

To Fight a Great War with Little-narrative

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Abstract: *Slaughterhouse Five* is a well-known postmodern anti-war novel, and when it comes to postmodern literature, it is inseparable from Lyotard's meta-narrative theory. However, there are few articles nowadays that link the two to study the narrative technique to deepen the meaning of anti-war. This paper analyzes the narrative art of *Slaughterhouse Five* from the perspective of Lyotard's meta-narrative theory in *The Postmodern Condition - A Report on Knowledge*. It aims to better analyze the significance of *Slaughterhouse Five*'s narrative art in the context of the anti-war theme. The article summarized the narrative techniques by analyzing the content of selected passages of the novel and analyzed them in the context of meta-narrative theory. Thus, it will discover that the little narrative and unique postmodern narrative features it employs deepen its anti-war theme. This finding will fill the gap between the two connections, not only deepening the anti-war theme of *Slaughterhouse Five*, but also better presenting Lyotard's meta-narrative theory in a more visual form.

Keywords: grand narratives, little-narratives, anti-war, postmodern, meta-narratives.

1. Introduction

Slaughterhouse Five is a postmodern metafiction that reconstructs historical events from a particular little-narrative perspective which comes to us with more and more complex reflective issues. When it comes to little narratives and postmodern techniques, it is easy to think of the famous French philosopher François Lyotard, whose book *The Postmodern Condition - A Report on Knowledge* clearly points out the decline of grand narratives in today's age and advocates a shift in perspective from grand to little, and advocates postmodern language games [1]. Grand narratives including the philosophical discursive narrative, which is about the legitimacy of truth, and the political emancipatory narrative, which is about the legitimacy of freedom. And the opposite of that, little narrative full of differences and unable to be measured by a single standard, and the only way out is by making them self-speaking in a way to be heard and treated with justice.

Most contemporary scholars have devoted themselves to examining the meta-fictional features of *Slaughterhouse Five* and the postmodern overtones it contains, in order to illustrate Vonnegut's avant-garde artistic style and to use it as a lens for the characteristics of postmodern fiction. However, how to deepen the anti-war theme through the unique little narrative perspective is rarely discussed. Narrative art exists for the purpose of deepening themes, therefore, this paper will analyze the narrative art in *Slaughterhouse Five* under Lyotard's meta-narrative theory in *The Postmodern Condition - A Report on Knowledge*.

For a better analysis, this paper will address two aspects. First, through the textual content of the novel, it will analyze how *Slaughterhouse Five* destroys the grand narrative and traditional political

perspective of traditional war fiction through the lens of the little-narrative, and how this will contribute to a particular reinforcement of the anti-war theme. Immediately afterward, the essay will analyze Vonnegut's postmodern character in opposing the monolithic nature of language through the hyper-narrative technique of *Slaughterhouse Five*, which will argue for the novel's unique narrative color.

2. Express anti-war Attitude Through Little Narrative

History generally defines World War II as a just war, but Raymond Federman has not convinced: the novels of the 1950s glorified it as a necessary, good war, a great journey, even if the Great War had many wounds...But Vonnegut's work, *Slaughterhouse Five*...sees contemporary American history as an absurd farce, his novels raise their own questions about these officially defined historical events[5]. By adopting the narrative perspective of an insignificant soldier in the war, the essay analyzes the real face of war, unveils the heroic lies behind the grand narrative, and presents a cruel and cold war and the trauma brought by war to the readers. And through this unique perspective, the absolute discourse of politeness is destroyed to a certain extent, and the heterogeneity of postmodern language is brought out.

2.1. Opposing war by Lowering Narrative Subject Status

Slaughterhouse Five completely abandons the traditional grand perspective of the confrontation between two armies and turns its attention entirely to private life. This paper can even think of this book as a history of life in a World War II prisoner of war camp. S Walter Hall once said that the main character Billie is perhaps the most passive and inert in American fiction. He running and hiding from the enemy, without the temperament and character of a soldier, not even as flexible and healthy as an ordinary person, a sickly and frail look, woefully surviving on the battlefield. "Chaplain assistants in the military have always been a joke, and Billie is no exception. He was incapable of killing the enemy or protecting his comrades." [2].

Vonnegut is a pacifist who opposes all forms of war. He believed that war was an irrational, destructive, and anti-human activity, collective madness, and a tacitly approved chaos, and that almost all governments, when war came, would promote war as a necessary, honorable and noble act for national freedom and national interests. But the real battlefield was one of incessant, mindless killing, with no connection to Those noble publicity slogans, as 135,000 lives were turned into smoke and dust in an unsuspecting city. Vonnegut uses these absurdities to tell people that the real face of war is the self-destruction of mankind, nothing more than an elaborate game in which one race destroys another.

2.2. Grand Narratives are Gradually Disintegrating in Modern Times

Billie's particular little narrative, full of comic relief, challenges the prim, brave and courageous soldier that is so common in grand narratives challenges the prim and proper soldier who is common in the grand narrative. The grand narrative consists of a philosophical discursive narrative about the legitimacy of truth and a political emancipatory narrative about the legitimacy of freedom, which together can be called the "grand narrative of modernity," which integrates countless little, scattered narratives into the great story of human progress, as if all social problems could be solved in the future.

Lyotard reverses the traditional philosophical relationship between logos and mythos. Mythos is not only not subordinate to logos, but on the contrary, the logos of the search for truth is itself a kind of mythos, and theoretical discourse about universal truth is only a kind of utopian myth. "In my opinion, theories are themselves narratives, but only disguised narratives, and we must not be

deceived by their ever-present lies. Even the merit of having previously created a narrative within an unshakable system does not shirk the responsibility of starting over." [5] He points out that meta-narratives have achieved a grand form of philosophy of history in the modern era, but people began to doubt it. Gary K. Browning, in his *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives*, makes the point that Lyotard challenges the assumptions and orientations of modern political philosophy [3]. Particularly noteworthy is his rejection of the notion of grand narratives, his promotion of a postmodernism that embraces difference and diversity, and his skepticism of unified meta-theory. World War I shook people's beliefs and values and the false state of mind was thoroughly exposed. During the period between the two world wars, irrationalist thinking such as the Pagan philosophy of life and Freudian doctrine emerged, and these doctrines renewed the inherent thinking of people, which renewed the inherent thinking of the people. Also in sharp irony with these U.S. generals, public opinion and so-called authorities, Billie's son turned out to be involved in the war business of slaughtering people, serving as an officer in a special forces unit in Vietnam War. This most starkly reveals that not a single historical lesson has been learned from the tragedy of World War II. Coupled with the emergence of many high-tech killing weapons on the battlefield of the Second World War, their use made people feel more insignificant and fragile of life, thus people began to suspect the grand narrative.

People truly recognized the dark side of war and began to reject the lies of the grand narrative. As Lyotard says in his book, "Identifying with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history, is becoming more and more difficult. [1]" To this day, wars have not ceased, and people have gradually cut through the false veneer of war to understand that the real war has no heroes, no victors, only defeated men, destroyed cities, scorched earth, blood, and death. "After witnessing the devastation of that place, this monstrous evil created by the British and American troops, the only thing I could think of and do was to do that which could not be done, to become an anti-war activist. After witnessing all this, it was my duty to say to everyone what I had only been able to assert, that we could no longer fight the war, no matter what." [6] Vonnegut firmly believes that there is no good or bad war, and that for the officers and soldiers on both sides of the war, their enemy is not the other side, but war itself, because only war brings destruction. "Dedicating oneself to catching up with Germany, the life goal the French president (Giscard d'Estaing) seems to be offering his countrymen, is not exactly exciting. [1]" Lyotard uses the example of the French president to illustrate the waning enthusiasm for grand narratives. Therefore, in the post-modern era, the noble historical mission can hardly inspire people to devote themselves to the great cause.

2.3. Little Narratives are Increasingly Accepted Instead of Grand Narratives

The social context of the meta-narrative has dissipated, and people have begun to willingly acknowledge intellectual limitations, fractures, contradictions, and instability, replacing them with personal "little narratives". "Life goal depends on each individual's industriousness. Each individual is referred to himself. And each of us knows that our self does not amount to much." People are gradually inclined to little narratives, gradually more favorable to such small characters as Billie who float in the flood of history, without a little autonomy, with little initiative to do anything in war and life, without courageous mental state and moving words and actions, and even without an undulating plot.

And the power of this little narrative is even more powerful than the grand scenes of two armies facing each other, reflecting the cruelty and absurdity behind the war. Just as traditional war fiction suffers from the question of whether it conveys the real war or turns it into a game of strategy. By taking a realist approach to writing, it is easy to lose the strength of criticism in the grand perspective, and the absurdity and folly of war can hardly be revealed, even making it seem more flamboyant and

magnificent. Therefore, Vonnegut weakens the characters as much as possible and reveals the lies of the grand narrative profoundly with such a setting as a little narrative.

2.4. To Eliminate Political Absoluteness Discourse from a Unique Perspective

The unique narrative perspective of Billie in the article also destroys the absolutes of political functional knowledge through a dialogue with Langford. In the book, the American newspaper news describes the Dresden bombing in this way - "Our air force attacked Dresden last night and all planes returned safely." The newspapers say nothing about the civilian casualties, the loss of artwork, and in the context of the grand narrative, language becomes a plaything to be thrown on and off by political forces.

The book describes one such fragment: Langford, who served as the official historical source for writing *The History of the United States Air Force in World War II*, has always had a confusion. "The book barely mentions the bombing of Dresden. The extent of the victory over the bombing of Dresden was kept a secret from the Americans for years after the war." [2] He stayed in the same ward as Billie when he was sick, and when his girlfriend came to visit him, he voiced his confusion and speculation-- "probably feared for many people who were traumatized inside"[2] and "thought it was dishonorable." [2] And Billie, who had been silent, suddenly spoke up, "I was there when the bombing happened." [2].

No matter how grand narratives beautify war, the pain of what really happened will always be there for humans. The military scientist Tammy Biddle notes in particular: "Due to the demographic layout of this phase of the war, the majority of Dresden's victims, both casualties and homeless, were women, children, and the elderly." [7] The author deliberately included in the text a character like Langford, who studied the history of war and air power, and whose very presence represented the official discourse. As the newspapers in the book portray it, it is politically charged, turning language into a weapon in the service of a grand narrative. A little individual like Billie, on the other hand, makes Langford speechless by simply saying, "I was there when the bombing happened." *Slaughterhouse Five* reconstructs the historical events through a particular perspective, dismantling the absolutism of the official narrative. This clip is a good illustration of this idea.

3. Challenge the Unity and Certainty of Traditional Language Through Advance the Narrative Technique

The whole novel is not only postmodern in its ideology, rejecting all worthy pursuits, but also very advanced in its creative techniques. But the story is not simply science fiction, and Amanda Wicks finds Vonnegut finding a terminology and structure to tell an experience beyond the scope of normative human consciousness, especially traumatic memories, by turning to the general features of science fiction. It shifting consciousness at will, traveling through time, and interspersing serious topics with absurd illusions.

3.1. Using "Time Travel Law" to Highlight the Absurdity of the Event

The "time travel method" is a summary of postmodernism's disruption of timelines, developed from Bergson's "psychological time", deliberately disconnecting the past, present and future, which were originally developed in chronological order, without transitions or twists, and interspersing scenes at will. The plot is reduced to express the changing thoughts of the characters, and the theme is deepened through the direct contrast of different time and space, then the plot will be more absurd and bizarre because of the direct contrast between different time and space to deepen the theme. Through this narrative technique, the chaotic mental state of modern American society and modern people is depicted.

If author describe the causes and consequences, it makes the terrorist event tentative. Vonnegut said, "Others give order to chaos; I give order to chaos." So in his writing method, he abandoned the linear narrative and instead adopted a jumping juxtaposition narrative. The so-called jumping juxtaposition is to narrate different scenes at different times together and keep jumping, which is based on an assumption that the novel's protagonist falls off in the chain of time and he will keep traveling through time and space, jumping unpredictably to any moment in his life, thus writing absurdity with absurdity. "Because in the midst of a massacre, I have nothing obedient to say." "Billie is caught up in the order of chaos as soon as he appears: "Listen, Billie is out of the bonds of time. He goes to bed as a dying widower and wakes up to find himself in a church for a wedding. He goes in the door of 1955, only to come out at another door in 1941. He goes back through this door and finds himself in 1963 again." [2].

This narrative technique completely breaks the traditional time line of the novel, but this is not simply a deliberate search for newness, but serves to express the theme. Billie's ability to travel in time allows him to see everything around him with an outside-in perspective, revealing the absurdity of the world from an outsider's point of view, but also bringing many hiccups that disrupt the normal rhythm of the narrative and the arrangement of the story. In the contrast, juxtaposition and contrast, the absurdity of the ongoing events and the world and characters are highlighted.

3.2. Using Absurd Narrative Techniques to Reflect the Absurdity of War

The novel's advanced narrative technique reflects the absurd world and human beings with the plain but absurd plot. "But undoubtedly even this pleasure depends on a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary-at least One adversary, and a formidable one: the accepted language, or connotation." [1], Lyotard advocates the indeterminacy and heterogeneity of postmodern language games to describe knowledge instead of the traditional unity and certainty. Protagonists are all pilgrims. Breaking the time constraint can make them weaken the pain they bear, reduce the sadness brought by death, and thus show a sharp sense of humor. Whereas traditional literary forms have fixed patterns and content, meta-fictional authors replace them with new content, which inevitably breaks the framework of traditional literary themes. Waugh argues that what was once 'the right thing to do' is now 'the thing about language,' and the inherent framing of the text is broken by parody [8]. The novel's advanced narrative technique doesn't care about the continuity of the plot and the integrity of the story. It deconstructs the sense of time and space of traditional literature, and also abandons the good and evil right and wrong and philosophical preaching that the novel should have. It expounds the events by means of the intersection of fiction and reality, exposes the dark side of real life.

Indeed, in the postmodern context, autobiography is sometimes defined as a form of metafiction, but its own relevance does not change. "When the postmodern way of writing, which blurs the line between reality and fiction, is combined with the narrative style of autobiography, the aim is to build a bridge between life and art" [9]. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, the autobiographical metafictional narrative has a therapeutic effect, helping the author Vonnegut to reconcile his urgent desire to recreate history with his avoidance of trauma, allowing him to overcome his narrative difficulties and reconstruct his identity, thus better conveying the novel's relevance - -The war has brought endless trauma to people.

3.3. Using "Appearances" to Express Anti-war Determination

In addition, the author makes several "appearances" fully exposing the hypocrisy and cruelty of war and strongly reflecting his desire for peace. "appearances" means that during telling Billie's story, interjecting from time to time to remind the reader where he is too. "That's me, the author of the book [2]." "Billie Pilgrim became Cinderella, and Cinderella was Billie Pilgrim [2]." "That is the active I and the passive I. [2]" "Billie and the others were taken by the guards to the pile of ruins. I

was there. O'Hare was there too. We stayed in the stable of the blind owner's inn for two nights[2]." The author speaks directly to the reader, deliberately interrupting the narrative story and "revealing" it, to some extent, hurting the authenticity and coherence of the narrative text. However, the author's occasional interruptions in *Slaughterhouse Five* do not result in this. The author's occasional interruptions do interrupt the reader's thoughts, but they are only temporary interruptions.

In fact, it draws the reader's attention more. The narrator's "I" briefly and subtly intervenes in the narrator's narrative, in fact, to further emphasize to the reader the reality of the Dresden bombing and the disbelief that Dresden was bombed by the Allies. Wherever the narrator's narrative goes, it eventually returns to the Dresden bombing. The author repeatedly pulls the reader from other story lines to the Dresden bombing, giving the reader the opportunity to see the absurd nature and evils of war and demonstrating Vonnegut's intent in writing the war novel *Slaughterhouse Five*: "I wrote about the bombing of Dresden out of an absolute impulse. I was a witness to the massacre, and as a person of European descent, and especially as a writer, I had to say something." [10] In other words, it is the Dresden bombing that drives the plot of *Slaughterhouse Five*. The reader is made aware of the fact that the process of getting rid of the horror of war is a long one, fully exposing the hypocrisy and cruelty of war and strongly reflecting the author's opposition to war and his desire for peace.

4. Conclusions

The article aims to examine the significance of the narrative technique in *Slaughterhouse Five* in deepening its anti-war theme from the perspective of Lyotard's meta-narrative theory. *Slaughterhouse Five* uses a lot of postmodern artistic techniques in its writing skills to deepen the anti-war theme. It is framed by impersonal characters and bland war scenes, a seemingly unattractive setting that overturns the traditional view of war, de-emphasizing the enemy and us or good and evil, and instead treats all of humanity and war as two war camps, with all wars, good or bad, being hostile to all of humanity and an anti-human existence. And the term "postmodern" in *The Postmodern Condition - A Report on Knowledge* has a double meaning.

The first meaning understands postmodern as pointing to a social condition characterized by the commodification of knowledge, the demise of grand narratives and the rise of micro-narratives. The article analyzes the features of postmodernism covered by the novel through narrative perspectives and narrative techniques, starting from the analysis of the content of the excerpts of *Slaughterhouse Five*. It emphasizes the importance and emergence of "micro-narratives" in the postmodern context, and uses its embodiment in the novel to show the novel's deviation from grand narratives, its unique approach to confronting war, and how it deepens its anti-war theme through narrative techniques. The second meaning defines postmodern as a kind of "meta-narrative questioning", a critical and innovative spirit that points to the future, aiming at continuous experimentation and innovation, breaking the consensus, finding new rules of the language game and establishing new boundaries of the game. The essay argues for the author's strong anti-war intentions by citing the distinctive meta-fictional features of the novel.

The writing technique of *Slaughterhouse Five* has even caused writers to study and critics to argue. This novel uses humorous and absurd techniques to write about the cruelty of war and the endless intrusion of war into life, increasing the absurdity and heaviness of the work, but also improving the reading interest of the work, provoking readers to compare and think, and opening up and developing a new art of fiction. This way of writing gives people a new understanding of the literary form of the novel, influencing the direction and way of writing of later writers, and is a rare and excellent postmodern work.

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