



Authorial Development from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG): Psychoanalytic Reading of Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-five and Timequake.

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Abstract

This article intends to explore the rational association connecting Kurt Vonnegut's encounter with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Post-traumatic Growth's impact on his narrative. Previous literature lean on linking the authors' spring of creativity to PTSD, it is a legitimate intent, for this study, to look at things differently attempting to verify the potential facet(s) of transformation. The centre focus of this paper is analyzing Vonnegut's healing process to explore PTG's affirmative connotations and how much serenity it can provide on the long term. In other words, we investigate if trauma narratives, trauma fiction in Slaughterhouse-five and Timequake, are vivid transcripts of the progressive healing process as a proof of PTG.

Article info

Received

February 09 ;2024

Accepted

April 22 ;2024

Keyword:

- ✓ PTSD
- ✓ PTG
- ✓ Authorial Development

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1. Introduction

Being an anthropologist, Kurt Vonnegut was fascinated with shapes of stories thinking about generating a new approach outside the traditional mode of storytelling Vonnegut explains that we are seldom told the truth addressing the conventional narrative modes, while he attempts to weave fragmented plots to create confusion steering focus to what is important and what is not. What is more interesting is composing a fictional version of somewhat overwhelming real events that defies traditional narrative modes, especially to convey a meaningful message after trauma “According to critics like Norman Holland, this sort of meaning grows out of the author's infantile traumas and manifests itself in the author's choice of words and situations”(Hume, 1982, p. 430). Additionally, employing semi-autobiographic modes of narration took his work beyond conventional science-fiction stories while exploring his psyche going through made-up scenarios to hunt for answers and interpretations that can be invested in finding serenity. Furthermore, Vonnegut’s distress caused by warfare and other personal tragedies nominates him as a target for this study since he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), nonetheless what seems frequently appealing is linking the concept of traumatic encounter to the birth of such a creative mind. In other words, Vonnegut can be studied as a post-traumatic growth (PTG) proper model knowing that he fits the paradigm. In order to make such a claim, we undertook studying Vonnegut at two completely different phases in terms of literary value and chronological gap,

one of his most well-known novels of all time *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969) and another in what seems to receive the least possible praise and his final novel *Timequake* (1997).

Once studying Vonnegut as a trauma survivor, it becomes an apt focus proving that he recovered PTSD’s devouring effects and simply formulated the fundamentals of developing PTG. In addition, shifting attention to his characters, interestingly, enables a practical hypotheses formulation to discover the details of his transformational expedition. Most of his work entailed utilizing semi-autobiographic narrative introducing characters like Kilgore Trout; a reoccurring character acknowledged by Vonnegut himself as his alter ego. While other characters like Billy Pilgrim, *Slaughterhouse-five* protagonist, were implemented to launch a reciprocal dialogue between Vonnegut’s existent happenstance, initially surviving the firebombing of Dresden, and the remote alternative ending up as Billy the ill-fated common man. Moreover, mirroring reality is Vonnegut’s essential target attempting to bend the rules in his fantasy layouts allowing the protagonists, and to some extent his unconsciousness, to experience freedom away from absolute truths that govern objective reality. Accordingly, the first part of this paper consists of reviewing the pertaining literature related to trauma studies to establish a chronological setting of concepts like PTSD and PTG respectively, and a second analytical part involving a psychoanalytic interpretation of both

novels in order to map out the gradual process of psychological positive change aligned to authorial development.

2.1. Trauma Studies: A Historical Background

The best way to understand the genealogy of trauma theory in literary context is to trace back the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society (Balaev, 2014, p. 2). Viennese school of psychoanalysis predominated as trauma studies origins trace back to Freudian concept of trauma dynamics in his *Studies in Hysteria 1895*. Freud at first described neurotic symptoms as a result of repressed drives and desires and not an outcome of traumatic events. Then, he formulated a preliminary impression that depicts traumatic symptoms as challenging to the limits of language and disruptive of meaning as a whole. Freud returned to theory of trauma more comprehensively in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle 1920* as he treated veterans of WWI conjecturing that the disruptive symptoms after war are closely related to what called a “death drive”; a biological urge towards equilibrium (Berger, 1997, p. 570). Additionally, the nature of correlation between trauma and memory became more pressuring to Freud, where he explains the concept of “latency” by 1939, and how memory of a traumatic occurrence can be forgotten over time but then resurface in a symptomatic form when triggered by similar event (Berger, 1997). Hence, Freud’s work laid the initial foundation guiding psychoanalysis to learn more about trauma

methodically all the way through the twentieth century.

Beginning with WWI, psychoanalysis attempted to track down the root of disorders related to warfare beginning with the early model ‘Shell shock’; a phenomenon which coined the first recognized war syndrome held responsible of multiple physical abnormalities caused by psychosomatic distress during the Great War. Veterans were in particular forewarned, “Not only did shell shock affect service personnel in theatre, it was also an enduring concern for returned veterans and had the potential to be a common disorder” (Jones & al., 2007, p. 4). Shell shock, also known as combat neurosis, was often ‘proscribed’ by WWII indicating how problematic the term was to be categorized (Jones & al., 2007). After World War II, postmodern context relocated the area of interest steering the scope of literary discourse to investigate subjectivity and its relationship with different truths in specially American contemporary literature. The aftermaths of WWII were more atrocious requiring scientific community to seriously contemplate trauma. Psychoanalytic approaches to literary discourse of what later became known as trauma theory by 1990’s allowed new insights to dissect the concept of trauma in literary studies.

Scholars believe that PTSD was born due to a political advocacy rather than a scientific breakthrough, Diedrich explains, “Most origin stories of the category PTSD cite the political advocacy of Vietnam War veterans in the United States as leading directly to the inclusion of PTSD in the DSM-III” (2008, p. 85). At the same time,

war in Vietnam sustained Vonnegut's strong political views against war as a whole, as one-time veteran, he emphasizes, "There is no good war" reflecting on his experience in WWII and agitated by warfare since it is utterly meaningless. *Slaughterhouse-five* assured this claim when perceived as an anti-war novel, whereas Vonnegut himself could not undeniably verify the genre of the novel at the time indicative of his own suffering symbolized in the inner struggle and how long it took him, roughly twenty years, to eventually articulate his traumatic experience. Vonnegut's purpose in *Slaughterhouse-five* was introspection and retrospection looking back from within, on top of serving as admonishment, intentionally or unintentionally, to others joining war at Vietnam because it is after all a similar event that might bring back the symptoms of his own tragedy at war.

In the 1980's PTSD became a prevalent concept among psychiatrists as a diagnostic category in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). Although it surfaced in a clinical context, PTSD continued to impact different domains and started to gain more attention. Clinical professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, Judith Herman was devoted to enlighten broader audience on the matter of traumatic studies. Her significant work "*Trauma and Recovery*" in 1992 illustrates the role of therapy during the healing process stressing the significance of connectivity between individuals, provided that the society would give a chance to listen to

those individuals allowing especially a truthful recollection of events resulting in a smooth 'process of forgetting' instead of labeling them as 'bear witness' which would lead to denial. One of the earliest works on trauma studies is : *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* in 1995 by Cathy Caruth who paved the way for a well-established endorsement of trauma theory encouraging interdisciplinary approach to trauma studies merging the efforts of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature to consider the gaps of traumatic experience (p. 4). Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* in 1996 followed to cover history of trauma including hysteria, shell shock and later on PTSD, and insists on the crucial part of literature in the theoretical expression of the very concept of trauma giving that psychoanalysis, literary theory share the twofold profound interest of describing and analyzing the traumatic experience.

Around the time of the growing popularity of PTSD, albeit some of the category dissimilarities amongst different scientific indexes (American Psychiatric Association and World Health Organization), PTG makes an appearance in mid 1990's offering new insights to Psychotraumatology. Tadeschi & Calhoun (1998), PTG pioneers, define post-traumatic growth as both a 'process' and an 'outcome', developing a cognitive mechanism to cope with psychological distress after a traumatic experience (p. 1). This process has been around for centuries in the various cultural conventions stressing the importance of positive changes that concede suffering as means of growth and wisdom (Tadeschi &

Calhoun, 1998, p. 3). Therefore, the notion of psychological growth goes back to early existential thought including Kierkegaard and Nietzsche pursuing concepts like *Amor Fati*¹ stressing the essence of growth past the existence of suffering as a necessity. This means engaging existential framework that survivors have created as a result of trauma, which means that growth might influence cognitively both the reconstruction of intellectual aptitude and perhaps even the spiritual matters. The only difference is that PTG within a clinical practice can now offer support to new patients with a manageable coping mechanism which promotes PTG as compatible with several disciplines that can help trauma survivors channel their adversities and more likely to develop positive orientations such as trauma narratives.

Trauma after-effects are often linked to the narrative's manifestations as direct influence including: fragmentation, length, temporal context, and reference to self. Trauma studies, thus, emerged to examine the literary discourse within a joint interdisciplinary vision in order to defy entropy that hit western society starting with WWII causing long-term distress and chaos mostly on an individual level. Trauma fiction, a sub-genre of trauma narratives, according to Whitehead is merely introducing the co-existing account for traumatic events and more importantly what follows as symptom formation

¹ Amor Fati: literally "love of fate" is a Nietzschean concept asking to love whatever it is that happens and what have happened to us including all sorts of horrible things.

resulting from the event (Beadling, 2005, p. 713). Furthermore, nature of trauma fiction is paradoxically appealing for it is hard enough going through such overwhelming events, so it must be really complicated to be represented in a fictional account which was reflected in Vonnegut's experience of being a prisoner-of-war (POW), an experience made him forever convinced that war has no logical vindication and changed his life once and for all. Between memories of the past, struggling unspeakability of the present moment and aspirations for the future, *Slaughterhouse-five* exhibited Vonnegut's unresolved psychological conundrum that would last till his last novel *Timequake* rendering a thin line swaying between PTSD and PTG.

2.2. Interdisciplinary Enquiry: Psychoanalysis and Trauma Narratives

The twentieth century can be properly marked as the historical context that established an interdisciplinary stance towards trauma theory and literature, Radstone argues, "Trauma theory denotes a vibrant, interdisciplinary area of Western scholarship developed since the 1980s through cross-fertilization between psychology and the humanities" (p. 1). Generally speaking, psychological trauma is usually identified as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, 2016, p.94). American contemporary literature, although not exclusively, targeted this area

calling this type of writing “Trauma Narratives” which also entails subcategories attempting to address the aftermaths of trauma, most importantly trauma fiction. Evidently, American literature is considered a fertile sphere of post trauma narrative. Herman (2009) explains, “[s]urvivors might live with a fragmented memory or a diminished sense of self, or might feel alienated (p. 42). Respectively, Vonnegut employs fragmented narrative mode and expresses himself through his protagonists as lesser version than the actual Vonnegut, and his feeling of detachment can be interpreted as a growing complexity in identifying what is important. Trauma narratives, thus, stand for a gradual expressive process that exploits profound personal experiences to authentically overcome a hardship beyond the established Freudian initial understanding of childhood trauma, repetition, and repression.

Using the psychoanalytic lens to observe trauma fiction is a promising field that enriches the interdisciplinary cooperation, and offers new contributions to literary trends and an opportunity to re-assess postmodern novels. Reading Vonnegut psychoanalytically as a trauma narrative allows new revelations on his conduct regarding the complex process to produce such a narrative. His visualization of characterizing victims of trauma lacking freewill and therefore lack of responsibility is an interesting aspect in order to illustrate PTSD’s lasting and

repetitive effects on the long term. Boer (1994) believes, “[p]robably no characters in contemporary fiction are more traumatized and emotionally damaged than those of Kurt Vonnegut” (3). Moreover, Veas-Gulani (2003) unprecedentedly intended to dig deeper into Vonnegut’s mind as she wrote ‘Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five where as the title implies a systematic attempt to profile Vonnegut’s protagonist reflecting the effect of trauma on the course of events, and provides a psychiatric reading to the three major key players of the novel: the author, the narrator and the protagonist. This threefold conceptualization point of view offers diverse angles to question Vonnegut’s ulterior motives, where he tries to be in his own shoes with someone else’s feet.

Science fiction studies affirm that trauma fiction offers a fresh lens to evaluate literary discourses, specifically in alien abduction scenarios where Luckhurst asserts that the Science-fictionalization of trauma as he puts it, can offer an insight into changing modes of conceiving contemporary subjectivity through the attributes of memory and trauma (1998, p. 48). As a case in point, Vonnegut constantly implements unusual settings for his novels for instance, the alien detail, when he arranges for the protagonist’s abduction by Tralfamadorians, who made appearance in more than once in different

novels, to establish a completely different standpoint of reality by adopting the Tralfamadorian philosophy of death, time, and meaning as a direct result of a “trance” resembling a hypnotic state experience. The reader explores the protagonist’s flashbacks travelling back and forth in time as a mode of narration that again confirms the science-fictionalization of trauma in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-five*, and merely revisiting incidents that took place after the firebombing of Dresden. Consequently, the ability of incorporating openness with PTSD shows Vonnegut’s memory maneuvering relatively and expressing traumatic growth through narrative mode which coincides with the psychiatric perspective advocating for considering positive changes after trauma.

2.3 Logotherapy: Therapeutic Principles of Growth

One significant scholarship overlapping with the study’s aim is Logotherapy. Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl shares a similar exposure to trauma similar to Vonnegut’s, as a survivor who was able to turn the same exact reasons of demise into triggers of improvement. He emphasizes finding meaning inside all moments, even more particularly the harshest of conditions. Frankl’s Logotherapy prioritizes *Will to Meaning* offering a replacement to Freud’s *Will to Pleasure* and Adler’s *Will to power* as the prime drive that label an authentic human life.

His experience at concentration camps laid the premise of his doctrine which praises meaning as the key motivation for men, and the conception of meaning above all other phenomena. Frankl also considers that happiness should not be pursued, but rather a side effect of pursuing meaningfulness in life. From an existential standpoint, and being a trauma survivor himself we can presume that Vonnegut shared Frankl’s convictions towards meaningfulness in postmodern condition. Frankl (1946) argues that The central theme of existentialism: to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and a purpose in dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself, and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes (p. 9).

The notion of making peace with fate is also highlighted in Frankl’s philosophy. In his book” *Man’s Search for Meaning*” (1946), he maps the formula of capturing meaning within suffering and even thriving when he indicates that “[e]ven the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself. He may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph” (p. 146). In other words, human beings are incapable of grasping the objective of a meaningless life, so they should be wise enough to accept the fact and chose to

construct their own subjective comprehension of a meaningful life as long as they can decide on their attitudes even in the darkest of moments; if one cannot change the deterministic circumstances of his situation, he should rather change his own perspective to a distant objective stance that accepts and appreciates the suffering.

In *Slaughterhouse-five*, Billy Pilgrim is introduced to time travel and the ways in which dimensions in outer space are different from those of the earth. Experiencing a four-dimensional world, which is beyond his understanding, allows him to move back and forth during his lifetime which seems to offer a peculiar solution to time's relativity. Little he knows he has to actually re-live every single moment as a condition in order to peacefully be satisfied with his fate. This signifies that Vonnegut's inclusion of his own survival story still troubles him, but he chooses to accept the fact that his misfortune might actually be a good coincidence. Time might construct the solution but rather in an odd conduct, Vonnegut perceives being unstuck in time as means of losing freewill (*Will to Meaning*) which according to the novel's context is what Billy should abide by. Furthermore, Vonnegut introduces time and freewill as interrelated and closely linked themes given that freewill does exist, however not beyond human limitations, it does not; compatibility is that safe space between strict determinism

and unconditional freedom of choice. Not only acknowledging the limits of human capacity as direct side effect of PTSD is what Vonnegut and Frankl have in common, but both see it preferable if trauma survivors can bounce back and move on to appreciate misfortune in order to build immunity and a create an invulnerable version of the vulnerable.

2.1. Slaughterhouse-five and Rocketing Success: Potential Trial of PTSD and PTG

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to always tell the difference."

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*,
Chapter 3

Probably the most infamous experimental novel written by Kurt Vonnegut and the steppingstone towards fame is *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969) or *Children's Crusades*. Although it was largely perceived as an anti-war novel by critics, the public and otherwise comprehensive reception of the novel stands witness on the rise of a great author. Furthermore, this period in which he wrote the novel constitutes the remission stage for Vonnegut's PTSD, where the PTG kicks in and takes over to illustrate the positive alterations after suffering. According to Calhoun and Tedeschi (2013), cognitive engagement and cognitive processing of traumatic events could be fostered by the sharing (or the "disclosure") of one's internal experience with others, (writing constitutes Vonnegut's channeling medium) as long as the individual's social environment is able to provide the

necessary support. After two decades of hesitation, Vonnegut at last came up with story to reconnect and mourn his experience properly by projecting his inner thoughts of war on his characters and shape of story.

In her book entitled: “*Trends in Literary Trauma Theory*“, Michelle Balaev (2008) explains the tenets of a trauma narrative which corresponds to Slaughterhouse-five characteristics. The main character in this novel, Billy Pilgrim, represents the nucleus component to study Vonnegut’s gushing discourse to overcome his semi-autobiographical traumatic experience in the bombing of Dresden and finding a way to cope with the consequences. As we examine Slaughterhouse-five, as a trauma narrative, which was thought by many scholars as an anti-war novel reflecting Vonnegut’s views on war, “[t]he traumatized protagonist in fiction brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values or ideologies” (Balaev, 2008, p. 155). The title “*Children’s Crudes*” alone aligns with Vonnegut’s perception of soldiers as children with neither a conscious understanding to the meaning of war nor the purpose behind it. This might suggest that the trauma novel focuses on a larger scale when trying to explore the cause-effect relationship that exceeds the individual and focuses on cultural trauma. Nonetheless, Vonnegut’s concern departed from broader to more centralized aim which is the individual struggle from within. Vonnegut’s mirroring techniques in reflecting his own traumatized psyche is a complicated option yet an extraordinary alternative as he put Billy in

the middle of unconventional construct of non-linear time flow allowing him to break through the ordinary dimensions of chronological alliance of events symbolizing the dilemma of freewill. Balaev further notes that, “Authors employ a nonlinear plot or disruptive temporal sequences to emphasize mental confusion, chaos, or contemplation as a response to the experience” (2008, p.159). The novel also delves particularly into reflecting Billy’s devastated childhood and his relationship with his parents like the incident of ‘sink-or-swim’ and his contempt for his mother no apparent reason, Brown says, “Billy’s relationship with both his mother and his father provides no familial comfort or support at any point in the book. In fact, their only mentions are negative, leaving him isolated throughout his childhood” (Brown,2011,p.103). Vonnegut’s expression, “they [Pilgrim and Rosewater] had both found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in the war” and use of the word “partly” suggests that Billy had experienced adversities prior his joining the army. If trauma is a multi-layered phenomenon tacking place across lifespan then there should be corresponding cause-effect concerning the aftermaths of trauma as well. Perceptibly, PTG is expected to gain its favorable consequences gradually. (p. 101)

"As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times."

- Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*,

Chapter 1

Vonnegut’s reluctance to be labeled as a science fiction writer suggests his effortless manner and often perceived as

silly to deliver an alienated critique of postmodern individual's ego in relation to social diminished value of meaning. *Slaughterhouse-five* presents us with three main figures for analysis: Billy Pilgrim through the eyes of the narrator who projects the author's convictions. This three-layered construct suggests a detachment feeling of fragmented psychological predicament at the time this novel was written. Billy's encounter with the Tralfamadorian aliens is probably the most significant epiphany since Vonnegut makes sure that *Fictionality* element should be a decisive plot twist to offer a serene answer to predestination and the unfortunate resonance of war and its reoccurring distress. Billy's PTSD at this point paves the way for a critical and informed debate, according to Vonnegut, as a reasonable remedy which is the power to have a choice, manifesting freedom by choosing to adopt the Tralfamadorian attitude 'why anything' and not be entirely helpless figuring out the dichotomy of freewill and predestination. However, time-travel strategy suggests a notion of escapism as a response to trauma, on in which time is non-linear and death is not perceived as a loss allowing Tralfamadorian deterministic philosophy to prevail which is maybe considered to be defeatist and empty (Gibbs, 2014, p. 58).

"If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed. Still--if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice."

- Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*,
Chapter 10

More recent critics may perceive *Slaughterhouse-five* to be a multifaceted type of storytelling that establish an ambivalent account of adversity, Earle argues, "For traumatic narratives, in which the event is often not fully uncovered or present within the story (while also not fully concealed), the palimpsest suggests a way of seeing both this (attempted) erasure and its continued presence and influence" (2022). More significant is Vonnegut's propensity to reveal a deep inner vision regarding his trauma-confrontation in Dresden and how he dealt with the highlighted wisdom Billy learned afterwards.

The novel simply introduces the first piece of science fiction by Vonnegut laying down fragmented, self-reflective and non-linear sequence of events that keeps Vonnegut's introspection, though pessimistic, alive as if it would develop to become a symptomatic pattern applicable to his upcoming novels with certain degrees of dissimilitude which will only arrive to an end with *Timequake*. This notion can be best explained by Mhoodar when he argues, "...the postmodern literature is characterized with ambiguity, complexity, and fragmented dialogue, use of black humor and, parody. The world represents a metaphor for the human status as it is seen to be unfriendly planet, but it can progress from fragmentation into integration (2021).

The meticulous use of humor and satire constitutes a great deal of unique approach of defying societal ills within the novel allowing Vonnegut to experiment and still keep such literary devices manageable and convenient in all his novels. Vonnegut's

pessimism is redeemed by humor: the joke of man's pride in how well he designed a machine to replace him, the grim humor of a frozen POW trying to don a coat ten sizes too small, the absurdity of a doomed Martian invasion (Shafi, 2017).

2.2. *Timequake hit Vonnegut hard: Premeditated Farewell*

Beginning with Freudian theory of psychoanalysis to the DSM official account on trauma disorders, repetition is one of the most pertinent symptoms of PTSD. In this context, Vonnegut's repetitive scenarios while addressing the issue of trauma are hard to miss. Addressing such sensitive issues in several novels and short stories might be indicative of the truth that the lasting effects of tragic experiences are invigorating his recurring plot. One of Vonnegut's most distinguished contributions is the ground-breaking timeline of storytelling. He believes in non-linear account of events that it becomes completely reasonable that his last product of literature is not his finest which is somewhat ironic. Towards the end of his career, the satirist mastermind found himself in a void loop preventing further revelations about himself and forcing his own characters to relive the unfortunate fate although in dissimilar circumstantial visions. Therefore, *Timequake* is more autobiographic, unlike *Slaughterhouse-five*, offering the only thing that was possibly new to the reader, which is transparency and openness on personal imperfections and limitations as a changed person and not an author.

The story goes about a global Timequake that takes place in New York City on February 2001, causing time to wind up back in 1991 forcing everyone to endure a decade of déjà-vu experience on auto-pilot mode with the absence of freewill. Vonnegut describes life in *Timequake* as "preposterous" while he wonders; "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? every, every minute?" (p. 43) Drawing attention to healthier approach to see the reality of the world, although it seems pessimistic, it is a sincere symptom of maturity and wisdom. Being his last novel, *Timequake* is discerned as a farewell to commemorate his legacy and announce his retreat. However, it is criticized for being the least creative novel Vonnegut has ever written regarding the excessive repetition of science-fictional elements and narrative display. Many consider this novel more autobiographic, simply because there is no plot and merely an account or a memoir of Vonnegut's personal experience over the years, where he attempted to contemplate his own life and discuss several sensitive themes such as freewill, death, trauma, regret and many more.

The novel is basically a replica, in terms of thematic baseline, of Vonnegut's previous novels except, being a semi-autobiography, it delves more into his memories of different tragedies and reveals personal ailment across his lifespan. While the plot is about a Timequake that erupts and forces the characters to re-live the past ten years, an apparently reoccurring theme of freewill in Vonnegut's narratives, it shows at the same time his attempt to honor his literary heritage by accounting for his utmost

sensible life experiences and the type of events behind his wisdom. Temporal Distortion is used in postmodern fiction in which fragmentation and non-linear narratives are central. In many cases, the use of this technique in postmodern fiction is in a variety of ways to create irony (Mhoodar, 2021). With this recollection of events; the author is stepping out of his comfort zone which had always been humor and satire in order to address life more sincerely and to openly restore the genuine sense of meaning. Thus, this novel offers the fact of impracticality to break away from reality through metafictional aspirations to find easier answers; instead acknowledges the severity of life which can be adjusted to pursue meaningfulness after all. Repetition can be regarded from a psychiatric perspective as a symptom of psychological distress that covers all traumatic events across Vonnegut's lifespan, yet Vonnegut's persistence on recreating parallel universes and several versions of himself, this, manifests Vonnegut's coping strategy and his authentic way of exploring the self. Trout, who Vonnegut describes as *alter ego*, when informed that Timequake's was over said, "Oh, Lordy! I am much too old and experienced to start playing Russian roulette with free will again." (p. 24) this is how Vonnegut perceived his routine of writing novels that have so much in common, funny and smart technique of ventilation, and preferring the cycle of repetition to cope with PTSD and insinuating that Timequake was actually a free choice being indifferent.

Towards the end of Timequake, Kilgore Trout seems to be the only one capable to

crack the syndrome of ennui as he repeats: "You were sick, but now you're well again, and there's work to do." (p. 116) Trout urges the others, after the Timequake was over and they have restored control over their decisions, signifying that hope still exists and symbolizing the hero figure. The loss of freewill in this example points out the tedious nature of routine in modern life, Vonnegut is trying to propose a solution to his earlier detachment issues by advertising the hero figure personified by Trout opposing the anti-hero figure in Slaughterhouse-five Billy pilgrim. His alter ego was in control for a long time telling the story over and over again disallowing Vonnegut to naturally recollect and narrate the events of his traumatic story in the most truthful way possible. Moreover, therapy in Herman's "*Trauma and Recovery*" insists on the 'smooth letting go process' which Vonnegut is finally able to do in Timequake divulging sensitive details about his personal life in the precise sequence they occurred, this allows memory to process traumas as honestly as possible allowing the individual to connect to others by choosing to heard rather than allow prejudice to contaminate his story of growth and give himself a verdict being forever vulnerable. Vonnegut's depiction here comes to disregard all the previous versions he offered in his previous novels making sure that self-reflective account should address the issue.

Vonnegut's final novel is often described as less creative for he was "growing old" and "finding it difficult to write". He mention at the very beginning that Timequake is product of failing first

version often referred to as '*Timequake one*', definitely did not the accustomed praise similar to his previous 18 books, but rather a "brilliant and celebratory benediction to the country he unashamedly loves, and to the struggling humane culture he continues to salute and sustain And if that isn't nice, what is?" (Rackstraw, 1997, p. 43) This reception was and still is bare witness of how mature Vonnegut departed with such blunt conclusion; things for him can't get better than this given that the past did not guarantee the present moment to begin with, and that conviction is on its own is a valid proof of growth.

3.1 Trauma Immunity and Psychological Development

Psychological theory has always targeted the different stages of development of the individual's psyche. Several theories were presented to explain the system behind human personality evolution and the way it works. What is relevant for this paper is Erikson's development theory in relation to psychoanalytic scheme of analyzing the characters' progress rate. The psychological state of Vonnegut's characters is the main concern as one delves into the analysis of the reflections adopted from his own suffering and his path of healing over the years. Writing, for him provides a safer recovery plan where he allows his fictitious inner-characters to be voiced again and again expressing how difficult it was to tell what happened, "I came home in 1945, started writing about it, and wrote about it, and *wrote about it*, and WROTE ABOUT IT" (Allen, 1988, p.163) In this aspect, each character is a mere simulation to what alternative

choices would have occurred and to what end those choices could have altered the outcome.

Breaking down the phenomenon of trauma can have two paradoxical facets, one is a sense of being vulnerable once facing mortality and the other which is more likely what Vonnegut emphasizes, one which Robert J Lifton describes as "[t]he survivor can retain an opposite image of having met death and conquered it, a sense of *reinforced invulnerability*"(p. 481). One can consider this sign of development as a step forward in the psychology of a trauma survivor. Unlike normal happenstance, the survivor is being exposed to significant test of endurance which can, similar to Vonnegut; provide solid evidence for post-traumatic positive change. A recent study shows that PTG can be experience during later life crisis or across lifespan and historical wartime traumas. This hypothesis inclines the traces of PTG in older adults such as Vonnegut, and it also indicates that PTG can affect the individual gradually across his lifespan (Kadri et al., 2020). Vonnegut's journey from atrocities during wartime in Slaughterhouse-five all the way to more peaceful reconciliation with the outcome of his career in *Timequake* implies that PTG is a gradual process of recovery that does not neglect symptoms of adversity, but rather accept and embrace them as an advanced sign of recovery and a valid evidence of personality development in late life.

When we examine Erikson's work on personality development, it is idiosyncratically clear that he is one of few to study the stages over the person's whole lifespan instead of only focusing on

childhood or adulthood stages. The final stage of development in Erikson's model in which he highlights: *Integrity vs. Despair* crisis is of a great importance to the current discussion i.e., whether to accept lived life as it is or mourn the paths not taken in life. Clayton notes "Erikson did formulate an eighth stage with the concomitant virtue of wisdom" (1975, p. 120) stressing how much attention Erikson gave to wisdom-related characteristics in late stage gains. Notably, projecting Vonnegut's final novel (*Timequake*) as a farewell being written in his late years, and being a trauma survivor himself, he seeks to abridge his experience by writing this novel unconventionally. Reflecting his wisdom and dismantling his most emotional losses are his anecdotes to echo growth and serenity.

PTSD as a concept represents the reaction along with side effects to traumatic incidents with the uniqueness of each individual's counter-response. Centrality of events might also give us some insight into the inner struggle of trauma survivors, considering trauma a significant part of identity knowing that the victim tries to integrate the experience to define the person he is. Although PTSD and PTG share the same foundational generative events, they take different paths," The finding that, in the aftermath of a trauma, centrality of event contributes to both distress and growth may at first seem paradoxical. Posttraumatic symptoms and PTG were not significantly correlated, suggesting that, although centrality may contribute to the development of both, distress and growth can exist independently of one another" (Groleau et al., 2013, p.481). A post-traumatic

transformation can be considered as an important stage of personality development for those who went through such events. Kurt Vonnegut is a major figure that can be studied as an archetypal example of the individual gradual transformation on both levels: personal and professional, the two dimensions that are strongly interrelated and cannot stand without each other.

As for the professional facet, Vonnegut is fortunate for being in the middle of such a psychological crisis as the outcome is very much compensated with an outstanding career.

His contemplative autobiographical and experimental forms of narration are and still a trademark honoring his legacy. Interestingly, Vonnegut's attempts to heal are explored through his distinctive characters who allow him to shake off the inner fear that haunts him, and answer, to some extent, his most omnipresent questions on existing. The autobiographical interjections also profoundly contribute to screening the positive affirmations and give Vonnegut a sense of relief with the incremental growth and peacefully concluding his work with a sincere exhibition of wisdom in *Timequake*. On the other hand, and on a personal level, Vonnegut never gives the impression of an absolute answer to his individual angst and the purposefulness of being, where he writes bluntly "we are here to help each other through this, whatever it is." (2005, p.50). This quote stands as a demonstration of an overall and fixed capacity of understanding the existential consisting ambiguity.

3.2. *Post-Traumatic Growth and Positive Personality Change under the scope*

Several scholarly attempts were devoted to examine PTG theory methodologically,” empirical research provides limited evidence that adversity reliably leads to improved psychological functioning” (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Mangelsdorf, Eid, & Luhmann, 2019). This concept is known in the field of Positive Psychology as post-traumatic growth, and it was first formally conceived by Psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun in the mid-1990s. Roughly 70% of those who experience trauma will undergo some type of post-traumatic growth on their journey to recovery (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Whereas this claim goes for considering PTG as post-hoc, Jayawickreme and Blackie(2014) also add that “researchers should examine PTG in terms of personality change; that is, changes in any set of “relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that reflect the tendency to respond in certain ways under certain circumstances” (Roberts, 2009, p. 140). This tendency constitutes a balanced review of PTG’s limitations and suggests a practical assessment especially on a personality development level. Infurna and Jayawickreme (2019) thus add, “While PTG does not necessarily have to be defined in terms of positive personality change to study it more rigorously, doing so opens a set

of interesting questions that can be answered through a personality framework. For example, adopting a personality framework allows us to examine whether changes in people’s life narratives or changes in momentary manifestations of thoughts, feelings and behavior following the experience of adversity leads to changes in specific personality traits.

Signs of recovery according to Herman (1998) can be summarized into three main stages: Establishing Safety, Remembrance and Mourning and Reconnection and Commonality”. Additional recent clinical practices stress the importance of narrative identity, in other words, how the traumatized person would narrate his story and how the narrative would echo safety and healing cues. Foley (2015) argues,” The capacity of metaphor to lessen the strong and negative response to memories of trauma may make it an ideal therapeutic intervention for veterans with PTSD who have difficulty disclosing their experiences. We will now consider studies that have made such therapeutic use of metaphors” (p. 3). Correspondingly, what is better than Vonnegut’s satirical approach! He implements metaphor effectively as a tool to deliver stronger outlook and build-up an optimistic stance, in which, there are signs of improvement in Vonnegut’s narrative identity that help us recognize his

gradual path of recovery and owning trauma as necessary means from PTSD to PTG.

As branch of positive psychology, PTG is still unfamiliar to literary discourse while psychologists are gradually progressing towards expanding the scope of research beyond clinical practice as an attempt to level the degree of scrutiny applied by psychoanalytical approach for instance. Vonnegut's novelty is not exclusive to the unorthodox thematic dialogue addressed in his novels and short stories; instead it is all about how and when he chooses to push against his own anxieties, whether psychological or existential, to create an asylum for his utmost cherished wisdom. By the end of his career, Vonnegut was proven correct by his own distinctive approach of storytelling. His personal and professional life knew ups and downs and neither of which could promise persistence as Vonnegut's conviction on shapes of stories already pointed. His last novel was not his best, his encounter with trauma did not destroy him, and his closure was latent as a result of understanding that there is not one. Vonnegut was able to weather the storm focusing fairly on his survival and value growth motions as a determined fate rather than lament something beyond his control.

Any theory is possibly prone to criticism with the intention of verifying its claims looking for significant shortcomings. Taking into account PTG, one must ask if it is a conclusive outcome of any sort of adversity and

whether one should abide by the collected answers. On a pragmatic level there are some interventions normalizing PTG's affirmative associations with stigma as an essential medium for growth when, for instance Dickinson explains," On a federal level, such psychoeducation is being provided by the Department of Defense's 'Real Warriors' Campaign, which encourages active duty service members and veterans to seek help for mental health issues, and normalizes reactions to trauma with access to academic articles and videos on typical human reactions to adverse events" (2021). PTG seems to compel an assertive and reassuring explanation to what PTSD can possibly offer from an optimistic standpoint. Dickinson further adds," Happily, the stigma surrounding mental health issues has begun to reduce in recent decades. This can be interestingly seen in the existence and timeline of the PTSD diagnosis" (2021). However, it would only be convenient to consider the long-lasting positive effects and the extent a person can overcome the overwhelming traces of psychological wounds and existential bewilderment around the whole experience of embracing suffering. Benefits and actual transformation may cause a certain controversy when we discuss trauma aftereffects as clarified Dursun and Söylemez," For example, the individual may take better care of his/her physical health after recovery may stop using drugs or may want to spend more time with

friends. These changes are undoubtedly important and valuable but may not involve a deeply personal transformation” (2020). Therefore, a thoroughly in-depth examination should verify the difference between standardized benefits and profound clues of psychological transformation. Giving that Vonnegut’s case was more protracted since it took him decades to embrace traumatic ‘stigma’ as reinforcement, we can claim that Vonnegut’s psychological immunity took a really fundamental and hard turn indicating significant signs of vigorous personal growth. Stanford health psychologist, Kelly McConigal (2016), argues that,

“the best way to manage stress isn’t to reduce or avoid it, but rather to rethink and even embrace it” (p, 12). McConigal’s solution can only makes us wonder, the most remarkable part which does exist in PTSD and not in PTG is STRESS, and whether embracing stress is the key answer hiding in plain sight towards healing.

. CONCLUSION

Post-traumatic Growth does not guarantee an absolute closure to trauma survivors as is evident in Vonnegut’s portrayal of the psychological development of his characters. Instead, the gradual amendments to PTSD’s reoccurring symptoms as in the Slaughterhouse-five notes and the compensational scenery behind

Timequake’s odd style are undeniable proofs of the maturation process Vonnegut and his characters have reached. Moreover, positive alternations within the process of overcoming trauma can be developed, i.e. an adaptive process suggesting that coping-skills can be taught. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Vonnegut’s alter ego, as implied by some critics, is allowed to take part in his fictive scenarios to create a remote imaginary paradise distant from the anguish of reality only to retreat and acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the soul from the irrefutable inconvenience of objective reality.

The two novels are distinctively two faces of the same coin as Vonnegut attempts to explicitly and implicitly defy psychological wounds of trauma by channeling his inner thoughts through science-fictionalized recreations of trauma. Vonnegut’s prolonged journey towards healing is not only radiant with resilience that leads to personal and professional growth, but also made him correspondingly serene with not having a closure. Trauma fiction, thus, is a therapeutic measurement that aligns with one, and most fitting for this study, of the three therapeutic reflections on PTG process highlighted by Dursun and Söylemez’s study, “...the third is the fact that sense can be made of suffering, and that these painful

experiences may enable gaining an Eudaimonic approach, a deeper personal, relational and spiritual awareness, and a wiser life orientation (Frankl 1963, Hall et al. 2010). Consequently, Vonnegut's characters, introspectively, from an existential angle and that of psychotherapy, are more likely to illustrate a valid version of positive growth following crisis allowing the self to indulge what could have been and simultaneously be content with the actual outcome.

While the majority of the previous literature reveals plenty of discussions on PTSD's effect on Vonnegut, there are no precise inquiries addressing the theme of PTG within the same aspect. However, a recent study made an effort to quantify the ubiquity of PTG in particular, and according to this bibliometric analysis focusing on research involving PTG from 1996 to 2020, an increasing number of researchers have begun to focus on PTG even cancer survivors which would greatly enhance understandings for PTG and carry out more in-depth researches (Kou et al., 2021). The fact that the study has 2596 references associated with PTG is even more compelling. The body of research on PTG's increasing popularity in the scientific community points to new avenues for understanding the positive changes that Vonnegut's case—as a

PTG case rather than just a consumed PTSD study—contains.

Furthermore, PTG comes to a common ground with the principles of Logotherapy. The fact that suffering should not be perceived as an agonizing chronic condition, but rather a new beginning towards achieving freedom to will, the will to build one's own construct of reality where meaning is the goal while happiness and prosperity are the side effects of such an endeavor. Thus, Vonnegut's fictional journey in accordance to the previous philosophical underpinnings are an attempt closest to remedy most of PTSD lasting effects and commemorate trauma as necessary causality. It is okay not to have all the answers as long as the answers obtained can cherish all moments as meaningful and abundant by choice.

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