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Published online: 18 Dec 2025

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Posthuman Metafiction: Construction of Dystopia through Narrative Strategies in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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dystopia, posthumanism, non-linear narrative, metafiction, identity

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative strategies in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). It examines how Vonnegut employs non-linear structure, metafiction, and posthuman narration to reimagine identity, agency, and the human condition in a dystopian world. Drawing on Zhang Na's concept of posthuman narrative developed in *Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction*, the study integrates narratology with posthuman theory to analyze the dissolution of human-centered perspectives. Zhang's framework emphasizes narratives that lack self-maintenance and evolve through the reader's engagement, reflecting a relational and hybrid form of subjectivity. Using discourse analysis, the paper demonstrates how Vonnegut's text disrupts traditional humanist assumptions by blurring the boundaries between human and non-human experience, realism and metafiction, and individual and collective identity. The research contributes to current discussions on posthumanism by showing how dystopian fiction redefines the human in technologically mediated and politically unstable contexts, offering new ways to conceptualize existence beyond essentialist paradigms.

Introduction

The paper aims to explore the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative strategy in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* published in 1969. Literary narratives serve as a space to redefine societal formation, individual identity and the social structures within a piece of work. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* records the life experiences of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim, along with the changing perception of reality and individual identity of characters in the backdrop of war and violence. The novel spans different time periods, encompassing Billy's childhood memories, life in Dresden, post-war experiences in America, and his visit to the planet Tralfamadore. The story is narrated in a non-linear or a stream of consciousness pattern and focuses on the negative experiences of war on the psyche and behaviors of the characters within the novel. This research conducts a narrative analysis of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* to depict the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative strategies that challenge the traditional humanist narratives in the novel.

The research applies Zhang Na's concept of posthuman narratives as elucidated in her book *Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction*. Zhang Na (2018) explores the concept of posthuman narrative, arguing that the integration of narratology with posthumanism exemplifies various aspects of posthuman metamorphosis and ideology. She highlights narrative as reflecting posthumanism by its "lack of self-maintenance intention and how self evolves through readers' reading so that it forges beneficial relations with others" (p. 7). The concept posits that posthuman narratives are embedded and constructed within a framework of narratives marked by the presence of non-human spatial patterns, independent of any individual perspective. Thus, Na's concept of posthuman narrative offers a deeper understanding of the narrative techniques employed in Vonnegut's novel, highlighting how these techniques contribute to the construction of dystopia within the novel.

Zhang Na introduced the posthuman becoming of the narrative and how narrative structures exemplify posthumanism within their construction, highlighting a world that is cognitively estranged from individuals. According to Na, the narrative involves posthuman hybridity that deconstructs the inherent binary oppositions present in the text and is marked with a non-linear pattern of narration that creates a sense of confusion and dystopia in the story. For instance, in the first chapter of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the narrator is describing his process of writing a novel through a realistic perspective, but the process turns out

to be the reality of the text as the narrator is revealed to be one of the characters in the narrative of his novel. Thus, the narrative challenges the traditional distinctions between reality and illusion as well as human and non-human reflecting posthuman hybridity and chaos in the text. The novel presents a tragic picture of World War II, where humans suffer loss of agency and individuality and are constantly pushed into a state of confusion and dystopia. According to Robert Tally "humane fatalism of *Slaughterhouse-Five* suggests one way of looking at the disjointed, often painful, experience of social life in the United States in the twentieth century" (2011, p. 85). The novel is a representation of society that links all living and dead matters in the world. David Porush (1985) in *The Soft Machine* highlights that Vonnegut "experiments with the structure of novelistic presentation" (p. 86). The author employs a war context to convey the destructive sense of a world where boundaries are blurred and individuals have fluid identities. Na defines this fluidity and chaos as a result of the disruption of "humanist dichotomies by adding more hybrid subjects into the self/other opposition, and brings back the all-too-human humanity to the chaotic world of presence" (2018, p. 9). Hence, the novel negates the traditional authoritarian intervention and dichotomies ultimately presenting a society that is characterized by pain, suffering and a dystopian sense of the world.

In addition to war, *Slaughterhouse-Five* reflects time as a controlling factor through Billy's character, who is able to switch between time and space. Christina Jarvis (2003) asserts that the time travel in the text juxtaposes the bombings of Dresden (p. 65). However, this research argues that Vonnegut portrays Billy as a posthuman subject who can navigate between past, present, and future as a means of escaping the harsh reality of society. Billy notes that "all moments, past and future, always have existed, always will exist" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 12), reflecting the absurd reality and repetition of chaotic events, thereby constructing a dystopia marked by human misery within the narrative. Similarly, Donna Haraway (1985/2016) suggests the posthuman sense of narration alters the boundaries of spatial perception for all individuals. As Harold Bloom (2007) notes that the novel describes a "new mode of perception that radically alters traditional conceptions of time and morality" (p. 5). Thus, the spatial and temporal metaphor in *Slaughterhouse-Five* demonstrates that all moments are present simultaneously, reiterating the repetition of events that contribute to the dystopian nature of the novel. Moreover, Vonnegut, through the narrative strategy of posthuman mortality and myth, constructs a dystopia reflecting the miserable human condition in a society. Posthuman myth narrative constructs the posthuman subjectivity and criticizes hegemonic realistic notions. Zhang Na reflects that as a "tool for the survival, the posthuman myth narrative is deployed to elucidate the posthuman becoming" of the narrative (2018, p. 11). This is evident in the novel as there is parody of realism eventually reflecting the posthuman narrative. Realism presents narrative as linear, chronological, and liberal humanist, allowing for the possibility of free will and responsible moral choice. However, the narrative technique used by the author implies that events like Dresden refute such liberal assumptions and Tralfamadore is, in fact, a posthuman myth promised upon a rejection of the philosophical assumptions of realism and moral choice, consequently reflecting a posthuman dystopia through narrative construction, marked with the absence of an individual's free will and central human subjectivity in society.

Hence, this paper aims to explore the construction of dystopia through narrative strategy in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* by carrying out a discourse analysis of the novel. The study also unpacks multiple interpretations of the text through the theoretical framework of posthuman narratives, examining how posthuman strategies in the novel challenge traditional humanist assumptions and construct a dystopian vision. The research objectives are to analyze how Vonnegut's use of posthuman narrative and metafiction deconstructs linear storytelling and represents dystopia, how the non-linear structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five* shapes posthuman subjectivity and identity, and how the motifs of mortality and myth disrupt conventional techniques of narration. These objectives are framed by the broader aim of understanding how posthuman narrative strategies reconfigure the relationship between humanist and posthuman discourses. The research questions address how Kurt Vonnegut employs narrative strategies to deconstruct linear narrative and reflect the formation of dystopia within the narrative construction of the novel. It explores how the non-linear narrative of Vonnegut's

Slaughterhouse-Five constructs dystopia with greater power and how it shapes the characters' posthuman experiences and subjectivities within the narrative of the text. How does Kurt Vonnegut critique humanist ideologies through posthuman narrative techniques in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* and what implications does this have for understanding the dystopian construction of the world in the novel?

The research is delimited to the discourse analysis of Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, which serves as the primary source. The research focuses on the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative strategy in the text. This is accomplished by using Zhang Na's concept of posthuman narratives, which is elucidated in her book *Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction*. Narratology as a method is employed to explore multiple narrative levels in the novel. It helps analyze the non-linear narrative structure in the novel, challenging traditional notions of space and time. Through narratology and posthuman narrative strategy, the research explores Billy's experiences, the author's voice and the Tralfamadorians' perspective.

Posthumanism and Narrative Discourse

This section reviews the existing literature on the concept of posthumanism, posthumanist narrative construction and highlights how the idea of posthumanism evolved over time. It also reviews the literature on the primary text *Slaughterhouse-Five* and thus, helps to trace the topic of this research within a larger context.

Posthumanism is the interconnectedness of human beings with the non-human or other forms of life that has its traces in the tribal myths and folklore of Asian, Native American and African subcontinents. In the Oxford Dictionary, posthumanism is defined as a "mode of thinking about the intersecting human, nonhuman, and technological worlds" that has become prominent in the late twentieth century, largely due to ecological campaigns that question the position of humans in relation to the natural environment (n.p.). The term posthumanism is a combination of post and humanism. Post indicates a subsequent phase and humanism refers to a philosophical movement that focuses on human values and experiences. Hence, posthumanism transcends humanistic notions, reflecting an evolving understanding of existence,

cultural shifts, and technological advancements in terms of individual identity.

Historically, posthumanism as a theory draws on the critique of Eurocentric humanism, reevaluating the humanistic myth of human beings as the centre of the universe and their attitude toward other forms of life. It shares certain commonalities with antihumanism, which decenters human agency to demonstrate how all matter co-evolves and is mutually dependent on one another. Posthumanism is generally associated with the works of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser (1961), which reflect the inherent instability of humanism. In his *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault talks about the history and concept of insanity to correct the rational accounts of psychiatry. Similarly, Althusser in *For Marx* notes that "myth of Man is reduced to ashes" (1996, p. 229) by science and materialism, simultaneously showing the inherent instability of human nature. Therefore, posthumanism as a theory explores the multiplicity and inherent instability of humanism, as well as the defined human existence of individuals within a society. According to Cary Wolfe (2003), in *Animal Rites*, Western humanism is dependent on the hierarchical binary opposition between human and animal. He asserts that human freedom, regardless of gender, class and race, has its possibility in "absolute control over the lives of nonhuman others" (Wolfe, 2003, p. 7). Hence, in the light of Wolfe's argument, posthumanism, unlike traditional humanist thought, rejects the binary oppositions and advocates for the co-existence of humans with non-humans in society.

Posthumanism also examines the co-existence of humans with technology, artificial intelligence and explores how these concepts impact the notion of selfhood and hegemonic social order among individuals in the world. Donna J. Haraway, in her "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), highlights that interconnected boundary breakdowns have transformed the long-established and dominant figure of the human into a cyborg. She says that in "our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway, 1985, p. 66). Similarly, Katherine Hayles, in *How We Become Posthuman* (1999), traces the historical trajectory of posthumanism and highlights the impact of digital technology on an individual's identity. She stresses posthuman subjectivity that focuses on the interplay

between technology and biology, hence challenging traditional distinctions. This study helps me analyze the interconnection of humans with non-humans in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* that challenges the traditional distinctions ultimately promoting a posthuman subjectivity in the text.

However, in *Our Posthuman Future*, the political theorist Fukuyama argues that the contemporary distancing from humanism is a threat to human existence as the individual's existence is a "meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience as a species" (2002, p. 7). Thus, the concept of posthumanism is reflected as a negative case that transcends moral boundaries and is synonymous with the lack of humanism. For Fukuyama, the factor X which is the essence of humanity, is compromised by a technological and digitised environment. Pepperell (2003) also states that posthumanism is a form of anti-humanism which is reevaluated by modern science. For a long time, individuals tried to develop and control technology in an attempt to be superior to all the species. However, this superiority is now being challenged by the very technologies that man has created and it seems that the "dominance between human and machine is slowly shifting" (Pepperell, 2003, p. 3). Hence, posthumanism on one hand, does destabilize the hierarchical boundaries but on the other hand, it also leads to a future that is overpowered by commercial, digitized and technological advancements.

Similarly, in recent times, posthuman thinkers have used this concept to state a hybrid culture marked by multiple notions of posthuman existence. Livingston and Halberstam in *Posthuman Bodies* (1995) argue that their research aims to address the challenges faced by a coherent human body. They bring into light the argument that posthuman is a state that "collapses into sub-, inter-, trans-, pre-, anti" states (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995, p. 8). It can be asserted that posthuman bodies and subjectivities are the result of postmodern relations of power and its consequences. On the contrary, Neil Badmington inquires whether posthumanism is antagonistic towards theory and human existence, highlighting that it is a "working-through of humanist discourses" (2003, p. 22). Elaine Graham (2002) shares Badmington's views that posthumanism studies the notion of otherness by drawing upon narratives from within literature. She examines the representation of

post-human, including monsters and aliens, to discuss the ethical implications of technological and scientific change.

Nevertheless, Singer and Rorty (1989) argue that moral concerns should extend beyond human life to a non-biological moral sense, a significant aspect of posthumanism. Thus, the strength of this research lies in its portrayal of posthumanism as evolving beyond the biological ethical and moral implications towards a posthuman scientific discourse. Similarly, in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Bruno Latour criticizes the traditional distinction between society and nature, ultimately advocating a posthuman perspective marked by the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities. Rosi Braidotti's (2013) notion of posthumanism focuses on the importance of embracing interconnectedness and multiplicity and argues for a post-anthropocentric politics that gives due importance to the diverse forms of life beyond human-centric perspectives. However, the weakness of this research lies in the fact that it does not address the condition and situation of human beings in a highly advanced and post-anthropocentric world.

Posthumanism is a vast field that includes various concepts and sub-categories within its definition. Stefan Sorgner and Robert Ranisch (2015) state that posthumanism is used as an umbrella term that includes both critical posthumanism and transhumanism. Critical posthumanism "rejects both human exceptionalism and human instrumentalism (that humans have a right to control the natural world)" (qtd. in Latorra, 2011, p. 533), whereas transhumanism focuses on humans as the centre of the universe, but it also considers technology as a part of human progress. Heidegger's (1977) ideas on nature and technology are significant to contemporary theories of posthumanism. Heidegger's idea of enframing presents a critical perspective on technology, treating it as a process rather than an artefact. Heidegger (1977) rightly claims that the "essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (p. 13). He reflects that enframing reveals how technology is a process of uncovering specific modes of being, leading to a pessimistic view of technology. Hence, since its inception, posthumanism has become a major site of discussion in contemporary times due to the erosion of human agency, as well as the notion that human centrality is no longer a convincing account of

the way the world works.

Posthuman narrative construction plays an important role within the field of literature in defining a narrative that is characterized by posthumanist thoughts and techniques. In this regard, Michel Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) has influenced the posthumanist thought. His examination of discourses and power structures led to the analysis of how knowledge and language shape our understanding of the human and non-human, ultimately contributing to posthumanist critiques within the narrative construction. Manuel De Landa, in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (2000), examines the non-anthropocentric view of history, exploring the evolution of human societies alongside non-human entities. He stresses an evolved understanding of history that considers the agency of both human and non-human factors, challenging traditional human-centric historical narratives.

In Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis (2013), Herbrechter provides an analysis of posthumanism, addressing key challenges within the field. The research explores implications of posthumanist thought on identity, ethics and the future of humanity, ultimately offering insights into the contradictions and complexities inherent in posthumanist narrative discourse. This research helps analyze the relationship between posthumanism and identity formation as well as how the posthuman narrative constructs dystopia in the text. Hence, posthumanism creates a sphere of responsibility that focuses on a crucial philosophical and sociological imperative.

Similarly, Jacques Derrida explains the ethical imperative by drawing attention to the notion of undecidability. There would be no decision in politics, ethics and thus, no responsibility due to undecidability. Derrida (1944) reflects that decision with conscious knowledge of taking it would not be a decision at all, rather it would be the "consequence of a premiss, and there would be no problem, there would be no decision. Ethics and politics, therefore, start with undecidability" (p. 66). This research is significant as it assesses how posthumanist narrative is characterized by undecidability that reflects ambivalence over the idea of transcending boundaries. Miskimmon (2014), in *Strategic Narratives: Communication, Power and the New World Order*, rightly claims that narrative informs how political participants and social actors comprehend and engage with one another ultimately creating meaning, expectations, organizing the plot, and framing the crisis.

Scholarly debates on posthuman narratives problematize human-centric positions, confronting if non-human intelligences can be conceptualized as non-humanistic, challenging human and non-human binaries. The posthumanist narrative, thus, moves beyond the human centrality to think through diverse narratives while reducing the impact of humanity. According to Grove, counter-narratives of Anthropocene move toward eco-centric possibilities that de-center the human and the authors write in order to "sketch out what possibilities I think might exist in the terrain of the apocalypse" (p. 229). Nevertheless, Bakker (2013) argues that post-anthropocentric or posthumanist narrative would abolish the human subject. Disconnection of the human from intention, volition and rationality, associated with it involves seeking that which is outside the perspectives of human and non-human relations and ultimately results in disconnected human-centrism. According to Kopnina (2020), posthuman narratives critique speciesism and focus on deprioritizing human centrism to replace the view that humans are superior and separate from other forms of life. Therefore, posthumanist narratives prioritize inter-species co-evolution and co-production, challenging the legitimacy of human-centric binaries such as human/animal, mind/body, and nature/culture existing in a society.

In light of the books, journals, and articles discussed above, multiple theorists have examined the idea, history, construction, and current status of posthumanism in a variety of contexts. Previous research highlights the socio-cultural and technological aspects of posthumanism, as well as the relationship between narrative discourse and posthumanism. Revisiting the literature on posthuman studies shows how there exist different notions and aspects of posthumanist thought, ranging from undermining binary oppositions, stress on fluidity of existence and the co-existence of human and non-human matter, thus reaffirming the relevance of posthuman studies in the contemporary milieu.

Lynn Buck, in "Vonnegut's World of Comic Futility", explores the creation of the world and characters in the novel. She suggests Vonnegut's "deliberate mechanization of mankind" (Buck, 2014, p. 2) and the cynicism of the comical world that he has created. The research shows

how Vonnegut's world diminishes the man-centered notions about the universe and reflects the fluidity of individual identity and existence in the text. Robert Merrill (1978) in "Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*: the requirements of chaos," argues that it is safe to assume that novels are a product of social protests and hence, are not written by nihilists. Thus, Vonnegut's early and late novels are written in the spirit of social protest. However, this research does not address how the text also serves as a space to move beyond the traditional human-centric narratives to a more metafictional narration within the broader framework of posthumanist discourse.

In "*Slaughterhouse-Five*: Time out of Joint", Edelstein (1974) explores the psychological impact of the sci-fi world on the characterization of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, and how his psyche is affected by it. This research thus helps to analyze the psychological state of protagonist Billy in a highly destructive environment and how it contributes to the creation of a dystopian world. The novel employs techniques such as interior monologues and juxtapositions to illustrate the fragmentation of human life. These strategies also serve to satirize the mechanisms of power and authority operating within society. Fengyuan Zheng (2023) in "The incapability of time and history in *Slaughterhouse-Five*" notes the time-travelling experience of Billy in the text and explores the relationship between this spatial travel and nostalgia within the novel. The research reflects how the time and spatial travel pave the way for the protagonist to recall his childhood experiences, as well as a way to distance oneself from the broader harsh realities, such as the experience of war, in the novel.

As a whole, the previous existing literature on Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* reflects the mechanization of individuals and how the novel is a social product criticizing the authoritarian structures and the abuse of power in society. The research also highlights how the narrative unfolds as well as the protagonist's nostalgia within the novel. However, the existing scholarships do not take into account the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative techniques in the novel. Thus, the construction of dystopia through posthuman narrative strategy offers a viable research gap to be explored in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Non-Linear Narrative Technique and Dystopia

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* explores the nature and complexities of posthuman discourse ultimately reflecting posthuman narrative strategies that contribute in the construction of dystopia within the novel. Vonnegut in his novel uses the posthuman narrative strategies that challenge traditional humanist narratives. It also challenges the distinction between reality and fiction within narrative construction in order to present a dystopian vision of the world. According to Robert Tally (2011), the "humane fatalism of *Slaughterhouse-Five* suggests one way of looking at the disjointed, often painful, experience of social life in the United States in the twentieth century" (p. 85). Hence, the novel explores the fatal aspects of human existence and constructs a dystopia through its posthuman narrative strategy in order to reflect the plight of individuals in a society.

The posthuman narrative is characterized by its lack of self-maintenance intention and a non-linear narrative in order to highlight the tragic experiences and confusion of the characters withina text. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut uses non-linear narration to tell the story of the life experiences of protagonist Billy involving his imprisonment during war in Dresden, post-war life in America and his visit to planet Tralfamadore. This non-linear narration and chaotic time-space aspect shows the posthuman dystopic world in which Billy is confused and is constantly trying to make sense of the world. Billy has been "unstuck in time" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 10) and jumps from present to the past and future as an attempt to cope with the inhuman war and dystopian world experiences that have affected him seriously. Hence, the linear plot is abandoned as Billy moves into the past and present without warning, showing the fragmentation of man's identity and the construction of a dystopia that is filled with destruction, loneliness, and traumatic experiences of individuals because of war.

According to Zhang Na in *Posthuman Becoming Narratives in Contemporary Anglophone Science Fiction*, the "narrative exemplifies posthumanism by its lack of self-maintenance intention and self-evolves through readers' readings so that it forges beneficial relations with others" (2018, p. 7). In first chapter of the novel, the narrator is describing his process of writing novel

through realistic points but the process turns out to be the reality of the text as the narrator is revealed to be one of the characters in the narrative of his novel. The narrator, while anticipating the climax of story, says that "American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 4). As a reader, one expects the climax of novel to be the same but this climax is never actualized since posthuman narrative denaturalizes the notion of realistic climax and deconstructs self-maintenance narration ultimately constructing a sense of dystopia with the blurring of realistic and fictional narrative intention.

The science fiction and dystopian texts undermine the traditional plot, characterization and setting of the novel. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* through its discontinuous presentation of narrative construction does not consider the individual consciousness of the author as authentic rather it allows the readers to produce a multiplicity of meanings. In narratology, the interplay between narrative and the author in a text is a metafictional device, therefore, Vonnegut's novel reflects the authorial voice as abstract that undermines objectivity and allows various interpretations of the text. For instance, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of American magnificence but in the text this symbolism is inverted as the statue rather than grandeur shows the dark reality of American society since, the model of statue is put in a corner where "hundreds of books about fucking and buggery and murder" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 86) are also placed. The different layers of narration are juxtaposed so that no single, linear, logical sequence of events can be traced. The reader is also in a constant mood of suspense and uncertainty confronted with disillusionment as the narrative itself is fragmented. Such a posthuman narrative triggers the sense of undecidability in Derridean terms and points to the fact that narrative itself is something arbitrary that pluralizes its interpretations in various situations based on the layer surfaced through the viewpoints of thoughtful readers. Hence, the variety of meanings denaturalize human centrality and narrative continuity representing the posthuman dystopia marked with the absence of human centrality and agency within the novel.

Moreover, according to Zhang Na, in the posthuman becoming narrative, any single character in the novel is reduced to the status of a tiny molecule. She notes that this "zoomed-out perspective makes the humans witness an abandoned existence like a face drawn on the beach erased by nonhuman forces" (Na, 2018, p. 9). Most of Vonnegut's characters are also reduced to insignificance in the wake of broader socio-political structures that the characters face. For instance, Billy is reduced to a mere robot directed by external forces such as aliens, natural disasters and war. He has no control over his life and has the fantasy of Tralfamadore in order to escape from the cruelty of war. His characterization shows the negative consequences of the Second World War, and how it affected the characters' psyche as "Weary felt, and Billy was going to pay" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 48). Billy's weariness and angst are caused by the events during the bombing of Dresden that have made him lost control over the life. At one moment he's a prisoner of war and another moment he's back in his childhood in New York. The narrator notes that "Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 10). Thus, the protagonist adopts this non-singular notion of time as a defense mechanism to rationalize the terrible experience of war.

Through fluctuating time and space, Billy detaches himself from the material world and gets into a world far away from the reality in Dresden. Hence, the characters in *Slaughterhouse-Five* give a zoomed-out perspective and through posthuman narrative strategy of unreliable spatial and non-linear narration are reflected as insignificant within narrative discourse ultimately constructing a dystopia in which individuals are confronted with a highly controlled, destructive and insignificant existence.

Temporal Dimension and Posthuman Mortality as a Narrative Strategy

In Vonnegut's novel, Billy is portrayed as fragmented and suffering in a dystopian world through narrative techniques that explore temporal dimension and posthuman mortality. Billy is in various spaces and times that give him the chance to go through his birth, death, and World War II experiences. According to critic Jarvis (2003), Billy's fragmentation is "apparent physically and mentally as a result of the cruel experience of war" (p. 88). Thus, Vonnegut makes Billy capable of travelling through time, which ultimately makes Billy more than a human and hence resorts to the idea of

posthuman subjectivity.

The temporal dimension within the narrative construction also provides readers with a vivid picture of wartime experiences, highlighting both the technological and social dystopias within the novel. Billy recalls his experiences, which include time travel and visits to the planet of Tralfamadore, where "there is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 88). As Mustazza (2011) observes, Billy's experiences — surviving the bombing of Dresden, returning home emotionally detached, marrying without love, raising children, and becoming unstuck in time — highlight the narrative's critique of humanist assumptions and its construction of dystopia. Thus, the temporal dimension is crucial for understanding Billy's conflicted existence, which marks the construction of a posthuman dystopia within the text.

The temporal dimension is synonymous with a distorted and chaotic sense of self and existence. According to Zhang Na (2018), the "Chinese-box spatial pattern indicates a fractured self into multiple layers with identical but distorted existences" (p. 19). Throughout the novel, Billy blends time, and there is no distinction between past, present, and future. Being unstuck in time in reality is the manifestation of duality and fragmentation in character, as Billy experiences trauma from the memories of the destructive bombing of Dresden. This is also one of the reasons why it is difficult for the reader to determine Billy's location at any given time in the novel. Thus, the space or time fluctuation technique reflects how Billy is hesitating between the present and the past with no control over his actions that emphasize the absurd dystopian world and existence.

The concept of memory plays an important role in posthuman narrative strategies. Na suggests that the notion of posthuman memory is not contrived; rather, it is based on the "posthuman's embodied and embedded pre-experience as a human being before metamorphosis" (2018, p. 8). This memory with a different embedding is often harsh and traumatic for the posthuman to recollect; however, for becoming posthuman, the "memory of being is remembered (Na, 2018, p. 8). The novel's narrative structure gives due importance to the memory or experience of pre-posthuman existence, which becomes a means of liberation from the

destructive world.

The novel's narrative structure is similar to Henri Bergson's concept of memory, in which all moments coexist in concentrated forms. Memories closer to the "present consciousness seem more concrete, concentrated into easily recognizable images; more distant memories are more disparate, fuzzier" (Bergson, p. 13). Billy recalls his memory of being human before his metamorphosis into a posthuman subjectivity, in which he is more than human, thus capable of travelling through spaces like those of the Tralfamadorians. The narrator observes that "he has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 10). Thus, Billy recalls his experiences and memories of being a human in the traditional sense, which provide him with comfort and solace. Although the technique of posthuman memory provides liberation or a sense of posthuman metamorphosis to the character, yet through this narrative technique, there is also the repetition of the devastating events of war, chaos and confusion, ultimately constructing a posthuman dystopia in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The posthuman mortality as a narrative technique contributes to the construction of dystopia within the novel. Zhang Na asserts that "posthuman mortality is the climax of the posthuman becoming narrative, which releases the strongest generative vitality for the next cycle of life in a becoming-imperceptible manner rather than being obsessed with the immortality of this being" (2018, p. 8). In the novel, Billy gives a speech in a baseball stadium in Chicago in which he predicts his own death and proclaims that "if you think death is a terrible thing, then you have not understood a word I've said" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 89). Thus, it illustrates the concept of posthuman mortality and Billy's disinterest in life.

However, the fact that Billy is killed immediately after the speech reflects both the posthuman vision of the next cycle of life and the pettiness of human life, constructing a dystopia through the narrative strategy employed within the novel. The posthuman mortality narrative is also "permeated with the apocalyptic hope for the redemption of the chaotic human world through the posthuman's self-sacrifice as a scapegoat" (Na, 2018, p. 8). This is evident in the text when Billy says that when a person dies, "he is still very much

alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 26). Thus, posthuman narrative is an embodiment of the world and denies the traditional notion of existence, while also constructing a posthuman dystopia within the narrative of the text, where individual life is treated as insignificant, trivial, and secondary to all the broader structures and non-human matter present in society.

Disruption of Humanist Dichotomies and Posthuman Dystopia

The posthumanist narrative involves the disruption of humanist dichotomies by incorporating a hybrid perspective into the narrative, thereby creating a dystopia. Na (2018) states that the "emergence of the embodied and embedded posthuman disrupts the humanist dichotomies by adding more hybrid subjects into the self/other opposition" (p. 29). In the novel's narrative, the self vs. other binary is undermined by the analogy drawn between more-than-human Tralfamadorians and the Nazi soldiers. On his daughter's wedding night, Billy is kidnapped by the Tralfamadorians, who take him to their planet and put him in a zoo. Billy asks them, "Why me?" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 55), which is reminiscent of a question that an American soldier asks to a German soldier who is beating him in chapter six of the novel, to which he replies, "Why you? Why anybody?" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 66). This question expands to the chaotic and destructive sense of the world, inducing thoughts as to why Dresden, why have all these wars? According to Bloom (2007), "whether from the Tralfamadorians or the German, the answer to the question of why is the same, although the Tralfamadorians are more thorough and more explicit in answering" (p. 39). This analogy drawn between the Tralfamadorians and the Germans also highlights the inhumane consequences of accepting a posthuman dystopia, as a lack of personal responsibility leads to destruction. This highlights the dilution of the boundary between Tralfamadorians and humans, showing both as interrelated along with the resultant chaos of the interrelatedness, hence, reflecting the posthuman dystopia within the narrative construction of the novel.

Furthermore, another posthuman characterization of narrative is its blurring of boundaries between reality and illusion as well as truth vs. falsity. The novel's narrative engagement with the idea of free will blurs the oppositions between truth and falsity or illusion and reality. It is generally understood that people are free to choose their own fate and that their actions bring a change in determining the future, but to Billy's dismay, he discovers that an individual's destiny is decided by external factors. He questions the Tralfamadorians about human free will and says that "If humans have free will, what then is the purpose of their brutal actions, like the bombing of Dresden during World War II" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 58). Billy even asks the Tralfamadorians if they can stop the universe from being destroyed, to which they reply, "We always let him and we always will let him. The moment is structured that way" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 55). Billy realizes that the idea of free will is an illusion and that we are always monitored by some source of entity – dystopia- in the world. Hence, the idea of free will is more blurred reflecting the posthuman dystopia in which individuals are reduced to the status of robots and treated as mechanized beings where each action is already planned and controlled by some authoritarian or more than human entity.

Similarly, wars deceive young people since they cannot understand the reality. Billy is a man who is deceived by the war and machines. His harsh existence becomes a metaphor for individuals living in an absurd and cruel world which controls its people through systematic oppression. When Billy sees the Americans shaved, he is shocked at their age and says "My God, it's the Children's Crusade!" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 46). Thus, within narrative construction. Vonnegut highlights war as a controlling system that manipulates people's mind. Billy even expects the Tralfamadorians to "fear that the Earthling combination of ferocity and spectacular weaponry might eventually destroy part or maybe all of the innocent Universe" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 50). Thus, through the posthuman hybridity and by the blurring of real vs. illusory existence of Billy, Vonnegut's narrative questions the very existence and humiliation of individuals in a society, eventually constructing a vision of dystopia.

Posthuman Myth and Metamorphosis as a Strategy to Construct Dystopia

Posthuman narrative involves the posthuman myth and parody that leads to sustaining a posthumanist thought. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a parodic perspective of "science fiction and war documentary" is presented

(Hutcheon, 2005, p. 44). Zhang Na (2018) notes that "posthuman myth is the pastiche, parody or revision of the Western central myth (p. 10). The parody of science fiction employed in the narrative structure revises the Western myth of progress and technology. The key point here is that neither of these two generic qualities of science fiction nor war documentary is preferred; rather, there is the problematization of myths as metanarratives, highlighting the poshuman world's uncertainty and suspension of centrality, ultimately creating a dystopian world without human subjectivity.

Similarly, posthuman myth narrative constructs the posthuman subjectivity. Zhang Na reflects that "as a tool for the posthuman's survival, the posthuman myth narrative is deployed to elucidate the posthuman becoming" of the narrative (2018, p. 11). This is evident in the novel as there is a parody of realism, eventually reflecting the posthuman narrative. Realism presents narrative as linear, chronological, liberal humanist thought, allowing for the possibility of free will and responsible moral choice. However, the novel implies that events like Dresden refute such liberal assumptions and Tralfamadore is, in fact, a posthuman myth promised upon a rejection of the philosophical assumptions of realism and moral choice, consequently reflecting posthumanism and a dystopic world marked with the absence of an individual's free will and central human subjectivity. Zhang Na describes the notion of posthuman metamorphosis as a narrative strategy within the posthuman discourse by which there is the formation of posthuman subjectivity. She highlights that the "posthuman metamorphosis is the very process of the becoming posthuman in various embodied and embedded becoming-others" (Na, 2018, p. 14). By including the elements of the other into the self, the self gets otherized and the narrative thus blurs the boundary between the other and the self.

It results in the collapse of humanist thinking of dualism, and there is a retrieval of agency against any artificially imposed boundaries. This posthuman metamorphosis is achieved by a Transworld identity. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim reflects this Transworld identity as he is "taken through a time warp" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 26) by the Tralfamadorians so that he can be on Tralfamadore for years, and still be away from Earth for only a microsecond. Hence, Billy, through his time travelling, acquires a more than human or transworld identity, highlighting the posthuman metamorphosis technique of the narrative in order to form a posthuman subjectivity and dystopia without the traditional, central, and humanistic definition of a human being. This posthuman metamorphosis leads to the destruction of traditional human as one loses individuality and a centralized status. Hence, the posthuman narrative technique highlights the lack of human agency and individuality marked with surveillance, control and destruction, ultimately constructing a posthuman dystopia in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Conclusion

As a whole, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* challenges traditional humanist narratives and constructs a dystopia through the posthuman narrative strategies employed in the novel. Through the lens of Zhang Na's posthuman becoming narrative, the research highlights how a non-linear and non-singular narrative, marked by the multiplicity of ideologies, posthuman myth, temporal dimensions, fragmentation of identities, posthuman memory, hybridity, and posthuman mortality, constructs a dystopia within Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The character Billy's experiences of World War II and non-linear narrative suggest the posthuman narrative's capability to reconfigure and disrupt human subjectivity. The novel explores multiple timelines, identities, and realities, blurring the line between fiction and reality, ultimately constructing a dystopian world. The posthuman dystopia within the text leads to a lack of human agency and centrality in the novel, ultimately drawing attention to the limits and impositions of scientific, technological, and posthuman studies. Hence, the non-human experiences and perspectives in the novel compel the readers to re-evaluate anthropocentric views, encouraging an evolved understanding of human and posthuman relationships. The research situates the novel within the broader field of posthuman studies, reflecting current debates on the nature of human agency and identity. It addresses the growing interconnections, responsibility and repercussions of the human and posthuman world. Thus, the novel, through its structure and posthuman narrative strategy, constructs a dystopia, bringing into light the disruption of traditional individual identity and humanistic thought in the world.

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