

Trauma and Literature
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Lecture - 50
Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five - Part 1

This is an NPTEL course titled “Trauma and Literature” on Vonnegut’s novel, “Slaughterhouse-Five”. We will look at how it is very attitudinally similar to “Catch-22” by Joseph Heller. The setting of the novel was Second World War. “Slaughterhouse-Five” is to be set around the Second World War. But actually it is a critique of the Vietnam War and emerged around the same time as the Vietnam War.

We find if we juxtapose those two novels Heller’s “Catch-22” and Vonnegut’s “Slaughterhouse-Five” we find they are very similar in terms of the way trauma is represented, in terms of the way the traumatized subject is represented through comedy, through dark humor, through the laughter of exhaustion, and also in a very postmodernist play of space and time.

We will find how this book has the carnivalesque quality about space and time in terms of how the sequences of the novel in terms of plot, actions are very non-chronological in quality. It almost has a magic realist quality. There is a magical space, magical planet from where peace comes from.

The site of the Second World War and the historical side of the Dresden bombing when the Allied forces bombed Dresden that becomes almost a centerpiece of the novel. That becomes an important event in the novel. As mentioned, Vonnegut himself was a war veteran. A large part of the representations in his novel drawn on from those experiences.

That makes it more for scouting satire. This particular novel is actually a satire or critique of the Vietnam War. Although it pretends to be a Second World War novel, it pretends to be a novel set in some of the space some of the planet, but is actually about the Vietnam War. It is a historical critique, a social critique of that particular war.

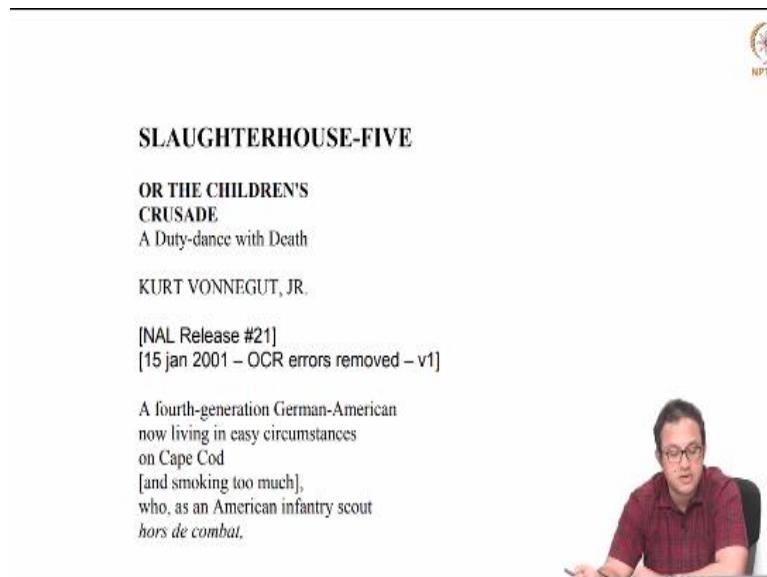
The Vietnam War was a very complex war in American history. It has been critiqued as a war of an active invasion, which is immoral in quality, unethical in quality. There was a lot of backlash that America faced at the level of foreign policy, at the level of international criticism on the war.

But also from a medical perspective, from a sort of medical political perspective the Vietnam War is also important because it introduced the term PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder. Prior to that, there was no such classified term. We saw how in “Mrs. Dalloway” by Virginia Woolf, the idea of the classification which was used was shell shock, which is the way to define the symptoms of a traumatized soldier.

There is a question of masculinity, there is a question of the soldier not being manly enough, and the lack of heroism. But when it comes to Vietnam War, we find that it became such a big symptom that the military medical vocabulary had to come up with a term and that was PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder.

We will look at the opening “Slaughterhouse-Five” in particular, the very postmodern playful opening. We will have an essay and at a critical essay to examine the novel in some more details.

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The subtitle of the novel is interesting “Slaughterhouse-Five”, or the “Children’s Crusade”, a duty dance with death. There is this dance macabre quality about this

novel. This is a sort of children's crusade like quality of the novel as well. The sort of quasi biblical ring to it. The quasi pilgrim ring to it is interesting because the protagonist is also called Pilgrim, Billy Pilgrim.

It is sort of focalized through his eyes, although Kurt Vonnegut as an author is also present in a very postmodern way in his other narrative. He often draws attention to himself as the writer of this. There is this quality of crusade, there is this quality of mighty adventure, but also the proximity with death, the duty dance with death. That is part of the irony in the novel.

That the whole idea of military adventure, the whole idea of military masculinity is a duty dance with death. We are always dancing with death as an act of duty. We will talk about the quality of duty, heroism, honor, masculinity in a moment when we sort of go further in.

This novel along with such a compelling depiction of trauma and war is also a very scouting satire and military masculinity. It completely deconstructs and debunks the myth of military masculinity in terms of how the sort of heroism, the nobility, or the glamour of military masculinity is completely taken off. It is completely undercut by the representations in the novel.

It is very similar to what we saw in Heller's novel "Catch-22", where instead of military heroism, we have a sort of cynicism of the highest order, very dark humor cynicism. That dark humor in Heller's novel, that irreverent cynicism in Heller's novel actually accentuates the trauma.

We discussed that when we read the novel that instead of making it profound and tragic, what Heller does, it makes it pathetic and emptied of meanings and its emptiness and exhaustion of meanings is what makes the trauma more insufferable, more moving, and more disturbing for readers. We find something similar happening in "Slaughterhouse-Five" as well.

This is more of a deliberately postmodern take on war. There is no temporality, there is no temporal sequence. There is no chronology per se. But it is all jumbled up and

inhabits different space and time, this imaginary space. This is a planet called Tralfamadore, which is this fictional magic realist planet. We can see that in the title itself.

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[NAL Release #21]
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A fourth-generation German-American
now living in easy circumstances
on Cape Cod
[and smoking too much],
who, as an American infantry scout
hors de combat,
as a prisoner of war,
witnessed the fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany,
'The Florence of the Elbe,'
a long time ago,
and survived to tell the tale.
This is a novel
somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic
manner of tales
of the planet Tralfamadore,
where the flying saucers
come from.

This is little short description, almost a blurb of the novel, where it says, “a fourth-generation German American now living in easy circumstances on Cape Cod, and smoking too much, who was an American infantry scout, *hors de combat*, as a prisoner of war witnessed the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, the Florence of the Elbe a long time ago, and survived to tell the tale.

This is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from peace.” Interestingly, this is largely autobiographical in quality, as mentioned. Vonnegut himself who was a veteran in the Second World War and he himself experience the Dresden bombing, but he survived it, because he was a prisoner.

He was a German prisoner, taken by the Germans, and he was inside a cellar as a result of which he survived the Dresden bombings which the allies did during the Second World War. This whole story can be seen as an act of reconstruction from that traumatic moment of being bombed by one’s own forces, and that sort of complicates the whole friend enemy binary in the war.

Because on one hand, he was about to be killed by his own forces, because he was a prisoner in war and he was sort of captured by the Germans. But because he was captured by the Germans, because he was put inside the cellar, he survived the bombings of his own army. That really problematizes and blurs the border lines between friend and enemy, insider and outsider, which is the whole point of this novel.

Because in a certain sense, that is the postmodern pluralism, that is the postmodern polyphony, that do not quite know the difference between the inside and the outside, between the friend and the foe, between the attacker and the sufferer, and everyone dies in the war and war kills everyone. There is no winner in the war per se. That is the whole philosophy in this novel.

The war does not leave any winners. They are just survivors and dead people and everyone loses in the war. But, what makes this novel gloomier and more dark in a postmodern sense is this sort of tragic comic quality, this play of sequences, the play with temporality, and this non-chronological narrative strategy to which everything is depicted through the eyes of Billy Pilgrim.

The writer, Kurt Vonnegut, who sort of constantly implants himself in the novel per se. This is first published in 1969, around the time of the Vietnam War. But the way in which the Vietnam War, the real war is distanced from and the whole idea of the historical war is moved away from and then is spoken from the position of another war, the Second World War.

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One



All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names.

I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967. It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, and we made friends with a taxi driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoner of war. His name was Gerhard Müller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

He sent O'Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:



But it is representing the Vietnam War, the futility, the immorality of Vietnam War, from the American perspective. Several critics who said this is one of the biggest antiwar novels written around that time.

There was a lot of antiwar protests which were happening around the Vietnam War, inside America and also from the international community that war was severely critiqued, massively critiqued in terms of an immoral illegitimate war. America got a lot of backlash in terms of military backlash as well as from international societies.

Including the UN was seen as an act of immoral invasion. This is sort of illegality about the war. There is guilt about the war which informs a trauma in a certain sense. Because Vietnam War, as mentioned, is sort of the macro moment in military history, in American history where the medicalization of trauma, military trauma, the medicalization of military masculinity reaches a climactic point with the classification of PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder.

It is against this backdrop that we have this novel, this so tragic, comic, darkly funny novel, a carnivalesque novel about heroism and the futility of heroism, the futility of existence. This flights of imagination, the flights of fantasy through which peace was seen as something that belongs to another planet. It does not inhabit. It does not belong to the planet Earth anymore.

That is part of the cynicism that is part of the gloom, part of the depression around that time, which is also the time in which lots of protests, lots of rebellion against Western imperialism, lots of rebellion against American imperialism were happening. This work of fiction is very much situated in that rebellious moment. We find that how this sort of the opening is quite metafictional in quality, in the opening chapter.

The opening is quite constructed in quality. It draws attention to the writer, it draws attention to the act of writing, which is a classic postmodernist strategy. The opening sentence is interesting. There is ambivalence about it. It starts with, the first half of the sentence, pronounces something else true, all this happened.

The second part of the sentence just approximates that. It says, more or less. It is an approximation. It is an articulation of approximation. It is not trying to suggest all this has happened. But then it is also warning us and advising us to acknowledge that this is sort of more or less is an approximation.

Now whether it does at a very fundamental level is that it talks about how truth is always an act of approximation. How reality is an act of approximation. The only access to reality, the only access to truth, it can only be through an act of approximation and nothing else. We cannot access truth as a universal construct.

There is no universal truth, there is no reality apart from what is insufficiently experienced, what is apart from what is approximately articulative. That quality of approximation, ambivalence and insufficiency is very much there planted in a very opening sentence in the novel. All this happened, more or less.

The war parts anyway, are pretty much true. "One guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a tea pot that was not his. Another guy I knew really did threaten to leave his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war, and so on. I have changed all the names." This starts off as we can see from the position of almost a pseudo-memoires in quality.

It sort of tries to present itself as something of a memoire, something of an account that what happened to that character who is now a writer. But interestingly and when

we just look at the similarities and convergences between this novel and “Catch-22”. The third sentence shows that someone was shot because he was taking a tea pot that was not his.

It almost has a funny quality to it and almost a tragic comic quality to accept that it is not comic, it is actually quite tragic. This is quite similar to “Catch-22” where a tragedy emerges or death emerges or loss emerges, not necessarily out of profound activities, but out of very flippant activities, very domestic mundane activities, which goes on to show how trauma is just becomes a norm, trauma becomes a daily discourse of living in this wartime conditions.

It is not something which needs to have a profound shape, which needs to have a *raison d’etre*, which needs to have some rationale. It just can be a very irrational event, an act of accident. The trauma, loss, tragedy can emerge out of little acts of accident. Someone who took the tea pot that was not his and got shot.

“Another guy I knew, really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war and so on. I have changed all the names. So the violence of the war, how that got extended after the war, when someone wanted to hire a personal gunman and kill all his enemies.” We are told that names have been changed. “I really did go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money, God love it, in 1967.”

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really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names.

I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967. It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, and we made friends with a taxi driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoner of war. His name was Gerhard Müller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

He sent O'Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:

'I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.'

I like that very much: 'If the accident will.'

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and



“It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces that Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.” The way in which the sort of carnivalesque quality of mixing up positives, negatives, mixing up nice serene features and shocking shuddering features; they converge together in the same way as they do in Heller’s novel “Catch-22”.

We are told that when he went back to Dresden, much later in 1967 decades after the Second World War, it looked a lot like Ohio, and lots of open spaces, no open than Ohio. It was nice and scenic and pleasant, except for the fact that he knows that there must be tons of human bone meal in the ground. So lots of corpses must be buried in the ground.

The constant proximity to death and as mentioned at the beginning, this sort of duty dance of death, “your duty bound to dance with death”. It means you are always already dead in a symbolic way. And that is a whole part of military masculinity. There is a whole part of the heroism of military masculinity that it entails a duty dance with death.

It entails compulsory, dance with dead, a compulsory movement with death, compulsory function with death. And that just becomes part of the norm. And even an open space like, Dresden the proximity to death is always there. And there is also a spectral quality. This is a ghost town. It is sort of built out of human bones. It is built out of human corpses.

It is built out of human dead bodies. It is built out of deadness. Everything that has grown in Dresden all the years after the Second World War has grown out of deadness, has grown out of spectrality, has grown out of absence. So this ghostly quality about Dresden, which is being a hint to that. I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V O’Hare, and we made friends with a taxi driver who took us to a slaughterhouse where we have been locked up at night as prisoner of war.

This is a symbolic site, the slaughterhouse where Vonnegut himself was taken as prisoner in Dresden. His name was Gerhard Muller. And we find that in the beginning of the novel, this is sort of dedicated, this book is dedicated to Muller, a German

person. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under communism.

He said it was terrible at first because everybody had to work so hard, and because there was not much shelter or food or clothing, but things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

We can see how the constant commingling, the constant convergence between the pleasant positive orders and the negative shocking orders so go on. We are told that things have become a bit better in Dresden and the communism has become bearable according to this person.

His mother was his daughter is getting good education, that is a good thing but his mother was burned to death in a fire, in a Dresden fire-storm. It is this constant ambivalences, this constant mixing of negativity and positivity, this constant mixing of destruction and aspiration; that is what happens after this after the war.

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he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.



He sent O'Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:

'I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.'

I like that very much: 'If the accident will.'

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.

But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then-not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either, when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons full grown. I think of how useless the Dresden-part of my memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about, and I am reminded of the famous limerick:



“He sent O’Hara a postcard at Christmas time and here it here is what it said. I wish you and your family also as your friend Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and hope that we will meet again in a world of peace and freedom in a taxicab if the accident will. I like that very much, if the accident will.” It is to notice instead of how, instead of God will, what it says the postcard says “if accident will”.

This is why we are looking at the opening with some attention. It talks about the accidental condition of human existence. The human existence is almost always already an accident. It emerges out of accidents. Birth is an accident, death is an accident, and life is an accident. And what time reminds us is something that we always already know that we are just products of accidents.

So, instead of any divine design any metaphysical design with controlling our fate, what is acknowledged over here that if it is a will of an accident, we will meet again. This bit of the randomness principle, the chaos theory of human existence is something which is articulated, and it is so in your face, and it is highlighted or foregrounded.

This is what seems attractive and honest to Vonnegut as a writer. “I would hate to tell you, what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time.”

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Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.

I like that very much: 'If the accident will.'

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*There was a young man from Stamboul,
Who soliloquized thus to his tool,
'You took all my wealth
And you ruined my health,
And now you won't pee, you old fool'*



“When I got home from the Second World War 23 years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do was to report what I had seen. And I thought too that it would be a masterpiece, or at least make me a lot of money since the subject was so big.” This is a bit in the novel where he is addressing, Vonnegut is addressing the reader directly.

“He is saying when I came back from the war, I thought it is just going to be a cakewalk, a very easy thing to write about Dresden because I was held as a prisoner. I thought just recount, reconstruct, remember, whatever happened and just write about it and it will make me famous and bring me a lot of money.” But instead, what we are told by him is that this book cost him a lot of anxiety.

He describes this book as a lousy little book, and that is interesting because that irreverence, that cynical irreverence to trauma is something which we will see even happening in Heller’s “Catch-22” where it is so traumatized, it is so full of trauma, it is so numbed to the trauma that even the profundity of trauma, the glamour of tragedy, the darkness of trauma just disappears entirely.

We have is just one cynical survivor’s guilt, one cynical survivor self, which just talks about how the little things little accidents made him survive. That still makes him hollow to the core. And that hollowness, the existential hollowness is very much there as part of the traumatic condition.

And what is interesting is that how that existential hollowness connects to the more macro hollowness of the war where we are just fighting a futile war, where war is just seen as an act of invasion and greed, corruption, and just entirely about the futility of power, the futility to expand one’s power and become more powerful.

The interesting thing over here is how this book per se, this novel per se, is seen as something of a failed enterprise, is seen as some kind of a personal project, which do not really work. That cynicism, that meta-fictional postmodern cynicism is very much there as a principal attitude in the novel. He thought it would be a masterpiece, or at least make me a lot of money as the subject was so big.

“But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then, not enough for them to make a book anyway. And not many words come now either when I become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls with his sons full grown. I think of how useless the Dresden part of the memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about. And I am reminded of the famous limerick.”

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old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons full grown. I think of how useless the Dresden-part of my memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about, and I am reminded of the famous limerick:



*There was a young man from Stamboul,
Who soliloquized thus to his tool,
'You took all my wealth
And you ruined my health,
And now you won't pee, you old fool'*

And I'm reminded, too, of the song that goes

*My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.
The people I meet when I walk down the street,
They say, 'What's your name?'*



“There was a young man from Stamboul, who soliloquized thus to his tool. You took all my wealth and you ruined my health and now you would not pee you old fool. And I am reminded too of the song that goes my name is Yon Yonson. I work in Wisconsin. I walk in a lumbermill there. The people I meet when I walk down the street they say, what is your name?”

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*And I say,
'My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin...*

And so on to infinity.
Over the years, people I've met have often asked me what I'm working on, and I've usually replied that the main thing was a book about Dresden.
I said that to Harrison Starr, the movie-maker, one time, and he raised his eyebrows



“And I say my name is Yon Yonson. I work in Wisconsin, and so on to infinity”. There is a reason why we have this two nonsense poems, why we have this two limericks over here. The first one is a very vulgar, limerick about this male genitalia, and the old idea of decadence and senility and the second one is the again vulgar Limerick about forgetfulness and repetitive rituals.

The reason why these two limericks juxtapose together and they so come right after the terrible tragedy that this person has suffered is because it talks about the futility of remembrance. It talks about the futility of narrative. It talks about the futility of storytelling and it is also talking about the purpose to preserve and experience through stories and this temptation, the seduction to move away to nonsense.

This temptation to sort of merge with nonsense and also he is reminded of the famous limericks which the singsong nonsense rhymes, which seems to be seem to make more sense to him than his remembrance of things past. It is how the terrible tragedy of Dresden where he was himself a part of.

Where he experienced a bombing experience, sense of being trapped. He experienced a sense of this near death experience, how that does not lend itself to a narrative. How it does not lend itself to this shape of a narrative. And how frustrating that is and to remember something which had happened to him and trying to remember something which he experienced, and yet not being able to say it.

And that futility, that purposelessness, that inability to say what one means is exactly what makes this novel, an act of futility, an act of purposelessness and that is what tempts him. And that is what reminds him of the singsong nonsense rhymes about endlessness and decadence and senility and forgetfulness, and purposelessness and exhaustion.

The two limericks at the beginning of the novel, they are quite symbolic, and they play important functions in the novel in terms of suggesting to us how meaningful narratives can always be elusive in quality, especially when it comes through a traumatic memory, how to produce meaningfulness, and how to produce meanings out of narratives might just be a distant dream.

The easier, the more tempting, the more purposeful the more pointed act of representation may just be limericks, which does not make any sense. But they just are the sound bites, when one recounts traumatic memory.

In other words, the difficulty to convert a traumatic memory into narrative memory, the difficulty or the near impossibility to convert a traumatic experience into a narrative shame is suggested over here. It is foregrounded over here, especially highlighted by the appearance of these two limericks, this singsong nonsense rhymes about masculine exhaustion and endlessness and this ad infinitum quality about names and identities and purposefulness.



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I work in Wisconsin...

And so on to infinity.
Over the years, people I've met have often asked me what I'm working on, and I've usually replied that the main thing was a book about Dresden.
I said that to Harrison Starr, the movie-maker, one time, and he raised his eyebrows and inquired, 'Is it an anti-war book?'
'Yes,' I said. 'I guess.'
'You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing anti-war books?'
'No. What do you say, Harrison Starr?'
'I say, "Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?"'
What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that too.

And, even if wars didn't keep coming like glaciers, there would still be plain old death.

When I was somewhat younger, working on my famous Dresden book, I asked an old war buddy named Bernard V. O'Hare if I could come to see him. He was a district attorney in Pennsylvania. I was a writer on Cape Cod. We had been privates in the war, infantry, canoe. We had never expected to make any money after the war, but we were



We see at the beginning, in the very opening chapter, and the reason why we spend some time with it is the futility of war, the exhaustion of war and the numbed condition that trauma creates and that is very similar again to “Catch-22”.

We have the character Yossarian and the other colonels around Yossarian, where they are so numbed by trauma, by consuming trauma at a daily level that they sort of they play little rituals, they invent little rituals and limericks, and different ludic narratives, playful narratives, ludic is playful, just to make fill in the time, fill in the space, just to make some kind of a pseudo meaning of their existence.

The war has reminded them the futility of war. The violence of war has reminded them that there is no meaning to this existence. There is no meaning to this masculine military heroism. It is completely a nonsense. So, the arrival of nonsense at the very beginning of this novel is quite symbolic in quality.

That becomes a pointer to the bigger, broader nonsense of the war, which does not make any sense. So, limericks just become the most authentic forms of representation when it comes to war. “Over the years, people I have met have often asked me what I am working on, and I usually reply, the main thing was a book about Dresden.

I said that to Harrison Starr, the movie-maker one time and he raises eyebrows and inquired, is it an anti-war book. Yes, I said. I guess. What I say to people, when I hear they are writing anti-war books? No, what do you say Harrison Starr? I say, why do you not write an anti-glacier book instead?” What he meant of course, was that there would always be wars and there will be and that they were not as easy to stop as glaciers.

This is again a very interesting metaphor, anti-glacier books and anti-war books and anti-glacier books are just the same thing, because it talks about the inevitability of war. It talks about the limitlessness of water and how wars will always be there since the beginning of evolution. It is purposeless to write about war or write about a critique of war than to stop a glacier from moving, as there will be always be war.

It points to the inevitability of this political position of this war and the futility of the position of resistance, the position of rejection. It becomes part of the futility of the whole writerly project. That is what this book is doing at the beginning.

It is talking about highlighting the failure or the collapse of the futility of the writerly project which informs the book like this, which informs this carnivalesque postmodern book, which is also an anti-war book about the Vietnam War, without naming the Vietnam War.

It was drawing on the writer’s own experience of the bombed Dresden and Second World War and talking about survivor’s guilt and talking about the numbed condition caused by trauma. But at the same time, this open acknowledgement of the futility of war, the futility of representing the war and the futility of taking a position of resistance against war.

