Social Issues in Literature

War in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five

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GREENHAVEN PRESS
A part of Gale, Cengage Learning
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**Chapter 1: Background on Kurt Vonnegut**  

1. Vonnegut’s Family and the Success of *Slaughterhouse-Five*  
   Peter J. Reed  
   Both of Vonnegut’s parents and their extended families immigrated to the United States from Germany. After working in public relations and journalism, Vonnegut became a literary figure and a popular culture icon.  

2. Vonnegut’s Despair About War at the End of His Life  
   Loree Rackstraw  
   When Vonnegut was in his eighties, the bombing of Dresden continued to haunt him, especially as war raged in Iraq and Afghanistan.  

3. Vonnegut on His Writing and Life  
   Kurt Vonnegut, as told to John Casey and Joe David Bellamy  
   In this interview Vonnegut comments on his experiences, including the World War II bombing of Dresden, Germany; his reception as a writer; and his philosophy as a novelist.  

**Chapter 2: Slaughterhouse-Five and War**  

1. Facing the Cruelties of Civilization and Its Wars  
   James Lundquist  
   The fantasy of the planet Tralfamadore is the means through which *Slaughterhouse-Five* protagonist Billy Pilgrim comes to terms with the cruelty of civilization, which is exemplified and amplified by war.  

2. Time Travel as a Brief Escape from War Memories  
   William Rodney Allen  


According to Vonnegut, war persists in the past and the present. Time travel allows a brief escape from its overwhelming reality.

3. Billy's Time Travel Is Not Science Fictional but Psychological

*R. Edelstein*

Billy escapes into his fantasies of time travel and Tralfamadore when real events, such as the bombing of Dresden, become more than he can bear.

4. Kindness in the Face of Cruelty

*R. McCoppin*

Although *Slaughterhouse-Five*, with its many references to different wars, makes it clear that war is inevitable, the response must be kindness, as Vonnegut shows through the behavior of his protagonist, Billy Pilgrim.

5. The Moral Problem of Billy's Fantasies

*T. Tanner*

Billy's escapist fantasy of Tralfamadore can be seen as either an avoidance of responsibility or as a necessity for surviving the war.

6. A Nontraditional Way of Conveying Chaos

*T. F. Davis*

Because human deeds during wartime are at odds with ethical behavior in peacetime, only a nontraditional narrative can convey war's senselessness.

7. Vonnegut's Denunciation of Tralfamadore

*R. Merrill and P. A. Scholl*

Far from being fatalistic and cynical, *Slaughterhouse-Five* affirms that through free will, humanity can change things for the better. The fatalist Billy Pilgrim does not represent Vonnegut.

8. Deromanticizing War

*S. Schatt*

Vonnegut, Billy Pilgrim, and the narrator are three distinct voices, offering different points of view in a novel intended to deromanticize war.
9. The War Novel: From Heroic Epic to Grim Reality

*T.J. Matheson*

In the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut records the development of his ideas about war novels, from his initial perception of them as romantic epics to his awareness of the reality of war's cruelty.

10. Why the Innocent Suffer

*Donald E. Morse*

Like Job of the Old Testament, Vonnegut asks the eternal excruciating question: Why do the innocent suffer? The inquiry becomes particularly urgent in times of war.

**Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on War**

1. Uncovering Military Secrets About the Deaths of Iraqi Civilians

*Sarah Lazare and Ryan Harvey*

Soldiers involved in a US attack in Iraq that wounded children and killed innocent people have openly denounced the military's callous attitude toward civilians.

2. Two Wars: Physical and Psychological

*Stu Weber*

Every combat soldier fights two wars: the physical one on the battlefield and the psychological one that continues for years after the soldier returns home.

3. Casualties of the Mind

*Heidi Vogt*

Four soldiers, deeply traumatized by witnessing the deaths of comrades, find it difficult to cope.

4. Child Soldiers

*Michelle Steele*

A variety of sources reveal the stark truth about the estimated 250,000 girls and boys who are forced to fight in conflicts throughout the world.