a heavenly azure. One hour later she was dead. So it goes" (p.122). This matter-of-fact acceptance of Valencia's death is paralleled by other ninety-nine instances of reported deaths followed by the refrain "so it goes". Though this paradoxical stance is in keeping with Vonnegut's satiric decorum, which he establishes as early as the title page of the novel, by the use of farcical language in reference to the Dresden fire-bombing, it is a reversal of perspectives, because we, the inhabitants of the historical world, expect people to be shocked by death, in spite of the fact that nowadays we are daily confronted with violence and death.

Despite the absence of the expected surprise reactions, the narrator signals the fantastic in other relevant ways. In the first place, he reverses the ground rules of the extra-textual world by establishing the ground rules for the context of Slaughterhouse-Five. Once these rules are accepted, however, the fact that the narrator himself doubts Billy's stories of traveling in time, and into outer space, represents a second reversal in the opposite direction, which lands us back in the historical world, whose rules would, then, remain unbroken. Thus, through his double role as character and narrator, Vonnegut intervenes directly in the plot, whereas his identification with Billy Pilgrim allows him to live vicariously the events that lead up to the fateful Dresden raid.

A similar process of identification, though not any-

where so extensive, unites Vonnegut to Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer, who is a minor character in the novel, and another of the author's masks. Thus, Vonnegut's personality is fragmented into a number of interdependent, inter-related characters, all of which give us some insight into his characteristics.

Fourth role: Vonnegut as Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer. (A manufacturer of lies)

As mentioned in the introduction, the publication of Slaughterhouse-Five was a turning point in Kurt Vonnegut's career, which meant the acceptance of his work, previously labeled as science fiction, by serious literary critics. Kilgore Trout in Slaughterhouse-Five stands for the unsuccessful science-fiction writer Vonnegut feared he might become.

Every reference to Trout is touched with irony and reflects satirically on Vonnegut himself. Trout is depicted as a "cowardly and dangerous" man, looking like a prisoner of war, who keeps body and soul together as a circulation man for a local newspaper. It is his task to bully and flatter and cheat little kids (p.111). No two books of his have the same publisher and he is conscious of his failure as a writer: "He did not think of himself as a writer for the simple reason that the world had never allowed him to think of himself in this way" (p.76). Like Vonnegut, Trout writes about Americans all the time, though "practically nobody on Earth is an American" (p.76). Besides, Trout's novels which have a definite Vonnegutian ring to them, provide biting commentaries on the absurdities of human existence.

By means of the fictitious writer's works, Vonnegut expands his views on life's ultimate questions and makes a satiric commentary on the serious problems facing Billy Pilgrim. Trout is also "a cracked messiah",²⁴ someone who

re-creates the world by means of bittersweet lies that paradoxically reveal basic truths of the human world. Trout as well as Vonnegut are trying to "re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help" (p.70).

Structurally, the inclusion of Kilgore Trout, the fictitious science-fiction writer in the context of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, besides allowing the author to draw an extremely unflattering self-portrait, serves the purpose of expanding the non-natural atmosphere that pervades the novel. Trout's novels, moreover, as possible sources for the details of Billy Pilgrim's Tralfamadorian adventures add to the effect of the fantastic by lengthening the reader's hesitation concerning their interpretation.

Thus, Vonnegut-as-character, our character from the world of "fact", turns out to be much more fantastic and more complex than he seemed, each of his masks standing for a different aspect not only of his personality but of Kurt Vonnegut's personality as well.²⁵ The initial character undergoes a process of decomposition,²⁶ and various attributes of his are disunited resulting in different individuals, each endowed with one group of the original attributes.

Decomposition of characters is a frequent device in all types of literature, but it is particularly consistent with fantastic narratives. Actually, multiplication of personality is one of the fundamental themes of the fantastic in the system of themes established by Todorov.²⁷ This multiplication, the metamorphosis of a being into various other beings, stems from a basic principle which is at the source of all the distortions of the fantastic - the fragility of the limit between matter and mind:

Thus, we can generalize the phenomenon of metamorphoses and say that a character will

be readily multiplied. We all experience ourselves as if we were several persons.²⁸

In this way, the author Kurt Vonnegut enters his fiction as if he were four different personae: he becomes Vonnegut-as-character, the author of a book called *Slaughterhouse-Five* who is also a character in the fantastic tale of Billy Pilgrim's pilgrimages; he becomes Billy Pilgrim himself; he becomes the narrator of Billy's stories, someone who has opinions and feelings diametrically different from his own; and finally, he becomes Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer. At times those different aspects of Vonnegut's personality are superposed and become, as the definition of superpose indicate, "one of a vertical series"²⁹ and as such their characteristics can be perceived through or mingled with the characteristics of any of the others.

Two facets of the protagonist Vonnegut, Vonnegut-as-character and Billy Pilgrim, are fused, for example, in one of Billy's rare interior monologues:

Billy closed that one eye, saw in his memory of the future poor old Edgar Derby in front of a firing squad in the ruins of Dresden. There were only four men in that squad. Billy had heard that one man in each firing squad was customarily given a rifle loaded with blank cartridge. Billy didn't think there would be a blank cartridge issued in a squad that small in a war that old (p.73).

Vonnegut-as-character mentions the incident in Chapter One as a true part of his story - "one guy I know really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his" (p.9) - which means that young impressionable Private Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., who like Billy Pilgrim "often saw things worth crying about" (p.131) must have witnessed the execution. Going back to the

event through Billy Pilgrim's consciousness, the author's voice overcomes Billy's when a deeply repressed memory comes to the surface, in his bitter comments about the war.

Though, at times, as in the examples examined earlier, the narrator is clearly independent, stating his own views which often oppose Vonnegut's diametrically, at other times the author's voice is superimposed on the narrator's and two of Vonnegut's personas become one. In Chapter Four, for example, it is Vonnegut's own voice we hear in the comments about empty homes: "The moonlight came into the hallway through doorways of the empty rooms of Billy's two children, children no more. They were gone forever" (53). These wistful words echo Vonnegut-as-character's self-description as an old man "with his sons full grown" and are consistent with Kurt Vonnegut's ideas on the matter, made public in biographical articles written on him or in his works of non-fiction.³⁰

There is also linguistic evidence to confirm the change of voice in that passage. A noticeable change in tone separates the narrator's preceding mocking comments on Valencia's "snoring like a bandsaw" from the deep feelings that underline the author's statements.³¹ A careful analysis of language would most certainly reveal various other examples of the superposition of Vonnegut's personas. As such is not our main objective, we shall not enlarge on the subject.

To conclude, we propose to reverse the process and bring together once again the four different personas of the author-as-character, so that he can be restored to the full integrity of his complex personality. This can be achieved if we reduce all of them to a common denominator: Vonnegut-as-character, the author of Billy Pilgrim's story; Billy Pilgrim, the listless soldier who becomes a herald of the Tralfamadorian truths; Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer and "cracked messiah"; the narrator of the Billy Pil-

grim story, who serves as a mediator between the hero and the reader, all of them have a point in common - they are messengers addressing the world in their diverse and characteristic ways. Those messages conveyed by the different personas of one being, Vonnegut, indicate his uncertainty as to the right attitude to take in relation to the universe - part of him recognizes the futility of trying to change the world and attempts to accept it as it is, whereas his other self feels compelled to contend with its wrongs.

4.2 A STAGE-FRIGHTENED ACTOR

The use of the fantastic, which is foreshadowed in the traits of Vonnegut-as-character, becomes a determining factor in the characterization of Billy Pilgrim, a character who travels in the fourth dimension, both on Earth and to an alien planet.

As a result of the first ground rule established for the narrative of *Slaughterhouse-Five* - Billy's mobility in time - Billy Pilgrim must perform a multiplicity of roles: each of his dislocations in time and space entails a corresponding transformation of his characteristics. These sudden changes, which are reversals in characterization, keep Billy in a permanent state of stage fright, since another ground rule is that he never knows what he is going to be next:³² the clown, whose ludicrous appearance draws derisive comments from the Germans; the contemporary pilgrim progressing through an absurd world or given to extraterrestrial pilgrimages; the innocent child who is the shocked, uncomprehending and listless victim of superior forces, which drag him through the European war scene and keep him wandering in time, in trips that are not "necessarily fun" (23); a modern Christ figure, marked by suffering and resignation. On the other hand, he is also a

prosperous businessman, a polished convention speaker and a self-appointed messenger who attempts to spread the wonderful Tralfamadorian lessons about time and death.

This multiplicity of roles reminds us also of the denomination given to the composite hero of myth "the hero with a thousand faces", which is the title of a book by Joseph Campbell used as part embasement for our analysis of plot.³³ The parallel is enhanced by the pattern of recurrence in Billy's adventures, the *regressus in infinitum*, for in the mythical world "the central process or movement is that of the death and rebirth, or the disappearance and return, or the incarnation and withdrawal of a god."³⁴ In fact, the equation "doppelgänger (hero with a thousand faces) *regressus in infinitum*," proposed by Max Schulz for the analysis of characterization and narrative progression in modern fiction³⁵ is singularly appropriate for the examination of Billy's traits combined with the erratic development of his story.

In order to analyse the multiple facets of the hero's personality, his "thousand faces", we have divided them into two groups, according to their relation to the world of reality (the inside reality of the text) or the world of fantasy. Billy's "real" roles include those of clown, child-victim and successful businessman. The fantastic aspects of his personality are those which bring him closer to the extraterrestrial world of Tralfamadore, namely, his condition as a pilgrim in time and space, and as a messenger.

We will start our analysis with an examination of the roles Billy Pilgrim fulfills in the "real" world.

The Clown in the Blue Toga and Silver Shoes

The world of "reality" for Billy Pilgrim is synonymous with cruelty as the intensely violent events of his life corroborate. His very physical aspect, which is not merely funny but grotesque, seems to be the result of a cruel joke of na-

ture. The author depicts him as a "funny-looking child who became a funny-looking youth - tall and weak and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola..." (p.23) "with a chest and shoulders like a box of kitchen matches" (p.28). His ludicrous appearance makes him the prototype of the anti-hero, a parodical twentieth century knight, similar in many ways to his most famous literary ancestor, Don Quixote. Whereas the Spanish warrior departs on his adventures attired in rusty armor and carrying ineffective weapons, our hero goes off to war actually empty-handed. He was never issued a steel helmet or combat boots, so he goes about bare-headed, his balding skull exposed to the wind and the cold; he wears low-cut civilian shoes, with a missing heel, the cause of his incongruous dancing gait(p.29). Billy's anti-heroic stance is established by the author himself who calls him a clown in as many words: "And there in the doorway (was) the clown in his toga and silver shoes(...)" (p.106).

We will see later on that Slaughterhouse-Five is constructed around the diametrically opposed points of view of free will and determinism. This conflict provides the backdrop also for Billy's clownish attitudes. His ridiculous attire is not of his own choosing, but determined by fate. On arrival at prison camp, Billy is issued a fur-collared black coat, full of bullet holes and so small that it becomes a vest on his tall awkward frame. The only pieces of clothing Billy can get hold of are the azure curtains and silver painted airman's boots - Cinderella's slippers -, stage props used by the Englishmen for their representation of Cinderella. In fact, Billy's strange attire transforms him into a parodical Cinderella,³⁶ complete with silver slippers (which are a perfect fit) and Blue Fairy Godmother. Vonnegut's incursion into the realm of fairy tale reverses the whole set of perspectives of this fantastic world. As Max Luthi remarks,³⁷ fairy tale

heroes live in a world with foreknown and stable ground rules, a world which is controlled by the conventions of the genre itself: evil is punished and good rewarded, the beggar transformed into a prince. In Vonnegut's tale the poor orphan becomes a clown instead of a prince when he dons his magic clothes and his reward is a gradual approach to a scene of fire and death, which he consistently tries to evade by means of time travel.

Further examination of Billy's motley clothes brings out other instances of the fantastic. The fact that the small impresario coat yields a two-carat diamond hidden in its lining constitutes a reversal; it is transformed from a source of ridiculous into a source of wealth. Although it is not in itself a fantastic occurrence as it does not contradict the ground rules of the narrative or, for that matter, the rules of the war game - one of Vonnegut's fellow POW's had actually taken quite a large number of precious stones from dead people in the cellars of Dresden (p.12) it can be said to be dis-expected. The depiction of Billy as a clown diverted us from thinking about him as anybody but a ridiculous waif. The fact that he becomes the owner of a valuable stone is dis-expected, but possible in the course of the narrative. It is a joke on Fate's harsh treatment of our unheroic hero and jokes, as we know, depend on the dis-expected, which approaches the diametric reconfigurations of the fantastic.³⁸

The clownish aspect of Billy's personality is enhanced by his incongruous actions. At a point in the narrative, on the POW's arrival at prison camp, Billy absent-mindedly stands too close to a glowing stove, while inwardly wondering if there was a telephone somewhere for him to call his mother. Billy never noticed his clothes were on fire, and he had to be dragged away and the sparks beaten out from his clothes. His appearance as well as his absurd actions draw a comment from one of his English hosts: "This isn't a man. It's a broken kite'" (p.68).

Another incongruous scene takes place at a party when Billy, having drunk too much, persuades a woman guest to come into the laundry room of the house, for his first and only adventure outside marriage. There was an awful scene, with everybody expressing disgust for Billy and the woman. The comic aspect of the situation is enhanced by Billy's ending up in his car trying unsuccessfully to find the steering wheel. This was a vain attempt because he was in the back seat of his car.

Billy's grotesque and clownish attitudes are also brought out in the scene of the arrival in Dresden, when as "the star" and leader of the American POW's fools' parade, he is mocked by bystanders and berated by a furious German doctor, offended by the sight of a soldier so ridiculously clothed:

The surgeon spoke English, and he said to Billy, 'I take it you find war a very comical thing.'

Billy looked at him vaguely(...) He had no idea that people thought that he was clowning....

'Did you expect us to laugh? the surgeon asked himBilly was mystified. Billy wanted to be friendly, to help if he could, but his resources were meager

'You thought we would enjoy being mocked?' the surgeon said.

'And do you feel proud to represent America as you do?' (p. 102)

This scene puts into relief another aspect of Billy Pilgrim's characterization; his childish innocence, which makes it impossible for him to understand the cruelty of a world that mocks his desire to be friendly and helpful.

The development of the child facet of Billy's personality takes different aspects. In his innocence, Billy is equated to Adam, while as a victim of human cruelty and un-

provoked hostility, he presents many similarities with Christ. Billy's childish characteristics, moreover, refer us back to the subtitle of the novel, "The Children's Crusade".

A Twentieth-Century Child Crusader

The starting point of Billy's characterization as a child-victim is his name, which sounds incongruous when applied to an adult. We are told that he kept the infantile form of his name - Billy - advised by his father-in-law who thought it would be good for business because it sounded "magical" and "friendly". Unwittingly he was touching on two of Billy's main characteristics, his fantastic ramblings through space and time and his eagerness to please.

Billy is portrayed as a gawky youth, childishy perplexed by the war, as is made evident in the scene of his baptism of fire in Luxembourg:

"The third bullet was for the filthy flamingo, who stopped dead center in the road when the lethal bee buzzed past his ear. Billy stood there politely, giving the marksman another chance. It was his addled understanding of the rules of warfare that the marksman should be given a second chance" (p.29).

The deliberate emphasis put on Billy's childishness is in keeping with the fantastic characteristics of Slaughterhouse-Five. The fact that the hero of so much time traveling and of trips to another planet, has the characteristics of a child makes it easier for the reader to suspend disbelief and accept the fantastic events of Billy's life, as the fantastic is more acceptable in the context of children.³⁹

On the other hand, as a child figure, Billy stands for the average soldier, generally an uncomprehending youth lost in a conflict he knows nothing about, thus establishing a

parallel between men at war and children. The association soldier/child is extended to modern army/ "Children's Crusade"⁴⁰ by Billy's being made a chaplain's assistant who, like a Crusader, departs on a holy mission.

But the role of Billy as a crusader has its comic undercutting, for a chaplain's assistant, as Vonnegut points out, is a figure of fun in the American Army, "powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends" (p.27). This anti-heroic position is in keeping with the satiric decorum of the narrative, whose ironic tone from the very beginning leads us to expect a reversal of perspectives, since irony consists in "stating the reverse of the truth as though it were clear truth."⁴¹

The consistent foregrounding of Billy Pilgrim's childish innocence gives rise to another association, Billy/Adam. Perhaps the most important aspect of this identification comes at the time of Billy's capture by a German patrol. The corporal in command wears a pair of golden cavalry boots, "which he had taken from a dead Hungarian colonel." As he stares into the depths of the shiny boots, Billy sees Adam and Eve, "so innocent, so vulnerable, so eager to behave decently" (p.41), instead of his own face. Billy's physical image, a comfortable familiar reality in the inside reality of the narrative, gives way to an alternative image, which sums up his psychological characteristics, through a paraxial process of metamorphosis.⁴² The parallel Billy/Adam becomes clearer when a fifteen-year-old soldier with delicate features, who is on the German patrol, is said to be "as beautiful as Eve." This association is further extended when the geodesic dome in the Tralfamadorian zoo becomes a metaphor for Paradise, with Billy and Montana living naked as Adam and Eve.⁴³

Vonnegut's self-reflexive observations about the people in his novel being so sick and so much the listless playthings

of enormous forces that they are discouraged from being characters apply to Billy Pilgrim as he is both sick and a listless plaything, at the mercy of uncontrollable forces. The child crusader plunged into the nightmare of war becomes a child victim, involved by awesome forces which he cannot either resist or understand. The emphasis on Billy's characteristics as a child and a victim makes him a "universal man-child" as Peter Reed⁴⁴ observes, a motif used by Vonnegut to show war as a terrifying unleashing of awesome forces which involve and destroy the children of men. Reed's interpretation of Billy as universal man-child is also consistent with the parallels between Billy and Jesus Christ which are established in the text.

From his childhood Billy had been familiar with Christ's sufferings for he contemplated daily an extremely gruesome crucifix which his mother had hung on the wall of his bedroom. The contemplation of torture and hideous wounds foreshadows Billy's own moral and physical sufferings as a victim of a hostile world. He is a victim up to the moment when he is shot to death by Paul Lazzaro in fulfilment of his promise to avenge Roland Weary's death. Thus, like Christ, Billy is unjustly accused and made a scapegoat who is sacrificed in expiation of other people's errors. Still like Christ, Billy is the target of much abuse and derision. Accused of "kicking", "yelling" and "whimpering" during his sleep he is prevented from joining his fellow prisoners on the floor of the boxcar. Consequently, he has to remain standing, holding on to a corner-brace, "self-crucified, holding himself there with a blue and ivory claw hooked over the sill of the ventilator" (p.58). Self-crucified Billy presents an even stronger parallelism with Christ.

In Chapter Nine, Billy's identification with Christ is made textually clear. Billy who was snoozing in a cart, hears

somebody speaking in commiserating tones that "might have been those used by the friends of Jesus when they took His body down from His cross" (p.130). Ironically those tones were not directed at Billy but at the cart horses which Americans' carelessness had reduced to a pitiful state. When he realized that he was inadvertently responsible for this, Billy burst into tears, whereas he "hadn't cried about anything else in the war" (p.131). Once again the identification with Christ is foregrounded when the author observes that "in that respect, at least, he (Billy) resembled the Christ of the Carol" which is why it was chosen to be the epigraph of the book:

The cattle are lowing,
The Baby awakes.
But the little Lord Jesus
No crying he makes. (p.131)

The only other instance in the war when Billy is reported as being "close to tears" comes before his self-crucifixion, when he is openly rejected by his companions. But as a middle-aged optometrist, Billy is shown weeping quietly and privately, without any apparent reason, although the text implies that he is a compassionate being who cannot accept man's cruelty to man. Therefore, Billy as a scapegoat, as a shattered soldier who is the innocent victim of human ruthlessness, and as the compassionate optometrist who helps people to see better, through the diffusion of his messianic message from outer space, makes an apt modern Christ-figure.

Besides, Billy's compassion for his fellow beings is another trait he shares with Vonnegut whose belief, which is expressed in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and in several other works of his, is that man must be kind and compassionate toward man.⁴⁵

Various instances throughout the novel evidence that Billy shares Vonnegut's creed of kindness and compassion. Even his marriage to ugly and fat Valencia can be considered an act of kindness. The narrator knows that Billy did not want to marry her: "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 life" (p.75). Billy's disease, which can be translated as his inability to accept human suffering, leads him into marriage with a woman "no one in his right mind would have married" (p.81). Billy does not feel any love for Valencia, but he is reconciled to the marriage since he "had already seen a lot of their marriage, thanks to time-travel, knew it was going to be at least bearable all the way" (p.82). Billy would rather put up with a marriage that is "bearable" than watch Valencia suffer as an unmarried, fat woman whom nobody wanted. Billy's kindness is further stressed by his attempt to comfort suffering humanity, with the Tralfamadorian notion that death is not permanent.

There are instances, nonetheless, when Billy seems unconcerned about human suffering. Thus, he can drive indifferently through the destroyed Ilium ghetto or accept the bombing of North Vietnam without protest.

Consistent with his depiction as a "listless plaything of enormous forces, "Billy's apathy is foregrounded at various points in the novel, whether the issue at stake is his own survival or the most trivial matter. The latter point is illustrated by the comic dialogue between Billy and his bride, who asks his help in the selection of their silver pattern:

'Billy,' said Valencia Merble.

'Hm?'

'You want to talk about our silver pattern?'

'Sure.'

'I've got it narrowed down pretty much to either Royal Danish or Rambler Rose.'

'Rambler Rose,' said Billy.

'It isn't something we should rush into, she said. 'I mean - whatever we decide on, that's what we're going to have to live with the rest of our lives.'

Billy studied the pictures. 'Royal Danish,' he said at last.

'Colonial Moonlight is nice, too.'

'Yes, it is', said Billy Pilgrim (p.77).

The above interchange which concerns a trivial matter corroborates Billy's unwillingness to assert himself, made clear at various points of his plight, both when he claims that "everything is all right" or when he voices his defeatists pleas to be left alone.⁴⁶ The overall impression we receive from Billy's characterization is that of a spineless boob ready to give up his hold on life. No wonder his hospital companion, the Harvard history professor Bertram Copeland Rumfoord, who is Billy's opposite in every respect, bored by Billy's talking in his sleep about quitting and surrendering and apologizing and asking to be left alone (p.123) is led to quote Theodore Roosevelt, "whom he resembled a lot": "'I could carve a better man out of a banana.'"⁴⁷

Thus, it is surprising that as an optometrist, Billy turns out to be an extremely wealthy and successful businessman. Although some critics⁴⁸ consider this part of Billy's characterization to be inconsistent with his role as bemused wanderer, we think that it is compatible with the peculiar fantastic atmosphere of the novel, as we shall try to explain in the ensuing part of this chapter.

Fabulous wealth for a Fabulous Hero

Billy's role as successful businessman, which makes him "rich as Croesus" is explained by his marriage to the boss's unattractive daughter, some time after his return from Europe. As a reward for this act, which we have ascribed to Billy's compassionate nature (see p. 67), his optometrist father-in-law makes him a manager of his prosperous Ilium office. As part of the "successful citizen" side of his personality, Billy is shown as a respected member of exclusive clubs - he plays golf on Sundays and is made President of the Lions Club -, who makes a habit of giving his wife high-priced jewelry.

Billy's successful handling of his father-in-law's business is not sufficiently accounted for in the context of Slaughterhouse-Five, nonetheless, for the few instances of his professional activity are not very effective. He falls asleep while examining a female patient and when he decides to go back to work, against everyone's expectations, after recovering from the plane crash, he is thought to be going crazy for attempting to comfort an orphaned boy with the unique Tralfamadorian view of mortality. Likewise, Billy's blundering embarrassedly in a porno bookstore, weeping quietly for no apparent reason, or being jiggled to sleep by the Magic Fingers contraption on his mattress does nothing to forward his success image. On the contrary, such facts demonstrate Billy's inefficiency and listlessness which, though acceptable in the context of war, when he was reduced to a physical and mental wreck by shock, hunger and fear, stand out paradoxically in the Ilium setting, and apparently negate the coherence of his characterization.

At the beginning of this chapter, we established several parallels between Billy Pilgrim and his creator, Vonnegut-as-character, for whom he functions as a persona. The

fact that both are successful financially merely expands the parallelisms between creator and creature. As can be verified by the title page and by Chapter One, Vonnegut-as-character lives in "easy circumstances"(p.3), though he had "never expected to make any money after the war" (p.14). It is not unexpected, then, that Vonnegut's alter ego, who lives the author's painful experiences, should equally emulate his creator in the financial aspect. Even the path followed by Billy to go up in life presents similarities with Vonnegut's extra-textual reality. Like Billy, who rose from rags to riches by devious means, namely, by marrying an ugly but extremely rich woman, Vonnegut had to take a detour in his career and resort to writing slick stories and pot boilers in order to finance his activity as a serious writer, which would eventually win him fame and critical recognition.⁴⁹

Besides, we should keep in mind the peculiar mingling of reality and fantasy in the context of Slaughterhouse-Five, which is especially evident in the characterization of Billy Pilgrim, a hero both from this world and apart from it. Billy's fluctuations between reality and dream, between the grim factual world of Dresden and the fantastic alternative world of Tralfamadore lend fantastic overtones to reality, whereas his fantastic world is marked by his Earthling doubts and problems. We can say, furthermore, that Billy's whole experience in many aspects approaches the world of Faery⁵⁰ where the overnight metamorphosis of paupers into princes is to be expected.

A pilgrim in space and time.

Billy's role as a pilgrim is foregrounded from the very beginning of the narration of his adventures, which starts with: "Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time"(p.23). The choice of such an unusual name, Pilgrim,⁵¹ suggests it

must have special connotations in the context, which become clear as we read. The whole narrative is set in the framework of a journey, with Billy as the traveler both to alien lands in outer space and to several places in our planet which to him must seem no less strange. The opening sentence of Billy's story also establishes that he is a fantastic pilgrim, one who is free of the restraining effects of time. Thus time travel and journeys to alien planets, conventional devices of science fiction, make part of the ground rules of the narrative. What singles Billy out, however, is his continuous shuttling from reality to fantasy.

By naming his protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut inserts him in the immemorial literary tradition of the traveler in search of mental and spiritual values, a tradition rooted in the very nature of man, who, from primeval times has longed for new horizons, in the hope of finding answers to the mysteries of the universe. In this respect, several critics have remarked upon the parallels between Billy's story and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Stanley Schatt stresses mainly the contrasts between the two "pilgrimages". He calls attention to the fact that Billy is a pilgrim who is not even a Christian and is not looking for Heaven.⁵² Instead, he has substituted Science Fiction for religious belief, as Wilfrid Sheed points out. Billy's solution to the problems of the modern world is "to invent a heaven, out of 20th century materials, where Good Technology triumphs over Bad Technology, His scripture is Science Fiction, man's last good fantasy."⁵³ Whereas Bunyan's Christian progresses toward revelation, Vonnegut's twentieth-century pilgrim does not progress at all, but keeps oscillating in space and time, between fact and fantasy.

A re-examination of the name Billy Pilgrim, this time from the point of view of sound patterns, discloses a linguis-

tic aspect in keeping with the overall derisive tone of the characterization. The assonance between the initial syllables *Bil Pil* can be said to establish a comic echo, adding consequently to Billy's depiction as a figure of fun.

Billy's ridiculous physical appearance coupled with his bizarre behavior, plus the sharply satiric tone of *Slaughterhouse-Five* point at the fact that he is a parodic pilgrim engaged in an unorthodox pilgrimage. Most of the time, in fact, rather than a pilgrim he is a bemused wanderer, unsure of his whereabouts and of his goal. Thus, asked by a German woman what he was supposed to be, Billy answered that he didn't know. He was just trying to keep warm (p.107). Frequently Billy has no idea of the time or of what planet he is on (p.93), so that he fulfills aptly the role of parodic pilgrim, lost in time and space.

Moreover, Billy does not undertake his pilgrimages voluntarily. As a child, he was taken to the Carlsbad Caverns and to the Grand Canyon by his father, who is oblivious to the boy's terror at the awe-inspiring landscape. His experiences in wartime Europe result from his being drafted into the Army. His trip to Tralfamadore, following his kidnapping by the little Tralfamadorian robots, is even more conspicuously involuntary, as his will is paralyzed by a zap gun (p.55). All this makes Billy a reluctant pilgrim, who is hurled into his adventures by the power of "enormous forces". Billy's reluctance to set out on his pilgrimages extends to the very first and most significant of all pilgrimages, which is man's passage through life. He is not merely a reluctant pilgrim, but one who is anxious to quit. It is Roland Weary's cruelty that keeps Billy alive in Luxembourg, whereas if he were left to himself, he would surely attain his wish to "turn into steam and float up among the treetops" (p.38). Back in Ilium, after the war, when he commits himself to the veterans' hospital,

Billy refuses to talk to his mother or to see her "because she made him feel embarrassed and ungrateful and weak because she had gone to so much trouble to give him life, and to keep that life going and Billy didn't really like life after all" (p.71). This is understandable in view of the series of personal catastrophes in Billy's life which include an unhappy childhood, the accidental death of his father, his wife's bizarre death by carbon monoxide poisoning, a nervous breakdown, difficult children, an airplane crash that nearly killed him, and the crowning experience of his life - the Dresden fire-bombing.

Dresden, the scene of the catastrophe which is the novel's *raison d'être* is actually the ultimate goal of Billy's earthly pilgrimages. Billy's approach to Dresden does not follow a straight line, but develops in circles, paralleling the endless Yon Yonson song introduced by Vonnegut in Chapter One.⁵⁴ The song functions as an objective correlative for the paths followed by both protagonists, Billy Pilgrim and Vonnegut-as-character on their respective pilgrimages to Dresden. Where it took Vonnegut twenty-three years to give artistic shape to his Dresden memories, it takes Billy several digressions to other periods of his life, before he finally reaches the fateful night of the fire-bombing. An illustrative example is Billy's escape from Dresden on the eve of its destruction, by time-traveling to 1967, only to "find himself engaged again, word for word, gesture for gesture" (p.111) in an argument with his daughter, who believes Billy's Tralfamadorian stories to be a sign of his insanity. However painful his daughter's words may be, they hurt less than the memory of the atrocities Billy witnessed in the war. Billy's slow progression toward slaughterhouse number five, moreover, is an apt metaphor for man's pilgrimage on earth and its unavoidable conclusion in death.

Besides establishing Billy's circuitous road to Dresden, the text also evidences his reluctance in talking about war or even remembering it. Valencia judges him to be "full of secrets" (p.83). In spite of his denial, we know that Billy has a "great big secret" so deeply repressed "somewhere inside" (p.116) that he is not aware of it. And Billy's secret is not merely his time traveling, "Tralfamadore and so on" (p.83) as the narrator wants the reader to believe, but the memory of the Dresden massacre. When Billy finally comes face to face with his haunting memories, a glance through a time window according to Kilgore Trout, he is able to remember openly the events of February, 13, 1945. It is significant for the meaning of the novel that Billy does not travel in time to the experience but remembers it "shimmeringly" (p.118). This noticeable break in the time-travel pattern establishes Billy's unwillingness to go back to the scene of the massacre and, through Billy, Vonnegut's own reluctance to come too close to a still vivid memory. In this way, Billy does not reach the ultimate goal of his earthly pilgrimage, which is interrupted by the recollection of the air-raid. Therefore, the only question Billy ever asks - "Why?" - remains unanswered.

Billy's earthly pilgrimages put into relief his characteristics as a reluctant and parodical pilgrim. The fantastic part of his pilgrimages, on the other hand, defines him as a character from an alternative world. The rules of this world allow him to travel in the fourth dimension but not to choose the role he is going to play next or to change the course of events. Were he able to alter events each time he visited a given period of his life, it would result in complete chaos for he would be establishing different time streams.⁵⁵ The novel would become a much more fantastic work if this particular rule were to be reversed and Billy able to exert effective action upon the course of events. Effective action might have pre-

vented the plane crash which nearly killed Billy, a painful event among the host of painful experiences that mark his life. He knew the plane was about to crash but, instead of trying to prevent the accident, he merely evaded it by traveling back to Luxembourg, to another as painful experience, at the hands of Roland Weary. Why didn't Billy warn someone about the imminent crash? The reason advanced by the narrator - that Billy didn't want to make a fool of himself - is just another example of his dubious reasoning, as it clashes with his affirmatives, repeated throughout the novel that Billy is unable to change anything. When he comments on Billy's motto,⁵⁶ he states positively that Billy is unable to change the past, the present and the future.

The four original ground rules we discussed earlier also hold on Billy's pilgrimage to Tralfamadore and that planet, like all fantastic worlds, provides elements of recovery, escape and consolation. Tralfamadore presents Billy with an upside down image of himself and of his existence, the first reversal occurring in his physical and mental characteristics. Although he does not actually undergo any observable metamorphosis, his body, which had earned him the epithets of "scarecrow" and "broken kite" - becomes beautiful in the eyes of the Tralfamadoreans who, having never seen a human being, supposed that Billy was a splendid specimen. Consequently, Billy begins to enjoy his body for the first time; he becomes beautiful in his own eyes. Furthermore, Valencia's dutiful husband is replaced by Montana Wildhack's ardent lover and a bearable marriage gives way to sexual bliss.

Mentally, Billy undergoes a similar diametrical reversal. The dazed soldier, anxious to surrender life, and the shallow businessman who accepts war in Vietnam and urban warfare with indifference, now give way to an argumentative Billy Pilgrim who voices his inner thoughts about man's inhumanity to man.

He discusses free will, war and peace, and brings into the open his fears that Earthlings might eventually destroy part or maybe all of the innocent universe. The Tralfamadorian robots provide him with consoling concepts of time and death which, in time, Billy wishes to impart to the world at large. Thus, in consequence, Billy the pilgrim becomes Billy the messenger, a role which is related to the central meaning of the novel, namely, how to go on living in a meaningless universe which seems doomed to destruction by man's cruelty.

Billy Pilgrim heralds the truth about time

Goaded by his need of bringing comfort to afflicted humanity, Billy Pilgrim steps into the role of messenger, a role which emphasizes the fantastic aspect of his characterization. The truth about time, which he brings back from his pilgrimages to an alternative world, represents a diametric reversal of Earthling concepts: instead of one moment following another one, "like beads on a string", all moments exist simultaneously and can be lived at will.

Billy acts as a messenger of sorts for the first time, when he addresses his fellow members at a Lions Club meeting. He has been elected president and is scared stiff of opening his mouth and letting his "reedy voice" be heard. But a metamorphosis has occurred and the ludicrous waif "with a voice box like a little whistle cut from a willow switch" has been replaced by a polished apeaker, whose voice is a "gorgeous instrument" with a deep resonant tone. The narrator is careful to dismiss any supernatural explanation and justifies the "miracle": Billy had taken a course in public speaking (p.39). This trivial speech, interspersed with jokes, "which bring down the house" foreshadows Billy's later messages about life's ultimate questions. His attempts to "comfort... people with the truth about time" (p.24), occur at various points in the

novel: he breaks into an all-night radio program devoted to talk, writes letters to a local newspaper and, later on, attracts crowds to huge gatherings in large open spaces.

Billy's activities as a messenger illuminate some characteristics of his personality. He is a sensitive, compassionate man who worries about people's sufferings and tries to bring them some comfort. On the other hand, he is persistent and capable of holding on to his specific purpose, in spite of the general incredulity which meets his initial communications. Not even his daughter's hostility moves him from his objective, though he protests only "mildly" and does not allow his anger to rise with Barbara's (p.27). Billy's messages, coming right after the airplane crash which left him with a fractured skull, are thought to be mere fantasy, whereas Billy is absolutely sure of their veracity. Thus, Billy remonstrates with Barbara that everything he had said on the radio was true (p.24) and that he hadn't mentioned any of it before the airplane crash because he didn't think the time was ripe.

Billy's role as a messenger strengthens the relationship between Billy Pilgrim and Vonnegut-as-character and, consequently, between the novel's two opposing worlds. When he proposes to spread the Tralfamadorian message, Billy steps into the role of a story-teller, of a spinner of tales, who longs to communicate and does so by telling lies.⁵⁷ Like his creator, Billy attempts to communicate his message in written and spoken form.⁵⁸ In his eagerness to "comfort so many people with the truth about time," as we mentioned above, he interrupts a radio program devoted to talk (p.24). With the same objective of prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls (p.26) our optometrist-messenger writes letters to the Ilium News Leader. Thus, Billy's activities as a messenger emulate Vonnegut's both as writer and speech-maker.

Messenger Billy makes it his task to help people see

better, even if better only from his own standpoint. Consistent with his distorted perceptions which make him see a magic curtain suspended in air,⁵⁹ or Saint Elmo's fire all over the landscape, our quixotic hero preaches an upside down image of the world, which is, nevertheless extremely consoling.

We have started our analysis by establishing Billy Pilgrim's roles as a clown, a child-victim, a businessman, a pilgrim and a messenger, which derive from his depiction as a time-traveling hero. A few of his traits have been revealed: he is a sensitive, compassionate, innocent, ineffective and passive human being, the butt of much derision by virtue of his ridiculous physical appearance. His traits were, moreover, shown to be tinged with ambiguity. Billy is at one time sensitive and indifferent, compassionate and unconcerned, he cries at lesser things but does not cry at things worth crying about. His outstanding trait is his passivity which makes him the listless victim of enormous forces, a stage-frightened actor in the hands of a relentless stage manager. Our chosen approach has proved to be in conformity with Vonnegut's text, which puts into relief what Billy does, rather than what he is. Therefore, our analysis was forcibly turned around to an examination of Billy's actions, where it should have revealed his moral traits or psychological texture. Actually it is nearly impossible to penetrate beyond the surface of Billy's actions. He is a two-dimensional opaque⁶⁰ character, which precludes the possibility of sympathetic identification between reader and character.⁶¹

In terms of the fantastic, Billy's two-dimensional conception has some consequences: the element of surprise, a useful sign for the detection of the fantastic, is absent. Billy never displays any surprise or shock at the outrageous events that befall him. This is consistent, however, with the

ground rules of the novel's narrative world: mobility in time, forward memory, as well as the pattern of recurrence of Billy's experiences. We have observed no further reversals of the rules of the world outside the text or of the intra-textual world. In spite of that, Billy's repeated change of roles represents as many reversals, with his characteristics transformed to fit each of them, though he remains basically a time-traveling protagonist. We have stressed these reversals when we studied each of Billy's roles.

Some structural reversals have also been observed, such as the fact that Billy remembers Dresden, instead of time-traveling to the scene of the fire-bombing.

Considering the structural element which defines the fantastic according to Todorov,⁶² hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation for some event which escapes the laws of our familiar world, we have arrived at a similar conclusion: Billy never hesitates. For him, time-traveling and Tralfamadore are as real as his train trip and the German prison camp; he never feels the contradiction between the real and the fantastic, which means that one of the conditions of the fantastic proposed by Todorov⁶³ is not fulfilled. The reader, however, may question Billy's pilgrimages, a phenomenon which contradicts the laws of nature but which, on the other hand, seems to be confirmed by a series of secondary indications: the fact that Billy knows when and how he is going to die is the most relevant of them. The reader's hesitation, which Todorov points out as the first condition of the fantastic is represented within the text but not through Billy. As we have pointed out, a reader/character identification is precluded by the text. We can say, nevertheless that the reader's hesitation is represented through all the other characters in the book who question the veracity of Billy's story: Barbara, the people at the radio station, Billy's clients, Barbara's

friends. Therefore, a certain hesitation persists in the reader, though it ceases to affect the protagonist. The conclusion we come to is that the study of Billy's character does reveal the fantastic, though not in the expected way.

A proper conclusion for this chapter must take under consideration the joint characteristics of Vonnegut-as-character and of Billy Pilgrim. Starting from the initial assumption that there are two protagonists in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we have established parallels between them, which have emphasized their similarities and contrasts. Their outstanding common trait is the multiplicity of roles they perform in the novel, interpreted either as Vonnegut-as-character's division into four different personas or as Billy Pilgrim's various facets. Multiplication of self, a device which is itself particularly consistent with fantastic narratives, has highlighted the fantastic qualities of the text in various ways:

- in the series of diametrical and repeated reversals both Vonnegut-as-character and Billy Pilgrim undergo when they shift to different personalities or roles;

- in the parallels between Vonnegut-as-character and a semi-fantastic hero, which stress the escape function of the latter's time travels away from the Dresden catastrophe and, consequently Kurt Vonnegut's similar desire to evade it;

- in the ambiguity of attitude displayed by Vonnegut-as-narrator, concerning Billy's extraterrestrial journeys and his dislocations in the fourth dimension;

- in Vonnegut-as-character's and Billy Pilgrim's ambivalent attitudes toward important issues of human existence. Their attitudes repeatedly undergo diametrical changes, from acceptance to engagement in human problems, and vice-versa;

- in the fantasticality of a structure based on coin-

cidences.

As a maximum point, our analysis of both protagonist's traits has evidenced the contamination of reality by dream, the intimate interpenetration of the real and the fantastic, which culminates with the identification of a character from the world of fact with the fantastic hero with a thousand faces. This means the author himself becomes a multifaceted hero who enters his fiction under different disguises.

NOTES

¹See Theoretical Approach, p. 10-11.

²HARRIS, C. Time, Uncertainty, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: a reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. *The Centennial Review*, 20(3):228-43, 1976.

³*Slaughterhouse-Five* is not the only example of the interjection of self directly as character. In *Breakfast of Champions* (New York, Delta, 1973), Vonnegut's presence is filled out by Dwayne Hoover and by the ubiquitous Kilgore Trout, and even by lesser figures who embody aspects of the author. Besides, he intervenes directly as author-character openly addressing the-reader: "I had come to the Arts Festival incognito. I was there to watch a confrontation between two human beings I had created: Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout!" (p.192). Vonnegut's last novel, *Slapstick* (New York, Dell, 1976) is also purported to present autobiographical material. The first sentence of the prologue states clearly: "This is the closest I will ever come to writing an autobiography," though the author's presence is not evident in the body of the novel nor does the bizarre story correspond to the events of Vonnegut's life. Perhaps the sense in which he intends this as autobiography is explained a little later on in the prologue: "It is," he says, "about what life *feels* like to me" (p.1).

⁴Louis Ferdinand Céline (real name Louis Destouches) became famous with his first novel *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit* (1932) whose qualities - tension caught from direct speech, care for words' vital truth and rejection of the "lie" of literariness - were to become central to Western literature. *Mort à Crédit* (*Death on the Installment Plan*, 1937) upheld his reputation. *ENCYCLOPAEDIA Britannica*. Chicago, 1973. v.5, p. 139.

⁵RUSS, J. The Subjunctivity of Science Fiction. *Extrapolation*, 15(1):51-9. Quoted by Rosemary JACKSON in *Fantasy; the literature of subversion*. London, Methuen, 1981. p.22.

⁶The italics are mine.

⁷The italics are mine.

⁸The italics are mine.

⁹The italics are mine.

¹⁰The italics are mine.

¹¹We gathered important autobiographical data from VONNEGUT'S prefaces to *Mother Night* (New York, Avon, 1970), *Welcome to the Monkey House* (New York, Dell, 1968), *Breakfast of Champions* and the prologue to *Slapstick*. His collections of non-fiction, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloons* (New York, Delacorte Press, 1974) and *Palm Sunday* equally contain valuable information. Important facts of Vonnegut's life are also related

in some essays in KLINKOWITZ, J. & SOMER, J. *The Vonnegut Statement* (St. Albans, Granada, 1975) and in KLINKOWITZ, J. & LAWLER, D., ed. *Vonnegut in America* (New York, Dell, 1977).

¹²To Charles HARRIS, Billy becomes "a dual persona, a mask not only for Vonnegut-as-character (who is already a mask of sorts for Vonnegut), but for Vonnegut the author as well." *Time, Uncertainty...*, p.232.

¹³See p. 18-19.

¹⁴Charles HARRIS considers the voice narrating Billy Pilgrim's story as that of the character in Chapter One. (*Time, Uncertainty...*, p. 231). In his essay *Geodesic Vonnegut; or If Buckminster Fuller Wrote Novels* (In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p. 236-7), John SOMER affirms that Billy moves "carefully under the deft hand of Vonnegut, the narrator, whose first word, 'Listen' echoes and re-echoes through the erratic corridors of Billy's schizophrenic passage through time."

¹⁵The narrator's statements that "everything is all right" occur on pages 45, 93, 105.

¹⁶Quoted by Robert RODGERS in *The Double in Literature*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1970. p.3.

¹⁷Cf. *Theoretical Approach*, p. 14.

¹⁸The italics are mine.

¹⁹See p. 28-29.

²⁰Instances of Vonnegut's extraterrestrial humor, like the ones mentioned here led Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin to say of him that he is one of the funniest men ever to write science fiction. SCHOLES, R. & RABKIN, E. *Science Fiction*. London, Oxford University Press, 1977. p.29.

²¹Another example of Vonnegut's playful humor is the Tralfamadorian belief that there were seven sexes on Earth, each essential to reproduction, among them male homosexuals and women over 65 years old (p.79).

²²VONNEGUT JR. K. Playboy interview. In: _____. *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*, p. 262.

²³*Theoretical Approach*, p. 16.

²⁴In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, Eliot Rosewater singles out Trout as America's greatest prophet. New York, Dell, 1974. p.19.

²⁵In respect of the projection of the writer's inner experiences into an imagined outer world, Schiller is quoted as saying "all creatures born by our fantasy, in the last analysis, are nothing but ourselves." Quoted by Robert RODGERS, p.3.

²⁶Robert RODGERS asserts that the phenomenon of decomposition in literature has its origins in a fundamental stratum of mental activity. At the level of common experience, few people escape the impulse to put on a false front at times. (p.5).

²⁷Tzvetan Todorov establishes two systems of themes that encompass all the themes of fantastic literature, themes of the self and themes of the other. The themes of the self which spring from the fundamental principle of the fragility of the limit between matter and mind are a special causality, pan-determinism; multiplication of the personality; collapse of the limit between subject and object; and lastly the transformation of time and space. The point of departure of the second thematic complex (themes of the other) is sexual desire, which is described in its excessive forms as well as its perversions. TODOROV, T. *The Fantastic*; a structural approach to a literary genre. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973. p.107-39.

²⁸TODOROV, p.116. It is interesting to observe that Robert Rodgers' observations quoted in note 26 translate essentially the same idea worded differently by Todorov, which we reproduce in the body of this thesis.

²⁹Superpose 1: to place or lay over or above so as to rest or be one of a vertical series or tier. WEBSTER'S Third New International Dictionary of the English Language. Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1971. p.2295.

³⁰Vonnegut makes clear in several of his autobiographical writings his dread of becoming someone who is no use for anybody, with the passage of time. Commenting on his divorce in 1970, for instance, he makes an assertion which backs this affirmative: "The shock of having our children no longer need us happened somewhere in there. We were both going to find other sorts of seemingly important work to do and other compelling reasons for working and worrying so." Embarrasment, p. 189.

³¹Between the narrator's and the author's statements there is a difference of types of what Geoffrey Leech calls *affective meaning*, "what is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker or writer." The narrator's attitude is mocking and depreciative, whereas Vonnegut's evidences his personal involvement and depth of feelings. Cf. LEECH, G. *Semantics*; the study of meaning. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981. p.23.

³²The ground rules of Vonnegut's narrative world were established on p.29-31 of A Glimpse of the Real and Fantastic Worlds in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

³³CAMPBELL, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973.

³⁴FRYE, N. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957. p.158.

³⁵Recognizing the atemporality of so much contemporary fiction and its abjurance of accepted systems of history with assumptions of organic and causal continuity, Max SCHULZ proposes an equation for the analysis of characterization and narrative progression, where traditional *natural* fiction is contrasted with contemporary *artificial* fiction:

	CHARACTERIZATION		NARRATIVE PROGRESSION	
NATURAL/	::	embryological (organic development)/	::	chronological/
ARTIFICIAL		doppelgänger (hero with a thousand faces)		<i>regressus in infinitum</i>

SCHULZ, M. Characters in the Contemporary Novel. In: HALPERIN, J. *The Theory of the Novel*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1974. p.144.

³⁶See chapter on setting, p. 118.

³⁷LUTHI, Max, quoted by JACKSON, p. 154.

³⁸See Theoretical Approach, p. 12.

³⁹Rabkin remarks that children are not yet so willing to accept reality that they are unable to accept unreality as well. Children, unlike adults, do not yet know irrevocably how things are and so have the delightful habit of accepting them as they are not. RABKIN, E.S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977. p.11.

⁴⁰Vonnegut's promise to Bernard O'Hare's wife to call his book *The Children's Crusade* motivated him and his friend to look up some facts about that event, in a book titled *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, by Charles Mackay. In chapter One of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut briefly relates what they found out: the Children's Crusade started in 1213, when two monks got the idea of raising armies of children, and selling them as slaves in North Africa. Accordingly, thirty thousand volunteer children were marched to Marseilles. Later on, half of them drowned in shipwrecks while the other half were indeed sold into slavery. Through a misunderstanding, a few children went to Genoa, where there were no ships waiting, and were treated kindly by the people and sent back home (p.18).

⁴¹The satiric tone of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is in keeping with Vonnegut's factual and fantastic way of writing, as satire is an inherently fantastic genre. Not only does it depend on narrative worlds that reverse the perspectives of the world outside the narrative, but the style usually depends on irony, "stating the reverse of the truth as though it were clear truth." Cf. RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. 144.

⁴²According to Rosemary Jackson this is a paraxial process of transformation. Dr. JACKSON employs the term *paraxis* - "that which lies on either side of the principle axis, that which lies alongside the main body" - as a useful term for understanding and expressing this process of transformation and deformation, inherent to the fantastic as a mode.(p.19).

⁴³See also p. 131.

⁴⁴"That particular emphasis to Vonnegut's war-criticism, and beyond that to his diagnosis of the contemporary human condition, necessitates that he extend - even mythicize - his presentation of Billy Pilgrim as universal man-child." REED, P.J. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* New York, Warner, 1972. p.184.

⁴⁵In *God Bless You, Mr Rosewater*, when its protagonist Eliot Rosewater baptizes babies, according to his religion of love, he tells them, "Hello, babies. Welcome to the Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies... 'God damn it, you've got to be kind'" (p.93). In *The Sirens of Titan* (New York, Dell, 1982), Malachi Constant, at the end of his life acknowledges having loved Beatrice, the mate imposed on him

against his will, and he finally realizes "that a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved." (p.313). Another corroboration of Vonnegut's creed is found in his non-fictional *Palm Sunday*, a collection of reviews and speeches and essays, similar to its predecessor *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*s. Vonnegut asserts that "if you were to bother to read my books, to behave as educated persons would, you would learn that they are not sexy, and do not argue in favor of wildness of any kind. They beg that people be kinder and more responsible than they are." The First Amendment, in *Palm Sunday*, p.6.

⁴⁶See *Slaughterhouse-Five*, p.28, 38, 123 and 132.

⁴⁷The same exact words are used in *Cat's Cradle*, when Philip Castle describes Franklin Hoenikker (New York, Dell, 1973. p.111), and by Harold Ryan, in talking about Dr. Norbert Woodley in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (New York, Dell, 1971. p.107).

⁴⁸For Peter Reed, the "chamber of commerce side of Billy Pilgrim never comes alive." REED, p.182.

⁴⁹In his introduction to a deluxe edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five* brought out by Franklin Library in 1976, Vonnegut makes some comments about the money he earned as a writer, particularly the money that his Dresden novel brought him. Such comments illustrate the usual cutting edge of his humoristic style: "One way or another, I got two or three dollars for every person killed. Some business I'm in." A Nazy City Mourned at Some Profit. In: *Palm Sunday*, p.302.

⁵⁰In fact, our analysis of plot will use basically Vladimir Propp's structure for the classification of folktales.

⁵¹In respect to *characterization* in the recent American novel of the absurd - a label which he applies to the works of Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon and John Barth - Charles Harris quotes Leslie Fiedler as commenting on the resemblance of figures in those novels to comic strip characters. This resemblance is clear not only in what Fiedler calls their "occasional obviousness and thinness of texture" but also in their very names - Dr. Hilarius, Chief White Halfoat, and Billy Pilgrim, for example, which suggest the types of names given cartoon figures - Daddy Warbucks, Jughead, Flat-top, etc. As in comic strips, the names often suggest specific attitudes or ideas. HARRIS, C. *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd*. New Haven, College and University Press, 1971. p. 26.

⁵²SCHATT, S. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* Boston, Twayne, 1976. p.8.

⁵³SHEED, W., quoted by SCHATT, p.83.

⁵⁴See also page 32 of this thesis.

⁵⁵As Scholes and Rabkin very appropriately remark, the backward time travel of science fiction creates paradoxical situations and "calls the nature of causation into question. If one can exist in time before one was born, then what is the nature of that existence? If one were to murder one's parents in the past, then one would not have come to exist. But if one had not come to exist, then one could not have travelled into the past." SCHOLES & RABKIN, p. 176-7.

⁵⁶ Billy's motto is discussed further under plot, p. 186.

⁵⁷ Vonnegut's concern with the decline of significant information is the subject of Tony Tanner's essay *The Uncertain Messenger*. Consequently, says Tanner, "plots and fantasies proliferate as a means of expression for the writer who longs to communicate and does so by telling lies." TANNER, T. *The Uncertain Messenger*. In: _____. *City of Words*. London, J. Cape, 1979. p.181.

⁵⁸ In connection with his career as a lecturer and speech-maker, Vonnegut remarks that it came to an end on the stage of the Library of Congress when his glib philosophy was challenged by a middle-aged man in the audience. "You are a leader of American young people," the man said. "What right do you have to teach them to be so cynical and pessimistic?" Vonnegut says that he spoke a few times after that, but he was no longer "the glib Philosopher of the Prairies" it had once been so easy for him to be. Preface to *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*s, p. xvi.

⁵⁹ See chapter on setting.

⁶⁰ Scholes and Kellog employ "opaque" as a synonym of inscrutable. SCHOLES, R. & KELLOG, R. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. p.166.

⁶¹ Raymond OLDERMAN points out that Vonnegut uses two-dimensional characterization to prevent sympathetic identification with a character and to force us to turn to an examination of the nature of the world. In fact, the use of character in the modern novel concentrates on his actions and the reader can penetrate very little beyond the surface of these actions. *Beyond the Wasteland*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972. p.16.

⁶² See Theoretical Approach, p. 16.

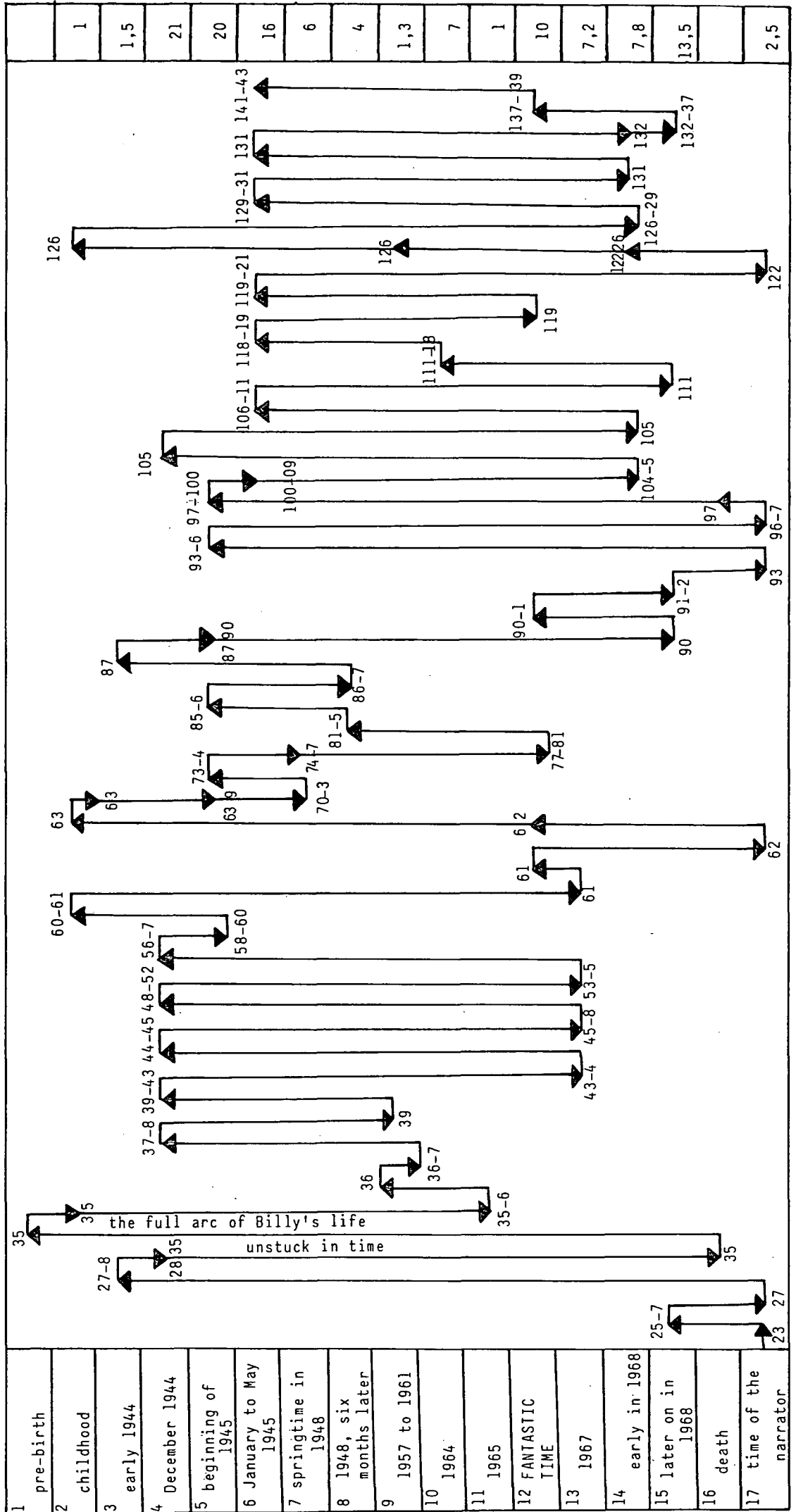
⁶³ Todorov points out that the fantastic implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters: that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated. The reader's hesitation is, therefore, the first condition of the fantastic. The second condition, that the reader identify with a particular character is not essential, though it is present in most fantastic narratives. TODOROV, p. 31.

5 MANY MARVELOUS MOMENTS SEEN AT ONE TIME

The first few lines of Billy Pilgrim's story are sufficient to make us acquainted with his main fantastic trait, that is, his mobility in time. An analysis of the time element is, therefore, of paramount importance for the comprehension of a novel which emphasizes time, the effects of the passage of time, and the interrelationship of time periods, by virtue of the creation of a character who, paradoxically, lives outside time.

In order to present an overall view of the numerous time shifts in the novel, which seem baffling at first - seldom do more than two pages fix on one date -, we have organized a chart* that registers Billy's movements from one to another of its several time periods. Since the objective of the chart is to order the several time shifts resulting from Billy's time travels, we have left out of it any references to the temporal structure of the part lived by Vonnegut-as-character, which follows a linear development.

* The numbers on the tips of the arrows indicate the pages of the several time shifts and the pages allotted each period in between.



We have grouped the numerous scene shifts in the Billy Pilgrim plot roughly in seventeen divisions, according to the time of their occurrence:¹

1. pre-birth: Pre-birth and death are the two extreme points of "the full arc" of Billy's life. His capacity for seeing his own death and his birth is established at the very outset, as one of the ground rules of the narrative. Billy can see not only the external circumstances of his death in 1976, but also the post-death period which is "just violet light and a hum" (p.30);

2. childhood period: comprised in this period are babyhood and instances of Billy as a small boy, and later on at twelve and at sixteen;

3. early 1944: the prelude to Billy's war experiences;

4. December 1944: Billy is shown stranded behind the German lines in Luxembourg and as a prisoner on his way to prison camp. The text emphasizes that "somewhere in there was Christmas" (p.52);

5. beginning of 1945: the camp for Russian POW's;

6. January to May 1945: Dresden and slaughterhouse-five;

7. springtime in 1948: three years after the end of the war. Billy is committed to the mental ward for nonviolent patients of a veterans' hospital;

8. 1948, six months after Billy's release from hospital;

9. 1957 to 1961: included are several minor events in Billy's life.

10. 1964: considered separately because it marks the time of Billy's meeting with Kilgore Trout, an event which occupies a seven-page sequence;

11. 1965: considered separately in order to maintain

the chronological sequence of our scheme;

12. FANTASTIC TIME: time out of time. In earthly terms, Billy's journey to Tralfamadore corresponds to the year 1967;

13. 1967: the main period of Billy's activities as an optometrist. It is also the time of his kidnapping by the Tralfamadorians.

14. early in 1968, twenty-five years after the arrival of the American POW's at schlachthof-fünf;

15. later on in 1968: Billy starts spreading the Tralfamadorian truths about time and death;

16. death;

17. present time of the narrator: included in this part are all the instances when the narrator breaks his consistent past-tense report and addresses the reader directly, using the present tense.

Though we have ordered the important dates in Billy's life chronologically, the novel does not at all follow a sequential development. This becomes especially evident in the jagged line in the chart that portrays Billy's spastic movements among the several events from separate times of his life.

The chart indicates further that the number of pages allotted each of our proposed divisions varies from one (childhood and 1965) to twenty-one pages (December 1944). This undoubtedly shows that some periods are more important than others and points at the convenience of regrouping our initial divisions in order to draw a clearer profile of the temporal sequences. As a first step, we may exclude "pre-birth" and "death", whose importance for the temporal structure of the novel will be discussed below, but which are not relevant as far as distribution of time is considered, because they are constituted by the briefest of flashes. Death is just violet light and a hum (p.35,97) and pre-birth, merely red light and

bubbling sounds (p.35). The same can be said of the childhood period. Divisions number four, five, and six come up to a total of fifty-seven pages, distributed over a period of a few months - from December 1944 to May 1945 - which gives us the highest page-per-time rate. Moreover, if we follow the line of the narrative carefully we will notice that it returns consistently to those three periods from every other date in Billy's life. These periods share a common setting, Europe, and contain the fulcrus of the novel, which is Billy's march toward Dresden and slaughterhouse-five and the culmination of his experiences in the fire-bombing. All these factors obviously bring divisions four, five and six together into an organic whole which can also absorb the division "early 1944", part of the same time sequence and thematical development.

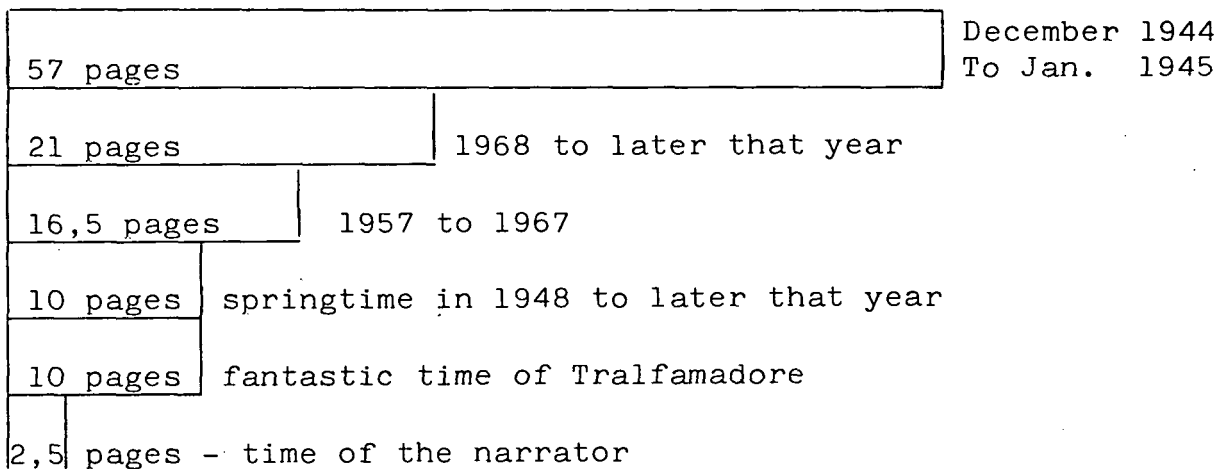
Three years after the war, the action is resumed, developing in two different periods, in springtime 1948 and six months later. The events from these two periods, besides being close in time, are intimately connected by a central theme, Billy's gradual transformation from a dazed soldier into an optometrist-businessman. The process begins with his commitment to a veterans' hospital and is completed with his marriage to an heiress, Valencia Merble, which transforms the barber's son into the son and heir of an extremely wealthy man.

Divisions number nine, ten, eleven, and thirteen may also be compressed into one, because they present a low page-per-time rate and contain minor events of Billy Pilgrim's life scattered over a ten-year period. The next division, the time spent on the alternative world of Tralfamadore, while it occupies only ten pages must be considered separately because of its relevance for our study of the real as contraposed to the fantastic. Finally, the year 1968, which is particularly important for the narrative, because of the accident which sets

Billy on his path as a messenger, constitutes the last time sequence in our proposed scheme. This leaves us with six divisions, instead of the initial seventeen:

1. December 1944 to early in 1945 - 57 pages;
2. springtime in 1948 to later that year - 10 pages;
3. 1957 to 1967 - 16,5 pages;
4. fantastic time of Tralfamadore - 10 pages;
5. 1968 to later that year - 21 pages;
6. time of the narrator - 2,5 pages.

A graphic representation of this page x time rate in decreasing order gives us a clear idea of the relationships between the several divisions:



This new distribution evidences that there are basically two major time streams in the Billy Pilgrim plot: from 1944 when he became lost in Luxembourg to 1945, when he lived through the bombing of Dresden, totaling 57 pages; and from 1968 to later that year, 21 pages. The events from 1957 to 1967 though totalling 16,5 pages do not form a sequence. We cannot leave out, however, the fantastic period of Tralfamadore which, though relatively short - 10 pages - marks the alternative time of Vonnegut's alternative world.

If this were only Billy's story we could settle for

the above time sequences as representing the whole time pattern of the novel. We must not forget, nevertheless, that this is Vonnegut-as-character's story as well, whose presence is felt overtly in Chapters One and Ten and also in his intrusions in Billy's story. This results not in another time stream, but in a different level of time.

Thus if we take levels of time as the ordering principle, we can say that there are four levels of time in the novel:

1) the time of the "real" part of the Billy Pilgrim plot, which comprehends his war experiences and his life in Ilium;

2) the alternative time of the fantastic world of Tralfamadore;

3) the time of the narrator;

4) the linear time of Vonnegut-as-character's autobiography, which crosses with the time of the Billy Pilgrim plot at several points in the novel.

We will start our analysis by examining the time of Billy Pilgrim's "real" world, which comprises four of the six time divisions shown in the graphic above.

TIME IN BILLY PILGRIM'S REAL WORLD

At the beginning of Chapter Two, a summary of Billy's chronology is presented, from his birth to the period that follows the plane crash early in 1968, which is the time when the story actually begins. This summary functions as a necessary guideline for the reader, allowing him to follow the main line of the narrative, because from the moment when Billy is said to have "come unstuck in time", it is difficult to keep track of the chronological development of events:

This was when Billy first came unstuck in time. His attention began to swing grandly through the full arc of his life, passing into death, which was violet light (....) And then Billy swung into life again (....) going backwards until he was in pre-birth (....) And then he swung into life again and stopped (p.35).

The pattern above is repeated throughout the novel, so that Billy swings frequently from pre-birth to death, from death to life, suggesting the endless birth-death-rebirth cycle of nature. This pendulum movement will be a constant in the time-sequence of the narrative, reversing the conventional linear development and the concept of chronological time: events from the past are lived after future events and vice-versa, culminating in the movement from death to pre-birth, from the end of existence to its very beginning.

It is noticeable that Billy's wanderings always take him back to the time period in one of the narrative's major time streams from which he started. This point of departure is generally the time stream running from 1944 in Luxembourg to 1945 in Dresden, which evidences the haunting quality of Billy's war experiences. An illustrative example is the sequence of events which follows Billy's first coming unstuck in time. Billy is lost behind the German lines in Luxembourg, right after his arrival at the scene of the Battle of the Bulge.² After swinging through the full arc of his life he stops at a terrifying childhood experience, his near death by drowning. From there, he travels to 1965, to Ilium to the scene of a visit to his decrepit mother in an old people's home. He blinks in 1965 and finds himself in 1958, at a banquet in honor of a Little League team of which his son Robert was a member. He blinks again in 1958, and travels in time to 1961, to a New Year's Eve party where his scandalous behavior, which is

entirely out of character, disgusts everybody. He leaves the party and passes out in his car, while trying unsuccessfully to find its steering wheel.³ He awakes still feeling drunk in the same time and place whence he had departed - a forest in Luxembourg during the Second World War.

The recurrent character of Billy's wanderings establishes a circular time structure, following the leads we observed in Chapter One, the Yon Yonson song, which goes on to infinity, and the self-reflexive references to the book:

This one is a failure and had to be, since
it was written by a pillar of salt. It
begins like this:

Listen:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

It ends like this:

Poo-tee-weet? (p. 22)

By occurring simultaneously, the beginning and the end of the book - as well as the beginning and the end of the several chains of events in Billy's story - merge into each other and a new cycle is started characterizing the regressus in infinitum narrative progression.

Apparently in order to help the reader keep track of chronology, each time shift is accompanied by several specific references to relative time. Taking again as an example the events examined above, we observe that Billy is said to be twelve when he nearly drowns in the Y.M.C.A. pool. He travels in time to 1965 and the text elucidates that he was "forty-one years old, and he was visiting his decrepit mother at Pine Knoll, an old people's home he had put her in only a month before" (p.35). Thus, we have three references to time: the year, Billy's age and the time that elapsed between two events. A contradiction becomes evident, however, which may be explained by carelessness. Billy could not possibly be

forty-one years old in 1965. Seeing that he was born in 1922, he would have to be at least forty-three, going on forty-four, if he had been born late in the year. A birth late in the year seems to be corroborated by the time references relative to the Battle of the Bulge: "This was in December of 1944 (....)" and Billy looked like an old man, his beard going white "even though he was only twenty-one years old" (p.29). Considering the date of the battle - December 16th to December 21st - and the reference to Christmas happening somewhere along the POW's ride to prison camp, we can place these events late in December. The obvious conclusion is that Billy was born late in 1922, possibly around Christmas.

However, Billy's birthdate becomes uncertain once again: we are told that he is forty-six early in 1968, on his return from hospital, after the plane crash, which would be possible only if he had been born early in 1922. But then again on the night of his daughter's wedding in 1967, when Billy was kidnapped by the Tralfamadorians, he is said to be forty-four (p.53). The wedding apparently takes place in late summer or early fall, since Billy's Lions Club meeting occurs in August of that year and we are told that "Barbara was about to get married..." (p.45). This is consistent with a late December birthdate. Billy is, therefore, presented as being forty-four in the second semester of 1967, which makes the affirmative that he is forty-six in the spring of 1968 a clear impossibility. Besides, later on in the novel, when Billy is reported to have been in the Tralfamadorian zoo for "six Earthling months" he is still presented as being forty-four years old (p.77).

Other chronological discrepancies involve Edgar Derby's age. The "poor old school teacher" is said to be forty-four years old (p.60). A few pages later, however, Derby himself tells the English Colonel at the British Compound of the prison

camp that he was forty-five.

At the end of Chapter Five, we are told of the Americans' arrival in slaughterhouse-five. Chapter Six starts with "Billy Pilgrim got onto a chartered airplane in Ilium twenty-five years after that" (p.104). Since we know that the Dresden part of the novel happened in 1945, this would place the date of the plane crash in 1970, two years after it actually happened.⁴

Those repeated instances of inconsistencies in time preclude the possibility of carelessness or error. Thus, they must have a distinct function. According to Charles Harris, the manipulation of the novel's chronology denies linear time since it is impossible to link the time references into a logical sequence. In his view, Vonnegut does not merely deny the relevance of chronological order; he denies its very existence: "By making it impossible to link the novel's various dates into a coherent, chronological sequence, Vonnegut effectively denies the pastness of Billy's past, the futureness of his future. Both past and future are now."⁵ To this explanation we add that the chronological discrepancies in the real world of the novel are due to the penetration of the uncertainty that marks time in fantastic world. As Todorov points out, in relation to time and space in texts of fantastic literature:

le monde physique et le monde spirituel s'interpénètrent; leurs catégories fondamentales se trouvent modifiées en conséquence. Le temps et l'espace du monde surnaturel (....) ne sont pas le temps et l'espace de la vie quotidienne. Le temps semble ici suspendu, il se prolonge bien au-delà de ce qu'on croit possible.⁶

Time in the "real" world of the novel is pervaded by

the characteristic uncertainty of time in supernatural worlds. We notice that as a result of his time travels, Billy is often uncertain about his surroundings, and loses track of time, to the point of forgetting his own age and what year it is. That is what happens, for instance, when Billy finds himself in his optometrist's office, after traveling in time from the scene of his capture in Luxembourg: "He tried to remember how old he was, couldn't. He tried to remember what year it was. He couldn't remember that, either" (p.43).

Reversals of chronology and of the concept of time which disrupt the logic of the "real" world of Slaughterhouse-Five become the rule when we turn to an examination of its fantastic world.

FANTASTIC TIME

Diametrical reversals of the laws of the factual world which rule movement in space and the counting of time, lie in the basis of the alternative world of Tralfamadore. In respect to time, the "real" and the fantastic worlds of the novel are sharply contrasted. Contraposed to the maddening slowness of the POW's train is the terrific acceleration of the flying saucer, which results in dislocation not only in space but also in the fourth dimension, for in the course of his journey to Tralfamadore Billy is dislodged in time and sent back to the war, to an event placed twenty-three years in the past and thousands of miles away from his present setting (p.56). The fantastic world of the novel includes, moreover, time warps which allow its space craft to cover 446,120,000,000,000 miles in hours rather than centuries (p.61). These figures reverse physical laws so completely that it is impossible to establish comparative tables between Earthling time and Tralfamadorian time. Faster-than-light travel postulated by

science-fiction writers not only brings time to a halt, but even turns it backward.⁷ Vonnegut's response to the problem is to use time warps, which makes space travel in *Slaughterhouse-Five* more fantastic than in conventional science-fiction, where writers try to base it on at least a suggestion of scientific probability.⁸

Thus, Billy claims that he hadn't been missed on earth "because the Tralfamadorians had taken him through a time warp, so that he could be on Tralfamadore for years and still be away from Earth for only a microsecond" (p.24). This is, indeed, a 180° reversal of the concept of time in the existential world. There are other peculiar traits to time on Tralfamadore: night comes to that alien planet for one Earthling hour out of every sixty-two (p.91) and all moments in time are simultaneous. The Tralfamadorian concept of time is the subject of Billy Pilgrim's second letter to an Ilium newspaper:

All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just that 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 (p.25).

To the image of the Rocky Mountains, which represents Tralfamadorian time, the author contraposes another objective correlative for Earthling time: a dot seen at the end of a six-foot steel pipe, welded to the eyehole of a steel helmet encasing the head of an Earthling who, in addition, is utterly unable to move. Earthlings have no choice of where to look at: they are enslaved by time, whereas the Tralfamadorians can

look at any moment they like, since all moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist.

In respect to time, the seriousness of Vonnegut's purpose in making use of elements of science fiction is evident, in spite of his parodic tone and bizarre imagery. This contradicts his affirmative, which we have quoted earlier, that he uses science fiction as a mere relieving of tension. Though Vonnegut uses an obviously kidding sort of science fiction as ideal for his own brand of comic parody and satire, it is also something more, providing the vehicle for his serious ideas, as well as his burlesque.

Moreover, fantastic time is not restricted to specific Tralfamadorian concepts. It has to do with Billy's time-traveling as well. Billy himself says that the Tralfamadorians didn't have anything to do with his coming unstuck in time: they were simply able to give him insights into what was really going on (p.27). An example that concentrates the fantastic elements of reversal of chronology occurring in the novel's real/fantastic context is the television film Billy sees while waiting for the flying saucer that, as he knows, is going to take him to Tralfamadore. Everything is reversed in the film, which shows a scene of an air-raid. Planes fly backwards, and bullets and shell fragments are suck from the other planes and crewmen. Bombs are gathered back into their cylindrical steel containers into the bellies of the planes. The reversal process continues, until all the metal parts of the planes are transformed into minerals and put back into the ground, "so they could never hurt anybody, ever again." Human beings turn back into high school kids. Billy, then, starts extrapolating, supposing that all humanity, including Hitler, turned into babies, "conspiring biologically to produce two perfect people, named Adam and Eve" (p.54-5)

The film seen backwards exemplifies aptly the diamet-

rical reversal of the relation present-past-future in Vonnegut's narrative world, which makes it fantastic. Some of the characteristics of fantastic time are even extended to the autobiographical level, which is the time of Vonnegut-as-character's autobiographical narrative, in the form of the protagonist's uncertainty about time.

TIME AT THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LEVEL

In Chapter One, Vonnegut-as-character is always very vague about time: he can never answer his wife's questions about the time, when he goes to bed late at night; he cannot remember either the year of his visit to Bernard V. O'Hare, saying "that must have been in 1964 or so - whatever the last year was for the New York World's Fair" (p.15). In Chapter Ten, he places the deaths of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King only a month apart.⁹ Thus, we have uncertainty about time pervading two levels of the novel, the level of Billy's "real" world, an essentially fictitious world and the autobiographical level, which is closely related to the external world.

The narration Vonnegut-as-character makes of current events, which happen in the present time of the novel - the year 1968 -¹⁰, link the internal time of the narrative, which Ducrot and Todorov call the time of fiction, to historical time, a time which is external to the text.¹¹ Nevertheless, in spite of using historical time in some instances, the autobiographical frame of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a piece of fiction and as such subject to the changes - slowing down, speeding up, compression and expansion - which accompany the time of fictitious worlds. The slowing down of time is evident in Vonnegut's non-night between planes in Boston, when he complains that time would not pass: "Somebody was playing with

the clocks. The second hand on my watch would twitch once and a year would pass, and then it would twitch again" (p.21). Similar reactions to the slowness of time are evidenced later in the narrative by the narrator when he describes the slow progress of the train creeping toward prison camp: "There would be a click, and then a year would go by, and then there would be another click" (p.56). In both examples, one from our proposed autobiographical level of time and the other from the "real" level of Billy's story, time is not counted according to the standards of reality, but is determined by the characters' inner feelings thus becoming psychological time.¹² In fact, time seems to creep with maddening slowness for anyone placed in antagonistic circumstances. Vonnegut-as-character is suspended in nothingness in a strange town, whereas the narrator conveys Billy's feelings of pain and terror, imprisoned in a boxcar.

The same incident links Vonnegut-as-Character's level of time to the fantastic level, through references to the manipulation of time by outside forces. Vonnegut's words "Somebody was playing with the clocks" are echoed by Montana Wildhack on Tralfamadore, "They're playing with the clocks again," said Montana (.....)" (p.38). To Vonnegut, a mysterious somebody was playing with the clocks and there was nothing he could do about it. As an Earthling, he is subject to clocks and calendars, and when a ground rule of his world is broken - a minute becomes a year - he feels the strangeness of the change. This feeling of strangeness approaches the effect of the fantastic on a character. Montana, on the other hand, knows that it is the Tralfamadorians tampering with the clocks, and is not at all surprised by the fact. Manipulation of time, as well as simultaneity of time, is the rule and not the exception on the fantastic world of Tralfamadore. In this instance, we may conclude that time at Vonnegut's level of the

narrative, the closest one to our experiential world, paradoxically is more fantastic than time on Tralfamadore, because Vonnegut's reaction marks a reversal whereas Montana takes manipulation of time as an ordinary occurrence and as part of the ground rules of the Tralfamadorian world. Manipulation of time, then, can be both a fantastic and a natural occurrence depending on whether it reverses or not the ground rules of a narrative world.

Another aspect of time at Vonnegut's level of the narrative, a thematic aspect, can be drawn from an examination of Chapter One, and this is the fixation over the fleeting nature of time, a constant reminder of human mortality, a preoccupation that is extended to all levels of the narrative. Though Vonnegut-as-character seems to disregard time entirely, with his vagueness about dates and the time of the clock, other positions he takes consistently negate this apparent indifference. Such are his preoccupations with the uselessness of old age and his quotations from Ferdinand Celine's *Death on the Installment Plan*, mentioned in the study of characterization. Like Céline, Vonnegut is obsessed by time, by the wish to arrest its flight, since its fluidity takes life to an unavoidable end. The examples of Vonnegut's obsession with time are paralleled by his characters on the various levels of the narrative. A surprised Billy Pilgrim asks himself "'Where have all the years gone?'" (p.44) when he awakens to reality after his continuous time-traveling. His words echo Vonnegut's quotation from Horace in Chapter One, *Eheu, fugaces labuntur anni*" (p.15). At other points, Vonnegut's covert worries about the fluidity of time and its more immediate consequence - old age - penetrate the time level of the "real" world: through Billy Pilgrim's decrepit mother who wonders how she could have got so old (p.36), and voiced by an unknown old man, whom Billy meets at a doctor's office, who complains about the physical miseries

of old age. "'Oh God,'" the man said, "'I knew it was going to be bad getting old. I didn't know it was going to be this bad'" (p.126).

Let us now turn to the remaining level of time we proposed earlier and which we have labeled "time of the narrator."

TIME OF THE NARRATOR

Billy Pilgrim's story is told in the past tense, with the exception of some passages, in which the narrator interrupts the telling to address the reader directly, and in the present tense. These instances constitute what we have chosen to call "time of the narrator". The first such passage occurs on page 23, at the beginning of the Billy Pilgrim plot, and has already been examined as a source of the ground rules of the novel's real/fantastic world. The next examples of the "time of the narrator" occur on pages 27, 62, 93, 96 and 122, as indicated on the chart, and are indirect reports of Billy's own accounts of his adventures:

Billy says that he first came unstuck in time in 1944, long before his trip to Tralfamadore (p. 27).

Billy says that the Universe does not look like a lot of bright little dots to the creatures from Tralfamadore (p.62).

Listen: Billy Pilgrim says he went to Dresden ... (p.93).

Billy Pilgrim says now that this really is the way he is going to die, too (p.96).

Here is how Billy lost his wife, Valencia (p.122).¹³

We notice that three of the quotations above report events from

the fantastic level of time: Billy is a wanderer in the fourth dimension and as such, has knowledge of the future, up to the moment of his death; the second one evidences that as a result of their unique concept of time, Tralfamadorians have simultaneous vision both in time and space. Those quotations, moreover, convey to us the leap in time and space from the past of the narrated events to the present of the narrative. The use of the present tense to report what "Billy says" places the narrator and Billy, who in these instances embodies all the fantastic notions of time in the novel, on the same level of time. This has the effect of bringing Billy down to earth, of drawing him away from his space and time wanderings, and closer to "our" reality. Since the present is the moment we live now, as we read the novel, we are also drawn into the same level of time. Consequently, Billy becomes more real, his physical presence felt, since he can communicate with the narrator, who, in turn, gets across to the reader, whose attention he calls with his repeated exhortations to listen to his tale. By means of the communication established through the narrator between Billy Pilgrim and the reader, at the present-time level of the narrative, the dream quality of Billy's wanderings in time is extended to the inside reality of the text where the narrator acts and to our own reality, which is external to the text. There is, therefore, a double contamination of reality by dream.

Whereas the quotations we have examined narrate past events, in relation to the present of the narrator, 1968, in the episode of Billy's assassination in Chicago the narrator relates a future event, whose description, paradoxically, he had heard directly from its protagonist. Billy has described his death to a tape recorder, using typical Tralfamadorian language: I, Billy Pilgrim, will die, have died, and always will die on February thirteenth, 1976 (p.96). The whole episode

is related in the present tense, up to the moment when Billy "experiences death for a while," and then "swings back into life again," all the way back to 1945. The narrator then resumes his past-tense manner of narration. This instance of the use of the present tense besides emphasizing the futureness of the event (in the narrator's view, of course; it is out of time for Billy) renders it more vivid and effective, by bringing it closer to the present of the reader.

The last quotation "here is how Billy lost his wife" contains a prediction of the narrator about the future. Predictions of the narrator are particularly numerous, concerning the execution of poor Edgar Derby:

Derby wouldn't survive the war. That good body of his would be filled with holes by a firing squad in Dresden in 68 days (p.60).

After poor Edgar Derby, the high school teacher, was shot in Dresden later on (....) (p.65).

(....) Edgar Derby, the high school teacher who would be shot to death in Dresden (p.69).

(....) Edgar Derby, the high school teacher who would eventually be shot, snored on another bed (p.93).

Though these examples do not fit our initial proposition of including present tense reports by the narrator, they represent a break in the consistent past tense report of events and should, therefore, be given special consideration when we study time at the level of the narrator. It is our contention that these quotations, made from the present of the narrated events¹⁴ (1945 - prison camp) represent a reinforcement of the authorial voice, behind the narrator's. The insistent repetition of this prediction, following the gradual approach to Dresden and its final realization, evidences Vonnegut's preoc-

cupation with a memory of an event that must have been traumatic to young Private Kurt Vonnegut Jr, in 1945. Thus, in a way, they bring together the narrator's and Vonnegut-as-character's levels of time.

Another significant merging of the different levels of time occurs in Chapter Ten, which completes the autobiographical frame of the novel. Vonnegut's voice is heard again unmistakably, commenting on contemporary events and recalling his and O'Hare's return to Dresden in 1967. This reminds him of a similar trip back to Dresden in 1945, when Billy and the other American POW's were marched back into town, after it was destroyed. At this point, Vonnegut identifies himself openly as a character who participates in Billy Pilgrim's Dresden experience: "I was there. O'Hare was there. We were to borrow picks and shovels (....) and go to work" (p.141).¹⁵ The four levels of time are, thus, brought together: the autobiographical, because the character Vonnegut relates his own experiences; the fictional/"real" since it is an event which takes place in the internal reality of *Slaughterhouse-Five*; the fantastic by virtue of the dislocations in time of its central protagonist, and finally the time of the narrator, as the narrative voices of the character Vonnegut and of the narrator are fused into one single voice.

Thus, by means of a time chart we have grouped the several time shifts into a number of divisions, and from these we deduced the time streams of the novel and its four distinct levels of time.

The analysis of time in Billy Pilgrim's real world established two important points:

- the circular structure of the narrative, resulting from time travel, a stock-in-trade of science-fiction, used by Vonnegut to allow his character to move erratically through time;

- the general uncertainty about time evidenced by the chronological discrepancies in Billy's story, disrupting its chronological sequence, which we interpreted as the penetration into the real world of the uncertainty that marks time in fantastic worlds.

At the level of fantastic time, we examined the Tralfamadorian concept of simultaneous time stemming from the basic fantastic principle of reversal which informs equally Billy Pilgrim's time travels.

Reversal of time, both on an alternative world and through the dislocations of a semi-fantastic hero in the fourth dimension, is the solution Vonnegut finds for his obsession with the fluidity of time, foregrounded by our analysis of the autobiographical level.

Departing from the establishment of four levels of time, we have moreover demonstrated how they interpenetrate, bringing together the real and the fantastic, the factual and the fictional, particularly at the level of the narrator, when the reader himself is brought into the context.

Some important conclusions can be drawn from our analysis of time: it is the peculiar temporal sequence of *Slaughterhouse-Five* which determines its organization in the "schizophrenic manner" of the Tralfamadorian novel, juxtaposing unrelated scenes, allowing the reader to see "the depths of many marvelous moments (....) all at one time." Vonnegut's manipulation of chronology, resulting in many unrelated messages which have no particular relationship except that "the author has chosen them carefully," may produce in the reader what he hopes, that is, an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep" (p. 63). In consequence, still like the Tralfamadorian novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* has no beginning, no middle, no end, in keeping with Kurt Vonnegut's personal philosophy on finality expressed when speaking of the

ending of his play *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*:

I hate endings - they are strictly technical.
Nothing in this world is ever final - no one
ever ends - we keep bouncing back and forth
in time, we go on and on ad infinitum.¹⁶

Vonnegut's statement reflects both his ideas of eternal recurrence and the particular form of Billy's time travels.

Time, therefore, is the fictional element which reveals more clearly the departure from the conventional tenets of composition and, what is more important, from the operating ground rules of the outside world.

Furthermore, we notice that the ideas about time, especially the preoccupation with its celerity, which pervade the levels of characterization and which were particularly foregrounded by the study of the time element, were all introduced in Chapter One. And since that chapter contains several verifiable biographical facts, the preoccupation with time can be traced back to Vonnegut himself. Thus, a wish to escape the restrictions of chronological time, which we have ascertained is shared by Kurt Vonnegut the writer as well, informs the main fantastic element of the novel: a timeless planet and a time-traveling hero who, by reversing a basic ground rule of our everyday world of mortality, is partly free from the bondage of punctual time.

NOTES

¹The specific references to relative time above are strictly based on the text.

²The Battle of the Bulge started on Dec. 16th 1944, and by Dec. 21st the Germans had penetrated sixty miles into the American lines. It was the last great German victory in the war.

³This same scene was used to illustrate Billy's characterization as a clown.

⁴Charles Harris calls our attention to several other chronological inconsistencies, besides the ones we have pointed out, as for example the ages of Billy's children. We are told that Billy's wedding took place six months after his release from the veteran's hospital to which he had committed himself in the spring of 1948. Since they honeymoon during Indian summer, the marriage must have occurred in the early Fall of 1948. On that honeymoon, Robert Pilgrim is conceived, which, assuming a normal gestation period, would place his birth sometime in the summer of 1949. However, in Chapter Eight, Billy invites Kilgore Trout to his and Valencia's eighteenth wedding anniversary party "two days hence" (p.114). Billy's meeting with Trout occurs in 1964, at least two years short of their eighteenth anniversary. Moreover, Robert is given as seventeen at this time (p.118). Yet, considering his birthdate as 1949 he could be no older than fifteen. Billy's daughter, Barbara is said to be twenty-one at the time the story begins, in 1968, whereas even if she were Billy and Valencia's first born she could be no older than nineteen in the Spring of 1968.
HARRIS, C. Time, Uncertainty and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: a reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. *The Centennial Review*, 20(3):239-40, 1976.

⁵HARRIS, p. 239-40.

⁶TODOROV, T. *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. Paris, Seuil, 1978. p.124.

⁷Scholes and Rabkin affirm that science-fiction writers, in their eagerness to send human beings to distant heavenly bodies, have chosen to ignore the constancy of the velocity of light, and postulated faster-than-light travel which would not only bring time to a halt but even turn it backwards. SCHOLES, R. & RABKIN, E.S. *Science Fiction*. London, Oxford University Press, 1977. p.124

⁸In connection with the distinction between science fiction and Fantasy, William Irwin remarks that "however remote, astonishing, or astounding a work of science fiction may be, it does not represent what convention regards as categorically and irremediably impossible." He also quotes for clarity's sake Kingsley Amis's words in this respect: "... while science fiction... maintains a respect for fact or presumptive fact, fantasy makes a point of flouting these..." IRWIN, W. *The Game of the Impossible*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976. p.96-7.

⁹Actually Martin Luther King was shot on April 4th two months before Robert Kennedy's death on June 5th. *Anuário Internacional* 1968. São Paulo, Agev, 1969.

¹⁰The present time of the narrative was deducted from Vonnegut's references to current events, such as the deaths of Martin Luther King and of Robert Kennedy and from his affirmative that it took him twenty-three years to write his Dresden book, after his return home in 1945.

¹¹Ducrot and Todorov divide the time of the discourse into internal and external time:

Temps internes	{	temps de l'histoire (ou temps de la fiction, ou temps raconté) temps de l'écriture temps de la lecture
Temps externes	{	temps de l'écrivain temps du lecteur temps historique

Cf. DUCROT, O. & TODOROV, T. *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Sciences du Langage*. Paris, Seuil, 1972. p.398-404.

¹²According to the division of fictional time proposed by Mas-saud Moisés into historical or chronological time and psychological or metaphysical time, the latter "flui dentro das personagens como um eterno presente. Porque interior, o tempo psicológico se desenvolveria em círculos ou em espirais." MOISÉS, M. *A Análise Literária*. São Paulo, Cultrix, 1981. p.101.

¹³The quotations above were also used to illustrate other points of our analysis in 4.1.

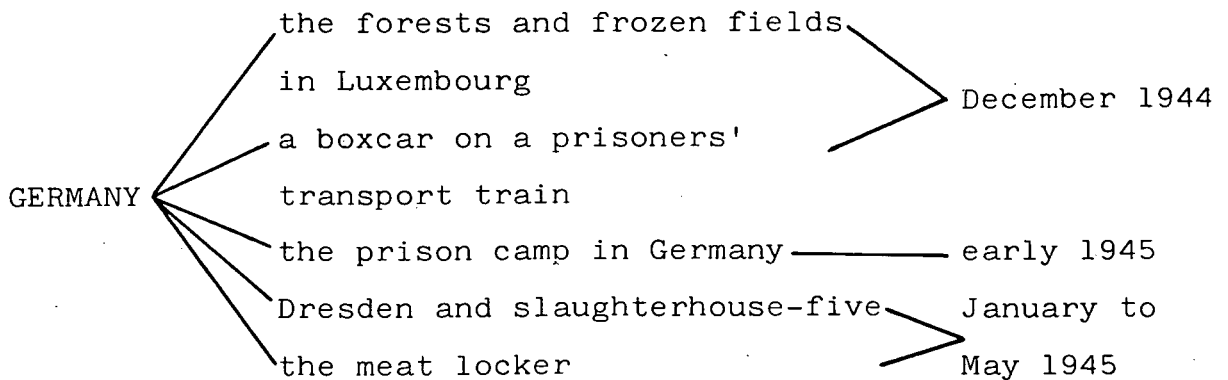
¹⁴As Jean Pouillon remarks "a cronologia romanesca é captada do interior nos sucessivos presentes que a constituem tal como foi vivida!" Prison camp in 1945 is one of these many presents of fictional chronology. POUILLON, J. *O Tempo no romance*. São Paulo, Cultrix, 1974. p.110.

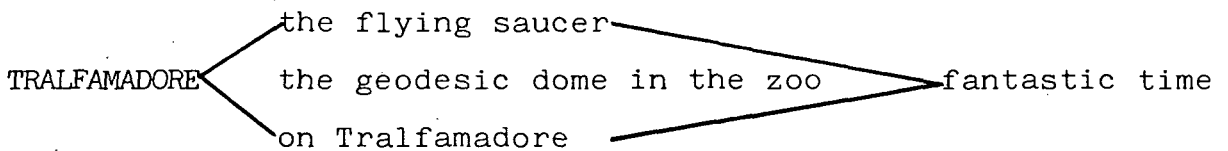
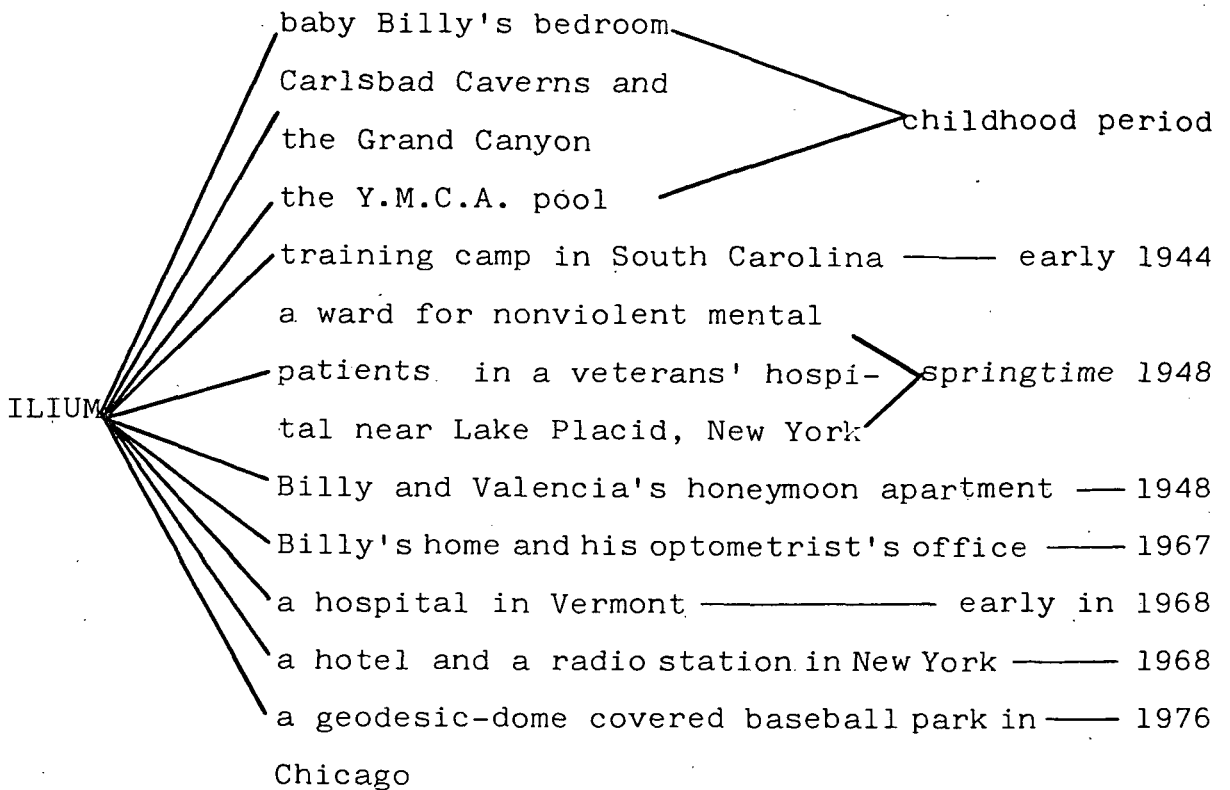
¹⁵See also p. 41.

¹⁶BOSWORTH, P. To Vonnegut, the Hero is the Man Who Refuses to Kill. *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1970 (sec.2, p.5). Quoted by Wayne MCGINNIS in *The Arbitrary Cycle of Slaughterhouse-Five: a relation of form to theme*. *Critique, Studies in Modern Fiction*, 17:55-68, 1976.

6. FROM WOMB TO TOMB

Having analysed the temporal aspect of the numerous scene shifts accomplished via time travel, we turn to a consideration of its various settings. In order to do this, we have referred again to our time chart,¹ relating each of its initial divisions to the scenery where the action develops, with the exception of "present time of the narrator" which understandably has no physical location. From the time-place correspondence established with the aid of the chart, a pattern emerged which indicated the existence of three main settings in the novel: Germany, the planet Tralfamadore, and the United States. All the locales in the novel may be grouped under one of those headings, as illustrated in the distribution below. The American setting comprises Ilium as well as several other less significant backgrounds which complete our view of Billy's life and adventures. Considering its relevance, we decided to use the name Ilium to designate the novel's American background, making specific references to certain places when necessary.





The setting of Slaughterhouse-Five offers a particularly rich ground for the observation of the special factual/fantastic character of Vonnegut's fiction, which juxtaposes the real sites of the author's experiences - Germany, to fictitious locations - Ilium, and to an imaginary planet - Tralfamadore. The rules which determine Billy Pilgrim's main traits, a pilgrim in space and time, also establish formal characteristics at other fictional levels. Thus, the framework of the plot is a journey and the setting is variegated, as it changes kaleidoscopically following the rhythm of Billy's pilgrimages.

Applying to setting Rabkin's continuum of the fantastic, the first point on the left (reality) will be occupied by Germany, if we assume that the places where Vonnegut-as-character claims to have been - the railroad yard crammed with

American POW's, certain parts of Dresden before and after the bombing - are actually part of the experiential world. Further on the right will be Ilium, a fictitious name for a place that may actually exist.² Yet some points to the right will be Tralfamadore and all its elements of science fiction which create a narrative world different from our own, especially when considered "against the background of an organized body of knowledge."³

The physical setting of Billy's first contact with war is a white silent world, through which a befuddled pilgrim and his less dazed reluctant companions wander aimlessly. All the details of setting point at the hostility of the background toward human beings. The "dark cold forest" with "pines (...) planted in ranks and files" and with "no undergrowth" offers little shelter from operation "mopping up" sardonically described as the "divinely listless loveplay that follows the orgasm of victory" (p.41). At all points the setting emphasizes that man is but a plaything at the mercy of unconquerable forces. The fear-ridden atmosphere magnifies sounds, so that the voice of a barking dog reverberates like "a big bronze gong",⁴ and transforms human beings into "woods creatures" who live "from moment to moment, in useful terror, "thinking brainlessly with their spinal cords" (p.39). The "four big unlucky mammals" are trapped in an immense white expanse of snow where they leave trails as unambiguous as diagrams in a book on ballroom dancing - step, slide, rest - step, slide, rest" (p.33). Used as a substitute for food (p.28), snow merely enhances starvation; instead of offering shelter, it puts into relief the four dark figures as excellent targets for hidden shooters. In the same way that it arrests the flow of a creek, freezing it into fixity, snow transforms live bodies into rigid corpses with "ivory and blue feet" or into stone or yet into glass statues: Billy was afraid to drop from

the boxcar to the ground, later in the novel, believing he "would shatter like glass" (p.58).

Color, when introduced in this all black and white world, is also associated with death. Roland Weary dies of gangrene when the endless marching on the snow transforms his feet into "bloody puddings". The two scouts are shot to death "turning the snow to the color of raspberry sherbet" (p.42). The numbing cold, and enveloping snow, the outstanding features of that part of the physical setting, emphasize nature's role as a simultaneously indifferent and destructive force. However, man's cruelty far exceeds the destructive power of the natural setting: the three deaths above are actually the result of human action, and human technology can create an "incredible artificial weather" - shower of "knives and needles and razor blades" (....) "shells bursting in the tree-tops" - when Earthlings do not want other Earthlings to inhabit Earth any more" (74).

The nightmarish qualities of the setting, darkness in contrast with limitless expansions of white, deep silence in contrast with preternaturally loud sounds, and above all the feeling of terror which penetrates the landscape and men alike, as found in the white world of wartime Luxembourg, are very similar to those traits ascribed to the topography of fantastic worlds:

The represented world of the fantastic is of a different kind from the imagined universe of the marvellous and it opposes the latter's rich colorfulness with relatively bleak, empty, indeterminate landscapes, which are less definable as places than as spaces, as white, grey or shady blanknesses.⁵

But the similarities of the novel's real setting with fantastic worlds do not end here. From the tightly sealed

crowded boxcar on the transport train which takes the American prisoners to camps in the interior of Germany, Billy travels in time to the Tralfamadorian flying saucer and then back to the boxcar again. Billy's presence in both settings contaminates reality with fantasy and vice-versa establishing a mutual exchange. Thus, the description of the German guards' "heaven on wheels" (p.58), which Billy beholds through the ventilators of the prisoners' boxcar, reminds the reader of the world of fairy:

There was candlelight, and there were bunks and quilts and blankets heaped on them. There was a cannonball stove and a steaming coffee-pot on top. There was a table with a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread and a sausage on it. There were four bowls of soup. There were pictures of castles and lakes and pretty girls on the walls (p.51).

Although the whole novel is structured in the "telegraphic manner" (p.3) with short sentences and paragraphs and deceptively simple language, the syntactical structure in this passage presents peculiar characteristics. The series of independent clauses beginning with "there to be", plus the strings of direct objects linked with "and" are obviously intended to parallel the style of children's tales, in which the information must be conveyed piecemeal, and the simplest syntax is necessary to ensure the comprehension of the child-listener or reader.⁶

Poor Billy Pilgrim, weakened by cold and hunger, looking with "enchanted" eyes at a scene of unattainable riches could be a modern version of some of the characters in Andersen's fairy tales, who stand as outsiders to a world of plenty. Actually the scene above presents many parallels with "The Girl of the Matches". The introduction of some traits of the

marvelous is an inference that man needs fantasy to offset the harsh facts of the insane world of reality.

On the other hand, the Tralfamadorian flying saucer, which we can take to be the fantastic counterpart of the prisoners' boxcar, has some incongruously ordinary characteristics. Billy is hauled into the saucer by means of a ladder "that was outlined in pretty lights like a Ferris wheel" and carried to a cabin where he is "strapped to a yellow Barca-Lounger which they (the Tralfamadorians) had stolen from a Sears and Roebuck warehouse" (p.56). A piece of Department Store furniture in a definitely non-natural setting does reverse our expectations diametrically.⁷

Other settings in the novel evidence the double contamination of reality by dream. Thus the paradoxical unreality of the setting which we have classified as the most "realistic" one is further enhanced in Chapter Five by the depiction of the "banquet hall" prepared for the English prisoners' enthusiastic reception of their American comrades. The Englishmen are described as "darling elves" who had prepared the heroes' homecoming, "sweeping, mopping (....) baking" and cooking "a witches' cauldron full of golden soup." The banquet hall displays an inordinate amount of riches to the fascinated Billy Pilgrim. To complete the fabulous atmosphere of the setting, "pink arches (....) with azure draperies hanging between them" and "two golden thrones" are set in preparation for the evening's entertainment, a musical version of Cinderella, "the most popular story ever told" (67-8). The parallel between what we considered the world of reality (Germany) and fantastic worlds is clearly stated later when, having donned Cinderella's clothes, soldier Billy becomes a character in a fairy tale: "Billy Pilgrim was Cinderella and Cinderella was Billy Pilgrim" (p.98). Thus the setting of a real battle in a very real war is transformed into a fantastic

background by virtue of Billy Pilgrim's reversal from a character in a war book into a character in the marvelous world of fairy tale. The marvelous atmosphere persists when the action moves to the last part of the war setting - Dresden and slaughterhouse-five. Thus, the city's "intricate and voluptuous and enchanted and absurd skyline" (p.100) reminds Vonnegut-as-character of the fabulous land of Oz.⁸ In post-raid Dresden, Billy arms himself for the first time with an ancient cavalry pistol and a Luftwaffe ceremonial saber which, imitating legendary King Arthur, he pulls out of a telephone pole (p.130)

In fact, from the moment of his arrival in Germany, Billy Pilgrim enters a strange world which, paralleling marvelous realms, is marked by repeated reversals. Having come to a far-off unknown land as a conqueror - an American soldier - he finds himself instead in a world of nightmare, transformed into an animal: he is a "filthy flamingo" (p.29), an "unlucky mammal," trapped and hunted in a cold deserted forest, subsequently captured and packed into a cattle-transport train. The final touches of this man-into-beast metamorphosis, which owes much of its effectiveness to the overall hostility of the background, are added by the placing of the American POW's in a slaughterhouse, a place originally built as a shelter for pigs about to be butchered. The relevance of this part of the war setting, which gives the book its title, lies in its association with death both at the denotative and the connotative levels. It is both a place where animals are killed for food and an objective correlative for the uncountable battlefields, for the thousands of cities which, like Dresden, were subjected to heavy air-raids, thus becoming immense slaughterhouses, where millions of human beings were killed mercilessly.

Dresden after the bombing, another site where Vonnegut-

-as-character claims to have been and, therefore, an element of the factual/fictional frame of the novel, paradoxically enhances the nightmarish atmosphere of the war setting, which approaches the fantasticality of horror fiction:

Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn (....) 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. So it goes (p.118-19).

Our horror at the narrator's description of the fire-storm is deepened when we realize that it corresponds to fact. Indeed, Donald Greiner points out that the novel's report of the fire-storm squares with David Irving's historical account of the Dresden raid, in his book *The Destruction of Dresden*.⁹ Even Billy Pilgrim's descriptions of the charred bodies resembling little logs because arms, legs and heads had been burned off are verified by Irving's book. The landscape of post-raid Dresden, a dead, silent world, nothing but stones forming deceptively low graceful curves, paralleling some strange alien world, and Dresden's corpse mines which yield thousands of putrefying corpses, surpass any horror devices - ghosts, werewolves, and other supernatural beings - that may be contrived by man's imagination. In every instance, the combined effects of man's cruelty toward man and of the hostility of the setting spell death and destruction.

Thus, Germany, ranged at the most realistic point on our scale of the fantastic, as the factual background of World War II, approaches the fantastic both in its obvious parallels with marvelous realms, but mainly because setting and events turn out to be more fantastic than reality. Candles and soap made from the fat of rendered Jews and Gypsies and fairies and

communists (p.67) coupled with thousands of deaths of civilians in defenseless Dresden, particularly the deaths of some young Breslau refugees whose bodies, Billy reports, "were boiled alive in a water tower by my own countrymen, who were proud of fighting pure evil at the time" (p.80) defy belief and reverse our faith in the humanity of man.

In relation to Billy Pilgrim, whether the real or the fantastic prevails, setting as used by Vonnegut underscores his passivity and weakness, revealed in his willingness to surrender, as a first reaction to difficulties. When a "lethal bee buzzes past his ear" he merely stands still as if to "give the marksman another chance" (p.29). At all times, setting functions as a foil for Billy's dumb innocence. Thus, Billy cuts a ridiculous figure, underclothed and armed with a two-inch pencil stub, in sharp contrast with the German reserves, "violent, windburned, bristly men" with "teeth like piano keys" "armed with machine-gun belts (...) (and) potato masher grenades" (p.48). But we find Billy's most contrastive image in Roland Weary. In contrast with Billy's skinny figure, Weary who looks like "Tweedledum or Tweedledee"¹⁰ short and thick and all bundled up for battle, has "fat to burn"; instead of a harmless pencil he carries "every piece of equipment he had ever been issued" (p.33) plus a vicious-looking trench knife (a present from his father) complete with a triangular blade that "makes a wound that won't close up" and spiked brass knuckles in its grip (p.31). Weary's methods of self-distraction and fantasizing approach pornography - he is the proud owner of a "dirty picture of a woman attempting sexual intercourse with a Shetland pony" (p.33), whereas time-traveler Billy who is beguiled into a porno shop in New York¹¹ much later in the novel, by the sight of Kilgore Trout's books displayed in the window, seeks escape in science-fiction.

Ilium, the second setting of Billy Pilgrim's earthly pilgrimages presents some traits which place it further to the right, and away from the realistic point, on our adapted continuum of the fantastic. Though it is the scenery of Billy's everyday life as a citizen of the United States of America, we believe it to be less realistic than Germany, because it lacks factual existence. The Britannica Atlas lists no towns named Ilium in the state of New York, though it does include Ilion and Troy, both situated a short distance from Schenectady.¹²

The name is not new in Vonnegut's fiction, but a legacy from his first novel, *Player Piano*¹³ where it is the setting of his dystopian society of the future. In that novel, according to information provided by Vonnegut himself,¹⁴ Ilium is just another name for Schenectady. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Ilium is described as a teeming industrial city, "particularly good for optometrists because the General Forge and Foundry Company is there" (p.23) and every one of its sixty-eight thousand employees is required to own a pair of safety glasses. Are we to take General Forge as a disguise for General Electric, and, consequently, Ilium as just a name for the same Schenectady of Vonnegut's earlier fiction?

The toponym Ilium, the Latin form of Troy, also refers us back to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,¹⁵ thus being a particularly fitting choice to designate the fictitious town in New York, an important piece in the factual/fantastic context of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Both Iliums, the real and the fictional ones, have double referents, one closer to the reality of the historical world and another of fantastic nature:

- Ancient Ilium
- historical - the ancient city in northwestern Asia Minor whose ruins are of enormous archaeological interest;
 - legendary - the legendary Troy of Priam, Paris and Helen, which Homer endowed with a glory that to this day stirs the imagination of man.
- Ilium, N.Y.
- fictional - a town somewhere in the State of New York U.S.A., where some of the events of the Billy Pilgrim plot develop;
 - fantastic - the site of Billy's fantastic kidnapping by the Tralfamadorians; also an illustrative example of the growing unreality of ordinary life in the modern world.

The analysis of Ilium as one of the physical locations of the Billy Pilgrim plot is closely linked to the whole interpretation to be given it. Thus, if we consider 1968 as the present time of the action and the events lived by Billy, from the time of his birth up to the present, as mere recollections of the past, the Ilium setting acquires central importance in Billy's life as the starting point of his mental wanderings into his past life. This makes Billy a successful businessman, who lives and works (very desultorily) in sumptuous surroundings: a beautiful Georgian home and a deluxe optometrist's office in a huge suburban shopping center. The outstanding symbol of Billy's life of riches is his Cadillac El Dorado Coupe de Ville, an eye-catching item in a catalogue of material possessions, which also stands for the family's conservatism as the stickers on the bumper indicate: "'Visit Ausable Chasm', 'Support Your Police Department', 'Impeach Earl Warren', 'Reagan for President'" (p.46,122). Billy's failure in forgetting his traumatic war experiences, ever present in his mind, can be accounted for by his sensitive nature imperfectly

repressed under the movements of everyday living. However, this would be a very simplistic interpretation of the complex structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, one which would clash, besides, with the author's intention of creating a non-realistic setting for Billy's adventures.¹⁶

If, on the contrary, we consider Billy's time-traveling as actual dislocations in time and space, the Ilium setting shrinks to the position of a stopping place in between his wanderings, a place he returns to when he is dizzy with time travel. Thus, Ilium has a double nature: the down-to-earth background of Billy's life as an optometrist and the intensely fantasy-contaminated springboard to his fantastic pilgrimages. The ambivalence of Ilium becomes evident when we examine some of its various locales. An illustrative example is the ward for non-violent mental patients in a veterans' hospital, to which Billy commits himself in 1948, driven into near insanity by his haunting war memories. A part of the physical setting, the hospital also functions as a threshold into an alternative world - mental insanity - that lies beyond the limits of normal perception, where one is unable to discriminate between the real and the unreal. Billy does not cross that threshold, but adopts an ambivalent solution instead, keeping a foot on the world of reality - as Valencia's dutiful husband and as the manager of his father-in-law's most prosperous shop - and leading a secret fantastic life, (does he invent his world by means of science fiction?). We can say that the transformation dazed soldier — husband/businessman/time-traveler results from a chain of events which started in another hospital on the German prison camp in 1945, where a hysterical Billy is given a morphine shot and strapped to bed. He emerges from hospital as a complete fairy-tale character, down to the ownership of a magic token - a diamond which "could work miracles for him" (p.93). In a way it does work a miracle by open-

ing for Billy the doors of the world of material affluence, when it seals his engagement to Valencia. Thus, Cinderella becomes a businessman and his magic stone a prosaic piece of costly property, insured at eighteen hundred dollars. However, Billy's Cinderella side thrives in secret until a third stay in hospital, twenty years later, after his fateful plane crash. This time, he emerges as the herald of the Tralfamadorian message, a role that combines the real and the fantastic aspects of Billy's personality, for he answers a "calling much higher than mere business."

Several other locales in the Ilium setting have a real/fantastic nature. The South Carolina hillside where Billy and a small congregation of Sunday worshippers are theoretically killed by the enemy becomes the site of a "Tralfamadorian adventure with death" (p.28), when the theoretical corpses eat a hearty noontime meal. The closer the association with Billy's non-normal activities, the more fantastic the Ilium setting becomes. Thus, the strange characteristics of the Tralfamadorian saucer that kidnaps Billy in his own backyard, - a large spacecraft, with pulsing purple light coming out of its portholes and navigating in space and time - are transferred to Billy's house. The floor is zebra-striped with darkness and moonlight and Billy feels spooky and luminous, "as though he were wrapped in cool fur that was full of static electricity" (p.53). Diametric reversal at the level of the Ilium setting actually occurs, however, when Chicago is reported to have been hydrogen-bombed by Angry Chinamen and the United States to have been Balkanized, "divided into twenty petty nations, "thus ceasing to be a threat to world peace, in the narrator's account of Billy's assassination in a not very distant future. - 1976.

At the other extreme of our continuum we have placed

Tralfamadore, an obviously fantastic realm with all the window dressing of space opera. Thus, Billy is taken into space via flying saucer, a faster-than-light spacecraft which can cover the hundreds of millions of miles which separate the Earth from Tralfamadore in mere seconds. Tralfamadore includes, moreover, all the stock-in-trade of space adventure, from zap guns to time warps and extraterrestrial intelligences. These, the Tralfamadorian robots, are described as two-feet high, green creatures, "shaped like plumber's friends"; they are equipped with suction cups and extremely flexible shafts "usually pointed to the sky. At the top of each shaft was a little hand with a green eye in its palm" (p.24-5). They communicate with Billy by means of a computer and a sort of electric organ which made every Earthling speech sound" (p.55).¹⁷

The depiction of the Tralfamadorians is evidently parodical, consistent with the comic decorum of the novel, which is extended to Billy's artificial habitat. It is covered by a geodesic dome, built of transparent material through which all his movements, even his trips to the bathroom, can be watched by the Tralfamadorian crowds, drawn to the zoo by Billy's presence.

Time warps, flying saucers, extraterrestrial beings and all the other trappings of science fiction that make up the Tralfamadorian world represent diametric reversals of our perspectives as inhabitants of the factual world. The whole Tralfamadorian setting is, therefore, fantastic, which justifies its placing at the point on the scale furthest away from "reality". However, our assumptions about the setting of a fabulous alien planet are diametrically reversed by the introduction of everyday ordinary elements into the world of fantasy. Billy's "simulated Earthling habitat" is furnished with various items "stolen from the Sears and Roebuck warehouse in Iowa City, Iowa," which range from a color TV set (which

didn't work) to a stereophonic phonograph and a refrigerator (which did) plus a hide-a-bed couch, coffee tables, end tables, etc, etc.(p.77-8). The flip-flop of the ground rules of the real world is followed by a flop-flip produced by the reversal of an alternative world's own ground rules,¹⁸ which make it all the more fantastic.

On the other hand, the use of realistic items of setting in an alien world contribute to the unique real - fantastic character of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which we have already observed in our analysis of *Germany and Ilium*. The various settings of the novel merge the real and the fantastic so completely, that it becomes difficult to determine whether we are in the world of fact or fantasy, at any given moment. As Glenn Meeter aptly observes in respect to Vonnegut's fictional world,

One does not read far in Vonnegut(...) without discovering that despite the naturalness of the narrator's voice, he is not in the natural world. He is instead in a world of futuristic fantasy, a world where beings like Bokononists and Tralfamadorians are as natural as grass and trees.¹⁹

Another important aspect to be noticed is the fact that details of setting give coherence and unity to Vonnegut's schizophrenic narrative, suggesting connections between its three worlds, the world of fact, the world of fiction, and the world of fantasy. Such details of setting often become motifs: the Russian prisoners surrounding the British have pale faces "like radium dials" (p.59), the motif is also attached to the face of young Billy's father's watch in the Carlsbad Caverns (p.63), setting off the darkness and the pervading terror of both scenes. The prisoner's train is painted with orange and black stripes; so is the party tent at Barbara's wedding. Billy's feet often

take a "blue and ivory" tinge, the color of corpses' feet. "Ivory and blue", first used to describe Billy's feet in the everyday setting of Ilium (p.25) is the color of feet of dead bodies observed in the war scenes (p.49,100). Billy's feet and "claws" are also described as being "ivory and blue" both when he is close to death on the boxcar and prior to his departure to another world - Tralfamadore (p.53-5). The phrase "nestle like spoons," used to describe the position of sleeping people, occurs equally in different settings. It is applied firstly to Billy and a hobo, his fellow prisoner on the boxcar (p. 52,56) and then to Billy and Valencia (p.53,87). The connotation of death becomes clear when the dead hobo is depicted as "nestling within thin air and cinders" (p.100). "Nestling like spoons" can be an objective correlative for death, since all those who are said to be in that position - the hobo, Valencia, and Billy - end up dying violently.²⁰

Another of those motifs acquires paramount importance in that it finally establishes a connection with the crux of Billy's existence, the fire-bombing of Dresden, putting an end to his evasive time travels away from the slaughterhouse. In fact, a barbershop quartet of optometrists singing a poignant song 'That Old Gang of Mine' at Billy and Valencia's wedding anniversary party, is the catalyst element that puts Billy face to face with his "great big secret". Feeling "as though he really were being stretched on the torture engine called the rack," (p.115). Billy finds an explanation for his reaction in the resemblance of the singers' facial expression with that of the four German guards who led the American POW's out of the meat locker into a devastated Dresden:

The guards drew together instinctively, rolled their eyes. They experimented with one expression and then another, said nothing, though their mouths were often open. They looked like

a silent film of a barbershop quartet.

'So long forever,' they might have been singing, 'old fellows and pals; So long forever, old sweethearts and pals - God Bless 'em - ' (p.119)

The same barbershop quartet, 'The Febs', is singing when Billy's plane smacks into the top of a mountain in Vermont in 1968, an episode which, chronologically, takes place after the Pilgrims' anniversary celebration (see time chart on p.89). In the novel's sequence of events however, the accident precedes the party, thus foreshadowing the association of the barbershop quartet motif with death.

Other items of scenery function equally as a means of linking the various levels of setting in the novel. An illustrative example is the sequence of scenes joined by an ordinary piece of setting - the bed, which acquires particular significance in the context since most of the time and scene shifts are effected when Billy falls asleep. Under the effect of morphine Billy goes to sleep in the prison hospital and from that bed he travels to his empty widower's home in Ilium, where he is put to bed by a waspish Barbara, who reproaches him rudely for being writing letters to local newspapers about the Tralfamadorian truths, still in his pyjamas and oblivious to the freezing temperature in the house. From there he travels in time to the zoo on Tralfamadore, where he is mated to Montana Wildhack. From Montana's delightful bed, he travels back to his widower's bed in Ilium. Thus he travels through the three settings of his pilgrimages, all in the course of two pages (p.90-1).

Billy Pilgrim's continuous shifts in space and time, like the mythical hero's voyage into the unknown, represent a passage into a new zone of experience, since Billy knows "what happens next" (p.90) but is unable to tell when it will

happen. He may just as well be about to change from one to the other of the innocuous locales of the Ilium setting or be poised on the threshold of a strange world, either the nightmarish war setting or the alien world of Tralfamadore. Thus, beyond the threshold, there is darkness, the unknown and danger, into which Billy plunges when he crosses a door.²¹ The crossing of a door, one of the most important linking elements among the various space shifts, echoes the mythical "passage through the gates of metamorphosis",²² for it entails a reversal in Billy's roles. In other words, traversing a threshold leads "from one state of being into the next."²³ Rosemary Jackson expresses basically the same idea when she says that the door in fantastic narratives - like mirrors, portraits, etc. functions as an aperture which "opens into another region found in the spaces of the familiar and the known."²⁴

The crossing of a door leads from one setting of Billy's adventures to another, in the following sequences of scenes: leaving the romantic scenery of his wedding night, Billy crosses the door into the bathroom, only to find himself groping along the rough walls of the prison hospital, searching for the door that leads outside, in order to satisfy a similar physiological need. This door lets a stunned Billy, "loony with time-travel and morphine," out into the prison night. He is plunged right into the middle of what seems to him an esoteric religious ceremony: bright pink words hang in air, painted on a "magic curtain supported in nothing" (p.86) while theatrical cries of grief fill the night. Thus by traversing doors, Billy proceeds by degrees from "reality" to the fantastic: starting from the sane, down-to-earth background of his nuptial bedroom in Cape Ann, Billy reaches a more fantastic scenery by virtue of his severance from reality by the effects of morphine. Mentally, he is on the threshold of a different world, in a state halfway between sanity and madness. The next

door takes him into still more fantastic surroundings where his "unreliable perceptions" give magic connotations to a commonplace notice written in fluorescent paint, urging the soldiers to keep the camp latrine clean, and reverse a scene of the "real" world into a "vision of Hell" (p.86).

But by far the most pervasive element in the three settings of Slaughterhouse-Five is the geodesic dome:²⁵ a geodesic dome covers Billy's Earthling habitat in the Tralfamadorian zoo; he is shot to death in a baseball park, "which is covered by a geodesic dome"(p.96); the access to the "first corpse mine in Dresden" is overlaid by a "membrane of timbers laced over rocks which had wedged together to form an accidental dome" (p.142). The semi-circular structure, which encases Billy and Montana's Tralfamadorian Eden has a strong connotation of life and fertility. Its shape resembles closely that of the human womb, inside which Billy and Montana, naked like Adam and Eve, re-enact the primeval act of creation which gave continuity to human life on Earth. The birth of their child is the climacteric component of that symbol. From a symbol of fertility and life, the geodesic dome is reversed diametrically into a death symbol, when a vault-shaped structure of rocks and timber turns into a tomb for hundreds of human beings. The ambivalence of the symbol becomes more evident in the Ilium setting, which, significantly, stands halfway between the real and the fantastic. The geodesic dome of the baseball stadium becomes Billy's tomb when he "experiences death for a while" (p.97). Yet, as Billy's death is followed instantly by rebirth, the geodesic dome is reversed from a tomb into a womb. Actually, similarity of shape establishes a close association between womb and tomb and dome, a similarity which is extended to the level of phonetics - /tüm/ /wüm/ /doum/.

The womb image is common to various settings of Billy's life. Pre-birth, not an image but the actual inside of the

human uterus is described as red light and bubbles. Similar to the liquid medium of pre-birth environment is the Y.M.C.A. pool, where Billy comes near death by drowning: "when he opened his eyes, he was on the bottom of the pool and there was beautiful music everywhere" (p.35). Billy was rescued, though he "resented it", and his near tomb turns into a womb, once again starting his life cycle.

As mentioned before, when we studied Billy's characterization, his erratic swinging through the full arc of his life, from pre-birth to death, from womb to tomb and back into life again, comes very close to the mythical cycle of death and rebirth. The coincidence between Billy's and the mythical hero's journeys can be also observed in what concerns their location. Like the hero of myth, Billy descends into the underworld, ascends into Heaven and journeys through unknown fantasy lands, in the pursuit of a quest. A situation reminiscent of the mythic journey to the underworld is Billy's descent into the meat locker "which was hollowed out in the living rock under the slaughterhouse", the shelter of the American POW's during the air raid. That it is the land of the dead is evidenced by the "few cattle and sheep and pigs and horses hanging from iron hooks" (p.110). Billy's emergence from the underworld, however, breaks the mythic pattern for, on his return to the land of the living, he finds himself instead in another land of the dead: 135,000 corpses in a landscape as desolate as the moon, nothing but minerals. Other settings which parallel the mythical underworld are the thousands of Dresden "corpse mines" and the basement rumpus room in Billy's Georgian home. The mythic pattern is distorted again for the opening of the corpse mines reveals merely death and decay, while the basement in Billy's house is not the site where truth is revealed to the hero, but where the hero reveals the truth, for Billy has descended into his rumpus

room to work on the message which spreads the Tralfamadorian lesson to the world.

The parallel with the mythical hero's perilous journeys to the underworld and to heaven is completed with Billy's trip to the fantastic world of Tralfamadore. As an alternative world, Tralfamadore must offer Billy a replacement of the rules of his world - violence, destruction and death - by a diametrically opposed set of ground rules. In fact, Billy's first contact with the Tralfamadorian concept of time offers him triumph over death and man's cruelty. Apparently Billy has reached utopia or total felicity, a society free from the menace of decay and death, whose members have discovered the secret of living peacefully. The secondary world of Tralfamadore, created through science fiction is, therefore, a compensatory world which makes up for the protagonist's "apprehension of actuality as disordered and insufficient."²⁶ The compensatory function of Tralfamadore is consistent with its utopic design and also with the fairy-tale characteristics which we have observed in the novel's setting. In fact, As William Irwin aptly observes, utopias "as reports from a remote felicity conveyed to an unhappy world, foster a Sehnsucht much like that generated by fairy tale and romance."²⁷ Not even the ominous aspects of Billy's ideal world - he is the prize exhibit in a zoo, confined under a transparent geodesic dome surrounded by a cyanide atmosphere - detract from his happiness or are inconsistent with the idea of Tralfamadore as a utopian society. Most utopias have something ominous about them, since "they involve the imposition of order on society at the expense of liberty."²⁸

Billy's alternative utopic world, ironically, is revealed to be in fact a dystopia²⁹ when he finds out its peace to be transient and its concept of time restrictive: it is impossible to prevent anything from happening, even the destruction

of the Universe. Thus, the Tralfamadorian heaven, a desirable mythical world identified metaphorically with the paradise of Billy's religion³⁰ - science fiction - proves to be a disillusionment. In consonance with the overall ironic and pessimistic tone of Vonnegut's fiction, the hero's wanderings through the three settings of his mythical adventures: Germany and the land of the dead, Tralfamadore and Billy's science-fiction paradise and Ilium - a metaphor for the unknown fantasy lands which await the hero once he departs on his quest - apparently do not bring the hero's pursuits to a successful ending.

As a first step for the analysis of setting in *Slaughterhouse-Five* we have grouped its various locales under the headings Germany, Ilium, and Tralfamadore, according to their "real" or fantastic nature. The specific characteristics of each setting were subordinated to these three initial divisions and studied separately. We arrived at the conclusion that this division, although effective for analytic purposes, does not define well the three settings of the novel, which present simultaneously realistic and fantastic traits.

Details of setting which are common to Germany, Ilium and Tralfamadore, plus motifs and symbols, were studied as a whole, outside our tripartite division. Common motifs and symbols were shown to provide a liaison among the various space shifts and consequently to give unity and cohesion to Vonnegut's schizophrenic narrative.

We have also established a relationship between Billy Pilgrim's wanderings through his three worlds with the archetypal hero's journeys through unknown fantasy lands, to the underworld and to heaven, based on the similarities of Billy's and the mythical hero's quests by virtue of their fantastic characteristic of rebirth.

Therefore, our examination of the setting in Slaughterhouse-Five has established that the real and the fantastic are intricately enmeshed in the fabric of Billy Pilgrim's world, a world which is above all overwhelmingly hostile. The hostility of the background which our analysis has emphasized both in its physical and human aspects - "the Earthling combination of ferocity and spectacular weaponry" (p.79) - has a twofold consequence: death and dehumanization. Death is the ubiquitous presence, the underlying or overt significance of motifs and symbols, besides being emphasized continuously by the recurring refrain "so it goes." Even the moment Billy considers as the happiest one in his life - his sun-drenched snooze in the back of a coffin-shaped green wagon, two days after the end of the Second World War in Europe - is associated with death.

Billy's dehumanization, which stands for the dehumanization of all mankind, transcends his metamorphosis into an animal on its way to the slaughterhouse. Man's cruelty to man transforms Billy Pilgrim into a robot, a puppet with no will of its own. The image of a bemused Billy lost in the nightmarish background of war, or in a parodic fairy-tale, or yet journeying through the archetypal heaven and underworld of myth emphasizes Vonnegut's prevailing idea that man is a plaything of enormous forces. Barring the war setting, whose magnified cruelty would unbalance anyone less sensitive than Billy Pilgrim, all the other settings, even commonplace Ilium, add to his listlessness and passivity. Standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, in awe of the majestic scenery, twelve-year-old Billy wets his pants. Later on, ironically his deluxe Cadillac, a mere piece of property, causes the death of his wife.

Indeed "plain old death", as everything else in Slaughterhouse-Five has an ironic treatment.³¹ Even in death, the hobo tried to "nestle like a spoon with others" (p.100) while a

trail like "the diagrams in a book of ballroom dancing" brings death to the two scouts, Billy's companions, who are killed by "three inoffensive bangs." Other details, a "bullet-proof Bible" and a portable organ manufactured by a vacuum cleaner company, emphasize the irony of Christianity in a situation where men are very unchristianly killing each other. Thus, setting has its important share in determining the satirical tone of the novel, functioning as an ironic backdrop for the unhappy action. Consistent with Vonnegut's ironic vision, the barbershop quartet of optometrists is named "The Febs", "an acronym for 'Four-eyed Bastards'" (p.104) thus undercutting the poignancy of one of the most moving passages in the novel, which describes the German guards' unbelieving astonishment at the sight of destroyed Dresden.

As mentioned above, we see the main function of setting as that of stressing the general hostility of man toward other men, epitomized in the pathetic figure of Billy Pilgrim, a sensitive human being, whose emotional fuses are blown by the witnessing of mankind's cruelty. Unable either to forget his war memories or to accept the human ferocity which caused the Dresden holocaust, Billy encounters the only means of survival in the creation of a fantastic alternative world. Survival through imagination is the solution found by the author who has his character re-invent himself and his universe by means of science fiction.

But here again Vonnegut's ironic treatment of his subject³² - the inhabitants of Billy's alternative world have a ridiculous shape and their reproduction depends on the existence of five different sexes - apparently belies the Tralfamadorian solution.

Indeed, science fiction may not provide an entirely valid solution but, by using one of its elements, time travel, to ascribe his protagonist the capacity of repeatedly entering

the world of the dead and emerging back into life, we believe Vonnegut has created a new mythology based on the recurrence of birth - palingenesia. Billy cannot avoid entering the tomb but since images and symbols in *Slaughterhouse-Five* encompass opposites he emerges from the tomb, which contains equally the idea of the womb, in order to run again "through the full arc of his life."

NOTES

¹See p. 89.

²Some statements made by Vonnegut himself indicate that, in *Player Piano*, Ilium is just another name for Schenectady, N.Y., where he worked as a P.R. man for General Electric. "So I wrote my first book, *Player Piano*, about Schenectady and it was published." Quoted by Joe David BELLAMY in Kurt Vonnegut for President: the making of an academic reputation. In: KLINKOWITZ, J. & SOMER, J., ed. *The Vonnegut Statement*. St. Albans, Granada, 1975. p.90. This is corroborated by another quotation from Vonnegut's Science Fiction in BROWN, F. *Page 2*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. p.117: "I supposed that I was writing a novel about life, about things I could not avoid seeing and hearing in Schenectady, a very real town, awkwardly set in the gruesome now." Quoted by KLINKOWITZ in Why They Read Vonnegut, *The Vonnegut Statement*, p. 28.

³According to Rabkin, a work belongs in the genre of science fiction if "its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an organized body of knowledge." RABKIN, E.S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977. p.119.

⁴The phrase "somewhere a big dog barked" occurs five times with little or no variation, both in the setting of war and in Ilium, where it marks two important scenes: Billy's meeting with Kilgore Trout, and the arrival of the Tralfamadorian flying saucer. The repetition of that phrase brings together the three settings of Billy's adventures. See pages 38, 55, 59 and 113 of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

⁵JACKSON, R. *Fantasy: the literature of subversion*. London, Methuen, 1981. p.42.

⁶As Jonathan Raban remarks, "the syntactical structure of any utterance forms a substantial part of the 'information' conveyed by that utterance." RABAN, J. *The Technique of Modern Fiction*. London, E. Arnold, 1972. p. 158.

⁷See Theoretical Approach, p. 13-4.

⁸At the sight of Dresden's skyline, the narrator's voice gives way to Vonnegut's: "Somebody behind him in the boxcar said, 'Oz'. That was I. That was me" (p.100).

⁹GREINER, D. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the Fiction of Atrocity. *Critique, Studies in Modern Fiction*, 17:45, 1973. Vonnegut himself quotes extensively from the forewords to David Irving's book, in the text of *Slaughterhouse-Five* on pages 124-5. We discuss the inclusion of citations from and references to other works, such as Irving's book, on page 148.

¹⁰The comparison of Weary with characters from *Through the Looking Glass* is another element which foregrounds Vonnegut's intention of

creating a non-realistic context.

¹¹A copy of the picture shown around by Weary with so much gusto, is the prize exhibit of the shop, kept under the counter "for connoisseurs" (p.136). We may conclude that Vonnegut is trying to show that human nature does not change.

¹²ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA. *Britannica Atlas*. Chicago, 1974. p. 200-1.

¹³Chapter One of *Player Piano* starts with a description of Ilium, of which the beginning is reminiscent of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*: "ILIUM, NEW YORK, IS DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS." VONNEGUT K. *Player Piano*. New York, Dell, 1976. p. 9.

¹⁴See footnote 2, p. 138.

¹⁵Our source of information for ancient Troy was ENCYCLOPAEDIA Britannica. Chicago, 1971. v.22, p.267-72.

¹⁶The author's process of composition and the resulting fantastic context of *Slaughterhouse-Five* are examined at some length in 7.1.

¹⁷Like Ilium, the planet Tralfamadore and its inhabitants originally appeared in a previous novel. This was *The Sirens of Titan*, in which the Tralfamadoreans had entirely different characteristics: tangerine-colored skin and three light "deer-like legs", which made them four and a half feet tall. Their voices were electric noise makers that "sounded like bicycle horns." VONNEGUT K. *The Sirens of Titan*. New York, Dell, 1982. p.267-8.

¹⁸See RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p.36-7.

¹⁹MEETER, G. Vonnegut's Formal and Moral Otherworldliness: Cat's Cradle and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.199.

²⁰The phrase "nestle like spoons" could have been suggested to Vonnegut by the sight of the countless bodies which were stacked before the mass cremations - first layer with heads pointed left, second layer with feet pointed left - recorded by David Irving in his historical account of the raid's aftermath. Cited by GREINER, p.45-6.

²¹Crossing a door, falling asleep and having tears in the eyes are the most common linking elements in Billy's time travels.

²²CAMPBELL, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973. p. 92.

²³"That which leads from one state of being to the next" is the definition of door, given by Ad de VRIES in his *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*. Amsterdam, North Holland, 1976. p. 143.

²⁴JACKSON, p.44.

²⁵Webster's defines "geodesic dome" as it is used in Architecture as "a dome or vault made of light straight structural elements largely in tension." WEBSTER'S Third New International Dictionary of the English

Language. Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1971. p. 948.

²⁶JACKSON, p. 173-4.

²⁷IRWIN, p.110.

²⁸SCHOLES & RABKIN, p. 27.

²⁹The majority of authors we have consulted emphasize the fact that in our time, the utopian impulse has been largely replaced by dystopian projections of disastrous current trends. Moreover, SCHOLES & RABKIN point out that "the change from utopian to dystopian fiction involves precisely the invasion of traditional utopian writing by the concepts and techniques of science fiction"(p.27).

³⁰See also p. 71.

³¹Sharon Weinstein as cited by Conrad Festa, asserts that Vonnegut is above all a master of the ironic vision - a vision which "allows contradictions to coexist, and functions as a dialectic that endeavors to hold incongruous attitudes in balance." WEINSTEIN, S. *Comedy and Nightmare*; the fiction of John Hawkes, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Jerzy Kosinsky, and Ralph Ellison. Dissertation, University of Utah, 1971. p.112. Quoted by FESTA, C. Vonnegut's Satire. In: KLINKOWITZ, J. & LAWLER, D., ed. *Vonnegut in America*. New York, Delta, 1977. p.142.

³²Following Northrop Frye's terminology we can classify Vonnegut as an *ironic mythical writer*. Ironic literature begins with realism and tends toward myth. FRYE, p. 137-40.

7 THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND FORM

Our analysis of various elements of Slaughterhouse-Five in the preceding chapters - internal ground rules, characterization, temporal structure, and setting - has not only opposed the novel's inside reality to its outright fantastic characteristics, but has rather emphasized the connection of the narrative with the factual world through the importance of the Dresden fire-bombing, which is also the shaping principle of the novel's structure. Another link with the historical world has been established through the autobiographical events in Chapter One which, though adapted and transformed by the artist's presentation, can be traced back to Vonnegut. We have used the terms fact and factual when referring to those events and to others throughout the novel, which are evidently based on Vonnegut's experiences.

As already mentioned, Vonnegut's voice is again heard loud and clear in Chapter Ten, thus completing the autobiographical frame of Slaughterhouse-Five, which is indeed a fictive story within an autobiography. Starting from this assumption, we have, then, two narrative lines in Slaughterhouse-Five, one which includes a series of events from the factual world and another which describes Billy Pilgrim's fictional - fantastic world, a product of the imagination. Though the character from the factual world is interjected into the imaginary world, and in spite of the fact that the two narrative lines often touch and intermingle, there are two distinct plot lines in the novel, the Vonnegut plot and

the Billy Pilgrim plot, which we will consider separately.

7.1 THE VONNEGUT PLOT

Broadly speaking, the narrative line we have termed "the Vonnegut plot" is *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself, which is in fact a novel about a novelist who has been at one time unable to erase the memory of his wartime experiences, particularly of the Dresden firestorm, and to face such distressing memories openly. Therefore, after several different attempts to tell his story, he ascribes his experiences to a semi-fantastic character, Billy Pilgrim. The Vonnegut plot, then, centers around Vonnegut-as-character's efforts to write his Dresden novel. Parallel with that point, the author makes comments on some events of his life, and introduces his ideas about significant issues of human existence, both aspects which have already been considered at some length in the preceding chapters.

In the examination of Vonnegut's difficulties in writing his novel, we follow the author's progress from an attempted realistic presentation of his subject matter to its final realistic-fantastic form. Vonnegut tells us of his several tentative outlines of the Dresden story, the "prettiest" of which, in his opinion, he had drawn on the back of a roll of wallpaper, using his daughter's crayons to depict different characters and events, and following a linear temporal sequence, with a beginning, a middle and an ending:

One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the other end was the end, and there was all that middle part which was the middle (p.11).

He also proposed to reproduce as far as possible his own experiences in Europe. The end of the story was to take place two weeks after the end of the war, on a beetfield outside of Halle, where thousands of allied prisoners of war, among them Private Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., were exchanged - one for one - for other thousands of Slavic prisoners. The final version of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a living proof that those attempts failed.

Vonnegut evidently came to realize that his Dresden story required a different fictional form. Using Eliot Rosewater as his spokesman, the author implies that Realism, as exemplified in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, a book which contains "everything there is to know about life" is not "enough any more" (p.71). Roland Weary echoes the same idea later on in the novel: "There is more to life than what you read in books" (p.32). Conventional realistic tools prove to be inadequate to describe a catastrophe of the magnitude of the Dresden firestorm which, although an ascertainable fact, is more unreal and harder to believe than the wildest fantasies and fictions created by the artistic imagination. As Raymond Olderman points out, the blurring of fact and fiction observed in every sector of modern life "does pose a problem for the contemporary novelist that demands a new response."¹ Vonnegut's response is to re-invent his fictional universe by using the fantastic in the same manner that Rosewater and Billy Pilgrim, who were living through existential crises in a meaningless Universe, became avid readers of science fiction (p.70).

We can say that Vonnegut uses the fantastic to provide his fictional characters, who "are alarmed by the outside world" (p.70), with a means of escape. To the author himself the fantastic becomes a different channel through which he spreads his message. His self-conscious struggles with what form to give his book may be summed up in Rosewater's words

to a psychiatrist:

I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful new lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living.(p.71)

As a creator of fiction, Vonnegut does manage to invent wonderful new lies for Billy to live by, at the same time that he develops a very personal literary technique. Peter Messent points out that indeed it is Vonnegut's attempt to find a fictional style "to suit the modern age, this adaptation to chaos, which has been one of his central concerns in his fiction ever since *Mother Night*."²

Some of the events of Vonnegut's life described in Chapter One are intimately linked to his search for new ways to convey his message.

At a certain point in Chapter One, Vonnegut remarks about his habit of calling long lost friends very late at night. From being a "United World Federalist" at the beginning of his married life, he claims to have changed into something else - perhaps a Telephoner. His aspiration for universal fraternity gives way to an irresistible will to communicate, which is symbolized aptly by the image of the Telephoner.³ The fact that Vonnegut is a telephoner ties up with the curious way in which Tralfamadorian novels are written. Billy Pilgrim cannot read them, but he can see how the books are laid out - "in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars," which remind him of telegrams. Tralfamadorian novels are indeed composed of many of these clumps of symbols, each of them containing an urgent message, "describing a situation, a scene" (p.62). This could also be a description of the structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which moves away from the accepted literary conventions of continuous plotting and con-

nected characterization to focus simultaneously on many marvelous and horrific moments. Vonnegut, the telephoner, continues to send his messages, now condensed in the form of "telegrams", which give the novel its peculiar schizophrenic form. Slaughterhouse-Five is indeed presented in telegraphic form, with terse sentences and short paragraphs, conveying unrelated messages from different periods of both Vonnegut's and Billy's lives. The final result is the creation of a "truly original contemporary idiom, as American as TV (....) as fragmented and discontinuous as contemporary existence".⁴

The story of the author's search for a new means of expression is counterpointed by covert criticism against realistic writing, made in the mocking irreverent tone used consistently by Vonnegut, even when dealing with the most serious or painful subjects. Empty traditional values and superseded concepts are the favorite target of his barbs, whether in the field of literary creation or not. An illustrative example of his irreverence concerning accepted literary conventions is found in Chapter Nine, in the episode of Billy Pilgrim's appearance on a radio talk show, featuring literary critics who proposed to discuss whether the novel was dead or not. The list of absurdities suggested by the critics as the probable function of the novel in modern society includes "to provide touches of color in rooms with all-white walls"; "to describe blow-jobs artistically" "to teach wives of junior executives what to buy next and how to act in a French restaurant" (p.137). Besides, his facetious reference to the writing of Uncle Tom's Cabin, "one hundred years after Appomatox", completes the author's inference that the Realistic mode of writing is a ludicrous anacronism in modern times. The episode ends with Billy's being "gently expelled from the studio during a commercial" after telling about his adventures in space and time travel. Billy's story can be taken as Vonnegut's own version

of the new role of fiction and his expulsion as a parallel to the author's rejection by mainstream critics who dismissed his earlier work as mere science fiction. Vonnegut further parodies Realism through his persona Kilgore Trout. At the Pilgrim's anniversary party, Trout tells a dull gullible but very beautiful woman that he could go to jail if he wrote something that hadn't really happened. It is like advertising, he says, where you have to tell the truth or you get into trouble (p.114).

In his characteristically facetious manner, Vonnegut is expressing the notion, which is shared by the majority of contemporary writers, that it is impossible to reproduce the external world, no matter how realistic a novel attempts to be, since the image of that world can never be equivalent to the object. Vladimir Nabokov's ideas on the subject of reality and fiction, as related by Max Schulz, are singularly illuminating.⁵ For Nabokov, life is the least realistic of fictions and he dismisses mimesis and identification with the hero as mere mythology. The raw data of experience does not constitute reality and the realistic novel which attempts verisimilitude is unreal paradoxically in direct ratio to its approximation to raw data. Thus, the realistic novel can never be more than a parody of the external world. And since if all novels are parodies of something else - either the raw data of experience, dreams, reconstructed memories or concepts of the mind - then the truest and most interesting novels will be those that frankly parody and ingenuously admit their artifice.

It is, in short, the problem of the modern writer's disbelief in the ability of language to correspond with the non-verbal parts of life, pointed out by Robert Scholes:

... modern critics (like Roland Barthes in S/Z) have shown with devastating irony that

even a great "realist" like Balzac did not make his linguistic code correspond with reality in itself, but simply alluded in his language to other already codified beliefs, other codes which themselves inevitably lack genuine ontological status. Language is language and reality is reality and never the twain shall meet.⁶

From that point of view, then, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a "true" novel because Vonnegut is continually calling our attention to the fact that it is an imaginative construct, in spite of the verifiable events which he includes in his autobiographical frame.

We count among those devices that stress the fictive nature of Vonnegut's story, the narrator's repeated exhortations for the reader to "listen" to him, as if he were a storyteller addressing an audience, and the several references to the writing of "this story". In Chapter Two, Roland Weary is reported to be imagining his own version of a true war story in which he and the two scouts form an inseparable and courageous unit "The Three Musketeers", whereas "the true war story was still going on" (p.34). Another instance of self-reflexivity occurs in Chapter Eight, where Billy Pilgrim finds himself engaged again "in the argument with his daughter with which this tale began" (111).⁷ At another point in the novel, the narrator interrupts the telling of Billy's ramblings in Luxembourg, to comment on the use of a particularly shocking swearword which was still a "novelty in the speech of white people in 1944" (p.29). Those examples of self-reflexivity are important stylistic signs of the fantastic, provided by the author.

Another device which underlines the non-mimetic nature of Vonnegut's novel is the introduction of all kinds of documents in order to emphasize "that sense of dealing with po-

tentially innumerable versions" which, as Tony Tanner remarks, "seems an important part of the epistemology of contemporary American writers."⁸ The narrative is interrupted again and again by quotations from extremely varied sources. There are songs, Christmas carols, dirty limericks, documentary (Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds; Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery), light opera (The Pirates of Penzance), speeches (President Truman's announcement to the world that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima), letters, poems, drama, critical studies (Céline and His Vision), classical odes (the quotation from Horace), pornographic magazines, professional journals (The Review of Optometry), low fiction (Valley of Dolls), high-level realistic fiction (The Brothers Karamazov, The Red Badge of Courage), and the Bible. Bearing directly on the Dresden episode, Vonnegut cites passages from David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden*, particularly from the introduction by Ira C. Eaker, Lieutenant General, U.S.A.F., retired, and British Air Marshal Sir Robert Saundby (p.124-25).

The use of a historical document such as Irving's has a twofold effect: on the one hand, it corroborates the facts presented in the novel, such as the situation of Dresden as open city, practically defenseless, with no important military targets; on the other hand, it puts into relief, by contrast, the non-realistic rendering of the event by Vonnegut who has Billy Pilgrim, in answer to a request by Montana Wildhack - "Tell me a story, Billy boy!" (p.119) -, tell the story of what he recalled from the Dresden fire-bombing. Thus, we have a story within a memory (it is important to keep in mind that Billy remembers the Dresden raid, rather than time-traveling to it). Billy's memory is part of the Billy Pilgrim plot, which in itself is the story told by Vonnegut-the-narrator as part of Vonnegut-the-author's report of how he wrote his Dresden

book, which we have considered to be the fulcrus of the Vonnegut plot. Vonnegut's chosen form of presenting the Dresden raid ties up with what we have said above, for it is a parody of a reconstructed memory (Vonnegut's recollection of Dresden) based on the raw data of experience, which happens within a dream (Billy's sojourn on Tralfamadore). Simultaneously with the writing of his book, Vonnegut is commenting upon literary technique and emphasizing the fictitious nature of his creation. We are aware all the time that he is making poiesis not mimesis, in spite of the factual basis of his tale.

Moreover, the indirect rendering of the Dresden bombing leads us to conclude that, in spite of the time which elapsed between the actual events witnessed by Private Kurt Vonnegut Jr., in World War II and the composition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut still is unable to face them with detachment. He is so deeply involved personally that he retreats several steps from a recollection of Dresden. Vonnegut's difficulties with literary form are paralleled and even superseded by his inability to accept or justify mass death: "I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money, and anxiety, and time" (p.9).

Another aspect that enhances the fictitious nature of the tale written by the protagonist of the Vonnegut plot is the inclusion of several elements from the previous novels by Kurt Vonnegut, the American novelist. Tralfamadore is a heritage from *The Sirens of Titan*. Ilium is familiar from Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano*. Howard Campbell, the American nazi propagandist whom Billy encounters in Germany, is the protagonist of *Mother Night*. At the veterans' hospital, Eliot Rosewater introduces Billy to the works of Kilgore Trout, both familiar from *Good Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.

The fact that two of those characters from previous books, Howard Campbell, Jr. and Kilgore Trout, are writers is

particularly significant. As a believer in the canary-bird-in-the-coal-mine theory of the arts"⁹ Vonnegut claims that writers function as the expression cells of society, and as such they are likely to sound the alarm when a society is in great danger. By availing himself of Campbell's monograph on the American soldier and of Trout's science-fiction books, Vonnegut adds the ideas of two fictitious "alarm systems", which allow him to "amplify images and opinions while writing one book instead of 200."¹⁰ The quotations from Campbell's monograph express in a facetious manner, Vonnegut's despair at the American class system:

America is the wealthiest nation on Earth, but its people are mainly poor and poor Americans are urged to hate themselves (...) It is (...) a crime for an American to be poor, even though America is a nation of poor. (...) They mock themselves and glorify their betters. Americans like human beings everywhere believe many things that are obviously untrue. Their most destructive untruth is that it is very easy for an American to make money. They will not acknowledge how in fact hard money is to come by, and, therefore, those who have no money blame and blame and blame themselves. (p.88-9)¹¹.

From the quotation above we infer that Vonnegut disputes the notion that poor people deserve to be poor, that only the fittest should reach the top in a natural process of selection. His rejection of that piece of social Darwinism is clearly stated in his non-fiction collection *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*s:

I'm not very grateful for Darwin, although I suspect he was right. His ideas make people crueler. Darwinism says to them that people who get sick deserve to be sick, that people who are in trouble must deserve to be in

trouble. When anybody dies, cruel Darwinists imagine we're obviously improving ourselves in some way. And any man who is on top is there because he is a superior animal.¹²

The part of the quotation which we have underlined is essentially what the narrator says about Tralfamadorian ideas in Chapter Ten, interrupting the flow of facts with which Vonnegut-as-character completes the autobiographical frame of Slaughterhouse-Five:

The Earthling figure who is most engaging to the Tralfamadorian mind, he (Billy Pilgrim) says, is Charles Darwin - who taught that those who die are meant to die, that corpses are improvements. So it goes (p.140).

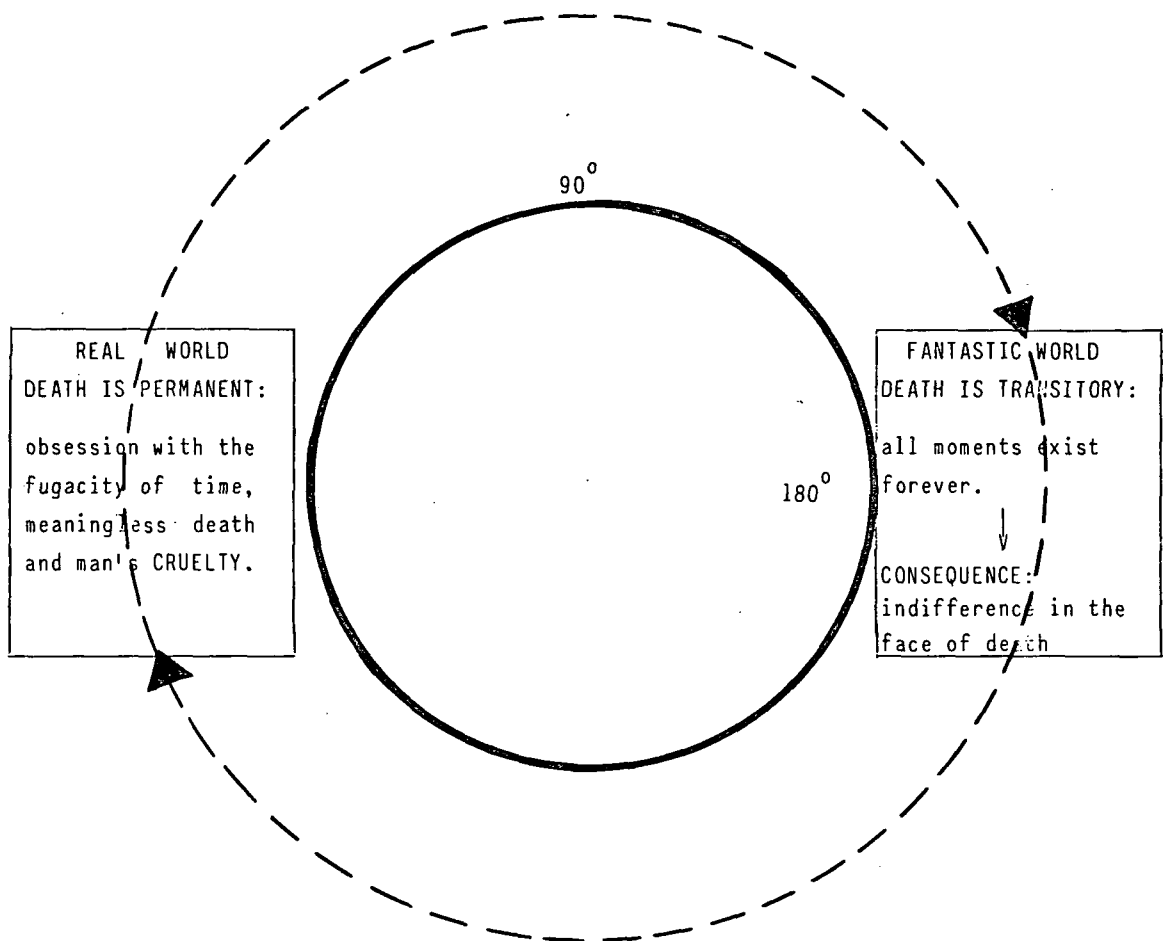
In order to understand the significance of the Tralfamadorian position for an interpretation of Vonnegut's thought it is necessary to examine the use the author makes of the fantastic in this particular instance. As Rabkin points out, by attention to the details used to create a fantastic world, we can discover the alternative perspectives of a writer and, by extension, his worldview.¹³ Since we know beforehand what Vonnegut's feelings about war and death are, through his recurring anti-death and anti-war protestations in Chapter One, the characteristic reversal process of the fantastic that results in the creation of Tralfamadore does not seem to reveal much on first sight. It represents, however, a way of testing the historical world against strange alternatives. Tralfamadore constitutes Vonnegut's alternative world, organized according to different laws than normal life, which ultimately serves a basic goal: to test an idea and the man of the idea.

The starting point of the process is Vonnegut's obses-

sion with the fugacity of time and his consequent hatred of death, particularly untimely senseless death brought about by human cruelty. By reversing 180° a ground rule of the historical world - that death is permanent - he creates a planet with diametrically opposed concepts of time and death. This fantastic reversal, though presented in Billy's story, must be considered here for a better comprehension of the Vonnegut plot. As we said before, the two narrative lines are intricately related.

Using the Tralfamadorian guide as his spokesman, Vonnegut teaches us a new way to look at death¹⁴ which stems from the unique Tralfamadorian concept of simultaneous time. This robs death of its sting since a person may be dead in a particular moment and alive and well in plenty of other moments, for "all time is all time" and no moment is lost forever (p.25). The Tralfamadorian reaction to death is understandably a shrug and a dismissing "so it goes".

The Tralfamadorians' total indifference in the face of death has much in common with the Vonnegutian rendering of Darwinism: those who die deserve to die, so death is an improvement. Ironically, the subversion of the real that Vonnegut effects in order to negate its most painful ground rule - the permanence of death - results in the confirmation of an equally painful reality - man's cruelty. The process of reversal started by Vonnegut runs full circle and ends up at the starting point - man's cruelty as an agent of death. We can represent Vonnegut's process graphically:



The first reversal, which removes the power of death, offers us escape from mortality, from the thought of death which haunts us in every moment of our lives. The second reversal, however, which emphasizes man's cruelty, means that if death is to be regarded with indifference, there is no need to stop senseless killing. In short, Vonnegut offers us escape from the horror of death and instead gives us confrontation with human cruelty.

Nevertheless, the concept that death is transitory, that one is dead for a while and alive in every other moment of one's life, is extremely comforting. In Vonnegut's grapholect, it is an example of *foma*¹⁵, "harmless untruth, intended to comfort simple souls."¹⁶ It is comforting for Billy Pilgrim, anyway. By creating the planet Tralfamadore and its peculiar concept of time and death, Vonnegut is obeying Eliot Rose-

water's injunction to create new lies, so that people may find a reason to want to go on living.

An example of such untruth can be taken from Howard Campbell's monograph: "It is easy for an American to make money." Another, one of Vonnegut's favorites is "Thou shalt not kill."¹⁷ In view of the notorious cruelty of Christians, it is no wonder Vonnegut considers one of the Ten Commandments a lie.

Questioned on how he reconciles his idea that writers are agents of change, "hopefully for the better"¹⁸ and the simultaneity of all moments in time, which implies that the future cannot be changed by an act of will in the present, Vonnegut responds: "You understand, of course, that everything I say is horseshit. (....) But it is a useful comforting sort of horseshit. (....) And we do have the freedom to make up comforting lies."¹⁹ Vonnegut's creation of new lies, that is, the fantastic reversal of reality, throws a different light on his worldview.

Images and opinions" are otherwise amplified by the inclusion of several of Kilgore Trout's novels. The presentation of those opinions through the books of a different writer, though a fictitious one, gives Vonnegut freedom to tackle some subjects in a new manner, and to reinforce his anti-war, anti-cruelty, anti-hypocrisy position without becoming repetitive. On the other hand, he is again using the fantastic as a mode of inquiry by contraposing reality to its alternative forms.

The core of the Kilgore Trout books is Vonnegut's pessimistic view of mankind. Man's lust for money is ridiculed and satirized. People kill each other to get to a fabulous money tree, whose leaves are twenty-dollar bills, only to end up as fertilizer for its roots. An Earthling couple displayed as curiosities in an extraterrestrial zoo, are goaded into behaving ridiculously when they believe to be amassing enormous sums of money in the Earth stock market: they "jump up and

down, and cheer, or gloat, or sulk, or tear their hair, (they are) scared shitless, or feel as contented as babies in their mother's arms" (p.134).

Another point Vonnegut stresses is that people prefer to think that everything is O.K., provided appearances are kept up. Thus, the "Gutless Wonder", a robot not programmed to feel any qualms about his actions - dropping burning jellied gasoline from the air on unarmed human beings on the ground - becomes very popular once he is cured of his halitosis, the only reason that made society reject him. Vonnegut criticises the American upbringing and its obligatory display of good manners which demand people to be unfailingly polite even in the most taxing circumstances. The covert criticism of *The Gutless Wonder* becomes open attack in some of Vonnegut's non-fiction, though he confesses himself guilty of the sin of smiling at outrageous things, just for the sake of politeness.²⁰

Politeness is what makes Vonnegut-as-character accept with an acquiescent 'I know, I know, I know' (p.14) the arguments of a University of Chicago professor in favor of retaliation measures against the Germans, seeing they were responsible for much cruelty in the war. The dialogue between Vonnegut-as-character and the professor is echoed in the *Billy Pilgrim* plot by another dialogue between Bertram Coperland Rumfoord, the Air Force historian who justifies the allied attack on Dresden, and Billy, who responds with Vonnegut's own words: "Everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does" (p.132).²¹ The same fallacy, that things must be accepted out of politeness, is behind the adoption of *Billy Pilgrim's* thought "Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt" by Vonnegut-as-character, the author of *Slaughterhouse-Five* who thinks it would make a good epitaph not only for Billy but for himself.²² In spite of that, Vonnegut goes on and writes his book, which turns out to be a serious libel against war

and death and human frailty. This means we should be wary of taking Vonnegut's statements at face value. Most of the time he is parodying, and satirizing reality, in other words, reversing the real. Hence his congeniality with the fantastic, a genre based on reversals.

The Kilgore Trout books also use the device of a visitor from outer space to put into relief the absurdities of man's behavior, when seen through the naive eyes of an extraterrestrial being. The visitor in question, in *The Gospel from Outer Space*, made a serious study of Christianity "to learn, if he could, why Christians found it so easy to be cruel" (p.75). He cannot understand how a religion which preaches peace and brotherly love has given the most cruel examples of senseless killing in human history, starting with the crucifixion of the Son of God.²³ This shows that reversals occur not only in the fantastic but also in the real world. Vonnegut's irony, in this case, is aimed at human relationship, at the reversal from how we say we should act toward each other into the way we do act.

Those instances of self-reflexivity we have examined earlier in this chapter plus the inclusion of the Kilgore Trout novels, and of quotations from various documents, are but mere accessories when compared with the two devices which make *Slaughterhouse-Five* the obvious product of a creative or imaginative act: the author's participation as a character in his own fiction and, above all, the imaginative construct of Tralfamadore.

The occasional interventions of Vonnegut-as-character in Billy's story are also a part of the Vonnegut plot and function as a recollection of the author's experiences in the war. Furthermore, they remind the reader of the presence of an authorial voice, hovering near in the background, as well as lend factual basis to the events described. In terms of the

fantastic, Vonnegut's interventions mean the interjection of an element from the objective world - the autobiographical frame, based on facts - into the subjective world - Billy Pilgrim's story, an obvious imaginative construct. In the course of our analysis we have emphasized and will emphasize the "contamination of reality by dream", meaning the superposition of the unreal (a time-traveling hero) over the factual (Vonnegut's war experiences). A reversal occurs in the present case and the "real" (the author) interferes in the fictional/fantastic world of Billy Pilgrim. It also represents the most important point of contact between the two narrative lines we have distinguished in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Thus, we have demonstrated the story of Vonnegut-as-character, the fictional counterpart of a real-life being, to be an intricate blurring not only of fact and fiction, but of fact, fiction and fantasy. The very events of his factual existence, which are expounded at greater length in the chapter on characterization, foreshadow the overt use of the fantastic, prevailing in the Billy Pilgrim plot. Vonnegut-as-character comes unstuck in time, uses the Tralfamadorian refrain "so it goes", and refers to some Tralfamadorian concepts, such as the possibility of spending eternity visiting this moment or that, as if he actually accepted them.

Our development of the main point of the Vonnegut plot, the author's difficulties in writing his Dresden novel, has put into relief Vonnegut's overt use of devices which, instead of the signals of the implied author stressed by Rabkin as a means to recognize the fantastic, show unmistakably the author's intention of departing from realism into a new narrative mode which flaunts its non-mimetic nature. The author's direct interventions in his fiction and other instances of self-reflexivity, which are inherent to Vonnegut's process of com-

position , have been foregrounded by our analysis in this chapter, as well as at other previous points of our work, as elements which highlight the reversal of ground rules. Once we are engrossed in the narration of Billy's adventures, the author's interventions, which are anti-expected, reverse our perspectives by shocking us into awareness of his presence, commanding his characters, and ordering his fiction. We have also pointed out how this effect is expanded, in the case of Vonnegut's novel, by the countless references to other works which have extra or intra-textual existence. The insertion of different genres into the context of Slaughterhouse-Five has been interpreted as a means of showing that Vonnegut's is only one of the many possible versions of the Dresden bombing. This leads us to question: "Is Slaughterhouse-Five a "true story", or merely foma? The introduction of works which have only intra-textual existence - Campbell's monograph and Kilgore Trout's books - have a similar effect by virtue of bringing into the context some characters from Vonnegut's previous fiction. Parallel to this effect, quotations from those fictitious writers amplify images and opinions, and expand Vonnegut's ideas on ultimate issues of man's existence, from the American class system, to life and death, to man's cruelty and, in consequence, to his apocalyptic view of the Universe.

Vonnegut's views are most effectively conveyed by the most fantastic of his literary devices, the planet Tralfamadore, which functions as a sounding board for his ideas concerning the dichotomy free will versus determinism, and as a point of convergence for the main themes of the novel: time, death and renewal. Vonnegut's alien planet also provides aesthetic distance between the author and his traumatic war experiences: the narration of the aftermath of the Dresden fire-bombing, as stressed in our analysis, occurs finally in the fantastic world of Tralfamadore.

Thus, the factual/fantastic context of *Slaughterhouse-Five* results from Vonnegut's need of developing a new means of expression, since conventional realistic forms were found to be inadequate. And Rabkin's observations in respect of genre development provide a singularly appropriate comment on Vonnegut's choice of literary expression:

Applied to theme, style, plot, character, or setting, or some combination of these, the fantastic has been one of the strongest forces combating aesthetic fatigue and thereby forging the development of literary genres. The pressures to create fantastic worlds come not only from the so-called real world: they come as well from the world of art.²⁴

7.2 THE BILLY PILGRIM PLOT

The conclusion that the author eschews traditional realism for not being true to experience, which we have drawn from the discussion of Vonnegut's writing process, is further corroborated by the study of the *Billy Pilgrim* plot, whose fantastic nature is emphasized from the outset.

Our analysis has pointed out so far that Vonnegut's use of the fantastic is characterized not only by the reversal of perspectives at the various levels of the narrative, but also by the resemblance with other genres of fantastic literature, such as fairy tale and horror fiction. We have shown, furthermore, that by substituting a fantastic framework for conventional realistic tools of composition, Vonnegut has paradoxically reverted to the most primary of narrative forms - myth. The mythical patterns we have recognized in the text include Billy's classification as the composite hero with a thousand

faces, recurrence of birth and the hero's ascent into heaven and descent into the underworld. Vonnegut's indebtedness to mythical patterns becomes yet more evident at the level of plot, for by concentrating all the action of Billy Pilgrim's story around the hero and his quest, he is employing the hero-monomyth structure, which is central to much legend, folktale, fairy tale, romance, and most popular forms of literature, including science fiction.²⁵ Its basic theme is the search for something, which can be translated as the hero's search for his own identity. This is, in fact, "the framework of all literature", in Northrop Frye's words:

The story of loss and regaining of identity is the framework of all literature. Inside it comes the story of the hero with a thousand faces, whose adventures, death, disappearance, marriage or resurrection are the focal point of what later became romance and satire and comedy in fiction ...²⁶

In his attempt to give appropriate fictional form to his Dresden experience, Vonnegut resorts to a reshaping of inherited mythologies. Thus, we can discern in *Slaughterhouse-Five* the traditional hero monomyth pattern which comprises three basic points:

1. the hero is at one with his society;
2. the hero undergoes a test or quest;
3. the hero achieves a new equilibrium.

This pattern proves to be a useful tool for the analysis of the Billy Pilgrim plot, a typical quest adventure, and besides, a piece of fantastic literature, which makes it a direct descendant of ancient myth.²⁷

Within this general monomythic pattern there develop some recurring symbolic situations which we can say are also present in the Billy Pilgrim plot, though transformed by Von-

negut's typical ironic treatment.

Joseph Campbell, in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, gives us labels for those symbolic situations, which occur in the course of the hero's quest.²⁸ We have listed the ones most relevant for our specific purpose selecting them from the three phases of the quest adventure, departure, initiation and return:

- a) the call to adventure;
- b) supernatural aid;
- c) the belly of the whale;
- d) the road of trials; (the slaying of the monster, descent into the underworld);
- e) meeting with the goddess;
- f) atonement with the father;
- g) apotheosis and epiphany;
- h) winning the ultimate boon.

Those terms applied to the structure of the Billy Pilgrim plot, in adapted form, emphasize the underlying symbolic functions of certain episodes in the novel. There are also similarities between Campbell's scheme and the "morphology of the folktale" arrived at by Vladimir Propp in his seminal study of the structure of the folktale.²⁹ In the preface to the second edition, Propp points out the possibility of applying his functions of *dramatis personae* to different kinds of narrative, other than folktales.³⁰ Moreover, the presence in *Slaughterhouse-Five* of elements which relate the narrative to the fairy tale genre,³¹ made us realize the validity of using the Proppian structure in our analysis. We found that at least some nine out of the thirty-one functions established by Propp,³² subsequent to the initial situation or introduction of the members of a family, which is the point of departure of his structure, could be applied to the fantastic tale of Billy Pilgrim's misadventures:

1. One of the members of a family absents himself from home(I).
2. The hero leaves home (XI).
3. The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper (XIII).
4. The hero acquires the use of a magical agent (XIV).
5. The hero and the villain join in direct combat (XVI).
6. The hero is branded (XVII):
7. The villain is defeated (XVIII):
8. The hero returns (XX):
9. The hero is married and ascends the throne (XXXI).

In most instances, the episodes of Billy's plight reverse or parody the significance of both Campbell's symbolic situations and of Propp's functions. But this only comes to show Vonnegut's ambivalent position as a writer who is torn between his culture's traditional literary tools and his need to create new means of expression more compatible with his personal experience.³³

Although they are worded differently, we notice that both schemes emphasize the same points of the quest-adventure: the need of departure, the ordeals or tests the hero must face in order to achieve his goal, the intervention of supernatural agents, the hero's return with his prize, and the final reward. Nevertheless, by combining elements from both Campbell's and Propp's morphologies we think we arrived at a third more detailed scheme which could prove appropriate for a study of Vonnegut's distorted use of traditional literary patterns:

- a) The hero is at one with society - initial situation.
- b) One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
- c) The hero leaves home in a quest.
- d) The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent

or helper.

- e) The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.
- f) The hero seeks to slay the monster.
- g) The hero undergoes several ordeals (descent into the underworld).
- h) The hero brings back a boon from a special world.
- i) The hero returns home.
- j) The hero is married and ascends the throne.

The scheme above will function as a guideline for our own analysis, It does not mean that Vonnegut's narrative conforms strictly to any given pattern.

More often than not, the Billy Pilgrim plot deviates from our adaptation of the Campbell-Propp structure.

Items -a and -b correspond to the first phase of the monomythic narrative pattern - the hero is at one with his society; items -c to -h fit the second - the hero undergoes a quest or test, whereas items -i and -j represent the third phase, that is, the achievement of a new equilibrium.

The Billy Pilgrim plot proper starts with Chapter Two, when Vonnegut supplies the reader with a microcosm of the novel, from which we can infer the ground rules of his alternative world, as well as the characteristics of the book's structure, which matches Billy's wild swinging through each moment of time, past, present and future. The ensuing chronological summary of Billy's life, from his birth in 1922 to the present time of the novel - 1968, makes it easy to follow the narrative line, in spite of the continuous shifts in time and space. The action itself starts with Billy's departure to Europe and it is to the European part of his adventures that we will mostly apply the scheme proposed above.

a) The hero is at one with society (initial situation) - From Billy's chronology we can gather the bare facts of the plot's initial situation, which is completed by further information provided in the course of the narrative. Billy was born in 1922, of a low-middle class family (his father is a barber) and is a better than average student. Although in this last aspect Billy can be said to be "at one with society", the initial situation of his tale offers some unsettling elements. He is encumbered with a grotesque physical appearance and his relationship with his parents is far from satisfactory..

Billy's father is described as "hairy", which brings to mind animalesque terrifying qualities. The boy is in fact terrified by the older Pilgrim's determination to make a man out of him, illustrated by the Y.M.C.A. incident, when he throws a frightened little Billy, who was expected to damn well swim (p.35),³⁴ into the deep end of the pool.

Billy's relationship with his mother is equally negative. Though she is a "perfectly nice, standard-issue, brown-haired white woman with a high-school education" (p.71) we know that he recoils from her physical presence³⁵: he pretends to be asleep every time she visits him at the veterans' hospital.

In short, Vonnegut's idea of an initial situation of equilibrium distorts the traditional pattern.

b) One of the members of a family absents himself from home - This parodic image of a happy family is shattered by two events, Billy's drafting for military service and his father's death in a hunting accident. The circumstances that surround Mr Pilgrim's death are particularly ironic as he was shot dead by a friend while they were out hunting deer (p.28). Thus, this event fits both Vonnegut's reversal of established patterns and Propp's function n° 1, as an intensified form of

absentation is represented by the death of parents.³⁶

When Billy returns from his father's funeral he is sent overseas, which leads us to the third point of our scheme.

c) The hero leaves home in a quest - The stage is set for the hero's adventures and the third part of our structure - the hero's quest. Contrariwise to the archetypal quest journey, Billy Pilgrim does not receive any particular call to adventure, either to perform heroic deeds or to search for an Earthly paradise. He is driven away from home by outside forces, instead. On the level of the narrative, this outside force is represented by the war, a factual event which is part of the inside reality of the text, and which can be interpreted as a tool of an all-powerful fate. On the fictional level, the force which manipulates the hero is Vonnegut, the protagonist of the autobiographical part, who dramatizes his own war experiences by using Billy as a puppet to live them.

This and other deviations from the traditional quest pattern which will be uncovered in the course of our study, show that it is distorted when used by Vonnegut. Thus, Billy is a parodic counterpart of the traditional hero: where the latter excels in physical strength or makes up for its lack with cunning and wit, Billy is weak, naive and incompetent.

d) The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent of helper - Where the mythic hero must undergo several ordeals that try his strength, cunning and resourcefulness, after which he is awarded a final prize, in the particular case of Billy Pilgrim, the pattern is reversed. Not only his shortcomings and lack of qualities make him totally inadequate for the role, of hero, but he always emerges from his several ordeals as a broken defeated victim. From the moment of his being plunged

totally unprepared into the nightmare of the Battle of the Bulge to the climactic fire-bombing of Dresden, the hero is placed by Vonnegut in successive trial situations, which turn him into a passive wreck.³⁷

In the first of such situations, we find an innocent Billy, dazed by the cruelty of war, ready to give up his reluctant hold on life. Roland Weary, one of his four companions, makes it his task to save Billy's life. A savior-victim relationship can, therefore, be detected between them. In Propian language, Weary performs the role of helper.³⁸ One of the constituents of the sphere of action of the helper is the "liquidation of misfortune or lack"³⁹ which Weary fulfills by keeping Billy alive, in spite of the latter's lack of will to live, using the utmost cruelty since Billy wouldn't do anything to save himself. Weary is, then, a parodic helper, one whose harsh methods reach a climactic point when he nearly kills Billy in a fit of "tragic wrath", after the two scouts, irritated by Billy's slow pace and apparent delirium, depart on their own, putting an end to Weary's fantasy of "The Three Musketeers":

It was entirely Billy's fault that this fighting organization no longer existed, Weary felt, and Billy was going to pay. Weary socked Billy a good one on the side of the jaw, knocked Billy away from the bank and onto the snow-covered ice of the creek. Billy was down on all fours on the ice, and Weary kicked him in the ribs, rolled him over on his side (....) He walked around to Billy's back. Billy's jacket and shirt and undershirt had been hauled up around his shoulders by the violence, so his back was naked. There, inches from the tips of Weary's combat boots, were the pitiful buttons of Billy's spine. Weary drew back his right boot, aimed a kick at the spine, at the tube which had so many of Billy's important wires in it. Weary was going to break that tube (p.39-40).

Ironically, Billy's life is saved by the arrival of a German patrol, whose role of enemy and pursuer is reversed into that of helper, performing the task of rescuing Billy from his helper turned executioner. Thus, Weary's role is ambivalent as he functions both as helper and villain,⁴⁰ when he becomes a hostile creature, attempting to destroy the hero.⁴¹ This incident and the later beating up of Billy illustrate the "crazy, sexy, murderous relationship" (p.30) Weary entered into with people who were more unpopular than himself, in order to even his score with a society that "ditched" him. The words: sexy and murderous, used by Vonnegut, furnish a clue to explain the insertion of the Roland Weary episode into the Billy Pilgrim plot, a narrative with fantastic characteristics. Sexual desire is the starting point of the group of themes of fantastic literature that Todorov labels "themes of the other".⁴² Violence and cruelty, evoked in our particular case, by the word murderous and exemplified by Weary's actions, are indubitably related with sexual desire and, as such, are also basic themes of the other. However, Roland Weary's sadism, as is generally the case with other examples of cruelty or human perversions in fantastic literature, does not surpass the limits of the possible, and therefore, evinces not the presence of the outright fantastic but rather of what Todorov calls the uncanny.⁴³ Besides the actual scenes of violence, of which Billy is the victim, there occur also instances of purely verbal violence, when Weary narrates events that do not really happen in the universe of the book. Thus, Weary tells Billy about "neat tortures"⁴⁴ he'd read about, or seen in the movies, or heard on the radio - about other neat tortures he himself had invented (p.31). His surrogate, Paul Lazzaro, the Chicago car thief, surpasses him in the narrative of either future acts of cruelty he planned against his enemies, or of past actions he had already practiced. For him, the sweetest

thing in life is revenge:

'You should have seen what I did to a dog one time. Son of a bitch bit me. So I got me some steak, and I got me the spring out of a clock. I cut that spring up in little pieces. I put points on the ends of the pieces. They were sharp as razor blades. I stuck 'em into the steak - way inside ... (The dog)swallowed it down in one big gulp. I waited around for ten minutes.' Now Lazzaro's eyes twinkled.' Blood started coming out of his mouth. He started crying, and he rolled on the ground, as though the knives were on the outside of him instead of on the inside of him. Then he tried to bite out his own insides. I laughed, and I said to him, "You got the right idea now. Tear your own guts out, boy. That's me in there with all those knives "' (p.94-95).

The passage above which foreshadows Billy's assassination establishes beyond doubt the villain's ingrained cruelty, in contrast with his victim's passiveness and innocence. On the other hand, in spite of his obvious delight in the suffering of his enemies, Lazzaro is endowed with a strange code of honor - "nobody ever got it from Lazzaro who didn't have it coming" he says - (p.95) which prevents him from exulting with the destruction of Dresden.

Thus, a question poses itself: Who is the real villain of the story? The cruel Roland Weary and his surrogate, Lazzaro, who murders the hero but who is unable to accept pointless death? The Allies who dropped fire bombs on a defenceless town and strafed the survivors, sincerely believing they were hastening the end of the war? The Germans who murdered millions of "Jews and gipsies and fairies" and who bombed London mercilessly? Vonnegut himself provides the answer, in his introduction to *Mother Night*:

If I had been born in Germany I suppose I would have been a Nazi, bopping Jews and gypsies and Poles around, leaving boots sticking out of snowbanks, warming myself with my secretly virtuous insides.⁴⁵

Vonnegut obviously feels that each of the sides in a war or in any kind of dispute believes to be fulfilling some kind of mission which, then, justifies the violences practiced in its name.

A villain who is not entirely villainous is in itself a deviation from the mythic pattern, which makes heroes the maximum symbol of virtue and good, whereas villains are patently exponents of evil and perversion. In this respect, Vonnegut distorts again the traditional pattern, since although one character may play more than one of the eight roles of the fairy tale (e.g. villain may be also false hero, donor may be also dispatcher), there is no mention in Propp of a character accumulating diametrically opposite roles, such as villain and helper.

The next step in the Billy Pilgrim - Roland Weary inter-relationship is the latter's death of gangrene, for which he blames Billy. Lost in his fantasy of "The Three Musketeers" Weary sincerely believes that Billy is responsible for the breaking up of the group and his subsequent capture by the Germans. From Weary's point of view, at least, there happens another reversal of roles with Weary playing the victim and Billy the villain. Later on in the narrative, the pattern is reversed back into its original form, when Paul Lazzaro, in payment of his promise of revenge made thirty-one years before to a dying Roland Weary, kills Billy Pilgrim. Thus, we have again Billy Pilgrim as victim and Roland Weary's surrogate as the villain/executioner. The choice of the executioner's name, Lazzaro, adds to the chain of reversals, as the biblical sym-

bol of resurrection becomes Vonnegut's death messenger.

Yet another interpretation can be given to the relationship between Roland Weary and Billy Pilgrim: that of master and disciple. Obviously, this is again a parody, Weary being presented as a travesti of the wise man of myth, when he initiates Billy into the mysteries of various torture instruments, of which he had an ample knowledge. Thus, for Billy's benefit, Weary goes into the details of several deadly weapons:

Weary made Billy take a very close look at his trench knife.(....)It had a ten-inch blade that was triangular in cross section. Its grip consisted of brass knuckles, was a chain of rings through which Weary slipped his stubby fingers. The rings weren't simple. They bristled with spikes.

Weary laid the spikes along Billy's cheek, roweled the cheek with savagely affectionate restraint. 'How'd you like to be hit with this - hm? Hmmmmmmmmmm?' he wanted to know.
(p.31)

The whole Roland Weary episode puts into relief the cruelty of the individual against the pervading cruelty of war itself.

e) The hero acquires the use of a magical agent - Billy's magical agent, travel in time, represents a diametric reversal of the ground rules of the historical world, as we have emphasized before, and "does try our willing suspension of disbelief", according to John Sommer.⁴⁶ No ordinary human being can be simultaneously in two different-places-and-periods, which are widely apart, as is the case of Billy Pilgrim:

Billy's smile as he came out of the shrubbery was at least as peculiar as Mona Lisa's, for he was simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding his Cadillac in 1967. Germany dropped away, and 1967 became bright and clear,

free of interference from any other time (p.45).

Billy Pilgrim first comes unstuck in time, the narrator tells us, some time after his first contacts with the general cruelty of war and the individual cruelty of Roland Weary. Thus, time travel enables Billy to evade some acutely painful situations, by escaping to other periods of his own life, whether in the past or in the future. The hero is offered a much-needed means of escape from a world whose "reality" threatens to destroy him. In this way, by means of time travel, Billy avoids repeatedly the scene of the Dresden raid and other equally painful situations, such as the endless harrowing trip in the boxcar toward prison camp:

Human beings in there took turns standing or lying down. The legs of those who stood were like fence posts driven into a warm, squirming, farting, sighing earth. (....) Now the train began to creep eastward (....) Billy Pilgrim (....) fell asleep and he traveled in time to 1967 again - to the night he was kidnapped by a flying saucer from Tralfamadore (p.52).

The exchange of the world of war for the Tralfamadorian planet, means a diametrical metamorphosis which again offers solace to protagonist and reader alike, for we also participate in the fantastic once we accept the ground rules of a narrative world, that is, Billy's time-traveling. The passage above also evidences that Billy can reach different periods of his life merely by falling asleep. His time-traveling can also be triggered by the crossing of a door, as shown by our analysis of the novel's setting. In this aspect, Billy's magical agent presents unique features, for time travel in *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not follow any of the departure points of the science-fiction paradigm, which are listed by Scholes and Rabkin: vi-

sionary experience, drug experience, preternaturally extended sleep or a fantastic craft for traveling in the fourth dimension, such as H.G. Well's time machine.⁴⁷ Vonnegut does not provide his hero with any of those means of dislocation.

Both forms of Billy's magical agent - crossing a threshold or falling asleep - produce the characteristic flip-flop movement of the fantastic. "Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day," in a reversal from the sterility of senile widowhood to the fertility of his young manhood, which was crowned on the night of his and Valencia's wedding by the conception of Robert Pilgrim.

The obvious psychological compensation that Billy finds in his time travels, especially in those dislocations that take him to Tralfamadore, may well uphold the hypothesis that his magical agent is a mere escape mechanism created by his imagination. His whole Tralfamadorian adventure could be the fruit of a sensitive man's diseased mind, who, after encountering so much death and so much evidence of hostility to the human individual takes refuge in an intense fantasy life.

Vonnegut does furnish several points to support such an assumption:

- While at the veterans' hospital, Billy becomes an avid science-fiction reader and Kilgore Trout his "favorite living author" (p.70). There, Billy reads several of Trout's novels which could have provided the source for his fantasy. The Gospel from Outer Space is about a visitor from outer space "shaped very much like a Tralfamadorian by the way"(p.75). The very title of another novel, Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension could have supplied Billy with the idea of the Tralfamadorians' living in the fourth dimension (p.72).

Later on, in the scene at the porno shop, Billy reads about a man who time-travels back to the time of Jesus (p.134). In that same occasion, after looking over another seeming new

book by Trout, *The Big Board*, he comes to realize he had read it years before in the veterans' hospital. The subject of the book - an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials and displayed in a zoo - could have furnished the basis for Billy's Tralfamadorian saga.

- The supposition that Billy is going crazy is stressed several times throughout the book. Thus, every person to whom Billy imparts his Tralfamadorian ideas inevitably judges him to be insane. His daughter Barbara thinks he is senile, an irresponsible child, because of damage to his brain in the airplane crash. She goes as far as threatening Billy with internment in an old people's home (p.27, 90,111). He is expelled from the radio studio, when he tries to teach the Tralfamadorian lesson (p.137). A similar attempt with a client elicits the comment that "Billy was evidently going crazy" (p.92). Bertram Copeland Rumfoord, his room-mate at the Vermont hospital, thinks he is a vegetable and should be "turned over to a veterinarian or a tree surgeon" (p.127). To clinch matters, Billy himself worries about his mental health. Thus, he commits himself to hospital some time after his return from Germany, because he feels he is going crazy, though "nobody else suspected it." It is emphasized that "the doctors agreed: He was going crazy" (p.70). It is even more significant that later on, in 1967, that is, before the plane crash, Billy is said to be worrying about his habit of falling asleep at work, which had been funny at first but "now" made Billy uneasy "about his mind in general" (p.43).

- Much in *Slaughterhouse-Five* may lead us to conclude that Billy's sojourn on Tralfamadore is a wish-fulfillment sexual fantasy. It is common knowledge that most fantasies and dreams represent some kind of compensation for a repressed need.

For Billy, who leads a nearly ascetic life as an Earthling - he is a virgin at twenty-one (p.29) and is unfaithful to his wife "for an only time" (p.37), his relationship with the beautiful Montana Wildhack, of the lashes like buggy whips and of the sculptural body, may well represent a wish-fulfillment dream. He reads about Montana in a "girly magazine", which may explain his choosing her for his mate. His relationship with Montana is described as "heavenly" and he spends much of his time on Tralfamadore in her "delightful bed" (p.91). Thus, Billy's colorless sexual life on Earth is transformed into its exact opposite in his "fantasies".

- It is obvious that the details of Billy Pilgrim's journey into space parallel those of his real life. From the moment when he is captured by a German patrol in Luxembourg, the events of his Earthling and of his extraterrestrial adventures match almost one to one.

Whether his capture is effected by German soldiers or by Tralfamadorian robots, Billy does not react at all, but remains completely passive, his will paralyzed, it does not matter if by a zap gun (p.61) or by his own unwillingness to fight for his life (p.38,40). The result is identical in both cases: Billy becomes a prisoner, however pleasant his confinement in the Tralfamadorian zoo may turn out to be.

The trip toward Billy's place of confinement is made in both instances in tightly sealed compartments, where he becomes the object of close observation on the part of his captors. Communication between prisoner and captors is established through tight apertures, narrow ventilators at the corners of the boxcar or a speaker and peepholes on the wall of the flying saucer (p.61).

The shrilly lit delousing station at prison camp reminds Billy of a building on Tralfamadore, where he was equally told

to take off his clothes on first arriving (p.59).

Billy's body becomes an object of interest, both of ridicule and admiration, because of its poor condition (a German guard measured Billy's upper right arm with his thumb and forefinger) or because of its novelty (the Tralfamadorians had never seen a human being before and supposed Billy was a splendid specimen).

On his wedding night, Billy's bride, Valencia, associating sex and glamour with war, "a simple-minded thing for a female Earthling to do", according to the narrator, drags the details of Edgar Derby's execution out of her reluctant husband (p.83-84). Similarly, a capricious pregnant Montana, lying in bed with Billy, wheedles him into telling her a story, and so he describes Dresden after the bombing.

There are other parallels between Billy's two worlds, but the most important similarities are those which have to do with ultimate questions and ideas. Thus, the first question Billy asks of his Tralfamadorian captors is "'Why me?'" ,echoing the narrator's "Why?" which follows the description of Billy's dream of the gentle companionable giraffes, and the startled "Why me?" asked by an American POW, who was brutally and unexpectedly hauled out of ranks and knocked down by a German guard.

The same life-inspiring motto which hangs on the wall of Billy's office is engraved on the outside of the silver locket containing the photograph of Montana Wildhack's alcoholic mother.

- Most of the scene shifts accomplished via time-travel, occur while Billy sleeps or during his periods of unconsciousness, at the Vermont hospital.

If we are to accept the points above without questioning, we will inevitably conclude that Billy's time travels and

his whole Tralfamadorian experience are but the product of his diseased mind, expanding the material supplied by his wide reading in the science-fiction field, through dreams or unconsciousness.

Billy's magical agent will then be a mere imaginary instrument of wish-fulfillment, similar to Roland Weary's fantasies of *The Three Musketeers*. Billy is the victim of a product of the imagination, while the world outside remains unchanged, as all his time traveling occurs within his mind. If we choose this solution we are reducing the events of the "unreal" part of the Billy Pilgrim plot to the category of the uncanny.⁴⁸ Billy's insanity furnishes a logical explanation for his imaginary excesses and for the apparent deviation from natural laws. This is, in fact, the way some critics read the text, like Tony Tanner, who considers Billy's time travels as the product of dreams and fantasies, a "re-experiencing of moments from the past or unexpected hallucinations of life in the future," in the present moments during the war.⁴⁹

On the other hand, in spite of all the evidence above which points at a natural explanation for Billy's magical agent, we must not leave aside a point stressed by Rabkin as of paramount importance for the recognition of fantastic reversals in a given text: "the fantastic is not simply the unreal, but the reversal of ground rules as one reads, the reversal of the context by the text"⁵⁰ and there is always the danger that these reversals may go unnoticed, if it were not for the clues provided by the author. Such clues are numerous in the context of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

At several points in the novel Vonnegut establishes a very clear distinction between time-travel and hallucination, imagination and dream. Thus, Billy's dream that he is a skilled ice-skater is definitely put down as hallucination, as craziness and not as time travel.⁵¹ Time travel is also dif-

ferent from imagination, as in the case of Valencia, Billy's bride, whose lively imagination is evident in her daydreams. While Billy was making love to her, on their wedding night, she was imagining that she was a "famous woman in history." She is not a time-traveler, though (p.81). It is clearly implied that time-travel does happen, that it is a real experience, and not the result of either craziness or vivid imagination.

The distinction between time-travel and dreams is established in two different occasions. When Billy is unconscious after his plane crash, for example, he is said to dream "millions of things", but only the true things are time-travel (p.105). Moreover, his dreams, unlike time-travel do involve wish-fulfillment. Under the effect of morphine, for instance, Billy dreams that he is a giraffe peacefully munching sugar pears among other giraffes, and fully accepted as "one of their own", a "harmless creature" like themselves, since their only weapons are their soft velvety horns. The dream obviously expresses Billy's longing for peace, companionship and physical comfort, to compensate for his present situation as a hungry and frightened POW, despised by his fellow prisoners. Like other characters in the novel Billy indulges in wish-fulfillment fantasy. But his time-travel and his Tralfamadorian sojourn are not included in these fantasies. Statements of the narrator - a surrogate for Vonnegut - patently show that the Tralfamadorian incidents constitute actual experience.

The text itself keeps the reader hovering between two contrasting interpretations of Billy's experiences: they are either the product of fantasy or constitute instances of the fantastic and Billy is actually a time-traveler. Vonnegut himself supplies weighty arguments that uphold both points of view, echoing the ambivalence that prevails throughout the novel.

The strangeness and dreamlike quality of Billy's experience keep the reader hesitating, which characterizes the fantastic, according to Todorov's theory:

J'en vins presque à croire: voilà la formule qui résume l'esprit du fantastique. La foi absolue, comme l'incrédulité totale nous mèneraient hors du fantastique: c'est l'hésitation qui lui donne vie.⁵²

We can safely conclude, then on the presence of the fantastic in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, both if considered as the reader's hesitation or the diametric reversal of ground rules.

Another argument against the existence of the fantastic in the text, might be the absence of surprise of protagonist and reader alike when faced with extraordinary events. First of all, surprise of characters is placed in secondary order of importance in the recognition of the fantastic to reversal and hesitation by Rabkin and Todorov, respectively.⁵³ Of more importance yet to justify the absence of surprise is the structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself, whose ground rules, established at the very beginning, forewarn both the protagonist and the reader. Moreover, the element of surprise results from the transgression of the laws of nature, from the reversal of what is considered normal and natural. The "real" world of Vonnegut's novel, however, is far from being normal or natural. Though it may not exactly break the laws of nature, it does trasgress every known law of human dignity and respect for one's fellow beings. Human bodies metamorphosed into little logs, candles made from the fat of human beings, innocent young girls boiled alive, all this makes the Tralfamadorian incidents seem probable and normal by comparison.

The fact that the details of the Tralfamadorian events parallel those of Billy's life as an Earthling does not deny

either the presence of the fantastic. Fantastic worlds are alternatives to the real world, and will inevitably reproduce details of the latter, though subjected to fantastic metamorphosis. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that "real" world though it may find it frustrating or unsatisfactory. As Rosemary Jackson observes, "the fantastic re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real."⁵⁴

We could apply to *Slaughterhouse-Five* Todorov's remarks about Kafka's world:

In Kafka, the supernatural event no longer provokes hesitation, for the world described is entirely bizarre, as abnormal as the very event to which it affords a background.⁵⁵

Besides the fact that the "real" events of the novel are "fantastic", its central character is not someone with whom the reader can identify, so that we could be astonished with him by the extraordinary nature of events. The protagonist himself becomes so "fantastic" that we cannot share his feelings and reactions.

Since the presence of the fantastic in the text is supported by the evidence presented, it is possible to consider time travel as magical, the magical agent which is the hero's reward. We must establish, then, how well Vonnegut's plot fits our adapted Proppian structure of the fairy tale. Billy's receiving a magical agent, in spite of the fact he does not deserve any reward, after coming out the loser in all of his confrontations with both environmental and human antagonistic forces, seemingly represents a deviation from the merit-reward mechanism. Billy's magical agent, however, presents serious drawbacks. In the first place, Billy has no control over his time travels. Thus, to evade the plane crash which killed

everyone on board and left him with a fractured skull, Billy closes his eyes and travels in time back to 1944, only to find himself being beaten by Roland Weary who was "bonking his head against a tree" (p.105).

Rather than a mere exchange of unpleasant situations, Billy's time travels can also land him in definitely worse circumstances. When he is on his way to Tralfamadore, for instance, his flying saucer enters a time warp and Billy is flung back into his childhood, to relive the terror he experienced at the Grand Canyon and in the total darkness of the Carlsbad Caverns. Billy's magical agent has, then, contrasting qualities - it does as much damage as good.

Vonnegut's handling of time-travel results, then, in a double reversal. By creating a time-traveling hero, he reverses diametrically the perspectives of the historical world. In this sense, it is a true to form fantastic device, one that opens for the hero the doors of ever-changing alternative worlds. On the other hand, as an ambivalent, magical agent which rescues Billy from certain predicaments only to plunge him into worse ones, time travel functions as a parody of the established reward pattern common to myth, folktale and fairy tale. Parody, as an inversion of an accepted rule, points again at the fantastic.

Being the recipient of a magical agent fits our hero, Billy Pilgrim, for the next step in our adaptation of the hero-monomyth pattern, which is the slaying of the dragon.

f) The hero seeks to slay the dragon - In order to pursue his quest, the mythic hero must face the dragon forces which stand guard to the object of his ultimate search. The dragon represents the pristine forces of evil which may appear variously as a dragon itself, an ogre, a hunter of men, monsters of sea and land, in short, a dangerous presence dwelling just beyond

the protected known region which the hero leaves behind him when he departs on his journey.⁵⁶

How, then, can we apply the dragon symbol to Slaughterhouse-Five? Which are the forces of evil that must be destroyed to allow the hero passage beyond the known into the unknown? The fact that Billy Pilgrim is an American should indicate the Germans as the probable forces of evil the hero ought to fight and destroy. However, Billy's unique situation during the air-raid, when he is nearly killed by his own side, a situation which reproduces Vonnegut's factual experiences in World War II, gives the matter new coloring. Billy, as Vonnegut's surrogate, identifies with both the victims - the German civilians - and the victimizers - the Allied forces. Context makes it impossible to establish who is right and who is wrong, who are the villains or the heroes. As we mentioned earlier, Vonnegut makes clear from the beginning that there are no villains in his stories. He is not concerned, therefore, with affixing blame and scorns the reasoning of all those who think that to balance an Allied atrocity with a German one is to neutralize both,⁵⁷ though he does not always argue the point openly.

Billy's position, which we have shown to be very similar to Vonnegut's in this respect, is illustrated by the incident in the Vermont hospital when his haughty room-mate attempts to justify the Allied military action:

'It had to be done,' Rumfoord told Billy, speaking of the destruction of Dresden.

'I know,' said Billy.

'That's war.'

'I know. I'm not complaining.'

'It must have been hell on the ground.'

'It was,' said Billy Pilgrim.

'Pity the men who had to do it.'

'I do.'

'You must have had mixed feelings, there

on the ground.'

'It was all right,' said Billy. 'Everything is all right and everybody has to do exactly what he does. I learned that on Tralfamadore' (p.132).

Billy's Tralfamadorian philosophy of acceptance puts him in the bizarre position of a mythical hero who is unwilling to fulfill his expected role of ridding the world of an evil monster, for the simple reason that he does not see where evil lies. No glory or fame is to be attained by the killing of harmless creatures. Since the dragon-killing theme is the central form of quest romance,⁵⁸ Vonnegut again distorts the monomythic quest pattern by creating a hero who evades slaying the monster, because he is unable to recognize it.

g) The hero undergoes several ordeals - An essential stage of folktale and myth adventure is the succession of trials which the hero must survive in order to reach his ultimate goal. As a rule, the object of this quest is to be encountered in distant unattainable regions, "a fateful region of both treasure and danger which may be represented as a distant land, a forest, a secret island, or profound dream state: but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight."⁵⁹

In this aspect, Billy's adventures conform strictly to pattern. He must overcome several obstacles on his way to fulfilment. Like mythical heroes, Billy ventures forth into an unknown region of darkness and danger as soon as he leaves the world of common day. His life is threatened at every turn, and his capacity of endurance strained to its utmost limits. Not the least of his ordeals is the confrontation with the villain - Roland Weary - which ends with the hero's defeat.

Unprepared and unwilling to engage in fighting, Billy is nearly beaten to death. In fact, death does come to him, later on, as a result of that confrontation.

On his laborious journey, Billy must face and overcome other obstacles: the long torturing march toward the prisoners' transport train, covering miles and miles in his flimsy civilian shoes, "bobbing up-and-down, up-and-down" (p.42-3), tormented by cold, hunger, and pain; the agonizingly slow trip to prison camp, a long chain of sufferings culminating in Billy's uncontrollable fit of hysterical laughter, which lands him in hospital, under the effect of a morphine shot. Billy who has already rambled through a dark dangerous forest, and been subjected to "unimaginable torments", then plunges into a "profound dream state", in which he is completely severed from reality. "'How nice to feel nothing and still get full credit for being alive,'" says of him the British Colonel in charge of the hospital. While in this state of unconsciousness, Billy's dream of the giraffes⁶⁰ corresponds to a glimpse of the "impossible delight" which awaits the hero in mythical regions.

At every turn, the nightmarish quality of Billy's "reality", its deviation from what can be considered normal and natural approaches the realm of the fabulous. It is no wonder, then, that its development should fit in most aspects the pattern of myth and fairy tale, though in an ironic parodic manner. This is true particularly of Billy's position as a hero: instead of the valiant hero who conquers glory for his superhuman deeds, he is an object of derision and ridicule, in spite of his profound and very real suffering. Thus he is chosen for his ridiculous appearance, as protagonist of the capture staged by request of German photographers, in order to show how miserably equipped the American Army often was (p.44).

No torment devised by fierce vengeful gods can equate

the torture of the American privates in the tightly locked boxcar. Man's inhumanity to man reduces individuals to an anonymous mass, while their human qualities are transferred to the boxcar itself:

To the guards who walked up and down outside, each car became a single organism, which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators. It talked or sometimes yelled through its ventilators, too. In went water and loaves of blackbread and sausage and cheese, and out came shit and piss and language(p.52).

The metaphor of the boxcar as a living thing entails a double metamorphosis: of human beings into a lifeless object and of that same object which contains a piece of suffering humanity into that very humanity. The process of metamorphosis goes further in Billy's case as, frozen stiff by cold and hunger, and by the long hours standing up, he becomes a glass statue, like a hero of fantastic literature fallen under the spell of malignant forces.

Billy's most painful and dreaded ordeal, nevertheless, is the bombing of Dresden, which also represents the maximum point of convergence between fact and fiction, between the real (extra-textual reality) and the fantastic. On the one hand, as a parallel to Private Kurt Vonnegut's factual experiences in World War II, it is the closest the Billy Pilgrim plot comes to the reality of the experiential world. On the other hand, the striking analogy of Billy's situation with the mythical hero's descent into the underworld places the narrative well in the realm of the fantastic. The description of post-raid Dresden evidently reflects the shocked reaction of someone who was there, Private Kurt Vonnegut. At the same time, however, it is an indirect report of Billy Pilgrim's rendition of his impressions, delivered at Montana Wildhack's

request, in the zoo of the fantastic planet of Tralfamadore.:

'Dresden was destroyed on the night of February 13, 1945,' Billy Pilgrim began. 'We came out of our shelter the next day'. He told Montana about the four guards who, in their astonishment and grief, resembled a barber-shop quartet. He told her about (....) seeing little logs lying around. These were people who had been caught in the fire-storm. So it goes.

Billy told her what had happened to the buildings that used to form cliffs around the stockyards. They had collapsed. Their wood had been consumed, and their stones had crashed down, had tumbled against one another until they locked at last in low and graceful curves.

'It was like the moon,' said Billy Pilgrim. One thing was clear: Absolutely everybody in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were, and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design. There were to be no moon men at all (p.119-20).

A fact stands out from the examination of Billy Pilgrim's ordeals and that is his complete failure in facing adverse circumstances. Close to death, unconscious under morphine, transformed into a brittle glass statue or dazedly roaming devastated Dresden, he offers an anti-heroic image of passiveness and defeat that reverses the accepted heroic behavior.

h) The hero brings back a boon from a special world. - When the hero finally accomplishes his quest, after having faced a series of ordeals, he is awarded the desired trophy, which may take the form of treasure or of knowledge of some sort. As Joseph Campbell comments, in respect to the hero's reward, "the boon bestowed on the worshipper is always scaled to his stature and to the nature of his dominant desire: the boon is simply a symbol of life energy stepped down to the requirements of a

certain specific case."⁶¹

What, then, is the desired trophy in Billy's specific case? At only two points in the novel does Billy express any kind of desire. One of those desires, couched in indirection, can be inferred from the framed motto which hangs on his office wall:

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. (p.46)

The narrator's ensuing comment that among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present and the future, shows that, though he may have wished for acceptance, courage and wisdom, only the first of those qualities was granted him. The recurrent assertions that everything is all right illustrate this point. How completely Billy accepts his own motto still remains to be seen.

Later on, when he is millions of miles away from Earth, on Tralfamadore, Billy asks his only direct questions in the whole text: "'Why me?' 'How did I get here?' 'How can a planet live in peace?'" "Why?" is the question Billy must have asked himself time and again, when he witnessed death, cruelty and wanton destruction. "Why?" must have been the question asked silently by an appalled Billy when he emerged from the depths of the meat locker to the reality of a destroyed Dresden. His journey to the underworld, therefore, has not provided him with an answer, whereas in the corresponding archetypal situation, the hero re-emerges as a new man, his

soul renewed by self-knowledge, the replacement of innocence and inexperience by maturity, or by the knowledge of some ultimate truth, which he has learned at the universal source and which he imparts to his society. None of this is true in the case of Vonnegut's hero. Instead of knowledge and maturity, only a void remains after Billy's innocence is destroyed by the series of trials to which he is subjected.

Since the hero's boon is not to be encountered in the "real" world of Slaughterhouse-Five - the Dresden meatlocker is a factual site of Vonnegut's war experiences - the hero is transported to its antithetical element, a fantastic planet. As Jerome Klinkowitz aptly observes, Vonnegut's recording of a personal and historical horror in the world of fact calls for an act of style and fantasy.⁶² Hence the Tralfamadorian concept of time, studied at earlier points in our thesis, which makes death acceptable.

However, the problem of how to account for death, particularly violent death, is not solved. How are we to reconcile the concept that man is master of his own will with the fact that he often chooses to be cruel? The Tralfamadorian concept of time again reverses an established Earthling concept, one that constitutes the core of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition informing Western civilization - free will. Free will, an exclusively Earthling notion in the totality of inhabited planets (p.61) is replaced by absolute determinism, represented in the image of bugs trapped in amber. Any attempt at explanation, then, becomes futile. Events happen - because they are structured to happen, and nothing man can do will alter their course. Consequently, no alternative is left but acceptance or yet the possibility of avoiding the unavoidable by ignoring painful moments and turning to the pleasant times of one's life.⁶³

Looking only at pleasant moments and ignoring awful ones

is part of the lesson Billy is taught on Tralfamadore. The application of this principle to both Billy's and the Tralfamadorians' lives, nevertheless, results in ironic reversal. If Slaughterhouse-Five is just one of the several possible versions of time-traveler Billy's visits to the various periods of his life, a conclusion that can be drawn from the rule that establishes the recurrent pattern of the hero's death and rebirth, then his choice of which moments to live again is not very successful. Only two moments are described as pleasant: Billy's nap in the sun, on the back of the coffin-shaped wagon, after the end of the war in Europe and his wedding night with Valencia. The remaining episodes furnish an appalling picture: his life in Ilium is superficial, running along the same ruts, when it is not shaken by outright tragedy, such as the violent deaths of both his father and his wife, and the plane crash of which he was sole survivor; his war experiences in Germany, crowned by the unforgettable Dresden incident, are extremely painful, to say the least; on Tralfamadore, he seems to have reached the fulfilment of his wishes but, then he is repeatedly hurled back to every distressing experience of his life on Earth. Either Billy does not accept the Tralfamadorian lesson wholeheartedly, or he is conforming to the ground rules of his story, which make him spastic in time, with no control over where he is going. Both explanations are acceptable in the context of Slaughterhouse-Five.

As for the Tralfamadorians, irony lies in the fact that out of an infinite number of pleasant moments which they could choose to live, those beings of superhuman intelligence should elect to spend their time watching a couple of Earthlings going through the movements of everyday living, as the prize exhibits in an extraterrestrial zoo.

Moreover, Billy's sojourn on Tralfamadore - his ascent

into heaven - furnishes the response to his questionings about death and man's cruelty contrariwise to his descent into the underworld, which leaves him more confused than before. That response can be summed up in one word - acceptance:

- Death is acceptable because it is not permanent.

Billy's words in his second letter to the Ilium News Leader make it clearer:

When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is "so it goes" (p.25).

- Men are not responsible for their actions, since no action be it good or evil can be prevented. The holocaust of Dresden, therefore, happened because it was structured to happen. In Tralfamadorian language, it will happen, has happened and always will happen that way.

However, Billy's attitude towards the trophy he brought from another world is ambivalent. He simultaneously accepts and rejects the Tralfamadorian philosophy. Some incidents illustrate Billy Pilgrim's seeming acceptance of his fantastic boon and its application to his everyday life:

- his indifference to the bombing of North Vietnam, proposed as a final solution by a military speaker at a Lions Club meeting. Billy's comment when the speaker says he should be proud of his son Robert, a sergeant in the Green Berets, in Vietnam, is typical: "'I am. I certainly am" (p.46);⁶⁴

- the view of Ilium's black ghetto, burned down by its rebellious inhabitants, or the desolation of the region where Billy's childhood home used to stand, razed to the ground by

the requirements of urban renewal, do not move him. "That was all right with Billy Pilgrim," says the narrator (p.45).

- compelled by Valencia's insistent questioning to talk about his war experiences, he has a "crazy thought" whose "truth startles him" - "Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt" (p. 83-4).⁶⁵

Billy's acceptance of all of men's actions is epitomized in his dialogue with Rumfoord, which we have quoted earlier in this chapter.

Billy's contrasting attitudes about the validity of his trophy will be discussed in the ensuing division of our scheme, which marks the hero's return. His quest has been accomplished but there still is a difficult task, which must be fulfilled by every quester, and that is how to render in everyday language the lessons he has learned in the course of his search.

i) The hero returns home - The peculiar structure of the Billy Pilgrim plot, which leads the reader back and forth through several widely spaced episodes in the hero's life makes it difficult to examine the hero's return, which is placed in the novel before other events which chronologically had occurred in a more remote past. A linear arrangement of events, however, shows that Billy returns home twice, the first time from the eery landscape of Dresden and the second one from Tralfamadore. In terms of mythical adventures - from the underworld and from Heaven.

Billy's return from the war conforms to Vonnegut's tendency to reverse, to parody and to deviate from traditional symbols and myths. Instead of being hailed as a hero and conqueror, Billy is committed to a mental hospital. Unable to accept the shallow events of his everyday life, he rejects "reality" once again and crosses a threshold into another alternative world, that of mental alienation.

Billy's second return home - from his paradisiacal sojourn on Tralfamadore is equally disappointing. He finds himself in the difficult position of sole retainer of the truth,⁶⁶ whereas his fellow men, unable to grasp its depth, dismiss it altogether as the ravings of a lunatic.

Thus, Billy's coveted trophy turns out to be ambivalent, as so many other elements in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. On the alternative world of Tralfamadore, the fantastic reversal of the concept of man's responsibility for his actions fits within the pattern of subversion of reality which characterizes fantastic worlds. Transported to the inside real world of the text, the Tralfamadorian view of the universe does not function so well. It clashes with Billy's compassion for his fellow men. He cannot endure the sight of human suffering even though the Tralfamadorians tell him that there is nothing he can do about it. He is torn between conflicting desires: his mind tells him to turn his back on human suffering - particularly the suffering he observed in Dresden - whereas in his heart, he weeps for mankind.

His contradictory feelings are illustrated by an incident in Chapter Four, when Billy sees a group of cripples selling magazine subscriptions in his neighborhood. He knows that is an illegal racket run by unscrupulous people and that he should call the police: instead, he weeps, although he does not know why. Moreover, that is not an isolated incident. "Every so often," says the narrator "for no apparent reason, Billy Pilgrim would find himself weeping" (p.46).

Paradoxically, it is Billy's compassionate nature, which prevents him from accepting the Tralfamadorian philosophy wholeheartedly, that compels him to spread the Tralfamadorian message or, at least, part of it - that the perpetual existence of all moments of time removes the power of death - in order to ameliorate human suffering. His decision to spread such

comforting ideas makes "the cockles of his heart" glow like coals. "What made them so hot was Billy's belief that he was going to comfort so many people with the truth about time" (p.25). As surely as man dies man is always alive in those moments that he lived. That is the vision of existence that Billy preaches in the final years of his life, the boon that he bestows on his fellow man.

Billy's acquired knowledge of the true nature of time enables him to face his own death without fear or regret, because he believes death lasts only for a short period of time. He is alive in all the other moments of his life. Thus, after experiencing death for a while, Billy is said to swing back into life to a moment arbitrarily situated thirty-one years in the past. Echoing mythical narratives, the hero's death is followed by rebirth, reproducing the endless cycle of life from birth to death and back again in a new birth. Northrop Frye remarks that the literary reproduction of the cycles of nature has a lot to do with a literature's tendency to identify the human world with the natural world around it. Thus, Billy's story resembles closely those mythologies" full of young gods or heroes who go through various successful adventures and then are deserted or betrayed and killed, and then come back to life again, suggesting in their story the movement of the sun across the sky into the dark or the progression of seasons through winter and spring."⁶⁷

In view of this birth-death-rebirth progression, the closing words of all Billy's speeches acquire new significance- "Farewell, hello, farewell, hello". Billy's life-transmuting trophy reverses the view of death held by Western man, from a permanent state of absence and negation into a transient void, "simply violet light and a hum," from which Billy emerges right after he dies.

Again we hesitate how to interpret the episode of

Billy's death. It can be a mere future hallucination. Two details uphold this hypothesis: Paul's Lazzaro's threats could have given Billy the idea how he was going to die; the division of the United States into "twenty petty nations so that it will never again be a threat to world peace" (p. 96)⁶⁸ means an intrusion of science fiction directly into the "reality" of the Ilium setting. This could be the work of Billy's imagination fed by his extensive reading in the field. We are led to conclude that Vonnegut's skillful use of fact and fiction, of reality and fantasy baffles the reader and produces the characteristic hesitation of the fantastic.

The dangers of the last stage of the hero's adventures, therefore, are great and it is not easy for the quester to retain his self-assurance in the face of disillusionment. Billy apparently manages to do so. He is not defeated by the adverse reaction to his preaching and at the end of his life, or should we say, at the end of one of the periods of his life, he is rewarded by the massive audiences who flock to hear him speak.

j) The hero is married and ascends the throne - Again the structure devised by Propp for the analysis and classification of folktales had to be adapted to fit Vonnegut's peculiar mythology. The hero's marriage to the princess, or its counterpart, does take place, but not as the culminating point of his adventures. Billy marries the princess, in modern terms the boss's daughter; some time after his return from the war, when his mythical quest is not yet accomplished. Moreover, his poor performance in the first part of his questing journey does not measure up to the reward he receives.

Vonnegut's princess, on the other hand, is once again parodical as she reverses the image of the conventional golden-haired, elegant fairy-tale heroine our experience as readers

leads us to expect. Valencia is ugly, a compulsive eater "as big as a house", and who, to top her clumsiness, wears trifocal lenses in rhinestone-trimmed frames of dubious taste.

Were Billy's story to follow the fairy-tale pattern faithfully, the appropriate finishing touches would be the inevitable cliché - "and they lived happily ever after." This is as far as resemblance with the world of fairy goes. The difficulties of Billy's "real" life are increased by his fixation over the Dresden holocaust which keeps him swinging back and forth in time and space.

At this point the pattern we chose for the analysis of the Billy Pilgrim plot seems inconclusive, as if things were left suspended in the air: the hero is married and ascends the throne; and then, what? We ought to keep in mind, however, Vonnegut's peculiar schizophrenic manner of narration in which there is "no particular relationship between all the messages (....) no beginning, no middle, no end ...", and which we have established as an aesthetic ground rule of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.⁶⁹ The book ends simultaneously with the war in Europe and its closing sentence "Poo-tee-weet", the birds' comment on the massacre, refers us back to Chapter One completing the circular frame of the novel, whereas from a chronological point of view there still is much to happen.

In order to follow the myth/folktale composite pattern, we have ranged the events of Billy's life in loose chronological order (it is difficult, for instance, to determine where the Tralfamadorian episodes should fit in). The use of our pattern, besides, has highlighted the war scene which takes up a sizable portion of the book,⁷⁰ as the fulcrus of the novel. Billy's life in Ilium and on Tralfamadore have, nonetheless, received due consideration.

From the initial situation to the hero's marriage to

the princess, the events of Billy's story were shown to fit the Proppian functions of *dramatis personae*, but much more to reverse and parody them, which is consistent with the structural characteristics of the fantastic. "Use of a magical agent," the function which reverses reality more thoroughly has proved also to be the most controversial one. The text offers contradictory evidence as to Billy's time travels being "true" or merely the fruit of imagination, which led us to conclude that Vonnegut does not allow any of those interpretations but keeps the reader hesitating between them.

The hero-monomyth pattern of our scheme, which is a variation of the structure devised by Propp, has emphasized other aspects of Billy's adventure: his journey through the road of trials, his quest and, finally, the hero's position as sole retainer of the truth that will redeem his society. Billy's boon, the new concept of time and mortality which he learns from the Tralfamadorians, represents the maximum reversal of the normal and the natural. Moreover, it maintains the atmosphere of hesitation and ambivalence, since the reader can never be sure of Billy's wholehearted acceptance of his hard-won trophy. Billy clings, as it were, to the fantastic Tralfamadorian concepts as the only means to survive the numerous painful trials which mark his life.

The approach we have chosen for the analysis of action in *Slaughterhouse-Five* has evidenced important aspects of the novel. Mostly, it has put into relief the fact that Billy's adventures are a story within a story and has emphasized, consequently, the need of a new gauge for an interpretation of the novel which is also the story of Vonnegut's composition of his book.

Thus, we have given special emphasis to the author's search for a new form of expression as the focal point of the

Vonnegut plot, which creates a context at times more fantastic than Billy's story. The ground rules of the Billy Pilgrim plot seldom expand, whereas reversals of the text by the text are frequent in Vonnegut's story, particularly observable in the examples of self-reflexivity and in the introduction of Trout's fiction.

Vonnegut's search for form runs parallel to his attempts to bestow on his protagonist the necessary qualities that may assure his survival in an absurd world. Since Billy Pilgrim functions as a persona for Vonnegut, we come to the conclusion that Vonnegut himself is trying to find new means for the interpretation of reality in the contemporary world.

NOTES

¹OLDERMAN, R. *Beyond the Waste Land*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973. p.2.

²MESSENT, P. *Breakfast of Champions: The Direction of Kurt Vonnegut's Fiction*. *Journal of American Studies*, 8:110, 1974.

³Tonny TANNER affirms that the human will to communicate is of central interest to Vonnegut, in all his work. *The Uncertain Messenger*. In: _____. *City of Words*. London, J. Cape, 1979. p.181-201.

⁴BELLAMY, J.D. Kurt Vonnegut for President: the Making of an Academic Reputation. In: KLINKOWITZ, J. & SOMER; J., ed. *The Vonnegut Statement*. St. Albans, Granada, 1975. p.85.

⁵NABOKOV, V. Quoted by Max SCHULZ in *Characters in the Contemporary Novel*. In: HALPERIN, J., ed. *The Theory of the Novel*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1974. p. 145.

⁶SCHOLES R. *Structural Fabulation*. Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1975. p.4.

⁷The underlining is mine.

⁸TANNER, p. 185.

⁹In his interview to *Playboy Magazine*, Vonnegut explains his theory that writers are like the birds which coal miners used to take down into the mines with them to detect gas before men got sick. The birds would keel over long before men were affected. That is what artists did in the case of Vietnam. "They chirped and keeled over. But it made no difference whatsoever. Nobody important cared. But I continue to think that artists - all artists - should be treasured as alarm systems." From *Playboy Interview*, in *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*. New York, Delacorte Press, 1974. p.237-8.

¹⁰On Vonnegut's inclusion of the works of fictitious writers in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Jerome KLINKOWITZ remarks that they are "entire unwritten libraries on the edge of Vonnegut's work, books-inside-books that allow him to amplify images and opinions while writing one book instead of 200, according to the injunctions of Jorge Luis Borges: *simply quote the rest as if they were already written*." *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* London, Methuen, 1982. p.69.

¹¹The view that poor people have only themselves to blame for their condition is defended by Senator Lister Ames Rosewater, Eliot Rosewater's father, in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. The Senator from Indiana dismisses the poor as merely the "scum at the top of a bucket of slime." If they were anything else rather than spineless morons they would raise themselves up by their bootstraps and out of their present situation. Vonnegut implies that the Senator stands for thousands of Americans who think like him, especially the rich and affluent. (New York, Dell, 1974.

p. 46).

¹²VONNEGUT, Playboy Interview, p.238. The underlining is mine.

¹³RABKIN, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p.76.

¹⁴RABKIN asserts that this function of the fantastic is educational in the root sense: it leads one from darkness to light, it creates in the mind a diametric reversal and opens up new and fantastic worlds. *The Fantastic in Literature*, p.25.

¹⁵The word *foma* was used in Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle* to describe the "truths" of Bokononism, a religion created to comfort the suffering people of San Lorenzo.

¹⁶VONNEGUT, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*s, xv.

¹⁷VONNEGUT: 'Thou shalt not kill.' That's a good lie. Whether God said it or not, it's still a perfectly good lie. And if it gives more force to say that God said it, well, fine." Playboy Interview, p.240.

¹⁸VONNEGUT, Playboy Interview, p.237.

¹⁹VONNEGUT, Playboy Interview, p.239.

²⁰In "Good Missiles, Good Manner, Good Night", Vonnegut says that if he had been invited into the home of the then Secretary of Defense - he had gone to high school with the Secretary's wife - he would have merely smiled and smiled, though he disagreed heartily with most defense projects. "I would have understood that the defense establishment was only doing what it had to do, no matter how suicidally. I would have agreed hearing the other fellow's side of the story that even for planets there are worse things than death." *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*s, p.104-5.

²¹See below in the Billy Pilgrim plot, p. 182.

²²Cf. A character from the world of fact, in 4.1.

²³The notorious cruelty of Christians is a recurring issue in all Vonnegut's fiction. "These words (the condemnation of sinners in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew) apalled me then, and they apall me now. They are surely the inspiration for the notorious cruelty of Christians." *Jailbird*. New York, Dell, 1979. p.81.

²⁴RABKIN, E.S., ed. *Fantastic Worlds; myths, tales and stories*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. p.169.

²⁵Cf. HUME, K. Kurt Vonnegut and the Myths and Symbols of Meaning. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 24(4):341, Winter 1982.

²⁶FRYE, N. *The Educated Imagination*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1964. p.6.

²⁷See Theoretical Approach, p. 17-18.

²⁸CAMPBELL, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968. p.36-7.

²⁹PROPP, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*. 2.ed. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979.

³⁰PROPP defines function as "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action"(p.21).

³¹See chapter on setting.

³²PROPP, p.25-65.

³³In her essay "Kurt Vonnegut and the Myths and Symbols of Meaning", Kathryn HUME makes a detailed study of Vonnegut's inner tension, between the symbolic situations he presents and the grotesque turns his experience compels him to give those situations. The conclusion is that Vonnegut's attempts to use the traditional myths and symbols of his culture end up in reversal, since his own bitter personal experiences negate their value.

³⁴The italics are mine.

³⁵This can be interpreted as a reflection of Vonnegut's relationship with his own mother, who committed suicide a day before Private Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was expected home on furlough. See *Palm Sunday* (New York, Dell, 1982), p.55. The negative connotation of the mother figure is a constant throughout Vonnegut's fiction. In *Player Piano* (New York, Dell, 1976), *Sirens of Titan* (New York, Dell, 1982) and *Mother Night* (New York, Avon, 1970) the mothers of the protagonists are distant or missing. Eliot Rosewater feels responsible for his mother's death, occurred when he took her sailing. In *Breakfast of Champions* (New York, Delta, 1973), Celia Hoover, who presents many resemblances with Vonnegut's mother commits suicide by eating Drano (Edith Vonnegut died of an overdose of sleeping pills). In *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself, Montana Wildhack's mother is an alcoholic.

³⁶PROPP, p.26.

³⁷Cf. 4.2. A Stage - Frightened Actor.

³⁸*Helper* is one of the eight character roles of the fairy tale: 1 - the villain; 2 - the donor; 3 - the helper; 4 - the princess(a sought-for-person) and her father; 5 - the dispatcher; 6 - the hero (seeker or victim); 7 - the false hero. Quoted by SCHOLLES, R. *Structuralism in Literature*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974. p.65. Considering the distribution of functions among dramatis personae, PROPP recognizes seven spheres of action, which involve the eight character roles of the fairy tale. Cf. p.79-80.

³⁹The sphere of action of the *helper*. Constituents: spatial transference of the hero; *liquidation of misfortune or lack*; rescue from pursuit; the solution of difficult tasks; transfiguration of the hero. PROPP, p.79.

⁴⁰We use the term villain in the sense given it by Propp of someone who either deceives his victim or causes harm or injury to a member of a family, giving rise to the subsequent events of a tale. Vonnegut's stories, as he himself observes in the opening chapter of *Slaugh-*

terhouse-Five, never have a villain in them. This may be due, he says, to his being taught at the University of Chicago, that there is no difference between people and that "nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting" (p.13).

⁴¹One of the aspects of PROPP's XII function. "The Hero is Tested, etc." is a "hostile creature attempts to destroy the hero" (p.39-42).

⁴²TODOROV, T. *The Fantastic*; a structural approach to a literary genre. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973. p.124-40.

⁴³See Theoretical Approach.

⁴⁴In Vonnegut's view the idea that mass torture, as used in World War II or in Vietnam, may force a whole people to abdicate from their beliefs, is based either on childish fiction, or on a childish awe of torture. "Neat torture", "cool torture" are expressions used by children to tortures they often make up, hoping they are new ones. This is an apt description of Roland Weary's behavior. See *Torture and Blubber* in *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*, p. 170-1.

⁴⁵VONNEGUT, *Mother Night*, p.vii.

⁴⁶SOMER, J. Geodesic Vonnegut; Or, If Buckminster Fuller Wrote Novels. In: *The Vonnegut Statement*, p.233.

⁴⁷SCHOLES, R. & RABKIN, E. *Science Fiction*. London, Oxford University Press, 1977. p.165-89.

⁴⁸TODOROV, p.24-5.

⁴⁹TANNER, p.195.

⁵⁰RABKIN, *Fantastic Worlds*, p.34.

⁵¹See p. 46.

⁵²TODOROV, p. 35.

⁵³See Theoretical Approach.

⁵⁴JACKSON, R. *Fantasy; the literature of subversion*. London, Methuen, 1981. p.20.

⁵⁵TODOROV, p.173.

⁵⁶CAMPBELL, p.78.

⁵⁷This is the opinion of Gal. Eaker in his Preface to the *Destruction of Dresden*. That Vonnegut scorns this positions is made clear by our previous discussion of his ideas.

⁵⁸FRYE, N. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957. p.189.

⁵⁹CAMPBELL, p.58.

⁶⁰Supra, p. 177.

⁶¹CAMPBELL, p. 190.

⁶²KLINKOWITZ, p.63.

⁶³We find a confirmation to this idea in the words of Vonnegut in biographical Chapter Ten: "Still - if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice" (p.140).

⁶⁴This ties up with both Billy's and Vonnegut's attitudes, discussed earlier in this chapter.

⁶⁵Already quoted on p. 40.

⁶⁶It is typical for serio-comic genres, as the Menippean satire, a genre into which *Slaughterhouse-Five* can also fit comfortably, the theme of a person who alone knows the truth, and is therefore ridiculed by everyone else as a madman. He is the sole carrier of truth, in relation to all others for whom the truth is insanity or stupidity. BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1973. p.126.

⁶⁷FRYE, *Educated Imagination*, p. 50.

⁶⁸Vonnegut's ideas come to the surface once again. He has made his position abundantly clear about what he calls "the ferocious" nature of Americans, "creatures who imagine that they are gentle. They have experimented in very recent times with slavery and genocide." In a Manner that Must Shame God Himself. In: *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*, p. 185. In *Slapstick* (New York, Dell, 1976), the United States of America has been equally divided into several unimportant nations, some of them monarchies and dukedoms. At a point in the novel the King of Michigan is said to be at war simultaneously with the Great Lake Pirates and the Duke of Oklahoma. (p.213). Both in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Slapstick*, China is the surviving world power.

⁶⁹See p.31.

⁷⁰We have established a relationship between number of pages per subject matter in our analysis of time.

8 CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, it was our aim in this thesis to analyze in depth Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, from the point of view of its fantastic traits, using as a main guideline Eric Rabkin's study of the fantastic in literature. We hope to have shown how consideration of the fantastic can give us new perspectives for the interpretation of Vonnegut's war novel, as well as for the analysis of his other works.

As the main objectives of our study, we proposed to illustrate how the fantastic acquires new perspectives when adapted to Vonnegut's narrative world, to find a response for the divergences in the categorization of his work, and to come to a better understanding of the author's worldview.

Our first step toward the achievement of our aims was to determine whether Vonnegut actually made use of the fantastic, understood as reversal of ground rules or the reader's hesitation. This point was unmistakably settled by the observation of the initial paragraphs of Billy Pilgrim's story from which we deducted a series of assumptions which reversed the perspectives of the world outside the text and created the ground rules of the world inside the text: mobility in time, forward memory, and recurrence of birth, counterbalanced by the hero's incapacity to control his dislocations in time and space.

The ensuing analysis of characterization, time setting and plot, evidenced that Vonnegut's use of the fantastic was not restricted to the inclusion of time travel, alien planets

and extraterrestrial beings, the stock-in trade of science fiction. Character study revealed multiplication of self and the interjection of a character from the objective world, Vonnegut-as-character, into the subjective world of Billy Pilgrim, which merges the inside reality of the text with the outright fantastic. The various roles played by both protagonists were interpreted as so many metamorphoses, resulting in decomposition of character, a device shown to be particularly consistent with fantastic narratives. As a maximum point of the contamination of reality by dream, we established the identification of the author with his protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, and his consequent transformation into a multifaceted hero.

Both from the standpoint of the novel's inside reality and of its fantastic world, analysis of time demonstrated diametrical reversals in chronology and in temporal sequence, time being contracted or expanded to suit the ubiquitous hero's time travels. This results in the author's schizophrenic manner of narration which keeps the hero oscillating in space and time, and which juxtaposes scenes from unrelated periods.

Further reversals were detected at the level of setting, where our initial attempt to range the novel's three groups of locales - Germany, Ilium and Tralfamadore - on a continuum of fantasy revealed the presence of the fantastic in the more realistic scenery and the incongruous introduction of the ordinary in outright unreal settings. Following the kaleidoscopic changes of scenery, Billy was shown as a parodic Cinderella in the fairy-tale World of Enchantment, as a frightened character of horror fiction, and as the reluctant actor of space opera. Even the background of Billy Pilgrim's everyday life proved to be a threshold world, where the hero hovers between the real and the fantastic. Moreover, the settings of his wanderings were equated to the unknown fantasy

lands, to the heaven and to the underworld of the monomythical hero's quest, the parallel with myth being completed by the composite myth/folktale scheme which we applied to the analysis of action.

That part of our study, which emphasized Billy's search for identity and Vonnegut's striving for a proper means of artistic expression, also evidenced repeated reversals. The narrative of Billy's adventures was found to fit in a parodical comic manner the morphology of myth and folktale. The author's efforts to write his Dresden novel resulted equally in reversal: the substitution of the fantastic for realistic forms of expression. Besides, his overt use of fantastic devices were interpreted as clear signs of his intention to depart from realism toward non-mimetic narrative modes.

Thus, there is ample evidence to corroborate our initial assumption that Vonnegut uses the fantastic in a very unusual personal way, to suit the needs of his narrative world. Moreover, the succession of symbolic situations which are parodied and reversed in the course of Billy's story is indicative of the author's purpose to create a new mythology which is consistent with the chaotic reality of the contemporary world.

As a point of paramount significance, our study has foregrounded Vonnegut's congeniality with the fantastic and its basic foundation on reversal. In our view, this furnishes a common denominator for the variety of tendencies in his work, since black humor, satire, the absurd, and science fiction are based on structural reversals. For the black humorist, life is a cruel joke and he reverses perspectives when he laughs at the viciousness of the world. The satirist holds up to ridicule contemporary situations which he judges to be wrong, by reversing perspectives of the world outside the text and by the use of irony, that is, by presenting the reverse of truth as it were clear truth. Absurdist writers,

who see our universe as chaotic, present a distorted and magnified view of reality that conveys pessimism and despair. Science fiction is obviously an offspring of fantastic literature. Thus, whether or not those labels are found to be adequate to define Vonnegut's fiction, they can all be subordinated to the fantastic.

Finally, our analysis has evidenced that Vonnegut's choice of narrative expression reveals his basic concern with important issues of human existence: time, death and human interrelationship. He does not give, however, any conclusive solutions for those problems. The Tralfamadorian world, which can be seen at first as providing means of escape and consolation turns out to be ambiguous: its unique concepts remove the power of death and stop the fluidity of time but, on the other hand, enhance human cruelty. Thus, Vonnegut offers us escape but gives us confrontation.

Moreover, the deterministic Tralfamadorian philosophy of acceptance is negated by all the instances of Vonnegut's preoccupation with mankind which we have detected both in the text of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and in his other fictional or non-fictional writings. Thus, the author's reasoning is proved to be full of ambivalences and uncertainties which keep the reader swinging between contradictory interpretations of his attitudes as freely as Billy Pilgrim oscillates in space and time. Like his hero, Vonnegut attempts to turn his back on life's painful moments - epitomized in the Dresden massacre - and to accept the sufferings of mankind with indifference. That he is unable to do so is emphasized by his very creation of consoling fantastic alternatives, though they may be just foma or comforting lies.

However, we believe that in his own personal way, by highlighting the world's wrongs through the comparison with strange alternatives, Vonnegut indicates his unwillingness to

accept the examples of man's cruelty - such as the Dresden massacre - as fate beyond the control of human free will. Moreover, his concern in exposing the weaknesses of mankind may be interpreted as the sign that there is still hope for the improvement of man. Hope is also expressed in the final voice in the novel, the birds' 'Poo-tee-weet' which signals life and renewal.

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