

Christiania Marí Aukan

Bachelor's thesis

# Authorial presence in the space of standard structure and temporality in science fiction war novels

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## **Abstract**

Kurt Vonnegut and Joe Haldeman have both struggled to come to terms with the reasons for war. In their novels *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Forever War* they depict the wars they were themselves involved in, through the lense of science fiction. Although the stories are written in a fictional format the authorial presence in the text allows the reader an insight into the perspectives of the authors on the topic of war. As a result of the authors inserting themselves into the text the novels can also be viewed as historiographical sources promoting anti-war ideologies. This thesis will explore the authorial presence as substitute for standardized structure and, or, temporality in the two novels. This will be done through an analysis of the main characters and the authorial presence displayed throughout the text.

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## Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* has frequently been the subject for analysis when it comes to both the temporality of the novel, with regard to the psyche of main character Billy Pilgrim, as well as its relation to Vonnegut's background, concerning the authorship of the novel. Many other novels also fit the criteria for such frames of analysis, one example being Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*. In many ways these novels utilise similar literary devices to orchestrate a depiction of the difficulties when it comes to representation of wars in general, and more specifically, the effect wars have on the soldiers that partake in them. Of special interest in both these novels is the fact that the main characters both become "lost in time" as a result of their war efforts. This unusual utilisation of temporal aspects lead both of the main characters to become alienated, both from time in general, but also, from the societies they were originally a part of. The effect of this becomes a somewhat shuffled chronology as well as the disappearance of conventional structure in varying ways. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Billy Pilgrim finds himself catapulted forwards and backwards within his own timeline, in addition to, in some cases, finding himself completely removed. For Mandella the temporality effect of being "lost in time" is more straight forward as he moves chronologically through linear time, though at a vastly accelerated rate. Although the narrative techniques of Vonnegut and Haldeman differ from one another, two things unify them. Firstly, the main characters have no control themselves or their travel through time. Secondly, they both use the presence of the author as a substitute of standard structure where it would be expected. Although one has to be careful not to over analyse authorial presence in texts this thesis will be focusing on the author's insertion of themselves into the novels as one of the most important stylistic devices. In both the works the imbedding of the author into the narrative occurs more frequently as the main characters find themselves removed from their natural timelines. This break in structure allows for the analysis of the underlying reasons for the creation of the stories through the penetrating perspectives of the authors within the texts.

The reading of such novels as commentary on the war efforts Vonnegut and Haldeman were involved in additionally allows us to pull the analysis of main characters and authorial presence into a historiographical focus. Through this perspective one can look at the science fictionalisation of trauma as a way to process events that have occurred in the authors' actual lives. Analysing the novels as such allows us to view *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Forever War* not only as fiction but as a non-conventional primary source of the Second World War and the Vietnam War respectively. One has to be careful not to over analyse this

fictionalisation, since there is no evidence Vonnegut or Haldeman have suffered from any psychological setbacks upon the return from war. Despite this, it is still possible to use the critique found in the novels to read the stories as individual perspectives of war. A critique we know to be present due to Vonnegut and Haldeman later being open about the fact that both novels are written with an anti-war mindset, which their characters mirror.

### **Diagnosing the main characters**

The development of diagnoses within psychological fields, following the publication of these novels, prove interesting, both for the attempt to understand what the authors have gone through individually, but also for being able to delve into the diagnosing of the main characters of their novels. It is of course a speculative analysis as neither Vonnegut nor Haldeman have been open about any of their own psychological traumas in any further degree than their novels, and through some interviews or speeches that have been published. Furthermore, making inquiries, into the psychological diagnosis that could have been reached today, is anachronistic as many of the diagnoses that may have been given in present time did not have a name, or scientific background when the novels were published in the late sixties and seventies. Despite this, some psychological descriptions and phenomena, that are now well known, effectively describe the choices and motivations of both Billy Pilgrim and Mandella. On top of using psychological phenomena that have been given scientific credibility in later times, abduction theories are an interesting source of literature. This is especially true when it comes to the attempt to analyse the characteristics of Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim.

Billy Pilgrim quite clearly suffers from, what in current times would be labelled as PTSD. However, upon the creation of the novel this had not yet become an official diagnosis. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was normalised in the 80s as a diagnosis to explain symptoms many veterans returning from the Vietnam War were showing. It is clear that this diagnosis was not a new phenomenon for the Vietnam war, but merely a scientific labelling of symptoms that had earlier been categorised as shell shock, combat fatigue or hysterical neurosis, and that were seen just as frequently in soldiers returning from earlier wars. (Wicks, 330). "PTSD is classified into 20 symptoms within four clusters: intrusion, active avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood as well as marked alterations in arousal and reactivity." (Miao, et al) Many of the symptoms one finds in subjects presenting with PTSD thus line up perfectly with the progression of Billy Pilgrim's character throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*. This is especially prominent in certain triggers we see Billy's reaction to, which launch him

into his episodes. These episodes can therefore be categorised as symptoms of his suffering. George Brown, a sociologist specialising in mental illness, describes one of the main symptoms of subjects presenting with PTSD being the wish to narrate their stories, often alternating between the past and present tense as they aim to complete the narration, with no awareness that they are doing so (Leys. 644). In an attempt to treat himself, Billy attempts to live his life in a way which allows for him to accept that the firebombing of Dresden has occurred without having to actually reenter his memory of it. This clearly affects his psyche and before long Billy falls out of touch with reality in such a way that he ends up hospitalised as a effect of a nervous breakdown.

In hospital Billy Pilgrim is introduced to Rosewater who, like Billy, is attempting to reinvent himself due to a traumatic episode. They connect over a common love for science fiction and the works of Kilgore Trout. Following this stint in hospital Billy returns to his life feeling better despite not being offered any real medical care. Amanda Wicks points out that Billy does not “so much reintegrate his memories as restructure them through the lens of science fiction.” (335). She moves on to point out that there is a clear connection between the episodes Billy later experiences which pertain to aliens and abduction and the novels Trout has written, which he has read during his hospitalisation. Here it is clear that Billy fills in the missing parts of his memories with a fictionalised abduction story to make sense of it all. The Trafalmadorians introduce Billy to a way of thinking which does not rely on the interpretation of past traumas. Instead they choose to focus simply on the happy parts in time, jumping backwards and forwards in memory as it pleases them. Asking about how to prevent war, as the Trafalmadorians have a peaceful planet, Billy is simply met with the response that war is unavoidable and that he should rather focus on the peaceful moments of his life:

“‘But you *do* have a peaceful planet here.’

‘Today we do. On other days we have wars as horrible as any you’ve ever seen or read about. There isn’t anything we can do about them so we simply don’t look at them. We ignore them. We spend eternity looking at pleasant moments.’” (Vonnegut, 96)

Billy attempts to follow this strategy as it allows for him to move around the traumatic memory which haunts him. However, it does not work for him as it does for the aliens of Trafalmore. Whereas they can choose which point in time to travel to, Billy becomes a “spastic in time” as he is randomly jolted backwards and forwards. Wicks points out that Billy’s difficulty with temporality does not only signify his traumatised nature but also the degree of it. (337)

Roger Luckhurst, a professor of Modern Literature, is one of the scholars who has attempted to study the science fictionalisation of trauma, both through his research into the topic through review of fictional accounts, as well as, his critique of studies into abduction theories that are performed by psychologists specialising in the field. One of his articles focusses on the creation of an “abductee” in order to fill the hole that is left in the memory of subjects who have undergone trauma so severe that the event itself cannot be recalled. These subjects are capable of creating a fictional story in order to process the events they have experienced, which they believe completely true. In severe cases, this fictionalisation of trauma has been known to lead to the creation of narratives of alien abduction. Roger Luckhurst describes alien abduction narratives as "not true" but also "not simply false, for textual distance from abductees should not efface the very real traumatic response that people actually experience, however 'fictive' the category is" (*Science Fictionalisation of Trauma*. 30). A common symptom of patients who have reported alien abductions is "a sense of confused temporality which constitutes a determinable gap of missing time" (Ibid. 31). This is obvious in *Slaughterhouse-Five* when Billy Pilgrim experiences his blackouts. This includes both his flashbacks to the Second World War, which he perceives as travelling in time, as well as his abduction to Tralfamadore. It is clear that the trauma Billy has faced in the war has left him unable to cope with his life normally. His inability to fill in his own life story leads to him losing himself both in regards to space and time. His less severe episodes are his flashbacks to specific scenes of the war, but these in return trigger him and lead to his later development into the fictionalisation of his story to incorporate alien abduction. Ian Hacking, a psychologist specialising in alien abductions brings in memero-politics as a reason for this. He thinks that a "forgotten event can be turned, if only by strange flashbacks, into something monumental" (Ibid. 33) This is very true in the case of the evolution of Billy Pilgrim's character. The main difference between his character and the research on alien abductions is that while Billy aims to work his way back to his initial trauma, abduction research starts at the trauma of the patient, for example child abuse, and often works an abductee or abduction theory into this, in form of hypnosis, according to Luckhurst.

William Du Bois, presents a different side of the debate on hypnosis. Though he felt that victims of shell shock deserved treatment he was unsure of how to best provide it. He theorised that hypnosis did not allow for the “neurotics” to become masters neither of their present nor the past, instead making them reliant on the physicians that treated them. He wrote:

“The neurotics, like the delinquents are antisocial ... stragglers from the army ... We do not know whether to believe in their hurts and put them in the infirmary, or to handle them roughly and send them back to the ranks.” (Leys, 628).

It is clear that when there was no clear diagnosis and much debate within the field, based on limited scientific research, receiving understanding as a returning soldier by physicians and not least the society you were re-entering would be challenging. This sceptical view of a treatment that had been proven to work, marks one limit of the two extremes when it comes to hypnosis. On the opposite side we have the, aforementioned, creation of abduction narratives. Already in the 1920s Brown warned that hypnosis put patients in a vulnerable position, pointing out that: “the patient’s disability is due to a form of dissociation and that in some cases hypnotism accentuates this disassociation.” (Leys, 630).

Luckhurst’s critique, and Brown’s warning, of a hypnotic approach through which the psychiatrist allows the subject to create an abduction narrative without intention to dissolve this narrative is very reasonable. There is no arguing, however, that the abduction narrative in *Slaughterhouse-Five* serves a distinct purpose. Upon discussing the effects of recollecting memories as a cure for shell shock it was debated whether what cured the subject was the ability to fill the whole left in their memory with an event, or if it was the fact that they were finally able to process the emotions that were suppressed. One of the professionals who have focused on the importance of emotion is Édouard Claparède. He reports that when he attempts to project emotions relating to past events, he:

“either continues to feel the emotion in the present, and hence not as past, or he ceases to experience the emotion altogether and instead merely represents himself to himself as a kind of depersonalised or deal ‘mannequin self’ whom he sees objectively ... as if he were a spectator of himself.” (Ibid. 637)

This is something we see in Billy Pilgrim when he views himself both in the Second World War, and also on Trafalmore. Brown adds that the shell-shocked soldier “in every case speaks and acts as if he were again under the influence of the terrifying emotions” (Ibid. 643) when he undergoes his episodes. There is no way to know if these emotions are merely a reenactment and triggered due to painful memories, or if they are felt in the way they were initially. It is therefore difficult to be certain whether or not the episodes Billy experiences help him or not. Ultimately, despite the debate on the importance of emotion, all in favour of

hypnosis as treatment generally agree upon remembrance as the most important part of a hypothetical cure, for whatever disease has developed as a result of the experience of a traumatic event.

Billy's curse as a "spastic in time" is improved when he finally remembers the events of Dresden and reaches a sort of serene disposition towards life and time in general. He adopts the Trafalmadorian view encapsulated in the much-repeated phrase "so it goes". Billy's character changes when he is finally able to recollect the moment he has been circling around. Vonnegut perfectly highlights the importance here of the remembrance as a part of the "cure". Although Billy has previously filled in the gaps in his memory, he had never properly recalled the events of Dresden. "He did not travel in time to the experience. He *remembered* it shimmeringly." (Vonnegut, 177). Accentuating the therapeutic process, he has gone through to reach this place in his travel, his own personal war against trauma, through the separation of this event from the ones in which Billy truly believes he is transported in time. This theory is solidified by the use of the word remembered. The scene, perhaps the most important in the book, humanises Pilgrim, and normalises the story.

We see much of the same desperation in Mandella, as in Billy, to control his jumps in time, or rather to remain in the present he is comfortable in. In Mandella's case, however, the government is to blame for his lack of control. It is not he who is lost, but rather his free will. This in turn forms Mandella as a very different character than Billy. Whilst Billy views his past with a sense of indifference, Mandella is in general upset with regards to the way he has been treated. In some ways one can see Vonnegut's character as alienating himself, and Haldeman's as alienated by those who are supposed to be on his side. The present therefore becomes Mandella's problem, much more than the past. The events of war themselves is not what triggers him, but rather having to face where he has ended up. Mandella unlike Billy is not a sick individual, he does not carry with him a disease. In fact, from the narrative of Haldeman's war novel Mandella may well be one of the only completely reasonable characters in the book. He continues to question those around him, wondering how any of it can be fair. The men in the army have been chosen seemingly at random, or in a sense targeted. Haldeman reveals this through his narrative.

"Why the fuck did this have to happen?"

I shrugged. It didn't call for an answer, least of all the answer UNEF kept giving us. Intellectual and physical elite of the planet, going out to guard humanity against the Tauran menace. Soyashit. It was all just a big experiment." (Haldeman, 7).

Mandella is consequent throughout the novel of his judgement of the government which has chosen a life for him that he would not have chosen himself. In the start of the novel this is simply an opinion as we cannot immediately see the effects his participation in the war has on him but as we progress it becomes an obsession deeply rooted in anger. Here, Mandella differs again from Billy Pilgrim. While Pilgrim suffers the effects many years later we in Haldeman's story are given a much more chronological run-through of Mandella's life. The time aspect is used to alienate Mandella from his society, his peers and what he has deemed normal, rather than being used to remove him from his own life psychologically. As time moves on, for Mandella more rapidly than those not engaged in the war he has been enlisted to, we see the effects of the choices that have been made for him. Of special interest is an event which occurs after Mandella has finished his first term for the army. When travelling in Europe with Marygay he encounters a violent attack in which he ends up, almost automatically as an effect of his training, killing the perpetrator.

“It was a girl they were attacking; it was rape. Most of them scattered, but one pulled a pistol out of his coat and I shot him. I remember trying to aim for his arm. The bias hit his shoulder and ripped off his arm and what seemed to be half of his chest; it flung him two meters to the side of a building and he must have been dead before he hit the ground.” (Haldeman, 126).

After this Mandella is forced to recall the episode under hypnosis. This situation distances Mandella further from Billy Pilgrim as he is forced to remember everything he has done. However, it supports the analysis of Mandella's character flaws as stemming from his lack of control over his own life. It is important to note that the reader never gets any other perspective on the characters than what is presented by themselves. When Pilgrim and Mandella have their episodes we never see them from someone else point of view such as a psychologist can observe his own patients. We can therefore never know how the characters appear to those around them as they think back to the past, or react to memory. The diagnosis of the characters must therefore be analysed completely from their own perspective. From this we know that while Billy views his past, and his change of character as a result of it, with complete indifference, Mandella does not. Billy does not believe himself capable of such evil as he has been forced to be a part of and thus feels the need to narrate his story in a way which removes

him from it. Mandella in ways agrees with this but with less indifference to the situation. He is able to set war in perspective after his situation in Europe.

“I stood there stupefied. I’d certainly seen enough death these past two years, but this was a different thing ... there was nothing noble in being crushed to death by the failure of some electronic component, or in having your suit fail and freeze you solid; or even dying in a shoot-out with the incomprehensible enemy ... but death seemed natural in that setting. Not on a quaint street in old-fashioned London, not for trying to steal what most people would give freely.” (Haldeman, 126).

From the first battle he fought Mandella has been viewed by his government as a kind of super soldier. He has been trained for a specific purpose. Mandella is controlled completely by an external factor and thus believes that if circumstances had not been what they were he would have been able to live a completely normal life. In a way he is correct. While Billy’s major issue is that he himself has blocked out the events of the war from his head due to his incapability to deal with it. As an effect he loses the ability to control his mind. Mandella, however, lacks control of himself with regards to his free choice of where to go both in space and time. The characters obviously develop differently but through this prove an interesting view of how the authors, who themselves participated in the wars alluded to throughout the novels, feel their main characters should be presented.

### **Authorial presence**

Both in the *Forever War* and in *Slaughterhouse-Five* we notice a heavy authorial presence. In Haldeman’s novel this can be seen in more physical ways through his description of a general who in ways represents Haldeman himself.

“The door opened and a full major came in. (...) He had a row of ribbons stitched into his coveralls, including a purple strip meaning he’d been wounded in combat, fighting in the old American army. Must have been that Indochina thing, but it had fizzled out before I was born. He didn’t look that old.” (Haldeman, 11).

The description of the major is a clear description of a man who has been involved and wounded in Vietnam, or as Mandella calls it “the Indochina thing”. Haldeman was himself



awarded the purple heart for his involvement in Vietnam, specifically because he was wounded in action. (Haldeman, 241). *The Forever War* starts in 1996 only twenty-one years after the end of the Vietnam War, however it is clear from Mandella's description that the war has already been forgotten. It is clearly a thing of the past for the new, young recruits. His remark that the major doesn't "look that old" enhances this view. The repetition of the word "old" to describe the American army, further dates any previous combat or war efforts as it is clear Mandella views the war as a thing of the past. This idea that any armed conflict is forgotten as soon as it is completed and only present conflict remains in focus is a recurring theme of the novel. This is strengthened by Mandella and Marygay being alienated both by their society as well as the structure of time around them as they progress through the novel. The two soldiers find themselves so out of place because their original mission, and reason they were enlisted, is no longer the present focus when they return after their jumps in time. This reflects directly back on Haldeman's own feelings on the treatment of soldiers returning from war. *The Forever War* is clearly a critique of not only the Vietnam war but of the treatment of its veterans. Haldeman's background gives us invaluable insight into how this feels as he translates his experiences into a fictional narrative.

Mandella mirrors Haldeman in many ways, and thus his authorial presence is not limited to the physical appearance of the general, but is present throughout the narrative. Though this depiction paints a powerful picture of what Haldeman believes will be how the future generation will view him, it is not a depiction which can encompass all the critique he has to bestow on war. For this reason he continues his critique through the opinions of his main character. There is no questioning that the authors of both these novels hold an anti-war perspective as a result of their own backgrounds. Mandella is enlisted against his will, dropped in an unfamiliar location, wounded and then subsequently, at the moment he thinks everything will be normalised, alienated to what used to be home. This exact list of events is what Haldeman wishes to point out through his work. And must be what he, himself, experienced as a result of his efforts for his country. *The Forever War* is about the Vietnam war because, as it is stated in the prologue of the book: "that is the war which the author himself has been in." (Haldeman, xi) Haldeman therefore, much like Vonnegut, writes not only a story which he feels he is required to share, but his own story which for his own sake he has to rid himself of.

Amanda Wicks points out in her article on the science fiction of trauma in *Slaughterhouse-Five* that through witnessing the devastation of the Dresden firebombing, Vonnegut created a belief that he had an authorial obligation to narrate not only his own story but the story for others. (p. 329). This obligation can be tied back into the ethical point of how

trauma narratives help pad the collective memory regarding events such as war. It is clear that the obligation felt by Vonnegut is mainly personal, and that no one would have pushed him into sharing his story against his will. This feeling of *having* to tell his story could be an explanation of the strong authorial presence Vonnegut has throughout his novel, filling in the gaps where he feels Billy can not control his story properly. Vonnegut himself states that he has for a long time had no proper recollection of Dresden and his need to remember his own story could be attributed to trying to rid not only his main character but himself of a sort of disease (Cacicedo, 360). Vonnegut commented after the completion of his novel that relaying the narrative had changed him, making him “a different sort of person” who got “rid of a lot of crap” (Ibid. 361).

While discussing a patient Brown comments that as a result of trauma he was: “Unable to discharge his powerful emotions directly, through actions or speech, he unconsciously “materialised” them by converting them into physical or bodily symptoms. Most striking of all, the patient would not remember anything about the horrifying events that lay at the origin of his pitiable state.” (Leys, 625). This is, as discussed, the case at some points with regards to the main characters but is also transferable to the authors. In the case of Vonnegut he offers this up about himself when he talks about the process of writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The act of forgetting is not only limited to non-remembrance of the original events but also the blocking out of reactions when displaying symptoms. This happens a lot to Billy Pilgrim, as opposed to Mandella. Haldeman’s novel still reveals a clearer authorial presence as Mandella’s story *reflects* Haldeman’s story, in a way which Billy Pilgrim does not reflect Vonnegut himself. Instead Vonnegut physically imbeds himself into the narration, making the points he appears at easier to spot in the text.

Working on the assumption that the narrator in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is representative of Vonnegut himself we can see him not only as a literary device, but also as an aid to Billy’s story. Upon discussing the function of Vonnegut’s narrator, in an article about the requirement of chaos in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Robert Merrill and Peter Scholl, distance themselves from a quietist view of both Pilgrim and Vonnegut, so that both characters represent, with regards to their past, the same indifference. This explores the effect trauma can have in leading to multiple personalities, or different perspectives of ones situation. However, the narrator may also be viewed as a more simplistic function. The narrator can be viewed as the only source of serenity that Billy Pilgrim has, though he is not necessarily directly present in his life at all times. Stanley Schatt, describes the “disembodied narrator who sympathises with the Tralfamadorian view of things, quietistic in the sense that it sanitises existence by encouraging one to avert the

gaze from unpleasant events.” (Schatt, 358). The scenes where this “disembodied narrator” imbeds himself into Pilgrim’s story are often those where Billy is most “lost in time”, providing clarity not only for Billy himself, but also the reader as Vonnegut himself tries to make sense of his own past. It therefore becomes clear throughout the novel that the temporal structure, or even general structure of writing, needs an authorial presence for the progression of the story to make sense. This adds to the importance of the narrative as a literary device. The effect can sometimes be perceived as an interruption, almost like someone is correcting the story as it moves along. This narrative again reflects the authorial obligation Vonnegut has been shown to feel towards the correct telling of his life story.

This obligation is something that seems evident in Haldeman’s text as well. The stark underlying critique of not only war, but societies’ response to it, is clearly produced by a man who has first hand knowledge of what his main character has been through. Haldeman’s text is less chaotic than Vonnegut’s, yet there is the sense throughout the novel that his character in a way lacks more control than Pilgrim does in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. One reason for the anger that is felt in Haldeman’s text could be that he, unlike Vonnegut, seems to have a clear remembrance of everything that has happened. While *Slaughterhouse-Five* works towards the recollection, and ability to write about the central event, *The Forever War* keeps moving forward, not returning to any specific event in the same degree. Mandella at times thinks back to Aleph-I, the first battle, but this is often in fleeting conversation, or thought. It should be mentioned however, that one does not know how much Mandella truly remembers of everything, as it is made clear that during the first battles the soldiers are under the influence of some kind of drug, in order to improve their performance on the field. This too reflects Vietnam, and other wars throughout history, in which drugs, especially amphetamine have been used in order to make war bare-able for those involved. Commenting on the problems surrounding narcotics used during combat in Vietnam, Lucas Kamienski uses a veterans first-hand view to describe the situation.

“We had the best amphetamines available and they were supplied by the U.S. government,” said Elton Manzione, a member of a long-range reconnaissance platoon (or Lurp). He recalled a description he’d heard from a navy commando, who said that the drugs “gave you a sense of bravado as well as keeping you awake. Every sight and sound was heightened. You were wired into it all and at times you felt really invulnerable.” (Kamienski).

The influence of narcotics further removes control from Mandella, a character who only wants to be able to decide for himself.

Another reason why Haldeman may be more present in his novel, is the fact that while *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published over two decades after the Dresden firebombing took place, Haldeman wrote and published his story while the Vietnam war was still at its height. Talking of Joseph Hellers' war novel *Catch-22*, in an article comparing the book with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Alberto Cacicedo mentions that "The novel circles around and around [the event] precisely because Yossarian can neither remember nor forget it." (Cacicedo, 359). This perfectly reflects both Vonnegut's character as well as himself. In *The Forever War* this is also the case but shown through an alternate perspective as it is not Mandella who forgets his missions but the world around him. It becomes Mandella's mission to remember the past as no one else does. Given the different lengths of gestation it may not be fair to compare the two novels. It took Vonnegut three decades to access the memories of his story well enough to write it, and even then, he had to use the medium of science fiction to make any sense of it. As mentioned, when Haldeman published his novel the war, he fought in was still ongoing. Nonetheless, looking back on the research Brown did during the First World War it is obvious that those soldiers treated for trauma even minutes after experiencing it could as easily be victims of psychological casualties, as those who did not process their trauma before later. The fact that the novel was published so soon after does give another perspective which we do not see as much of in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, being the public's behaviour regarding to the return of soldier. While Mandella remembers much more than Billy Pilgrim, and is not as fixated on one specific event from the past, he circles more around the fact that no one around him seems to remember, or place any importance on the first battles he fought for his country. What annoys him the most is the fact that they are not treated based on their individuality but rather their collective involvement in something they have not chosen for themselves. It is also worth mentioning that the tones of the authors may differ on this subject, Haldeman's being more bitter, due to the reception of soldiers in the real world. While Vonnegut seems to act with indifference to how the people surrounding him views veterans, as Pilgrims' story develops more as an individual battle with the self. It is worth mentioning with regards to reception that the soldiers returning from the Second World war were in general treated as heroes upon their return. The veterans returning from the Vietnam war have, on the other hand, not been treated with so much kindness, alienating them further from the homes which they, in some cases, had been forced to leave. No matter for what reasons the authors' have chosen to interject themselves into the stories, it can be argued that through doing so they have proved the

obligation they felt to share them. In his review of *The Forever War*, Adam Roberts, a British science fiction novelist describes why this genre suits the creation of a war narrative stating: “If you want to tell a story about war, you need to find a way of articulating a profundity of alienation, a depth of strangeness and dislocation. Science fiction as a medium enables you to do that better than any other” (Haldeman, J. p. ix).

The choice to use science fiction can be further discussed, especially with regards to the authors’ attempt to relay the true horrors and consequences of war. Science fiction does provide a narrative form through which the author may explore inhumane and incomprehensible facts within the frame of a genre which often moves into unreal realms. Wicks claims that it therefore becomes a perfect lens through which to “read the trauma of war in general”. (331). Despite purposefully using SF as the genre of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and as main components in many of his other novels, Vonnegut originally dismissed science fiction. He stated that authors who write within the genre generally do not write fiction which has any purpose other than portraying narratives of complete make belief. In spite of his originally discrediting the genre, Vonnegut chose to write his anti-war novel in this style claiming it was not possible to retell the story of his past in general fiction, or even non-fiction. Despite his previous attempts to do this, as he admits to his army buddy’s wife:

“‘Mary’ I said, ‘I don’t think this book of mine is ever going to be finished. I must have written five thousand pages by now, and thrown them all away.’” (Vonnegut, 13).

There are several reasons why this could be an easier way to narrate the stories. Firstly, it allows for Vonnegut not only to distance his character from the trauma of Dresden, but also himself as he works through his writing to come to terms with what has happened. Secondly, it provides a way to allow the reader to subject themselves to the make belief of the novels, before facing the reality that lies behind the metaphorical fictional curtain. Brown counters the first point, based on previous research into the field of trauma treatment, being that he felt “recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result,” (Leys, 625). If this is the case, and events must be remembered so vividly as to invoke the exact emotions felt in the past, one could argue that Vonnegut and Haldeman’s use of the genre of science fiction as their medium to convey their war trauma can be deemed faulty. This was however rejected by other members of the same debate with regards as to how much emotion has to say for hypnotic recollection as a cure for trauma for the opportunity of processing their own pasts. William McDougall and C.S. Myers were part of the opposing side with the latter making it clear that

“It is the recall of the repressed scene, not the ‘working out’ of the ‘bottled up emotional energy’ ... which is responsible for the cure.” (Ibid. 626). In this case science fiction can be seen to be a great medium to simply allow the subject to narrate the events which have at one point been so traumatic that they have been not only repressed, but seemingly completely forgotten. In this way we can view the aim of narrating their stories as not only for others, but also as a way through which to process their own traumatic experiences. Assuming this to be a valid assumption, it is not strange that both authors should feel a need to, or simply cannot refrain from, commenting on the stories of their main characters and thus imposing clear authorial presence on the narrative as a literary device which allows for both the message to be made clearer, and the plot to run more smoothly.

### **Socio-political importance**

When looking at the authorial presence in the novels it becomes interesting to look further than the primary sources, such as the novels themselves or interviews conducted with the authors. Pulling the analysis into the field of memero-politics is a good way to do this within the scope of the historical aspects of the novels. The study of memero-politics was originally introduced as a way to study history in the scope of new emerging perspectives as imperialistic tendencies became outdated during the course of the twentieth century. (Luckhurst. *Science Fiction and Cultural History*. 4). The field proves an interesting topic of study when relating it back to the scope of war and diverse perspectives in the context of social critique. Memero-politics is based on the comparison and contrast of the varying perspectives that derive from one specific event. Through their novels Vonnegut and Haldeman have been able to display the troubles of being a returning soldier through the difficulties faced upon returning home, not only in regards to themselves but also their surroundings. Of additional interest, for this view, is the deliberate choice they have made to write their respective texts in the genre of non-fiction, and even more narrowly within the specific genre of science fiction. Through this both authors have been able to portray both the inhumane and unimaginable situations they have been subjected to inside the bounds of a genre which itself is meant to be unbelievable. The result of this yields stories which are easier for readers to delve into using imagination and then only while submerged in the novel or upon completing it allows them to connect the unimaginable back to the very authentic origin stories of the authors. As much as *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Forever War* remain within the scope of the science fiction genre they also touch on the very real events, as well as the consequences that the Second World War

and the Vietnam War had on those who returned. This is one of the main reasons why the analysis, not only of the main characters but also, of the clear authorial presence found within the novels so interesting.

One of the main reasons why looking into the effect science fiction war novels have on the perception of the war is that they in some way add to the historiographical first person point of view that is found largely in non-fictional sources. Allowing for an alternate way to portray the true horrors of war within the spectre of fiction. Although, Haldeman and Vonnegut, as previously stated, choose to do this in two very different ways, the authorial presence forces the authors to give something of themselves to the texts in a way that one would not expect from narratives which do not base themselves so clearly on events that have been experienced personally by the author. Usually one has to be careful not to read too much into the meaning of the author when analysing fiction. However, in this case, the analysis of authorial presences bases itself on the statements of the authors, within their novels as well as in reality. The creation of the novels in both cases quite clearly aimed to depict the troubles war brings into people's lives, not only of societies functioning as a whole, but also specifically for the soldiers who have participated in acts of war. Nonetheless, it is important not to conclude too decisively on the meanings and motivations of the authors as much will remain speculation. This is especially true when it comes to research of the psychological effects and repercussions of war, with regards to the main characters of the novels, as well as on the authors. There is no denying, however, that both the novels reflect not only the chaos imposed on an individual from his experience in combat through the main character, but also clearly reflect the authors themselves. The authorial presence becomes most apparent when the main characters face challenging decisions or rough flashbacks. This is the reason for the importance of investigating authorial presence where structure is weak, for example due to the effect of being lost in time. As a whole this allows us to view the effects of war in a non-conventional way.

Pierre Janet, a French psychologist, distinguished between two kinds of memories: traumatic which is wordless and static, and narrative which tells a story, Janet claimed that the ultimate goal was to "put the story into words". (Leys, 648). He has been praised for validating the idea that "the goal of therapy is to convert traumatic memory into narrative". However, Janet has later been critiqued for pushing for alteration or even erasing narratives once they have been processed. Opposed to his idea of erasing traumatic memory completely, there has in recent times been a push for the truth to be told and narrative memories to be shared. This is not only for the patients' own good but individual narratives of the past have also gained

support on a socio-political plateau. Victims of traumatic experiences regarding war are encouraged to speak out about their traumas for collective value as the “determination and recuperation of the historical past has an inherent ethicopolitical value”. (Ibid. 653). This is what Haldeman and Vonnegut give the reader through their individual narratives.

Regardless of the genre these narratives are presented through, the question of whether or not the stories can be used as primary sources when looking for historical materials to depict the Second World and Vietnam war is an interesting subject to look into. In the very least, the stories present opportunities for individuals interested in the subjects to analyse them with the aim to find passages which could tell them something about the historical events they depict. For example, the first battle at Aleph-I, where drugs are used to enhance performances of the scared soldiers can be paralleled with the problematisation of apparent government sanctioned use and distribution of drugs to soldiers fighting in the Vietnam war. In cases like this, not only the main characters narrative, or authorial presence, is of interest. It also gives the reader a chance to analyse direct critique of specific events or problems which become visible through the thinly veiled science fictionalised narratives of real wars.

### **Conclusion**

In what can only be described as an own sub-genre of historiography, written within the fictional genre, Haldeman and Vonnegut give us a view of the very real consequences war has had, not only on themselves, but also on others. Both novels depict battles, in regards both to the wars they have fought in, but also consequent individual battles. This form of narration of the stories could, as previously mentioned, be treated as a sort of cure which allows the author to move on from the traumas of the past. As Vonnegut mentions he has viewed the memory of Dresden as a disease which he is unable to cope with, addressing the creation of the novel as a way to get rid of this burden. We cannot be certain that Haldeman felt the same upon the completion of his novel, but in this work, Haldeman, unleashes his fair share of critique towards war efforts. In the bid to create anti-war novels, Haldeman and Vonnegut have wisely chosen to share their own stories, though in a somewhat unconventional form. Perhaps this tells us more about what one should expect from an eyewitness account of such traumatic events than any history book or critical article could ever say. In order to humanise individuals participating in wars the authors have had to quite literally alienate the enemy. Yet, the aliens in Vonnegut’s story are not the enemy, although Billy Pilgrim is their victim, for he has been desensitised by his victimisation during the Second World War, in a stark commentary on humanity. Analysing



the works from a historical perspective therefore allows us to see not only the literary functions of the authorial presence but the great value of the authors as sources to true incidents.

It is clear from looking at the two novels that the storylines indeed cover true historical events. The characters of both *Billy Pilgrim* and *Mandella* give the reader an insight into the consequences war has on the individual. The struggles these main characters have to deal with both during their time serving in the army, as well as upon their return, allow us to analyse not only their characters in general, but also the authors as they become present throughout the text. Though it is well acknowledged that authorial presence should not be overly analysed when looking at literary works, these two novels prove that there may be something to be found in the background of authors. This is especially prevalent with regards to stories such as these, which narrate a perspective that allows us a look into past events. As commented upon throughout the text the author is present in both novels, especially when the main characters feel they are losing control, be it of themselves or their storyline. In the cases where there is a clear authorial presence in the narrative it is easiest for the reader to see the personal connection the authors have to their respective works. In any work which did not touch upon such personal subjects as underlying traumatic memory an author may have reworked the story in order to get it right from the main characters perspective. Instead the authors have imbedded themselves into their texts making it even more clear that fictionalisation of trauma is happening through the narration of these stories. The sense of loss of control may also be analysed as an effect of the authors aiming to turn traumatic memory into narrative memory in order to rid themselves of the lasting effects of their war efforts. This need for control over one's own story is the reason why authorial presence works as a replacement for standard structure and, or, temporality in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Forever War*.

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