

Slaughterhouse-Five Essay – on one of themes

1. Fate and free will
 - a. The Tralfamadorians live with the knowledge of the fourth dimension, meaning that all moments in time occur simultaneously and endlessly – time is circular rather than linear. They believe that every moment in time has already occurred and their life is predetermined with no control over them, so they accept their fates.
 - b. Billy learned from the Tralfamadorians that if there is nothing we can change about time there is no such thing as free will. Life is therefore predetermined and there is a lack of control over life.
 - c. Will is defined as the ability to alter your own future. The Tralfamadorians tell Billy that the idea of free will is unique to those on earth, and everyone else in the universe knows better. Those on Earth believe in time being linear.
 - d. Billy's knowledge that life is predetermined allows him to cope with the realities of aging, death and pain. (He believed that if humans have to suffer, at least there is nothing to be done about it.)
 - e. Billy's resignation makes him feel better, but it lets him off the hook as he does not have to bother or worry.
 - f. Throughout his life Billy runs into obstacles that go against his free will.
 - i. As a child, his father throws him into the deep end of the pool to teach him how to swim, and lets him sink. Billy prefers the bottom of the pool, but against his free will he is rescued. – shows no control over his life
 - ii. He is also drafted into the war against his free will. He is not well trained a soldier without proper attire.
 - g. Tells his sons not to be involved/participate in massacres and the manufacture of war machinery.

- h. As Billy accepts the Tralfamadorian teachings, his actions indicate the futility of free will. He survives Dresden despite being poorly trained and a joke of a soldier – shows that deterministic forces render free will and human effort an illusion.
- i. **Edgar Derby's** confrontation with Howard W. Campbell allows him to become a character. He is a character because **he is willing to try to do what is right**, even if not successful.******His decision to stand up for what he believes sets him apart from the other characters.**
- j. Ironic he survived even though he was least prepared in battle. Also survived plane crash – only one to and knew about plane crash before it happened but let it happen b/c no control. Suffers skull fracture.

2. Destructiveness of War

- a. The catastrophic firebombing of Dresden in WWII sets up for all of the other random events in the story.
- b. Tralfamadarians --- War is inevitable – ignore the bad times(death) and focus on the many more good moments
- c. Tralfamadarians show how much the war has affected Billy and his existence. It seems that Billy may be hallucinating about his experiences with the Tralfamadarians as a way to escape a world destroyed by war – a world he cannot understand.
- d. The Tralfamadorian theory of seeing in the fourth dimension is not just used as a way to rationalize all of the deaths Billy has witnessed. Billy is a traumatized man who cannot come to terms with the destructiveness of war without invoking a far-fetched theory to which he can shape the world.

3. Time

- a. Being unstuck in time is a defense mechanism **escapism**– it takes him away from his world and troubles and blocks it out.

- b. Pilgrim – someone who is on a journey through time
 - c. Billy believes he knows what will happen in the future because he has knowledge of the fourth dimension.
 - d. Sight - Corrects vision of patients, tries to correct worlds nearsightedness
 - e. Billy goes to war and witnesses horrific events, becoming mentally unstable as a result. He does not have a firm grasp on reality and at random time he has flashbacks to other parts of his life.
 - f. His belief that aliens captured him and put him in a zoo before sending him back to earth may be part of his imagination.
 - g. It is possible that he has gone insane after all that he has been through. Therefore, his alien encounters and time travel can be seen as a hallucinations triggered by events that remind of traumatizing events.
 - h. He has lost true sight and lives in a cloud full of hallucination and self-doubt. One that corrects others sight is quite blind himself (figuratively).
 - i. So it goes – shows that death is just one moment in time. That person is alive and well in all other moments. Shows the inevitability of death – out of ones control.
4. Compare and contrast women and men – no women even in war
- Mary O'Hare- anger towards war – why Kurt Vonnegut calls the book the Children's Crusade – she doesn't want him to glorify war
 - Montana Wildhack – porn star
 - Valencia – Billy's wife, dies of carbon monoxide poisoning
 - Barbara – Billy and Valencia's daughter
 - German widow – shows sense of compassion
 - Maggie White - so beautiful/pretty, make babies
5. Moral statement about America in general
- a. Greed – pointless to be greedy

- b. Way should live life
- c. American consumerism – defined life by gift shop
- d. Pilgrim says no son of mine involved in killing and wars
- e. Marriage
- f. Children – bizarre, separate life
- g. Nurture of parenting
- h. Inappropriate**
 - i. Man's inhumanity to man**
 - ii. Sending children to war**
- i. Oblique(indirect) references to religion – God is dead, Adam and Eve, and and in Chapter one where lady turned into pillar of salt = don't look back.

A mythic journey of fractured lines(themes)

- **Every person is incomplete person and lives are fractured**
- **Is it true? – search for meaning afraid to know**
- **Everyman**
 - **pilgrim searches for things**
 - **Represents fear of aspects of life**
 - ***eludes truth and meaning**