

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg  
Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik (Angewandte Anglistik und Amerikanistik)  
WS 2003/2004  
Prof. Dr. Wolf Kindermann



Schriftliche Zwischenprüfungsarbeit

**Slaughterhouse-Five & Timequake:  
Continuity and Paradigmatic Change in the Works of Kurt Vonnegut**

Stefan Weißhampel  
Sternstraße 09  
06108 Halle  
Tel. 0345-4723125  
Email: stefan\_weisshampel@gmx.de  
(Lehramt an Gymnasien- Englisch/Geschichte)

## Content

1.	Introducing: a Comparison .....	1
2.	Determinism vs. Free Will – the Vonnegut Paradox .....	5
3.	Fiction or Autobiography? – Vonnegut as a Character in his Fiction .....	11
4.	Vonnegut’s Subject Matters: from Evils of Technology to Self- Respect .....	15
5.	Do the Questions Remain? (Conclusion) .....	19
6.	Bibliography .....	23

## 1. Introducing: a Comparison

Since his first novel *Player Piano* (1952) the works of Kurt Vonnegut have changed tremendously. This concerns not only stylistic, but paradigmatic changes as well. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the development of Vonnegut's writing in a comparison of his breakthrough-novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)<sup>1</sup>, and the 1996-published *Timequake*.<sup>2</sup> With this comparison change and steadiness on a surface-level and of general beliefs and worldviews should be examined.

Due to the vast number of unique features in Vonnegut's novels, which would be worthy to be scrutinised, it appears to be impossible to deal with all aspects of his works appropriately. Therefore the focus of this paper is on three distinctive features which will be discussed. Firstly, the topic of free will and determinism should be of interest because it seems to be a crucial one since Vonnegut's works have been discussed scholarly. Even over thirty years after *Slaughterhouse-Five* one can still see different opinions concerning Vonnegut's standpoint in his novels with regard to determinism and free will. While one faction believes that Vonnegut's works in general, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* in particular are marked by a general believe in cosmic determinism<sup>3</sup>, others think that within a set of parameters man has to use free will in order to achieve fulfilment.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore the notion of determinism underwent tremendous changes during Vonnegut's career. Socio-economical determinism was replaced by sociological and psychological determinism which was in turn replaced by biological/genetic/chemical principles governing man's decisions.<sup>5</sup> For the fact that the topic of free will vs. determinism has been established even before *Timequake*, the urgent need to take this leitmotif of Vonnegut's work into account becomes obvious, since the existence/non-existence of free will appears to be central in *Timequake*, which will be discussed later on.

Secondly the autobiographical insertions in the works of Vonnegut will be discussed. This distinctive feature of his work has been a main area of scholarly interest since *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which the first and the tenth chapter are mainly, if not absolutely autobiographical.<sup>6</sup> Relatively little has been written on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse-Five: or The Children's Crusade – A Duty Dance with Death*. London: Vintage (ed. 1991). 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Vonnegut, Kurt. *Timequake*. London: Vintage (ed. 1997). 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Cordle, Daniel. "Changing of the Old Guard: Time Travel and Literary Technique in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut" *The yearbook of English studies* 30 (2000). 176.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, Bo. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut: Moral Paradox and Narrative Form*. Abo: Abo Akademis University Press. 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

<sup>6</sup> Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. Boston: Twayne

autobiographical character of *Timequake*, although this is one of the most eye-striking distinctive feature of the novel, and a remarkable further development of Vonnegut's fiction.<sup>7</sup> One should be able to recognise the relatively staple influences of Vonnegut's biography on his fiction,<sup>8</sup> as well as the currently urgent topics of interest of Vonnegut on a surface level.

Finally, the change of these "topics" from *Slaughterhouse-Five* to *Timequake* will be discussed, since Vonnegut has always adjusted his fiction to current social and political circumstances.<sup>9</sup> In this part of the paper the topics of his 1969 classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the *Timequake* will be figured out, while raising the question, if and how a paradigmatic change took place in the time between the two novels. Furthermore the constant factors in the writing of Kurt Vonnegut should be of interest.

As a basis of this paper *Images and Representations*, edited by Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed should be named, due to the fact that it embodies magnificent up-to-date contributions to central topics of Vonnegut's works.<sup>10</sup> A further source of input is the Academic Dissertation *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut: Moral Paradox and Narrative Form* by Bo Petersen, which offers a detailed insight view into the problem of the so called "Vonnegut Paradox", the tension between determinism and free will in the works of Vonnegut. Additionally Peterson offers a superb overview of the time-levels of *Slaughterhouse-Five* which elucidates the development of the plot beneath the level of spatialisation of time.<sup>11</sup> If one establishes the traditional narrative, which could be reproduced by bringing Billy's life in the right order according to this overview, one could easily read *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a classical Bildungsroman.<sup>12</sup> Another main source of information is the monograph *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the novel and the world* by Jerome Klinkowitz, who has contributed a lot of scholarly work concerning postmodernism in general, and the works of Kurt Vonnegut in particular.<sup>13</sup>

In 1991 William Rodney Allen claimed that Vonnegut's career can be

---

Publishers. 1990, 22. & Allen, William Rodney. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press. 1991, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Broer, Lawrence, R. "Vonnegut's Goodby: Kurt Senior, Hemingway and Kilgore Trout" *At millenniums end: new essays on the work of Kurt Vonnegut*. Kevin Alexander Boon Ed. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2001, 69.

<sup>8</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Leeds, Marc and Peter J. Reed Eds. *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*, Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 253 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. 1999, 193.

<sup>13</sup> Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990.

divided into the three parts of a science-fiction, meta-fiction and neo-realism.<sup>14</sup> This distinction between the parts seems to be rather arbitrary since *Timequake*'s central event is that

“[...] a sudden glitch in the space-time continuum[...] that made everybody and everything do exactly what they have done during the past decade, for good or for ill, a second time.” (Timequake, xii)

The fact that the malfunction is caused by the universe reflecting on its own expansion, coming to the decision that there is no point in expanding any further and deciding to shrink, carries some scientific features that would suggest to include the term science in describing Timequake. In doing so “the timequake [zapped] everybody and everything in an instant from February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001, back to February 17<sup>th</sup>, in 1991.” (Timequake, xiii) The zap-back marks a fictitious variation of the generally accepted principle of an expanding universe which could be paralleled to the term of chron-synclastic infundibula from *The Sirens of Titan* (1959),<sup>15</sup> especially because of its rather comical description as a “glitch in the space-time continuum.” (Timequake, xii) In *Timequake* a generally accepted phenomenon<sup>16</sup> is applied and adjusted to fulfil literary, comical function<sup>17</sup>. This suggests that *Timequake* could be pigeonholed in Vonnegut's science-fictional period as well. Moreover the direct influence of Hemmingway in Timequake (Timequake, xi) could suggest the work should be categorized in the authors meta-fictional phase. The two points above underline the difficulties in structuring Vonnegut's career into periods. For *Slaughterhouse-Five* this is even harder, since the book marks the turning point from science-fiction to meta-fiction, especially because of the chapter one, focusing not only on Vonnegut's biography, but on the genesis of *Slaughterhouse-Five* as well.<sup>18</sup> This is of importance since the science-fictional and meta-fictional elements of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Timequake* can be considered as trademarks of both novels, but do not allow to divide Vonnegut's career into periods, which has a great influence on the analyses of the leitmotif and the addressed topics.

Nevertheless the mixture of a highly personal quality of the novel, the science-fictional features and the refusal of traditional fiction did not bring him a Nobel Prize, a National Book Award, or a Pulitzer Prize, but a cult following, which is strengthened by fact that Vonnegut is considered as the crazy uncle of

---

<sup>14</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 11.

<sup>15</sup> “The Sirens of Titan” Marc Leeds. *The Vonnegut Encyclopedia: an Authorized Compendium*, Westport: Greenwood Press. 1995, 146.

<sup>16</sup> The expansion of the universe.

<sup>17</sup> The shrinking of the universe which causes the ten-year re-run.

<sup>18</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 11.

the American writers family. He is “the old codger full of wit and wisdom and more than a little bullshit.”<sup>19</sup>

The untraditional narrative of both novels does more than puzzling the reader and creating a cult. By the structure of his novels Vonnegut speaks up against the assumption that life is like a story, consequently he rejects the idea of teleological development that implies the existence of a beginning a middle and an end, which is nothing more than an illusion.<sup>20</sup> This leads to the assumption that Vonnegut highlights pluralism and the multiplication of voices, questions and conflicts which has shattered what once seemed to be (although it never really was) the placid unanimity of the great tradition of the West.<sup>21</sup> This identifies Vonnegut unequivocally as a postmodernist, not only by the untraditional narrative, but by introducing the recipient to the process of writing, a technique applied not only in literature, but the arts in general. The piece of art from this point of view represents nothing but its process of creation. An approach which is central in the works of for example Jackson Pollock.<sup>22</sup> As an example of this technique in Vonnegut's works one should name the prologue of *Timequake* in which Vonnegut compares the novel to the marlin in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*. The narrator who later on turns out to be Vonnegut, asked a fisherman on Cape Cod what Santiago should have done. He told Vonnegut to chop off the filets and leave the rest to the sharks. (*Timequake*, xi) Since Vonnegut seems to believe that the marlin represents Hemingway's novel *Across the Water and into the Trees*, and the sharks represent the critics, he thinks of *Timequake (I)* as his marlin. So what he did with the original novel was cutting off the filets and publishing them as *Timequake (II)*. He claims this explicitly in the prologue of *Timequake* when he asks: “What was I to do? Answer: Fillet the fish. Throw the rest away.” (*Timequake*, xii) The reader has always had the chance to accompany Vonnegut during the creation of his works. In the Preface of *The Vonnegut Encyclopedia*<sup>23</sup> he informs the reader about his latest project *Timequake* and his inability to complete it to his own satisfaction, a situation which is present in the later filleting of *Timequake I*. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* the failed attempt to create a proper outline of the Dresden story he wanted to write

---

<sup>19</sup> Peck, Dale. “Old Codger: Timequake by Kurt Vonnegut” *London Review of Books*. Vol. 19: No. 24 (1997), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Cordle. “Changing of the Old Guard” 2000, 166.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, Todd Fleming Jefferson. *Comforming Lies: Postmodern Morality in the Works of Kurt Vonnegut* (Dissertation). Dekalb: UMI Microform, UMI Number: 9604236. 1995, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Rosenberg/Barthes/Hassan: The Postmodern Habit of Thought*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Vonnegut, Kurt. “Foreword” Marc Leeds. *The Vonnegut Encyclopedia*. 1995, ix.

represents an excellent example of the understanding of art representing the process of creation as well.

“I used my daughter’s crayons, a different color for each main character. One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the other end was the end, and then there was all the middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on.” (SF, 4)

Unquestionably, these findings suggest to understand Vonnegut as a postmodern writer, not only by period, but by distinctive features.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore in the following part the topic of determinism vs. free will will be discussed, since this paradox represents an important facet of Vonnegut’s works, which are marked by his postmodern atheist’s morality.<sup>25</sup>

## **2. Determinism vs. Free Will – the Vonnegut Paradox**

Ever since the works of Vonnegut have been discussed scholarly, the aspect of determinism and free will has always been of interest. Some critics interpreted Vonnegut’s character’s fatalism and obedience to determining rules of the universe as Vonnegut’s own resigned acceptance of the deplorable conditions of human life.<sup>26</sup> But nowadays most of the publications on his writing stress the unique compatibility of free will and determinism which is created in the fiction of Vonnegut.<sup>27</sup> He, as a postmodern writer, stresses that man is not simply moving between the points of exercising free will or being determined. He or she is simply moving. This can be seen as a parallel to postmodernists’ thinking that manmade decisions cannot be placed on a scale between good and evil.<sup>28</sup> Vonnegut’s set of values goes beyond this (modernist’s) conception of binary opposition. He understands the world as perceived through language. Furthermore he seems to neglect any kind of teleological development, since *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Timequake* both seem to oppose a traditional, modern

---

<sup>24</sup> This failed attempt to write such an outline could also be read as an example of Vonnegut neglecting the principles of beginning, middle, and end which suggests a teleological development.

<sup>25</sup> Davis. “Comforming Lies” 1995, 14 ff.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 15 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Broer. “Vonnegut’s Goodby” 2001.

& Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994.

Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990.

& Leeds, Marc, Peter J. Reed. *Kurt Vonnegut. Images and Representations*. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000.

& Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 45.

narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which is not anything more than an illusion, either in fiction or reality.<sup>29</sup>

This understanding of reality, represented in Vonnegut's fiction, allows the reader to consider Vonnegut as a postmodern humanist.<sup>30</sup> He seems to play with the notion of a human life which is determined and meaningless, because all events are fixed in advance and that there is no meaning or direction within changes.<sup>31</sup> However, behind this offending fatalistic worldview a fragile construction of a compatibility of free will and determinism builds up.

In his works Kurt Vonnegut establishes free choice as basically illusory, but free will is not ruled out completely, since the exercising of free will is closely related to a societies' economical hierarchy. In this particular way of thinking wealth and other factors secure the opportunity to decide on the basis of ones own free will.<sup>32</sup> The importance of these determining factors changed throughout the course of Vonnegut's career. After *Slaughterhouse-Five* socio-economical determinism was replaced by sociological and psychological determiners, which in their turn were replaced by genetic and bio-chemical determination of man.<sup>33</sup>

Another facet of his set of values concerning free will and determinism is the believe that fate works in a larger perspective, whereas doing good – by exercising free will - is restricted to private live.<sup>34</sup> This implies that the small cruelties, done in private life, are as bad as the tremendous ones, since they could have been prevented by simply exercising one's free will sanely.<sup>35</sup> Vonnegut stresses that we should treat each other with common decency and loving kindness,<sup>36</sup> which would in fact be doing good in private life.

An additional dimension of Vonnegut's understanding of the universe is cosmological determinism. This has often been confused with a denial of free will, due to the fact that man is the victim of enormous, uncontrollable chaotic forces. A point of view which resembles the authors believe in modern physics, relativity theories, deterministic theories and uncertainty principles.<sup>37</sup> This awareness of uncertainty leads to a loss of absolutes, principles and explanations.

---

<sup>29</sup> Cordle. "Changing of the Old Guard" 2000, 166.

<sup>30</sup> Davis. "Comforming Lies" 1995, 16 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Cordle. "Changing of the Old Guard" 2000, 176.

<sup>32</sup> Davis. "Comforming Lies" 1995, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 52.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Broer. "Vonnegut's Goodby" 2001, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Davis. "Comforming Lies" 1995, 13 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Festa, Conrad. "Vonnegut's Satire" *Vonnegut in America: an Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut*, Jerome Klinkowitz and Donald L. Lawler Eds. New York: Delacorte Press. 1977, 138.

“Explanations of classical physics that destroyed the total explanation of divine revelation have in their turn been destroyed and have been replaced by uncertainties, not by other certainties.”<sup>38</sup>

But even though one knows that he or she lives in a universe which was not constructed for mankind, and which can only be explained by principles which are constructed as tools to make sense from chaos, it is still possible to make decisions within certain parameters. The crucial point here is the understanding that we do not give the universe meaning.<sup>39</sup> Out of this understanding of helplessness before cosmic anarchy, Vonnegut turns to the formative power of art to restore himself, to create a picture of his perception of the universe.<sup>40</sup> In this sense writing functions as his self-therapy<sup>41</sup> and can be seen as his approach to his psychological malfunctions and feelings of helplessness. Therefore Vonnegut's work becomes an autobiographical psychodrama.<sup>42</sup> Seeing Vonnegut as a (cosmological) determinist he seems to have empathy with characters like Billy Pilgrim, Dudley Prince, and Monica Pepper who simply do what they have to do,<sup>43</sup> and who are naïve believers in the sanctity of their company, their country, their religion.<sup>44</sup> They represent the determining forces which weight down on them. At this point one can see the Vonnegut Paradox, the determination of protagonists who are only awaiting death and mankind facing total extinction, in contrast to the author's insertions suggesting and promoting a human higher order consciousness.<sup>45</sup> Vonnegut applies the motif of cosmological determinism by presupposing that man's actions are controlled by cosmological forces such as a predestined order and an extraterrestrial control of life on earth, which is a science-fictional representation of cosmological determinism, since the extraterrestrial actions of aliens are predestined by these cosmological forces as well.<sup>46</sup> In *Slaughterhouse-Five* this becomes obvious when Billy is introduced to the Tralfamadorian philosophy:

“ ‘We [Tralfamadorians] know how the universe ends-‘ said the guide [in the zoo] ‘and the Earth has nothing to do with it, except that *it* gets wiped out, too.’ [...] ‘If you [the Tralfamadorians] know this’ said Billy, ‘isn't there some way you can prevent it? [...]’ ‘The moment is structured that way.’[said the Tralfamadorian guide] ” (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 84)

---

<sup>38</sup> Festa. “Vonnegut's Satire” 1977, 138.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Davis. “Comforming Lies” 1995, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Broer. “Vonnegut's Goodby” 2001, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 44.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

Even the Tralfamadorians who function as a counterpart of the unaware Billy Pilgrim, as the anthropological character, who criticises Billy's views and believes from an outer-perspective, are not free to change the structure of the moment.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover they are promoters of fatalistic worldviews, apostles of this most attractive escape.<sup>48</sup> In order to denounce them as being not superior Vonnegut depicts them as rather primitive since they gain delight from watching kidnapped humanoids in a zoo, cheering when they mate and urinate.<sup>49</sup> But since Billy turns out to be a follower of the Tralfamadorian philosophy of the predestined structure of the moment, his hallucination of the Tralfamadorians seems to work considerably well. Their mission is to help Billy to flow like a river, to make life more endurable through fantasy.<sup>50</sup>

“When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now when I [Billy Pilgrim] myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is “So it goes.” ‘ ‘ (Slaughterhouse-Five, 20)

The phrase of “So it goes.” which appears about 106 times in the course of the novel encapsulates the Tralfamadorian morality and philosophy.<sup>51</sup>

The discussion of these three words are the very centre of the critical debate concerning *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Vonnegut's opinion concerning free will and determinism. While some critics argue that the phrase represents a denial of the difference in meaning between the death of 135 000 people in Dresden and a bottle of champagne,<sup>52</sup> others tend towards saying that Vonnegut wants to make the reader rise and scream that it is not the way it is. The reader should become aware of the fact that there is a difference between the death of Martin Luther King and a bottle of champagne.<sup>53</sup> A third faction simply considers the phrase as a symbol which embodies everything concerning death within the novel: acceptance, sorrow, humour, outrage.<sup>54</sup>

In *Palm Sunday* Vonnegut himself explains “So it goes.” as his response to his reading of Céline's *Journey to the End of Night*:

“It was a clumsy way to say what Céline managed to imply ... in everything he wrote, in effect: ‘Death and suffering can't matter nearly as much as I

---

<sup>47</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Festa. “Vonnegut's Satire” 1977, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>50</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 269.

<sup>51</sup> Cordle. “Changing of the Old Guard” 2000, 175.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>53</sup> Festa. “Vonnegut's Satire” 1977, 145.

<sup>54</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 96.

think they do. Since they are so common, my taking them so seriously must mean that I am insane.’<sup>55</sup>

This statement forbids to presuppose an indifference toward death on Vonnegut’s side. To apply the phrase in connection to a bottle of champagne (Slaughterhouse-Five, 53) is the outcome of Vonnegut’s playful, comical postmodern use of language within which “ ‘So it goes.’ ” functions as a refrain.<sup>56</sup> In *Timequake* determinism is displayed by various devices, such as the rerun following the timequake and PTA, the *Post-Timequake Apathy*. PTA, as a direct result of the rerun in which people were not free to do what they want, is an unawareness of the opportunity to exercise free will again. People had simply forgotten how to exercise free will.

“Most other people, after the relentless reprise of their mistakes and bad luck and hollow victories during the past ten years, had, in Trout’s words ‘stopped giving a shit what was going on, or what was liable to happen next.’ This syndrome would eventually be given a name: *Post-Timequake Apathy* or *PTA*. (Timequake, 99)

The image of free will “kicking in again” comes up numerous times throughout the novel. (Timequake, xiii, 77, 97) The consequences of PTA can be seen in the death of Zoltan Pepper, who died because he was “smacked by a runaway fire truck” while he was about to ring a doorbell when “free will kicked in again.” (Timequake, 77) The horrible consequences of the timequake itself can be elucidated by focusing on the case of Dudley Prince, the African-American security-guard, whom the timequake had made ten years younger,

“but [which] was no break in his case. It meant he was again serving two consecutive life sentences, without hope of parole, for the rape and murder of a ten-year-old girl of Chinese-American and Italian-American parentage, Kimberly Wang, in a Rochester crack house, of which he was entirely innocent.” (Timequake, 57)

The image of false imprisonment alone suggests a determination by uncontrollable forces, but is strengthened by the idea of a re-imprisonment during the rerun following the timequake, which adds the notion of cosmological determinism to the already established social determination of individuals. But the problem of determinism is not restricted to rerun and PTA exclusively, since other determining factors come up as well. Such as the determination by genes<sup>57</sup> (Timequake, 119) or sense of humour.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Vonnegut, Kurt. *Palm Sunday*, New York: Lawrence/Delacorte, 1981, 296.

<sup>56</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 244 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Vonnegut distinguishes between two types of writers with different innate qualities

<sup>58</sup> Vonnegut refers to himself and his sister Allie not being able to exercise their free will (not to laugh at people losing their dignity by falling).

(Timequake, 101) In *Timequake*, Vonnegut - just like in *Slaughterhouse-Five* - plays with the notion of life being nothing else but determined, except for one detail. Kilgore Trout, who is not enthusiastic about free will at all, saves mankind by exercising free will. The down and out science-fiction writer<sup>59</sup> who does not create three-dimensional characters, but objects being playthings of irresistible forces, cruel inventions and cockamamie ideals (Timequake, 63), saves the world by recognising his ability to exercise free will again by saying nonsense like “ ‘Boop-boop-a-loop, dingle-dangle, artsy-fartsy, wah, wah’, and so on.” (Timequake, 99)

Furthermore he, as the only person with control over himself,<sup>60</sup> recognised that he was much too old to play Russian roulette with free will again at his age and therefore he decides to “get his ass in gear” (Timequake, 112) to re-establish free will again by shouting “ ‘You were sick, but now you’re well again, and there is work to do.’ ” (Timequake, 178) This utterance which wakes everybody up when it is broadcasted by CBS is named Kilgore’s Creed. This unusual practice of beneficial, humanitarian use of free will<sup>61</sup> marks the feature of *Timequake*, which distinguishes the novel from *Slaughterhouse-Five*, since Vonnegut sets up a Happy End for the first time. The formerly homeless Kilgore Trout is brought to the Ernest Hemingway Suite in Xanadu on the summer resort village Point Zion, Rhode Island as a reward for his heroic behaviour during the end of the timequake.<sup>62</sup> By setting up this end Vonnegut solves the problem of the Vonnegut Paradox by displaying a beneficial use of free will within the parameters of determining factors. This effect is even strengthened by the exercising of free will by Kilgore Trout who appears as a prototype of pessimism and fatalism up to this particular beneficial use of free will. The very fact of a happy end for Kilgore Trout gains its extraordinary value from the fact that Vonnegut establishes Trout as his alter-ego explicitly in *Timequake*. (Timequake, xiii)

Since *Slaughterhouse-Five* is already considered as an autobiographical novel, and the autobiographical character appears to be even more important in *Timequake*, the influence of Kurt Vonnegut’s biography on his writing should be investigated in the following part.

---

<sup>59</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Rackstraw, Loree. “The Paradox of ‘Awareness’ and Language in Vonnegut’s Fiction“ *Images and Representations* Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000, 64.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 64 ff.

### 3. Fiction or Autobiography? – Vonnegut as a Character in his Fiction

Many features of Vonnegut's fiction, like the untraditional narrative and the problem of free will and determination have been the object of investigation. Another aspect which has been of interest is the highly personal quality of Vonnegut's novels. At this point one can see major differences between *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Timequake*.

In 1965 Kurt Vonnegut turned to first person journalism which allows meta-textual comments and reminiscences, that are omnipresent in both novels.<sup>63</sup> The first person narrator immediately establishes Kurt Vonnegut as the author-narrator,<sup>64</sup> an assumption with which should be dealt carefully in literary criticism. But since Vonnegut himself points out unambiguous links to and remarks on the autobiographical character of the particular piece of art, an author/narrator distinction might be unnecessary.<sup>65</sup> This claim can be supported by the observation that since the preface of *Mother Night* (1966) Vonnegut has become more and more autobiographical. His writing often draws direct parallels between his novels and his life.<sup>66</sup> For example Kilgore Trout represents Vonnegut's bedraggled science-fiction writing alter-ego. He is everything Vonnegut is afraid of. A moralist and an unread science-fiction nerd, whose "prose is frightful" (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 79).<sup>67</sup>

The parallels between Billy Pilgrim and Kurt Vonnegut do not allow such a presupposition of an alter-ego relation. Although there are astonishing parallels.

"In fact Vonnegut's autobiography metafictionally determines Billy since his life draws heavily on that of his creator's: both were born in 1922, graduated from high school and enrolled in college before going to war in 1944. Both were taken prisoner in the Battle of the Bulge, experienced the firebombing of Dresden and were honourably discharged in 1945; both were married soon after the war, finished their education and pursued reasonably successful careers."<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand the clear cut distinction between Billy Pilgrim and

---

<sup>63</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 235.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 236

<sup>66</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Reed, Peter J. "Kurt Vonnegut's Bitter Fool: Kilgore Trout" *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*. Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 243.

Vonnegut can be seen from the first person narrator commenting -in a voice directly identifiable as Vonnegut's- on rather doubtful utterances of the protagonists by adding "he says."<sup>69</sup> (Slaughterhouse-Five, 22) This is the case when Billy claims that his first time travelling happened in 1944 in war. Interestingly, many scholars have taken this statement by Billy Pilgrim for granted,<sup>70</sup> although the "he says" comment and the obvious influence of Kilgore Trout's science-fiction on Billy Pilgrim's schizophrenic state of mind (Slaughterhouse-Five, 78)<sup>71</sup> suggest that the early time-travelling is constructed by the later, mentally even more disturbed Billy Pilgrim. It would be more appropriate to claim that Billy's "time-unstuckness" is caused by his reading of Maniacs in the *Fourth Dimension* by Kilgore Trout in the mental ward hospital in 1948 (Slaughterhouse-Five, 75). It represents a "new lie" (Slaughterhouse-Five, 73) which allows Billy to cope not only with his schizophrenic state of mind, but with the horrible war experiences that caused his insanity. But in contrast to previous readings the Tralfamadorian philosophy is applied by Billy not until 1948. This theory can be underlined by the fact that Valencia blames Kilgore Trout for her father's insanity which again becomes obvious when she finds him writing his second letter on his time travelling experiences to a newspaper. (Slaughterhouse-Five, 120)

Another interesting autobiographical facet of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the character of the first, and to some extent the last chapter of the novel. Some scholars, like Jerome Klinkowitz, regard the first chapter as a prologue, and the last chapter as an epilogue. Therefore the two chapters function as a frame. Here, the real life author is the narrative's central character. Klinkowitz stresses the fact that the novel does not start with an imitation of life, but with the real thing – the historical Kurt Vonnegut, who has survived the bombing of Dresden, summarizing how he spend twenty years trying to figure out how to write this book and finally finished it the day after Senator Robert Kennedy, another verifiable historical personage, died in public spotlight. In contrast, in chapters two to nine the author appears only three times as an average soldier.<sup>72</sup>

Neither the narrators function as central character, nor the real life

---

<sup>69</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 241.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991 & Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990.

The aliens of The Gospel from Outer-Space looked like the Tralfamadורים, who later on kidnap Billy Pilgrim.

<sup>72</sup> Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990, 21.

character of the autobiographical insertions should be doubted. But analysts of Vonnegut's works such as Bo Peterson deny the theory of a pro- and epilogue in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.<sup>73</sup> For Peterson the first and the last chapter mark no frame, but a part of the story. The crucial point of Peterson's theory is the very end of the novel. Since in the tenth chapter Vonnegut comes back to the murder of Robert Kennedy and other dead real life people (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 154), the idea of an autobiographical frame seems acceptable. But after what should be the frame, the 'picture' continues when Billy Pilgrim time-travels again to Dresden in 1945 where he has to recover corpses and where the bird sings "Poo-tee-wee?" (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, pg 156/157). This indicates that the last chapter cannot be considered as an epilogue, but as an attempt to fuse a fictitious biography with real life experience as much as possible.<sup>74</sup> The tendency of fusing marks the dominate stylistic aspect of *Timequake*, in which the autobiographical insertions are spread across the whole book and can be read as paralleled to the plot. One can find over 60 remarks of the author concerning his friends, colleagues, critics and his family. A remarkable example of this is chapter 43 which is dedicated to Vonnegut's elder brother Bernie who died from cancer. This part of the novel features not only information on Vonnegut's family and Bernie's surprising decision to create pieces of art, but Kurt Vonnegut's general opinion on the question "art or not?" (*Timequake*, 144):

" 'You yourself [Bernie] are gratified by some music, arrangements of noises, and again essentially *nonsense*. If I were to kick a bucket down the cellar stairs, and then say to you the racket I had made was philosophically on a par with *The Magic Flute*, this would not be the beginning of a long and upsetting debate. An utterly satisfactory and complete response on your part would be, 'I like what Mozart did, and I hate what the bucket did.' [...] "If you really want to know whether your pictures are, as you say 'art or not,' you must display them in public place somewhere, and see if strangers like to look to them. That is the way the game is played.[...]" (*Timequake*, 144)

This 'statement' offers an interesting view on Vonnegut's opinion on art. If art becomes art by a certain public interest, one could easily presuppose that literature is art if a lot of people are interested in a certain book, and therefore buy it. It does not seem farfetched to believe that such a philosophy is uttered by an author whose biggest commercial success –

---

<sup>73</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 236.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

*Slaughterhouse-Five*, entered the best-seller list and was published for seven additional hardcover prints.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless one can see a change of mind of Vonnegut concerning the connection between commercial success and consideration as art. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, when Billy is kidnapped by the Tralfamadorians and the only earthlings book the aliens have is Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls*, a 1960s bestseller (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 63), Vonnegut criticises traditional novels. He lets Billy ask the Tralfamadorians for something else, since the great realistic tradition of Dostoyevsky, who inspired Vonnegut has deteriorated into Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls*.<sup>76</sup> If one compares Vonnegut's dislike of traditional, popular fiction to his statement concerning art and public interest, one would have to assume his disregard of popular fiction of 1969 has been replaced by a pragmatic, more tolerant approach concerning the parameters of defining art in 1996.

The differences of the autobiographical parts and opinions can be seen in other examples as well. For example the epilogue of *Timequake* is dedicated to his Brother Ernie (*Timequake*, 215 ff.) and furthermore the book offers descriptions of and anecdotes featuring Vonnegut's mother, his father, Bernhard O'Hare, his sister Allie, his first wife Jane and a vast number of other relatives. (*Timequake*, 1, 12, 23, 68, 69, 85, etc.) Quite often, Vonnegut gives the impression that his characters are influenced by persons which play a role in his biography. For example, Trout's mentally ill father (*Timequake*, 50-51) can be seen as the fictional counterpart of Vonnegut's maternal grandfather, who, according to Vonnegut, should be blamed for his mother's suicide. This parallel can be drawn since Vonnegut applies the phrase "Ting-a-ling," which can be tossed back to Trout's father (*Timequake*, 137) Vonnegut seems to be mainly interested in focusing on the comical but tragic side of life, like his depressive sister's family's bankruptcy, which was caused by Allie's husband who invested all his money to manufacture and promote a toy of his own invention (*Timequake*, 85). In contrast Vonnegut stresses his sister's sense of humour as well, which was quite similar to his own (*Timequake*, 101 ff.). This dimension of Vonnegut's writing cannot be found in *Slaughterhouse-Five* where Vonnegut only refers to his experience of witnessing the firebombing of Dresden, his and his war-buddy Bernhard O'Hare's return to Dresden in

---

<sup>75</sup> Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990, 23.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

1967, his post-war life and his attempts to write about the massacre (Slaughterhouse-Five, 1-16). Focusing on the process of creating art is present in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, when Vonnegut depicts his unsuccessful attempt to create a proper outline (Slaughterhouse-Five, 4), as well as in *Timequake*, where Vonnegut compares Timequake (I) to the Santiago's marlin in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which represents Hemingway's novel *Across the Water and into the Trees*. The depictions of the process of creation of *Timequake (II)*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* are essential for the understanding of the novels since they not only explains the narratives, but as well mark the novels as being postmodern.<sup>77</sup>

The following paragraphs of this paper is closely related to the one above, since the paradigmatic changes and the topics Vonnegut seems to be interested in will be scrutinised. At this point one might consider the biographical dimension of Vonnegut's writing as an important factor. However, for having dealt with this point to a certain extend already, the focus shall be rather put on other topics coming up in *Timequake* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

#### **4. Vonnegut's Subject Matters: from Evils of Technology to Self-Respect**

During the following paragraphs the topics Vonnegut seems to be interested in will be examined. The purpose of this approach is to find constants and variables of issues he addresses. Firstly, the depiction of the evils of technology, which is a traditional topic in Vonnegut's novels will be considered. Since his early works, he is mainly concerned with the disadvantages of modern technology.<sup>78</sup> The subject matter of the novels is mostly presented on two different levels. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* the atrocities and the senselessness of war are central topics of the whole plot. The dimensions of destruction of the massacre can easily be tracked back to the development of military machinery, conventional and nuclear (Slaughterhouse-Five, 137). Furthermore this central message comes up as a summarized plot of one of Kilgore Trout's short stories. *The Gutless Wonder* features a humanoid robot being avoided because of his halitosis. Other robots are not avoided although they drop napalm on people without conscience. (Slaughterhouse-Five,122) This leads to the assumption that

---

<sup>77</sup> Klinkowitz. *Rosenberg/Barthes/Hassan*. 1988, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Festa. "Vonnegut's Satire" 1977, 134.

dropping napalm on people is acceptable, whereas halitosis is unacceptable. This idea of a possible acceptance of massacres is criticised in the novel when Bertram Copeland Rumfoord reads various books on the destruction of Dresden which justify the firebombing (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 136). If one considers that *Slaughterhouse-Five* was written during the Vietnam war, the criticism of still ongoing atrocities of war become obvious. In *Timequake* Vonnegut refers to the disadvantages of technology on three levels:

1. within Trout's short stories e.g. *The Sisters B-36*<sup>79</sup> (*Timequake*, 15 ff.);
2. in a comment of the author concerning the use of nuclear power (*Timequake*, 6);
3. as a part of the plot of *Timequake* (I), when everybody falls victim to PTA and cars and aeroplanes cause major destruction. (*Timequake*, 106, 179 ff.)

From the examples of Trout's stories, taken from both novels, one can see the central purpose of the science-fiction author's stories which are important because of their humanness, rather than their pictureness.<sup>80</sup> Trout enables Vonnegut to underline the message of his novels with a parable within short stories.<sup>81</sup> The science-fiction of Trout's stories becomes a device which allows to deal with topics which normally would appear as too complicated, too controversial.<sup>82</sup> Science-fiction stories play an important role since they allow us to distance ourselves from ourselves, because one cannot bare too much reality. Therefore reality must be disguised as the unreality of science-fiction. By disguising the reality, the grotesque character of man's deeds becomes obvious.<sup>83</sup>

Another topic Vonnegut is interested in is religion. For Vonnegut, God is an invention fulfilling a psychological function in human society, but whose existence is not based on any type of evidence.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless he admires the transformative power of religion.<sup>85</sup> Not surprisingly the bible

---

<sup>79</sup> In this Trout short story, one of three sisters on the peaceful Planet Booboo decides to become a scientist rather than an artist. She invents barbed wire and flamethrowers and therefore destroys the peace which was typical for the Planet Booboo.

<sup>80</sup> Broer. "Vonnegut's Goodby" 2001, 81.

<sup>81</sup> Reed. "Kurt Vonnegut's Bitter Fool: Kilegore Trout" 2000, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Reed, Peter J. "Hurting `Til It Laughs: The Painful-Comic Science Fiction Stories of Kurt Vonnegut" *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations* Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000, 36.

<sup>83</sup> McNelly, Willis E. "Kurt Vonnegut as Science-Fiction Writer" *Vonnegut in America: an Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut*. Jerome Klinkowitz and Donald L. Lawler Eds. New York: Delacorte Press. 1977, 93.

<sup>84</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Klinkowitz. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. 1990, 70.

can be regarded as one of Vonnegut's major influences, even though he thinks of himself as an atheistic postmodern humanist.<sup>86</sup>

Again, an important topic is introduced by a Kilgore Trout short story in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In *The Gospel from Outer-Space* aliens think that Christian people could only become violent, because the bible carried the wrong message, which is that it was only wrong to crucify Jesus, because of his connections to God. The moral of such a gospel is that you have to make sure that the victim you want to harm is not well connected. As a result the aliens send mankind a new gospel in which Jesus was a bum and a pain in the neck of a whole lot of people, and he was only adopted by God when he was about to be crucified. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 78 ff.) This story is a plain criticism of Christian morality. One can find a lot of parallels between the Jesus from *The Gospel from Outer-Space* and Billy Pilgrim. He is a bum who has absolutely no connections until he marries Valencia. Furthermore Billy "lets himself down, hanging on a diagonal cross brace in the corner", until the other prisoners of war force him to leave his spot. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 56) It appears to be Vonnegut's conscious intention to depict Billy as a Christ-like figure.<sup>87</sup> Like Christ, Billy brings a new message to the world and he is depicted rather innocent and he accepts his own death. Billy teaches to face death calmly, since death is not the end. He is the new Christ who teaches that there is life after death, which is the literary consequence of the Tralfamadorian novel.<sup>88</sup> In addition other Judeo-Christian references can be found, since Montana Wildhack and Billy live the life of "the space-age Adam and Eve".<sup>89</sup> When the Tralfamadorians teach Billy their philosophy, he eats from the tree of knowledge and is expelled from his symbolic garden and sent back to earth where he starts to preach.<sup>90</sup>

At first, in *Timequake* religion seems to be less important, although Trout gives Vonnegut his own satirical account of the Book of Genesis, in which the Garden of Eden "might be considered the prototype for the Colosseum and the Roman Games." (*Timequake*, 25 ff) Furthermore Vonnegut sets up a scenery in which the religious, armed guard Dudley Prince finds Trout's manuscript of *The Sisters B-36*. He believes that the

---

<sup>86</sup> Davis. "Comforming Lies" 1995, 176.

<sup>87</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 10, 86-87.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>89</sup> Peterson. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut*. 1994, 276.

<sup>90</sup> Allen. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. 1991, 93 ff.

sheet of paper must be a message from God himself, since “[w]hat happened on planet Booboo, after all, wasn’t a whole lot different from what seemed to be happening on his own.” Because of what the timequake had done to Prince,

“he had become as contemptuous of the idea of a wise and just God as [Vonnegut’s] sister Allie had been. Allie opined one time, not just about her life but everybody’s life, ‘If there is a God, He sure hates people. That’s all I can say.’” (Timequake, 56)

By looking closer on the novel, one sees that being religious and the loss of belief are major aspects of *Timequake*. An outstanding example of this are Vonnegut’s remarks concerning his war buddy Bernard O’Hare losing his faith:

“My great war buddy Bernard V. O’Hare, now dead, lost his faith as a Roman Catholic during World War Two. I didn’t like that. I thought that was too much to lose.”(Timequake, 72)

In contrast to the fundament of religion which was unstable for Bernard O’Hare and seems to be unstable for the fictitious character of Dudley Prince, Vonnegut presents the reader the idea of humanism:

“Humanists try to behave decently and honorably without any expectation of rewards or punishment in an afterlife. The creator of the Universe has been unknowable so far. We serve as well as we can the highest abstraction of which we have some understanding, which is our community.  
Are we enemies of members of organized religions? No.”

Vonnegut seems to promote the idea of behaving decently without expecting something as an opportunity not to become discouraged by not gaining any rewards. This allows a person to live his/her life self-respectful. This leads to the assumption that not losing self-respect is the central message embodied in *Timequake*. Since it is regarded as Vonnegut’s first book with a Happy End,<sup>91</sup> *Timequake* is structured around Kilgore Trout, who is admired by Vonnegut for not losing his self-respect although he was a hobo for much of his life (Timequake, xiii)<sup>92</sup> and his outer-appearance would suggest missing self-respect, because -due to his lifestyle- he looks like a bag-lady (Timequake, 61). Trout’s function, to make us recognise the malaise of the world we inhabit and to provide some wisdom and some healing laughter, is central in Vonnegut’s novels.<sup>93</sup> Therefore he deserves a

---

<sup>91</sup> Rackstraw. “The Paradox of ‘Awareness’” 2000, 64 ff.

<sup>92</sup> Broer. “Vonnegut’s Goodby” 2001, 81.

<sup>93</sup> Reed. “Kurt Vonnegut’s Bitter Fool: Kilgore Trout” 2000, 72.

Happy End. Especially since he appears in so many of Vonnegut's novels.<sup>94</sup> He is the debunker, demystifier, a mocker through which Vonnegut can be as iconoclastic as he pleases.<sup>95</sup> That Trout dies peacefully and in self-respect in his luxurious Ernest-Hemingway-Suite at the age of 84 distinguishes him from the people, fictitious or real, who lost self-respect and committed suicide (*Timequake*, 69, 183).<sup>96</sup>

Since *Timequake* is (up to now) Kurt Vonnegut's last novel, he seems to give Trout the deserved end after so many novels in which he functions as a writer of what is considered lower than pornography: science-fiction.<sup>97</sup>

## 5. Do the Questions Remain? (Conclusion)

To sum up the findings of this paper, one should stress the fact that the topic of free will and determinism is still a central one in Vonnegut's works in 1996. Although it underwent tremendous changes. To some extent it would be possible to describe *Slaughterhouse-Five* as basically deterministic and fatalistic since the Tralfamadorian philosophy influences the narrative and therefore suggests fatalistic tendencies of the author-narrator. However, one should be aware of the distinction between Billy Pilgrim and Kurt Vonnegut. The fatalistic acceptance of his destiny by Billy should not be tracked back to Kurt Vonnegut. One could also imagine that the author depicts a negative example of passive behaviour which offers no other possibility than being a plaything of irresistible forces. He as an author who is present in the novel offers another option by functioning as a role model. He offers the reinvention of reality by turning to the formative power of literature.

In contrast, in *Timequake* a pessimistic reading seems to be impossible. Trout becomes the role model of exercising free will beneficially. He re-establishes free will for everybody by shouting "Kilgore's Creed", even though he is not optimistic about free will at all. Furthermore, the fact that Trout is a hobo suggests that the connection between socio-economic factors and the opportunity to exercise free will is a problematic one. Even if a person has economically unstable background, it is still possible to exercise free will within a set of physical parameters. On the

---

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), *Timequake* (1996)

<sup>95</sup> Reed. "Kurt Vonnegut's Bitter Fool: Kilgore Trout" 2000, 69.

<sup>96</sup> The list of people who committed suicide features Adolf Hitler, Eva Braun, Ernest Hemingway, and Edith Vonnegut

<sup>97</sup> Reed. "Kurt Vonnegut's Bitter Fool: Kilgore Trout" 2000, 70.

other hand, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the economically successful Billy Pilgrim does not exercise free will, but takes refuge with his schizophrenic time-travel and the fatalistic Tralfamadorian philosophy. These findings suggest, that a cosmological determinism in the sense of being determined in a larger perspective - by physics - is a solid basis of Vonnegut's work. But Vonnegut is an advocate of free will and man's duty to exercise free in private life. Everyone should exercise free will beneficially for himself and for the others, just as he did when he decided to use writing as his therapy to form new reality from his experiences of war and suicide.

Vonnegut's presence in his novels is crucial for the readers perception of Vonnegut as a advocate of the beneficial use of free will. The fact that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is still written as promoting determinism could have forced him to strengthen the autobiographical notion of his writing. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* the biographical insertions can only be found in chapters one and ten, although they should not be read as an autobiographical frame, but as a part of the story. In addition the real Kurt Vonnegut acts in the novel three more times, only to verify the circumstances of Billy's war experiences as being historical. This restriction to the first and the last chapter might have caused the confusion of Billy's determinism with Vonnegut's viewpoint concerning the topic.

In order to prevent such a confusion in *Timequake*, Vonnegut places the autobiographic insertions all through the novel. Additionally Vonnegut sets up a Happy End for a protagonist who uses his willpower beneficially by waking up mankind which is paralysed by PTA. At this point one could argue that again one should not confuse Trout's deeds with Vonnegut's position, but this time a correlation of the author's viewpoint and his protagonist's actions is obvious, since Vonnegut expresses his admiration of Trout who never lost his self-respect. Furthermore Vonnegut never praises the suicidal characters, real or fictitious who occur in *Timequake*.

However, self-respect is one of the central topic of *Timequake*, since it is the feature that distinguishes the protagonist from the other characters if not from the rest of mankind who are not able to free themselves from PTA, because they lack the self-respect which turns out to be typical of Trout. Billy Pilgrim also lacks this self-respect, since he simply flows in the river of time and moments, therefore the topic of indestructible self-respect does not come up in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The two topics discussed above seem to form the core of

Vonnegut's fiction. Moreover, one finds the topic of religion which is featured in both novels. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* the Trout short story *The Gospel from Outer-Space* marks a criticism of the Christian believe, which seems to justify bad treatment of people which are not as well connected as Jesus is. In order to underline his message, Vonnegut depicts Billy Pilgrim as a Christ-like figure, except from the fact that Billy is not well connected. Interestingly, Billy does not turn to believe in God in order to cope with his war traumata. But Vonnegut does not restrict himself to criticism exclusively, since he uses images of the Judeo-Christian believe, by depicting Billy Pilgrim and Montana Wildhack in their Tralfamadorian zoo as a space-age remake of Adam and Eve. At this point Vonnegut presents us the Book of Genesis as one of his major sources of influence. This can be seen in *Timequake* as well, when Trout tells Kurt Vonnegut his version of the Book of Genesis at the Clambake. In general the Christian believe is not a central topic *Timequake*. The formative power of religion and the phenomenon of believing seems to be more interesting for Vonnegut. To some extent it looks as if he envies the people who still can believe, because he has lost formative power of religion. Therefore he has to turn to humanism which is more straining, since one has to make beneficial use of free will by doing good in private life without any expectations of reward. Furthermore the pressure of punishment for not living right is missing, which makes it even harder to stick to ones main believes.

As the last topic, one should come to the evils of technology which are central in both novels. In the plot of *Slaughterhouse-Five* destruction of Dresden was only possible by using aeroplanes. Nevertheless, this event has not been invented by Vonnegut. However, he sets up a paralleled short story by Trout (*The Gutless Wonder*) in which humanoid robots drop bombs on people without being avoided. In contrast another robot is avoided for having bad breath. In *Timequake* the machines run amok because they have no conscience and no free will which they can get back by the end of the rerun. Furthermore, in *The Sisters B-36* the death of creativity is caused by the invention of TV, barbed wire, and flamethrower. Again, the inventions can be described as not contributing to the improvement of the situation of numerous underprivileged people on the earth.

Finally, one can say that the evils of technology are not embedded in the devices themselves, but in the unbeneficial use of free will. Consequently one has to sum up that the evils of technology are embodied

in their appliance which is governed by the use of free will. The exercising of free will in turn is governed by the ideals one commits himself/herself to. As a perfect solution Vonnegut suggests the idea of humanism, but he also seems to accept believing in a creator of the universe, as far as this supports ones beneficial use of free will which is far to often not the case. Therefore the topic of free will and the principles which govern free will are central in *Timequake* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The other frequent issues of Vonnegut only function as devices for him to depict his central topic.

## 6. Bibliography

### Primary Literature:

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse-Five: or The Children's Crusade – A Duty Dance with Death*. London: Vintage (ed. 1991), 2000.

---. *Timequake*. London: Vintage (ed. 1997), 1998.

### Secondary Literature:

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. 1999.

Allen, William Rodney. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press. 1991.

Broer, Lawrence, R. "Vonnegut's Goodby: Kurt Senior, Hemingway and Kilgore Trout" *At millenniums end: new essays on the work of Kurt Vonnegut*. Kevin Alexander Boon Ed. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2001.

Cordle, Daniel. "Changing of the Old Guard: Time Travel and Literary Technique in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut" *The yearbook of English studies* 30 (2000): 166-177.

Davis, Todd Fleming Jefferson. *Comforming Lies: Postmodern Morality in the Works of Kurt Vonnegut* (Dissertation). Dekalb: UMI Microform, UMI Number: 9604236. 1995.

Festa, Conrad. "Vonnegut's Satire" *Vonnegut in America: an Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut*, Jerome Klinkowitz and Donald L. Lawler Eds. New York: Delacorte Press. 1977.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Rosenberg/Barthes/Hassan: The Postmodern Habit of Thought*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press. 1988.

---. *Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming the Novel and the World*. Boston: Twayne Publishers. 1990.

- Leeds, Marc. *The Vonnegut Encyclopedia: an Authorized Compendium*, Westport: Greenwood Press. 1995.
- McNelly, Willis E. "Kurt Vonnegut as Science-Fiction Writer" *Vonnegut in America: an Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut*. Jerome Klinkowitz and Donald L. Lawler Eds. New York: Delacorte Press. 1977.
- Peck, Dale. "Old Codger: Timequake by Kurt Vonnegut" *London Review of Books*. Vol. 19: No. 24 (1997), 26/27 .
- Peterson, Bo. *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut: Moral Paradox and Narrative Form*. Abo: Abo Akademis University Press. 1994.
- Rackstraw, Loree. "The Paradox of 'Awareness' and Language in Vonnegut's Fiction" *Images and Representations* Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000.
- Reed, Peter J. "Hurting `Til It Laughs: The Painful-Comic Science Fiction Stories of Kurt Vonnegut" *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations* Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000.
- Reed, Peter J. "Kurt Vonnegut's Bitter Fool: Kilegore Trout" Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed Eds. *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*, Westport: Greenwood Press. 2000.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. *Palm Sunday*. New York: Lawrence/Delacorte, 1981.