

Slaughterhouse-Five Essay: Irony, Dark Humor, and Satire

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Irony, Dark Humor, and Satire in Slaughterhouse-Five

Kurt Vonnegut uses a combination of dark humor and irony in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. As a result, the novel enables the reader to realize the horrors of war while simultaneously laughing at some of the absurd situations it can generate. Mostly, Vonnegut wants the reader to recognize the fact that one has to accept things as they happen because no one can change the inevitable.

Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* may not be filled with delightful [satire](#) and comical scenes, there are accounts which force the reader to laugh. In one instance, an extremely drunk Billy Pilgrim is searching desperately for the steering wheel of his car: "He was in the backseat of his car, which is why he couldn't find the steering wheel," Vonnegut writes (47). In another episode, Billy becomes "unstuck" in time while watching television, so that he sees a war film backwards and then forwards. The most humorous sequence takes place when Billy travels from the zoo on Tralfamadore to his wedding night with his wife, Valencia. He wakes up to find himself in the German prison camp. He then finds himself

back with Valencia after returning from the bathroom. He goes to sleep, then wakes up on a train on the way to his father's funeral.

In any case, the reader encounters much [dark humor](#) in the novel. There is a sense of an embittered humor with the Tralfamadorian phrase, "So it goes," which is repeated over 100 times in the novel. John May says that Vonnegut's purpose in repeating the phrase after each statement of death is to build its meaning with each incremental refrain (Contemporary Literary Criticism 8: 530). At first, the saying can be looked upon as funny in an ironic way. However, as one reads further, the phrase becomes irritating and irreverent. The reader cannot fathom so many deaths meaning so little. According to Wayne McGinnis, it is most likely Vonnegut's intent to cause such feelings from the reader (Contemporary Literary Criticism 5: 468). This punctuating phrase forces the reader to look at the novel's deaths one after the other.

Ultimately, the repetition creates a feeling of resentment that too many people are killed. The saying is a grim reminder that means exactly the opposite of what its words say. Vonnegut ends the novel with the reminder of the deaths of JFK, Martin Luther King, and all of those that died in Vietnam.

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