



Billy Pilgrim's Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five

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Abstract. The thesis is about Billy's psychological trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five. The objective of the research is to explain about the symptoms of trauma experienced by Billy, the triggers of Billy's trauma, and ways of Billy's dealing with his trauma. The analysis uses literary theory of trauma by Cathy Caruth. Because trauma relates to psychology, the psychological approach is used in this research. The findings show that symptoms experienced by Billy are recurrent uncontrollable memories of past traumatic events, losing his enthusiasm for life, delusive about Tralfamadorian planet as well as his adventure in time, and sleep disturbance followed by weeping for no reason. The causes of Billy's trauma are the result of his participation in world war 2 where he witnesses many horrific events like the bombing event in Dresden city, and getting humiliation as well as harsh treatment from his fellow soldiers, fellow prisoners, and German soldiers. The other causes is facing the events after the 2nd world war that exacerbates his trauma that is the plane crash he is travelling in and the death of his wife due to carbon monoxide poisoning. Way of Billy's dealing with his trauma is the indirect way in his unconscious state which relates to his delusif Tralfamadorian planet and traveling in time. Tralfamadorian planet is simply Billy's imaginary place which is quiet and peaceful and his traveling in time that he believes.

Keywords: Trauma, trauma symptoms, trauma triggers

Introduction/Pendahuluan

The world today is facing another big threat to human existence after the following news about the Russian military attack in East Ukraina in the early year of 2022. Responding to this extraordinary situation, many countries strongly condemn the Russian military's action as a threat to the existence of the Ukrainian country and as a big threat to world peace. There is no country directly involved in helping Ukraine with military power support. Due to the absence of direct military assistance from allies countries, Ukraine's government openly invites young and adult Ukrainian men or women side by side with their military force to fight and maintain the sovereignty of the Ukrainian country. This situation reminds us of the dark history of World War II when there are people from the affected or involved countries who got drafted into the army either voluntarily or because of the obligation to defend the county. After WW2 many veterans are still alive today who carry their terrible wartime memories for the rest of

their lives. Many veterans of WWII have experienced mental illness after the war or post-war trauma.

Some veterans of World War II write their life war experiences in the form of Literary Work which contains their experience, their point of view about war, and the long-term effect of the war that they have. Literature is one of the ways humans always use to describe their experience and behaviour with the concept of time and place that are specific according to the time when that literary work is written or time chosen by the author. As the main subject of the literary work, all the things about humans can be a theme. The theme that the author can use is always content about human behaviour, culture, or social aspect.

One of the examples of veterans of WWII who wrote his experience in the form of Literary Work is Kurt Vonnegut. Vonnegut writes novels with a total of 14 Novels during the 50 years of his life after WWII. One of the famous novels by Kurt Vonnegut is Slaughterhouse-Five. The Slaughterhouse-Five is the biggest and the most well-known novel by Kurt Vonnegut that tells a story from the point of view of Billy Pilgrim, a war veteran of World War II who suffering from PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). PTSD is a mental disorder after someone witnesses a terrible event. War, life-threatening accidents, life-threatening diseases, sexual abuse, harsh treatment and bullying are a few terrible events which can lead someone suffers or be diagnosed with PTSD because of the trauma triggers.

There is one branch of Research Literature called Psychology of Literature which is study of the human psychological state. According to Wellek and Warren (1962) explain that psychological analysis can be analysed from the aspect of the actor, the aspect of the characters in the story, or psychology aspect of the reader. According to Aras (2015), Literature and Psychology have a strong correlation with the fact they deal with human beings and their reactions, perceptions of the world, miseries, wishes, desires, fears, conflicts and reconciliations; individual and social concerns, using varied concepts, methods, and approaches. A literary work author will use his perspective and experience when making about his work through the main character or all the characters in his literature work or the theme. "... writers often document their own cases, turning their maladies into their thematic material" (Wellek & Warren, 1963, p.81).

In this study, the researcher will research the psychological state of Billy Pilgrim, the main character in the novel Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut. In this study, the researcher will analyse the psychological state of Billy Pilgrim, main character in the Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut. The novel is about the story of a veteran of World War II named Billy Pilgrim. This novel has several setting places like the German city of Dresden and Luxembourg with setting time during WW2, Ilium, New York during the post-war period, and Tralfamaldore, an alien planet where Billy is placed in a zoo by Tralfamaldorian creatures named Tralfamadorian. Billy Pilgrim is the main character in the novel Slaughterhouse-Five who suffers from prolonged trauma or PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) after the world war ended. In this research, the researcher will analyse Billy's traumatic symptoms exposed in the novel, the triggers of

Billy's trauma, and how Billy deals with his trauma. The theory of Trauma by Cathy Caruth is used to analyse Billy Pilgrim's trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996) as cited in Shoukat and Waheed (2021) introduces literary trauma theory. According to her theory that trauma is a recurring phenomenon, with no time limit and an unexplainable phenomenon. She describes trauma as a recurring phenomenon because it happens again and again in the mind of the character. She adds that trauma is no time limit because it gets someone stuck in a situation. In this way, a person starts mingling both his past and present. On the other hand, she also explains that trauma is an unexplainable phenomenon because it causes problems in one's consciousness and the way of expressing in language. Due to the trauma, the person cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy because he is trapped in memories and finds it difficult to express what he feels to others. The research aims to describe Billy's traumatic symptoms exposed in the novel as well as the triggers of Billy's trauma, and Billy's ways of dealing with his trauma. The researcher sees this research as very important because it is related to the situation now in Ukraine and Russia. By understanding Billy Pilgrim's trauma in the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we can see the long-term effect of the war on those involved and learn that war has no benefits, but, harms the individuals involved with trauma.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research that uses the Reading and Note-Taking technique to collect the data and the Descriptive Analysis technique to analyse the data. According to Hancock (1998), qualitative research is the development of information based on social phenomena based on existing data without reducing the explanation or meaning of the phenomenon. The focus of this research is the trauma experienced by Billy Pilgrim, the main character of the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. Trauma is the phenomenon contained in the novel as the object of this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of Billy evolved in the World War II he suffers from prolonged trauma. Billy shows symptoms of trauma in the novel start from, recurrent uncontrollable memories of past traumatic events, losing his enthusiasm of life, delusions about alien planet named Tralfamadore where he is kept in the zoo with women named Montana Wildhack and his travelling in time, and also sleep disturbances followed by weeping for no reason.

There are four triggers of Billy's trauma describes in the novel. First, insulting and physical violence he experiences during WW2 from his fellow soldier and during his time as a war prisoner. Secondly, he witnesses the bombing of Dresden city during his time as a war prisoner in the WW2. After the world war there are two incidents that make Billy's post-war life worst, firstly, plane crash he travelling in with his father-in-

law. In this incident Billy survives but his father-in-law is dead because of the incident. The last, the death of his wife, Valencia, caused by carbon monoxide poisoning.

A. The Symptoms of Billy's Trauma

The symptoms of trauma showed by Billy are the result of Billy joins to the World War II as a soldier. There four symptoms Billy shows more than one or two times in the novel. The explanation of each symptoms experienced by Billy are as follows;

1. Recurrent Uncontrollable Memories of Past Traumatic Events.

Billy experiences recurrent uncontrollable memories of past traumatic events or Billy experiences flashback for most of his life. Billy's first time having a flashback on his memories is during his service as a chaplain's assistant when World War 2 is still in progress. Billy's first time has a flashback which is called "unstuck in time" when World War II is still in progress in 1994, long before his delusional adventure on the Tralfamadorian planet. The first time Billy has a flashback is when he and three American soldiers escapes from the battle of Bulge that has been wandering for three days. On the third days Billy stops in the middle of the forest and he leans against a tree and closes his eyes. At that moment Billy has a flashback which is called "unstuck in time". Nurhaddi (2019) explains that the unconscious mind of a traumatized person is suppressed by constantly experiencing flashbacks and influencing the way they think. It can be seen that this is also experienced by Billy, besides Billy who is not aware of having flashback, Billy's mind is also affected by believing that this event is time travel. Billy who does not know that he has having a flashback sees it as an uncontrollable back and forth passage of time. Billy thinks he is the only person who can knows what will happens next to him and those around him without realises it is all just flashbacks from his memories long ago. It is not clearly explained which memory first time he has flashbacks for, but it is clear that since that day Billy has continued to experiences flashbacks throughout his life. From this event, he later often gets into a delusional state in which he believes that he can be travelling in time without controlling which it is called "unstuck in time". Caruth (1996:91) describes that people who suffer from a traumatic event are often in a repetitive flashback.

2. Losing Enthusiasm for Life.

Billy feels that life is meaningless and he has lost his enthusiasm for life because of what he has experienced and witnessed during the war. The novel also explains that every time he finds someone dead he always responds with the phrase "so it goes". Also, the novel describes that Roland Weary several times saves Billy from death and Billy will do nothing to save himself. Long before his time in the veteran mental hospital, he has tried to get shot by a German Markman and wished that everyone would leave him behind so he can get shot or captured by German soldiers. This happens after he and

three other American soldiers survive the Battle of Bulge and on the third day of wandering after having escaped.

Roland Weary saves Billy's life from his stupid decision more than one time. Billy's unenthusiasm in life is clearly describes when he gives the German Markman another chance to shoot him which he believes is normal. The novel also explains that Roland Weary even has to kick and cursing Billy because he wouldn't move or do anything to save himself. Even after Weary saves him, Billy has told Weary and the scouts that he wishes they would leave him.

The next explanation of Billy's unenthusiasm in life is about a framed prayer hang in his office which expresses his method for keeping going even though he is not enthusiastic about living. This also explains since Billy leaves the veteran mental hospital that he still finds life meaningless and never tells anybody about his situation or his feeling. His situation gets worse for his psychological condition since leaving the veteran mental hospital because his family never know what happen to him during the World War II and people think he is going crazy.

Another explanation in the novel which indicates Billy's unenthusiasm in life and finds life meaningless is when he and Rosewater a veteran of war from a different battle are hospitalized in the veteran mental hospital. They both find life meaningless because of what they have experienced and witnessed during the war. It is explained that Rosewater on purpose has shot a fourteen-year-old fireman whom he thinks is a German soldier and on the other hand, Billy has seen the greatest massacre in European history which is the bombing of Dresden.

3. Delusions.

This is related to Billy's delusional condition about the Tralfamadorian planet and his adventure in time that he believes is real. He believes that he can travel in time uncontrolled and he is kidnapped before by a Tralfamadorian spaceship and placed in a zoo with an artist named Montana Wildhack. However this delusion is imaginary about Tralfamadorian, flying saucer, and adventure in time that he believes is influenced by science fiction novels written by Kilgore Trout. This is where all about Billy's delusion comes in. Rosewater is the person who introduces Billy to science fiction in the first place during their recovery in the veteran mental hospital.

All his delusive planet and travelling in time are influenced by science fiction books that Rosewater introduces to him. All the science fiction books Billy reads are coming from a writer named Kilgore Trout. Billy devotes himself to tell his story one day but he has waited for the right time to tells it. Billy believes that the first time he "travels" on the Tralfamadorian planet is when he is 44 years old in 1967 on the night of his daughter's wedding. He reveals all of his adventure in radio night talk after the plane

crash. This is when his daughter Barbara knows about his father's delusive but not yet knew his father suffers from PTSD.

4. Weeping for No Reason and Sleep Disturbances.

It is explained in the novel that Billy always weeps for no reason when he is trying to sleep. There is none of his family rather than his doctor who knows about his condition. He is under his doctor's order to take a nap every day to fix his complaint but in that condition, Billy would weep for no reason most of the time. At that time during the life of Billy Pilgrim psychological trauma is not yet known by the public or medical personnel and psychiatrists so sometimes doctors or psychiatrists only provide advice that is not directly related to the trauma problem and sometimes incorrectly or unable to diagnose patients who have psychological trauma disorders it is also because at that time Trauma is not yet recognized.

Because of this condition, Billy has sleep disturbance. Every time he tries to sleep, the weeping would come out for no reason. Someone who suffers from trauma at some point has sleep disturbance because their mind never rests from thinking about the traumatic event they have witnessed. This thing is also experienced by Billy and every time he tries to take a nap, sleep wouldn't come instead of coming to tears.

The weeping that Billy experiences whenever he tries to sleep is an unconscious reaction and sometimes for unknown reason. The reason is unknown because the situation where Billy as a person who experiences this situation does not have any clue about the reason he is crying bitterly and also the doctor who treats him can only provide advice that is not directly related to the trauma experienced by Billy. The doctor only advises Billy to rest every day to get calm, but it is in this calm state that Billy cries bitterly while experiencing flashbacks to the traumatic events he experiences. People closest to Billy also never know that Billy often cries in his sleep. The reason behind it is because Billy has never shown this to those closest to him and is secretive about the situation he is experiencing.

B. Triggers of Billy's Trauma

The triggers of Billy's trauma are combination from insulting and physical violence he has received during the World War II and witnesses the event of the bombing of Dresden City. In addition, the events after the World War II that exacerbates trauma experienced by Billy are the plane crash he is travelling in and the death of his wife Valencia. These triggers are elaborated below:

1. Insulting and Physical Violence.

Billy is often got insulting and becomes an object of mockery by his fellow soldiers and prisoners, and sometimes gets physical violence especially from Roland

Weary. Weary often insults with physical violence to Billy since they escape from the Battle of Bulge until they become German prisoners and bring to Dresden city. Sometimes Weary insults and threatens Billy by using physical violence. Caruth (1995) explains that Trauma is a late response to a overwhelming event or events in the form of recurring phenomena. Save says that trauma experienced by Billy is his late response to all violent he has experienced from his enemy and from fellow soldier during World War II. All his violence experiences become the trigger of the trauma that he suffers during his life.

Besides his terrible and terrifying experiences close to death, Billy suffers from being insulted by his fellow prisoners during their time in a boxcar in World War II. Litaay (2018) describes psychological abuse is not just ordinary verbal abuse, but an attack on a child's social and emotional abilities, futhermore it is a threat to human psychology. The definition and explanation about people who suffer from a traumatic event are not only about experiences close to death like war and natural disasters but also some people suffer from traumatic experiences because of insulting, harassment, psychological abuse, or bullying from other people or someone close to the person.

2. Witnessing the Bombing of Dresden City.

The Bombing of Dresden is the most significant event which really affects Billy's post-war life following other events which worse for Billy's psychological condition. At that moment he witnesses the greatest slaughter in European history. More than 130.000 people are dead at that event. "War always contributes bad effects for the world. it can damage some important places or country and kill many people. Moreover, war kill countries economy and future. Indirectly, a war can create trauma." (Nurhaddi, 2019, p.49). The novel describes that Billy finds life meaningless because of what he has seen in war especially the Bombing of Dresden. In Dresden city, Billy has seen German schoolgirls bodies get boiled alive by his fellow soldier because she is trying to escape. Billy and some of his fellow soldiers survive and escape from this terrible event. This event is the last time Billy evolves into the war.

Among the many traumatic events experienced by Billy, the bombing of the city of Dresden is the worst and the last one he witnesses which later affects Billy's life and his mindset. Billy sees life as meaningless since the following war and he only lives based on a destiny that he believes is predetermined and cannot be changed. When Billy is hospitalized after returning from the war Billy finds his life has no meaning and purpose, in short because of the bombing of Dresden, Billy in the future just lives without living his life at all. It is explained that during his stay at the hospital Billy tries to rediscover his identity. "Without any warnings, those traumatic events can happen to every person when they are not mentally prepared and those can also trigger people to experience trauma." (Sartika, 2020, p.122). One of the triggers of someone suffering from PTSD is that in his life he has experienced and witnessed extraordinary cruelty or

terrible events that are not understood but stored in memory which then gradually will become a psychological disorder in the future because it is not treated or investigated. During Billy's lifetime until his death in 1976, the psychological trauma is unknown to both the public and psychiatrists. Psychological trauma only begins to be recognized by experts and is recognized as a mental illness in the 1980s.

3. Plane Crash Accident.

Billy's plane crash is a traumatic event that has been directly experienced by Billy since World War II, which is told as part of a flashback experiences by him. In that incident, Billy is the only passenger who survives the horrific incident and has injuries all over his head. This made her psychological state become worse because he loses her father-in-law and several friends he knows in the plane crash.

Billy in 1968 attends an international meeting of ophthalmologists. Billy along with his father-in-law who is also an ophthalmologist and his professional colleagues departed by the same plane to the city of Montreal where the meeting is held. On the way Billy's plane crashes and he is the only person who survives in the accident. As a result of this accident, Billy has injuries all over his head and suffers a concussion. Billy is hospitalized for an unspecified period of time but during his treatment Billy's wife has an accident and is poisoned by Carbon Monoxide. It is also explained that Billy, who has flashbacks of the plane crash, feels that he knows what would happen to the plane he is flying in but does not want to tell anyone because he feels that this incident is predestined and could not be changed. After finishing his treatment, Billy returns to his house and he is quiet for a while.

4. The Death of Billy's Wife.

In the novel, it is explained that during Billy's treatment in the hospital after a plane crash, his wife, Valencia, has an accident where she is poisoned by Carbon Monoxide. At that time, Billy does not know that his wife has died in an accident. His daughter Barbara is the one who takes care of all of her mother's funeral.

The quotation "While Billy was recuperating in a hospital in Vermont, his wife died accidentally of carbon-monoxide poisoning." (Vonnegut, 1968:99) explains that while Billy is recovering in hospital as a result of the plane crash. His wife, Valencia, is dead in an incident of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. Since the plane crash and the death of his wife, Billy no longer cares about the businesses he owns and focuses on convincing those around him about what he has experienced and seen on the Tralfamadorian planet. Even though Billy shows symptoms of mental disorders, no one from his immediate family find out or invites Billy to have his mental state checked by a psychiatrist. His daughter, Barbara, thinks he is senile from a concussion.

All the possible causes of trauma that exist can be seen that Billy experiences all of these things starting from, the loss of family or those closest to him who cares for him such as the death of his father in a hunting incident, the execution of Edgar Derby people who cares for Billy while they are in prison, the death of his father-in-law due to the plane crash they are traveling in and the death of his wife from poisoning. In addition to losing people close to him, Billy during World War II often receives humiliation and physical violence, especially from Roland Weary. The next cause that most influences the post-war life of Billy is when he has witnessed the greatest massacre in European history, namely the bombing of Dresden which has killed more than 130,000 people. Billy also has to live life under death threats from Paul Lozzaro.

Although Billy indirectly shows symptoms of psychological trauma or at least shows symptoms of mental disorders considering that at that time psychological trauma is not known yet to the general public or even to psychiatrists. No one from his family has any suspicions about Billy's psychological state. Besides that Billy is described as a closed person and never tells his life when he is involved in the battlefield. Billy has to suffer psychologically for years without knowing what the cause. Billy's psychological state after the war worsens where he has to face the fact that his father-in-law has died in a plane crash they are both traveling in and Billy's wife Valencia has died in a terrible accident.

C. Billy's Ways of Dealing His Trauma

There is nothing much that Billy does to help or cure his trauma directly. It is because during Billy's time, trauma is not yet recognized by people and Billy himself knows nothing about what is trauma and its symptoms. It is explained that Billy several times consciously tries to get help from other people like doctor to deal with his mental breakdown but the problem there is no one at that time who knows what happens to Billy. Doctor simply just gives advice or order which is not related with Billy's trauma and false diagnoses to Billy. In unconscious way Billy does something to help his trauma or as a way from Billy to deal with his trauma. "Unconscious is a deep psychological condition of human mind. It is very important in influencing human behavior consisted of impulse, drive, and traumatic experience." (Qodariyah, Rohmah, & Natalia, 2017, p.79). Tralfamadorian planet is the biggest example of how Billy indirectly deal with his trauma. It is clearly for Billy that Tralfamadorian planet is a safe place for him to become himself. Tralfamadorian planet is a dreaming place for Billy where there is no violence action or killing other for no reason. After coming back from World War II, Billy is hospitalized at the veteran mental hospital because he is suspected that he has mental breakdown but doctor has false diagnosed him with Nervous Disorder. Billy does not know what to do with his condition during his time at the hospital because what he has witnessed in the war but tries to reinvent himself. Simply Billy sees life meaningless. During his time at the veteran mental hospital, he meets Rosewater an American soldier from different battle. Rosewater at the same low point in his life same

as Billy, but still has spirit to live his life. Rosewater is the person in the first place who has introduced Billy to science fictions written by Killgore Trout. Since that time Billy has been influenced by science fiction in extreme way until it is became his delusif. Billy believes that he can traveling in time uncontrolled and he believes that he has been kidnapped several times by Tralfamadorian and taken to the planet in fourth dimation. On that planet Billy finds peace and harmony that he never finds during his time on Earth. During his time on Tralfamadorian planet, he also has a mate, woman named Montana Wildhack an adult actrees. Montana Wildhack is a simply dreaming woman Billy wants, a proposional and beauty woman not Valencia who describes has ugly face and fat. It is also explained in the novel that actually Billy does not want to has a wife like Valencia. Also Billy believes that he can travel in time uncontrolled which is called "unstuck in time" where he can revisit his memories back and forward but most of his memories are terrible and miserable. Billy believes that if he stays in Tralfamadorian planet that he can revisit his memories and meets people that love and hate him. It is just the way Billy deals with death because he has lost many of poeple that he knows love or hate him. Billy believes that someone always lives and still lives in the past even if the person has already died.

Billy has suffered from mental breakdown and trauma because of his past but has no clue to dealing with that in concious way. "The larger part is the unconscious of the mind. All the things, which are not easily available at a conscious level, such as our drives or instincts, memories, and emotions associated with trauma." (Sibi, 2020, p.76). In Billy's unconcious condition where all his dreams forming and become his way to dealing with trauma. His uncarrying and clueless family just see Billy as a quiet and nobel person who never tells story about what really happens to him during the war. Unlucky for Billy during his time, trauma is not yet recognized and just four years after his passing trauma is recognised by the experts. It is also too late for Billy even he still lives during 1980 or more because he has gone to far on his misery and becomes hard to cure his condition even at that time Billy has succeded diagnosed. Trauma becomes hard to cure if it is late to identify it.



Figure 1 Anaphora Logo

CONCLUSION

Trauma experienced by Billy is a late response from Billy and people around him about what really happens to Billy during his time in Wolrd War II and becomes worst for Billy because he has to deal with his trauma until his death without support from family. All the symptoms that Billy has showed directly and indirectly fail to be recognized by his family or even doctor. Billy is a type of person who is never open about his feelings. Billy hides all his pain and trauma for himself. Because of lack of

recognition by Billy or his family, Billy's unconscious mind forms all Billy's dream and wish in the form of delusive.

Because of failing to recognize about the symptoms that Billy has showed directly and indirectly, Billy experiences uncontrollable memories of past traumatic events, loses his enthusiasm for life, delusive about Tralfamadorian planet and his adventure in time, sleep disturbance followed by weeping for no reason. Billy has to live with his trauma until his death comes without one of his own family or people close to him knows. Billy has to deal with his trauma as a late response from terrible events that he has witnessed.

All this traumatic events influences Billy's life, how he sees life, and how he responses about life and death. During his time in World War II he has witnessed and experienced on the first hand about the terrible effect of war. Billy has seen one the greatest slaughter in history, the bombing of Dresden. He has experienced insulting and physical violence on the first hand by his fellow American soldier. After coming back from war, his doctor fails to diagnose Billy's mental breakdown. His family never asks or searches about his past especially during his time on the World War II and Billy is the type of person who never tells about his personal matters. The events that make Billy's life even worst are the plane crash he has traveling in, losing his father-in-law, and the death of his wife because of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

Simply his delusive Tralfamadorian planet and adventure in time are his dream about what type of place and condition Billy wants to live in. Tralfamadorian is place where Billy can live in quiet and peaceful and has beautiful woman. His delusive traveling in time is how Billy sees life about. He wishes that he can always revisit his past and meet people he has already met before but they have died. Billy's delusive condition is a dream of place where he can live in peaceful and quiet place and can meet people who have already died.

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