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**FROM POSTMODERNISM TO POST-POSTMODERNISM:
REWRITING HISTORY IN KURT VONNEGUT'S
SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE AND GEORGE SAUNDERS'S *LINCOLN
IN THE BARDO***

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ÖZET

Ecesu Altın Şahin, Postmodernizmden Post-postmodernizme: Kurt Vonnegut’ın *Slaughterhouse-Five* ve George Saunders’ın *Lincoln in the Bardo* Eserlerinde Yeniden Yazım Tekniği, Başkent Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı, 2024.

Yeniden yazım, edebi bir alt tür olarak kabuk görse de postmodern dönemin yükselişi ile öne çıkan bir edebî tekniğe dönüşmüştür. Bu edebî teknik sayesinde eski metinler ve herkes tarafından onanmış tarihsel bilgiler, üst anlatıların yıkımı ile tekrar gözden geçirilmiş ve yeniden yazılmıştır. Bu tekniği benimseyen yazarlar, okuyucularını tamamen farklı bakış açıları ile tanıştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu bilgiler ışığında, bu çalışma, Kurt Vonnegut’ın *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) ve George Saunders’ın *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) adlı eserlerinde işlenen Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’nin İkinci Dünya Savaşı’na katılımına ve Amerikan İç Savaşı dönemindeki politikasına yeni bir bakış açısı sunarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın odağında yer alan iki eser de postmodern bir yöntem olan yeniden yazım tekniğini kullanmaktadır. Postmodern bir roman olan *Slaughterhouse-Five*’da görüldüğü ve aynı zamanda post-postmodern bir roman olan *Lincoln in the Bardo*’da da gözlemlendiği gibi, yeniden yazım tekniği çağdaş edebiyat eserlerinde de etkili olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Kurt Vonnegut romanını, İkinci Dünya Savaşı tarihini üst kurmaca ve bilimkurgu unsurlarını kullanarak kaleme alırken, post-postmodern çağda, genellikle günümüzün Vonnegut’ı olarak kabul edilen George Saunders ise, fantastik bir dünya yaratır ve Amerikan İç Savaşı’nı meta duygusal unsurları kullanarak yeniden yazar. Postmodernizm ve post-postmodernizm olmak üzere farklı edebî dönemlerde yayınlanan her iki eser de üst anlatıya meydan okurken, bu tarihsel dönemleri eleştirmekte ve empati, nezaket ve hümanizm gibi değerlerin altını çizmektedir. İki roman da aynı değerlere odaklansa da postmodern edebiyattan çağdaş edebiyata doğru anlatım tekniğinin evrimi, *Slaughterhouse-Five*’ın ironi dolu ve yıkıcı bir tonu benimserken, *Lincoln in the Bardo*’nun ise yapıcı ve duygusal bir üslup kullanması ile açıkça görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Postmodernizm, Post-postmodernizm, Yeniden Yazım, Meta-duygusal Kurgu, Tarihsel Üstkurmaca

ABSTRACT

Ecesu Altın Şahin, From Postmodernism to Post-Postmodernism: Rewriting History in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and George Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Başkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, American Culture and Literature Master's Program with Thesis, 2024.

Although rewriting history has been recognized as a literary sub-genre, it has evolved into a prominent literary technique with the rise of postmodern era. With this approach, older texts or accepted historical facts have been revisited and rewritten through the deconstruction of grand narratives. Through this process, authors endeavor to challenge readers with entirely different perspectives. In light of this, this study aims to analyze Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and George Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) as they present a new perspective on the United States' involvement in the World War II and the American Civil War. Both novels employ a postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history. As demonstrated in the postmodern novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* and also observed in post-postmodern novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history remains influential in contemporary literary works. In this context, Kurt Vonnegut rewrites the history of the Second World War in his novel, using metafictional and science-fictional elements. In post-postmodern era, George Saunders, often regarded as modern-day Vonnegut, through the creation of a fantastical realm, employs metaffective elements to rewrite the American Civil War. Published within different literary periods, postmodernism and post-postmodernism, both novels challenge the grand narrative, critique these historical epochs and underscore the value of empathy, kindness and humanity. While both literary works share a thematic focus on these values, the evolution of the narrative technique from postmodernism to post-postmodernism is apparent as *Slaughterhouse-Five* adopts an ironical and detached tone, whereas *Lincoln in the Bardo* uses a constructive and sentimental tone.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Post-postmodernism, Rewriting History, Metaffective Fiction, Historiographic Metafiction

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Aim of the Study

The aim of this thesis is to compare and contrast Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and George Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) in terms of the writers' approach to rewriting history. Both *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Lincoln in the Bardo* adopt postmodern literary techniques to tackle the traumatic experiences of war on collective and individual levels. In the novels, both authors challenge the grand narratives and criticize the American Civil War and the US's participation in the World War II by rewriting these particular historical periods to articulate a new perspective regarding these historical events. Published in different literary historical periods, postmodernism and post-postmodernism respectively, and portraying different historical periods, 20th and 21st century respectively, both novels emphasize the human need for communication, empathy, and kindness, the experience of being caught up in liminal time and space, and the representation of grief. This study aims to explore these themes by discussing how the postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history employed in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is still very influential in literary production today as is observed in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. By analyzing both novels closely, this study aims to pursue how rewriting history as a postmodern narrative technique has evolved in the post-postmodern context and still gives the opportunity to address contemporary political and cultural issues from a subversive point of view. In brief, this thesis argues that while Vonnegut employs metafictional elements to show that history is not objective but ideologically and discursively constructed, Saunders adopts metaffective elements to show how emotions are constructed fictionally but yet able to produce real emotions such as grief, loss, empathy and love to unite a country divided by ethnicity.

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), who is known for his satirical and darkly humorous tones in his novels, is the author of fourteen novels, three short story collections, five plays and five nonfiction works. He attended Cornell University and the Carnegie Institute of Technology before enlisting in the US Army and being deployed to Europe to take part in World War II. When he was captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge, he was imprisoned in a meat locker of a slaughterhouse in Dresden, where he witnessed the allied bombing of the city in 1945, and satirically portrayed these events in *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969. After the war, he specialized in anthropology at the University of Chicago before becoming to a full-time writer. Vonnegut published his first novel *Player Piano* in 1952 and

with his first science-fiction anti-utopianism novel, he achieved considerable success. His first novel is followed by *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), in which Vonnegut introduces his imaginary universe called Tralfamadore for the first time. After *Mother Night* (1962), he published *Cat's Cradle* (1963) which is regarded as a parody of religion. By publishing *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), Vonnegut introduces his recurring character Kilgore Trout. Also, he is well-known for his novels entitled *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968), *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1970), *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), *Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloon* (1974), *Slapstick* (1976), *Jailbird* (1979), *Palm Sunday* (1981), *Deadeye Dick* (1982), *Galapagos* (1985), and *Bluebeard* (1987). Although his earlier fictions mainly belonged to the science-fiction genre, he used less science fictional elements in his later works. Among his works, especially, *Slaughterhouse-Five* had achieved great success without describing any war scenes or directly attacking the fighting countries, Vonnegut managed to write an anti-war novel. *Slaughterhouse-Five* attained popularity not only because of the protests against the outbreak of Vietnam war, but also because of the long history of violence in the US which had witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr and Robert Kennedy who were the supporters of peace and hope.

Slaughterhouse-Five, which is considered as a semi-autobiographical account of the fire-bombing in Dresden in 1945, emerged from Vonnegut's own experience of World War II. As the author himself was the survivor of the war by chance, in his novel, he explicitly and also humorously criticizes WWII showing the psychological condition of an innocent man, Billy Pilgrim. The novel focuses on the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's experience during WWII, his adaptation to causal life and his travel through time. In the novel, like Vonnegut, Billy Pilgrim joins the army during World War II as an American soldier and witnesses the massacre in Dresden, which becomes a turning point in his life. Billy's traumatic experience at war distorts his concept of reality and truth. With the loss of the ability to differentiate what is real and what is true, Billy, as a post-war traumatic self, is entrapped within time-travel and a planet called Tralfamadore. Throughout the novel, Billy, who has mental disorientation, experiences time-travel between his life in World War II in Dresden, his postwar life as a rich optometrist in the US and his third life on the planet Tralfamadore, where he is abducted by the aliens.

In the novel, which is regarded as one of the major texts of postmodern literature, Vonnegut depicts the traumatic view of the protagonist with a mostly sarcastic manner. In other words, he bursts out his war experience to his writing and creates an innovative narrative structure. This leads him to enrich his novel with a corrugated narrative, which

involves flashbacks and flash-forwards. Moreover, with the non-linear use of time, he lays bare the psychological condition of not only his protagonist but also himself. In this sense, Vonnegut's contribution to this particular historical event with the loss of integrity in Billy's consciousness allows the readers to reconsider their accepted perception on the effects of the war.

Slaughterhouse-Five can easily be perceived as a postmodern novel since Vonnegut successfully brings together a collage of genres, which are autobiography, slapstick comedy, trauma fiction, science-fiction and historical fiction in his work. Nonetheless, it is much easier to identify Vonnegut's subversions of history with black humor in his work. He also blends history and science-fiction by allowing his fictional representation of a real historical event to be problematized by science-fiction. Therefore, although his novel is based on historical facts, by disrupting the linearity of time and using science fictional elements, Vonnegut blurs the sharp distinction between truth and fiction. This is why *Slaughterhouse-Five* is regarded to be a historiographic metafiction, a term coined by the critic Linda Hutcheon, rather than a historical novel. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon (1988) clarifies that historiographic metafiction does not present historical events and periods in a 'true-to-life' manner, and it does not generate historical 'reality' either. Instead of evoking reality, it focuses on the textuality and the fictionality of history. By challenging the traditional sense, historiographic metafiction disrupts the experience of what is known as official history.

In the novel, Vonnegut gives a chance to his readers to have a different insight into the understanding of the war and to reconsider the terrifying effects of the post war period when Billy claims he is kidnapped by two-foot-high aliens, which are called Tralfamadorians. In this regard, Marija Kačavendić (2014) states that "[i]n *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut presents various levels of a reality, one that does not have unambiguous boundaries or clarity; this reality mirrors the world he is trying to blur and soften, because it is too violent and cruel" (p.203). Therefore, by creating multiple realities, Vonnegut allows Billy to be free from the sorrowful memories of the war, his sense of grief and a world without empathy. In line with this, with the use of science-fictional elements and blurring the concept of time, Vonnegut poignantly draws all the attention to the effects of this shameful war on the innocent survivors and sheds light on the lives of psychologically wounded people who were affected by the war. By rewriting history, he demonstrates new perspectives regarding the war and presents his own idea about the decisions made by the American politicians.

From a different yet related perspective, George Saunders (1958 -) presents the reader with another chaotic period of American history. Saunders, who is seen as modern-day Kurt Vonnegut, follows the footsteps of the author of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and just like him, he rewrites the history of the American Civil War in his Man Booker Prize-Winning novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017). However, unlike Vonnegut, he turns his focus onto the emotional power of the novel without any ironical detachments. Saunders, being a writer of short stories, essays, novellas, children's books, and novels, published his first story collection *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996), which became a finalist for the 1996 PEN/Hemingway award. In 2000, he published his second story collection *Pastoralia* and with his third story collection *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), he became a finalist for the Story Prize in 2007. In 2013, he published another short story collection *Tenth of December: Stories* and finally won the 2013 Story Prize and the inaugural Folio Prize. For his excellence in the short story genre, he received PEN/ Malamud Prize. Saunders's works focus on consumerism, corporate culture, working-class, and late-capitalism and similar to Vonnegut, he generally raises moral questions as well. Therefore, it is not a surprise for the reader to identify the themes and techniques of his early works in his first full-length novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

Lincoln in the Bardo, which takes place at a cemetery during the night immediately after the death of Abraham Lincoln's eleven-year-old son, William Wallace Lincoln, is also an example of the rewriting history technique. The novel has an innovative structure as it is narrated by a chorus of ghosts, and it is composed of a series of hundreds of monologues, some of them are ghosts speaking and some of them are actual transcriptions from history books. Thus, the text diverges from conventional prose, adopting the structure of a play, with more than 160 ghosts commenting on the events, and completing each other's sentences. Adopting a postmodern attitude towards the grand narrative and the universal truth, Saunders's choice of multivocality in narration questions the nature of truth and challenges logocentric perceptions of history. The novel is set in 1862 during the American Civil War and while the bloody war is going on, President Lincoln loses his son to a fatal disease. Despite the doctors' expectations for recovery, Willie gets worse and worse and eventually dies. He is laid to rest in Georgetown cemetery and out of unbearable grief, Abraham Lincoln returns to the crypt to hold his son's body. From this seed of historical truth, Saunders creates a supernatural realm where Willie Lincoln and all the ghosts, who are in a transitional state called, in the Tibetan tradition, the Bardo, gather because they have unfinished business. Even though Saunders's novel is also based on historical facts, just like *Slaughterhouse-*

Five, with these supernatural elements similar to what Vonnegut does in his novel, Saunders also blurs the sharp distinction between history and fiction. Thus, Saunders's novel can also be approached by the discussions of historiographic metafiction. In this regard, according to Clare Hayes-Brady (2020), *Lincoln in the Bardo* can be considered as an example of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. Moreover, Hayes-Brady (2020) also states that

The novel combines primary sources with imagined "ex-centric" characters who observe or peripherally engage in historical events and disrupt our experience of and assumptions about what is "known," a practice that is lent additional layers by focusing on such a studied period in history and by including the perspective of a kind of afterlife. (p.75-76)

The aforementioned quotation posits that *Lincoln in the Bardo* may fit the example of Hutcheon's theoretical concept of historiographic metafiction because within the narrative framework, there is a deliberate combination of primary historical sources and fictitious characters situated within the realm of afterlife. Moreover, this combination of real and fictional elements within the narrative challenges the epistemic boundaries. In this regard, the blending of legitimate historical records with the author's fictional imagination and afterlife perspective adds complexity into the narrative and problematizes the representation of reality as it is.

Unlike *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which uses satire and irony as means of communication, *Lincoln in the Bardo* adopts a sentimental and an emotional tone while focusing on the relationship between the father and the son and between the president and his country. Like most of the authors, Saunders also follows the spirit of time and becomes a part of post-postmodernist movement, New Sincerity, which breaks away from the postmodernist irony and cynicism. With this new movement, while rewriting the history of the American Civil War by employing one of the most significant historical figures, Abraham Lincoln, unlike postmodernist writers who are detached since they generally use irony and black humor, as a post-postmodern author, Saunders displays historical awareness by adopting a constructive tone. Moreover, his characters are endowed with empathy and a sense of morality. While Abraham Lincoln's tremendous personal grief and sorrow transform into empathy with his own people regardless of their racial and ethnic roots in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim's experience of trauma and loss result in a delusional state of mind, emphasizing escapism as means to highlight the potential for a better world.

Saunders's use of emotions and his focus on the representations of the characters' feelings expand historiographic metafiction into a metaffective fiction within the New Sincerity aesthetics in the post-postmodernist period. Despite the postmodern period, which

allows its readers an ironic distance towards the literary works, in the 21st century, post-postmodernist literature ascribes considerable value to human connectivity, empathic engagement and feelings. Therefore, within the contemporary literary landscape, metafiction, characterized its deliberate self-awareness to challenge the traditional narratives and to blur the sharp lines between reality and fiction, evolves into metaffective fiction. This transition involves not only intentional fictionality but also a conscious exploration of the construction of emotions (Clare, 2019). In line with this, in his article “Metaffective Fiction: Structuring Feeling in Post-postmodern American Literature”, Ralph Clare (2019) argues that post-postmodernist fiction focuses on bringing back a sense of reality by creating well-developed characters and exploring emotions. Clare (2019) also adds that the contemporary authors believe in “creating a literature that values human connection, empathy, emotion, belief” (p.263). According to the contemporary authors, it is a response to what they have perceived as “narcissism, cynicism, solipsism, media saturation, and debilitating forms of cultural irony of the postmodern world” (Clare, 2019, p. 263-264). To illustrate this point, in considering race – a human-invented term – it is vital to emphasize that it was one of the divisive points in America in the 19th century. Thus, despite being aware of the necessity of the Civil War for the good of the country, President Lincoln feels reluctant to continue with this bloodshed after the death of his son in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Now, he can empathize with the parents who lost or will lose their own children over the war between the North and the South. In this regard, it is possible to argue that with the loss of his son, Lincoln’s motivation towards the emancipation changes. His personal suffering opens another window for him to see the war from a different perspective. Moreover, Hayes-Brady (2020) states that the loss of Willie Lincoln “provokes the action or decision that implicitly leads to a movement toward racial (or racially symbolized) equality. In this respect, we return to questions of sincerity, empathy and compassion” (p.89). As it is stated, in his novel, Saunders suggests that kindness, compassion and empathy can overthrow racism. Furthermore, in his interview with Foyles Bookstore (2017a), Saunders himself states that “anything I did that was weird or experimental or innovative had to be in the service of the emotional power of the book” (n.p.). Just like other contemporary authors, Saunders aims to evoke the reader’s empathy through his novel. Similarly, in another interview with Manufacturing Intellect (2018b), Saunders states that for him, “literature has always been a way of softening borders between people” (n.p.). In this regard, it is possible to argue that contrary to the perspective of postmodern authors, Saunders, considered part of New

Sincerity movement, asserts that through fiction, readers can gain a crucial understanding of the emotional states of others.

Saunders published *Lincoln in the Bardo* right after the presidential election in the US. During that time, Donald Trump, who won the election and defeated the opposition leader Hillary Clinton, overturned the American national values during his service as the 45th president of the United States from 2017 to 2021. From his first days in Washington to his last, he adopted discriminatory and racist tones towards non-Trump supporters and his policy included major changes such as imposing very sharp immigration restrictions in order to divide the country into two. Moreover, due to his executive orders and his discriminatory policy, Trump and his administration were seen as a threat to the country. Like many people in the United States, before and after the election, Saunders also continued to speak his mind through his interviews and/or articles. Before the election, in his article “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” in *The New Yorker*, Saunders (2016) states that “LeftLand and RightLand are housemates who are no longer on speaking terms. And then the house is set on fire. By Donald Trump. Good people from both subnations gape at one another through the smoke” (n.p.). In brief, it is possible to argue that Saunders considered Trump’s presidency as an alarming time since his comments, attitudes, and decisions were all divisive and they did not involve any spark of kindness or empathy. In addition to this, while Saunders was touring around the States for *Lincoln in the Bardo*, he noticed that his novel felt of the moment even though he completed the writing process before this ungenerous moment began. Moreover, in another interview with Foyles Bookstore (2017b), Saunders proclaimed that “people in the United States [were] hungry for anything that address[ed] the angst that they [were] feeling at that time” (n.p.). Thus, his novel became “a sort of reflection on America at its best, or at least as it was trying to be its best” (Foyles Bookstore, 2017b, n.p.). Therefore, while rewriting history to criticize the ongoing racial discrimination in the country, Saunders chooses Abraham Lincoln as a historical figure whose only aim is to unify the United States. With his constructive tone and positive portrayal of Abraham Lincoln, Saunders emphasizes the importance of kindness, compassion, and empathy, which can gather individuals around a collective identity. He wants his readers to notice the differences between these two presidents of the US by showing Abraham Lincoln as a kind of president who had the courage to fight for the abolition of slavery and to resist inequality towards African Americans. Donald Trump, on the other hand, willingly divided the country into two by declaring to make America great again by privileging upper class white culture.

Overall, Vonnegut rewrites the history of the Second World War in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* to expose the tragic consequences of it and he exploits metafictional devices as well. Likewise, a century later, in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders reincarnates the postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history to introduce his critical opinion on the American Civil War and the president of the US at that time. Underlining these similarities between these two novels, it can be concluded that despite being two examples of postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history, the ironical and detached tone in *Slaughterhouse-Five* turns into a constructive and an emotional tone in *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

1.2. Theoretical Background

The term 'postmodern' has emerged in the final decades of the twentieth century and it is still used in various contexts. Although 'postmodern' was not a new term, it first gained its current meaning in architecture in the 1970s and it has spread to other art forms such as literature, dance, film, theatre and music. However, since the term is too complex and hard to define, according to Linda Hutcheon (2006),

Some denigrated [the postmodern] to a 'style'; still others elevated it to a historical 'period'. These variations do not only signal differences in critics' perspectives, however; they also mark the multiplicity and complexity of the cultural phenomena gathered together under this heading. (p.115)

Due to having many confusing descriptions of the postmodern, some critics tried to trivialize the term; nonetheless, the postmodern artists stopped being silent and hesitant.

As Hutcheon puts, the postmodern blurs the boundaries between popular and high art and between mass and elite culture, and it embraces multiplicity by resisting the idea of having a center and by challenging the postmodern element of grand narrative. Moreover, the postmodern deconstructs binary oppositions such as high art / popular art, white / black, male / female and by doing so, it shatters down the hierarchy of values and undermines the idea of hierarchy itself. Even though the postmodern seems to be deconstructing not only the conventions of literary tradition but also modernism, it is possible to claim that in some ways, it follows the footsteps of modernism. Hutcheon (2006) supports this argument by stating "the very word 'postmodern' illustrates this, for it carries within itself the 'modern' – from which it both derives and deviates. It is 'post' in the sense of both temporally 'after and conceptually 'beyond'" (p.117). From a similar perspective, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2014) claim that "[t]he word 'postmodern' itself seems odd, paradoxically evoking what is after ('post') the contemporary ('modern'). How can something be after the contemporary?" (p.279). Furthermore, Ihab Hassan (1987) also suggests that "[t]he word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or

suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within” (p.87). In other words, although the postmodern challenges every single point the modern supports, the ‘new’ name still includes the old term. Therefore, by questioning the prefix ‘post’, the critics mentioned above put an emphasis on the undeniable continuity from modern to postmodern.

In order to situate the postmodern, before pointing out the difference between postmodernism and postmodernity, Hutcheon (2006) clarifies the meaning of postmodernism. According to the critic,

Within cultural and aesthetic history, it is modernism – the art and theory of the primarily Europeanized West of the first third of the twentieth century – that offers the initial defining relationship for ‘postmodernISM’, the word now used to describe a certain kind of art and theory born in and flourishing after the infamous counter-cultural sixties. (p.117)

Even though some critics claim postmodernism needs to be distinguished from modernism and thus, it needs to have a different term, Hassan (1987) argues modernism and postmodernism are not divided by an Iron Curtain or a Chinese Wall since history is a palimpsest and culture is porous to the past, present, and future and he also believes people are all simultaneously Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern. Furthermore, according to Hutcheon (2006), Hassan noticed the fact that modernism had more sides that postmodernism learned a lot from. These were the attempts by the avant-garde to break down the boundaries between art and life and between the common people and the elite, as well as their experimental challenges to the idea of a single truth, whether it was about what ‘art’ was or how to live in society. In this regard, it can be proclaimed that modernism and postmodernism cannot be evaluated as two different periods of time since, despite some noticeable distinctions between them, postmodernism learns and grows from modernism. In *The Postmodern Turn*, Hassan (1987) supports this point by stating a period “must be perceived in terms both of continuity and discontinuity” (p.88) because the two periods may complete and/or separate from each other at the same time. Therefore, although postmodernism follows the footsteps of modernism, it may show distinguished aspects. To illustrate, Hassan (1987) also clarifies the contradictions between these two periods by stating “if much of modernism appears hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist, postmodernism strikes us by contrast as playful, paratactical, and deconstructionist” (p.91).

Terry Eagleton (1996) defines postmodernism as “a form of contemporary culture, whereas the term postmodernity alludes to a specific historical background” (p.7) in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Similarly, Hutcheon (2006) explains the difference between these two terms by stating “postmodernism is usually used to talk about cultural and artistic

dimensions, while postmodernity usually connotes the more general social and political context” (p.119). Until the addition of the prefix ‘post’, human reason was accepted as at the center and one’s knowledge of past to present was determined. However, with postmodernity, the understanding of grand narratives is demolished, and the idea of single truth is challenged. Eagleton (1996) also explains postmodernity by stating that it “is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation” (p.7). In this respect, postmodernity rejects grand narratives and ends the tyranny of the idea of the single truth in order to make everyone’s voice including the powerless ones in the binary oppositions, can be heard. Individuals who had previously been sidelined by the grand narratives began to insist on being heard. This is where the postmodern theory’s emphasis on the outsider, the marginal, the ex-centric or the different first took root (Hutcheon, 2006). The death of grand narratives challenges the core of modernist ideas since with postmodernity, the concept of subjectivity was born. Knowing the fact that the new postmodern concept of ‘subjectivity’ opposes the modernist’s sense of identity because the self is not regarded as a unified entity, but rather, as one that has remnants of the others (Hutcheon, 2006). Therefore, by having the traces of the others, binary oppositions generated by modernism are deconstructed. In addition to this, Hutcheon (2006) also proclaims that just like poststructuralism, postmodern theory “‘denaturalize[s]’ what seemed ‘natural’ in society and culture” (p.121). In other words, postmodern theory aims to support its own ideology by using its deconstructive tools of parody, irony, and self-reflectivity.

Postmodernism reflects a changing society and culture in which old assumptions about industrial growth, rising economic expectations, and traditional middle-class norms have been called into question (Iggers, 1997). Using the deconstructive tools of parody, irony and self-reflectivity, postmodernism successfully shakes the core of the history and every single aspect of all humanities and social sciences. In this regard, Jean-François Lyotard (1984) suggests that “[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert’s homology, but the inventor’s paralogy” (p.25). In this regard, since postmodernism criticizes the idea of the single truth and rejects historical realism, it represents the death of the center and can be defined as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984, p.24). Hence, it is possible to claim that the postmodernist movement is not unified. It is not a fundamentally left-of-center or right-of-center (at some point on a

spectrum) tendency, nor it is the result of post-1968 intellectual/Parisian depression (Jenkins, 2003). Therefore, by creating suspect and multiple realities without a center, postmodernism eliminates hierarchical distinctions and blurs the boundaries of reality and fiction. Hutcheon (2006) also supports this postmodernist approach to history as follows:

But because poststructuralism and postmodernism together had challenged Western cultural assumptions about totalities and coherent unities, logic and reason, consciousness and subjectivity, representation and truth, the history with which the postmodern concerned itself was not the single, neutral or objective Truth assumed of empirical History. (p.122)

Therefore, according to the postmodernist approach, it is possible to argue that the acknowledged history is just an authoritarian practice, and it only considers the interest of the male-dominated culture. It suppresses the weak and the minority of the past. Moreover, traditional historians or history writers aim to impose the dominant voice of white males over their readers using third person narration technique; however, they cannot be fully objective, and historians can only interpret the past events through a subjective eye. Postmodernists put an end to this overruling regulation and give the opportunity to the ones who are deprived of the chance to talk and write their own histories (Yılmaz, 2007) and release suppressed voices from the influence of the dominant totalitarian. From a similar perspective, Elisabeth Wesseling (1991) also justifies this idea by stating “the absence of ethnic minorities from [...] history does not result from some sort of natural, automatic process, but from deliberate exclusion” (p.166) and by adopting this ideology, the possibility of multiple histories is celebrated.

Before the postmodern approach to history, in the nineteenth century, “traditional history defined itself in opposition to literature as an empirical search for external truths corresponding to what was considered to be the absolute reality of the past events” (Onega Jaén, 1995, p.12). However, postmodernists argue that historical facts cannot exist independently of the historian and thus, historical events cannot represent the reality since they are a production of the historian’s interpretation. Furthermore, American historian Hayden White (1978) elaborates on the issue and states that

One of the ways that a scholarly field takes stock of itself is by considering its history. Yet it is difficult to get an objective history of a scholarly discipline, because if the historian is himself a practitioner of it, he is likely to be a devotee of one or another of its sects and hence biased; and if he is not a practitioner, he is unlikely to have the expertise necessary to distinguish between the significant and the insignificant events of the field's development. (p.81)

White supports that historical facts are inherently incomplete and fragmented, depending on whose history is being considered. In essence, it is possible to state that the truth of history

is questioned because historians can only generate the selected parts of the history. This suggests the compulsory need to widen the gap between history and literature. Henceforth, the new perspective on history, distinct from the conventional historical approach of the 19th century, results in historical novels deviating from those written in the eighties or earlier. Similar to White, in *The Idea of History*, R. G. Collingwood (1994) insists that historians are aware that they manipulate information derived from their sources. The historians may take what they consider significant and leave out everything else, or they may introduce elements that the sources do not explicitly convey, or they may critique them by rejecting or altering information they perceive as false or deceptive. The statement from the historian proves the fact that the reality of history, as well as the reports and records about it, are not entirely faithful to the utmost truth. They are either altered or constructed because they are documented and narrated through the subjective eye of the historian. In harmony with these theories, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon (1988) also argues as such:

History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought—as a human construct. And in arguing that history does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and “gleefully” deny that the past existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense, as social texts. (p.31)

Hence, with the denial of fixity of the past and the objective truth about it, postmodernism cuts the bond of literary and historical studies and also explicitly questions conventional history writing. As a result, the traditional approaches to historiography are no longer considered as legitimate. Therefore, postmodern historical novels and the historical novels written before postmodernism become almost completely different from each other. According to Hutcheon (1988),

Both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. But these are also the implied teachings of historiographic metafiction. (p.141)

Drawing upon this excerpt, both historical writing and fiction have often been studied for their similarities. It is found that they are powerful because they seem realistic even if they do not always generate the exact/objective truth. Moreover, they are characterized as linguistic constructs, and they also engage in intertextuality by borrowing texts of the past. These observations align with the concept of historiographic metafiction. Therefore,

Hutcheon (1988) elaborates on it, and she argues that postmodern historical novel can be categorized under historiographic metafiction since “[i]n problematizing almost everything the historical novel once took for granted, historiographic metafiction destabilizes received notions of both history and fiction” (p.160). Before moving on with the analysis, a short theoretical background is a prerequisite to be able to explain historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction stresses the theoretical difficulties in separating fact from fiction in order to offer critiques of teleological history. These works investigate history as a discipline that studies the relationship between power and knowledge in the past as well as a poetics and discourse form—basically, as a social and political construction. Postmodern novels subvert the historical narratives produced by consensus historians by reconstructing established or contested histories (Oppermann, 1999). Historiographic metafiction combines the elements of both historical writing and metafiction, which is a narrative technique that self-consciously addresses the fictionality of a work, and it challenges the way history is constructed in literature. Therefore, as one of the key features of it, historiographic metafiction plays with the truth and lies about the historical record and in doing so, problematizes the possibility of historical knowledge. Since it is impossible to answer whose truth gets told, it creates a contradiction by deliberately falsifying the recorded history. Although historical fiction mostly incorporates details and/or historical data to get verification in the fictional world, historiographic metafiction almost never assimilates the data (Hutcheon, 1988). Briefly, historiographic metafiction criticizes the historical narratives and events to challenge the traditional historical narratives and most importantly, to highlight the subjective nature of it. It also seeks to undermine realism by employing historical material within the parodic self-reflexivity of metafiction. Moreover, it engages with other historical texts, referencing them within the narrative and with this intertextuality, the narrative becomes complex. Following this definition, it is possible to claim that historiographic metafiction deliberately uses past events or historical figures that traditional history avoids including and hence, it plays the part in composing alternative histories.

Writing about past events and well-known historical personas in a literary text has always been intriguing for the authors. In American literature, writing about history starts with the earliest writers who were explorers and/or the permanent settlers, and it is no surprise that in the 21st century, the contemporary authors still take their subject matter from history, and they continue to interrogate the issues of war, race, and trauma in their novels. Nonetheless, even from the slightest change in the political climate to the global financial crisis, every possible turn in the political life affects literary works of that period in a

significant way. In this regard, in *Literature After Postmodernism Reconstructive Fantasies*, Irmtraud Huber (2014) asks “[i]s it not to be expected that literature, too, would change, or rather that it had better change if it wants to remain relevant” (p.5). Based on her question, under the contemporary social issues and cultural and political changes, it is possible to argue that the philosophy of postmodernist literature has changed in the 21st century. In this regard, in *Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon (2002) also supports the invalidity of postmodernism in the contemporary world by stating “[t]he postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on – as do those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first- century world” (p.181). Therefore, it can be concluded that in the 21st century, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a dramatic change in American literature has occurred. With shock, sadness, fear and anger, a lasting historical legacy breaks the power of irony and thus, postmodernism.

Robert McLaughlin (2004) notes that a large number of fiction writers who have emerged since the late 1980s appear to be responding to what they regard as postmodernism's perceived dead end—a dead end brought about by postmodernism's disengagement from society and immersion in a language devoid of references. In his article, McLaughlin (2004) also explains the reason behind the death of postmodernism by stating “[a]s postmodernism's main qualities, irony and self-referentiality, percolated into the culture at large, however, they were claimed by television and became its dominant mode of operation” (p.64) because by integrating postmodern irony into everyday life and popular culture, it loses its effect as an estrangement tool. This clearly forces the writers of fiction to find a new way beyond postmodernism's culture of irony and ridicule because the techniques, which are used to show rebellious acts, become common and ordinary. Thus, the culture of irony and ridicule dramatically loses its power against the culture of consumer technology, and this leads to an apparent change in contemporary fiction. In the article, “Post-Postmodern Realism?”, Madhu Dubey (2011) also suggests that around the time that postmodernism came to an end, in the 1990s, American fiction in the years that followed, which is often referred to as post-postmodern, is said to have been characterized by a renewed engagement with the social world. Moreover, Dubey (2011) highlights the issue as “[m]any other literary critics have similarly argued that the period after postmodernism is characterized by the emergence of a new kind of fiction that once again aspires to represent and critique the social world” (p.364). Furthermore, Huber (2014) also suggests that literary reactions to postmodernism demonstrate that the limits of irony and skepticism are reached and now there is a “general agreement that literature struggling to recover a sense of commitment and sincerity” (p.24).

Since almost all the authors follow the spirit of time, their departure from postmodernism to post-postmodernism can easily be predicted. With the demise of postmodernism and the birth of post-postmodernism, contemporary authors begin to create post-ironic and sincere literary works. Likewise, Nicoline Timmer (2010) explains this trend as “it is not unthinkable that after endless proposals for deconstructions, a desire to construct will break through” (p.21). Eventually, there is an agreement between scholars on the call for an alternative vision; however, “opinions on what precisely will eventually be remembered as the dominant factor in the current literary shift vary widely. Nevertheless, realism, sincerity and authenticity make their appearance with a striking frequency” (Huber, 2014, p.6). Moreover, according to Huber (2014), even though the shift of interest retains much of the postmodernist ideas, it looks beyond postmodernism’s ongoing attempts to disrupt, alienate, and subvert. After deconstruction, it aims to reconstruct. Briefly, after the limits of irony and skepticism are pushed, although 21st century literature tries to recover a sense of sincerity and a feeling of empathy, scholars are still working to make sense of the current state of literature.

Although many scholars disagree on what to name such a literary movement, by the late 1980s, the hegemony of postmodernism begins to be questioned. Moreover, Jesús Bolaño Quintero (2022) claims that even though the symbol of the end of postmodernism is often associated with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, discussions about its decline continue for a long time. Before the attacks, many scholars and theorists have been actively declaring the decline of postmodernism in the 1980s and the 1990s. Briefly, pro-postmodern theorists agree that a new literary form is needed because they believe there is an obvious return to belief and truth. In agreement with this, it is possible to claim that most of the literary works written in the 21st century are in pursuit of what is real and they turn their focus into empathy and communication of feeling in their novels (Huber, 2014). Therefore, this reconnection to the real in the 21st century helps to improve the communicative bond between the writer and the reader. According to Fredrick Jameson, a prominent cultural critic, during the postmodern era, it is notable that the intensity of emotions and feelings are weakened, or they lack genuine depth, and he describes this postmodern feature with a concept called “the waning of affect” (Jameson,1991). Contrary to postmodernism, the post-postmodern literature is willing to believe and hence, it liberates emotions, sincerity, and a sense of empathy, and it also celebrates sharing (Timmer, 2010).

Although post-postmodernism is still not fully defined, there is a noticeable desire to go beyond postmodern irony and cynicism. Devoid of ironic undertones, sentimentality

begins to gain power and eventually, a literary movement called New Sincerity, “a term that has become synonymous with the post-postmodern” (Labuschagne, 2022, p.6), emerges. Thus, with the shift away from postmodern irony, post-postmodernism brings realism, authenticity, affect and sincerity back to American literature. To support this argument, Timmer (2010) highlights that “most notable in the work of this younger generation of writers is the emphatic expression of feelings and sentiments, a drive towards inter-subjective connection and communication, and also a sense of ‘presence’ and ‘sameness’” (p.13). According to Timmer, these works point out the notion of sincerity and empathy. Furthermore, in the essay collection *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again*, David Foster Wallace (2009), who is accepted as one of the most important American writers of the 21st century, reveals that unlike postmodernist radicals, the next generation of literary figures are the anti-rebels, whose aim to sympathize with human troubles and emotions. In addition to this, Wallace (2009), who revolutionizes American literature, supports his argument as such:

Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. Today’s risks are different. The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the “Oh how banal.” To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness. Of willingness to be suckered by a world of lurkers and starers who fear gaze and ridicule above imprisonment without law. (p.149-150)

In consideration of the expressed viewpoint, both postmodernist and post-postmodernist have taken risks in the processes of writing their literary works. Postmodernists challenge the social norms, and they accept to face disapproval as the rebellious figures. However, now post-postmodernists can be accused of being too emotional, which leads to be mocked by the society. In this regard, Timmer (2010) adds on Wallace’s argument and continues that due to irony’s widespread usage in commercials and television programs, it entirely loses its critical meaning and instead evolves into a ‘mode of social discourse’. Thus, it is interesting to note that a lot of what Wallace predicted would emerge as the next generation of rebels has, in fact, mostly materialized: sincerity, softness, and a certain sentimentality. Moreover, according to Bolaño Quintero (2022), “the young generation of New Sincerity writers” (p.18) exhibit a symbolist sincerity that speaks to utopian humanism and the unfulfilled ambition of modernity, while also retaining that baroque theatricality that comes from postmodernism (Bolaño Quintero, 2022). In alignment with the statement, although New Sincerity is considered as a new movement, it seeks to incorporate postmodern elements, at

least as a reaction of postmodern ideology. To exemplify this point, just like Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo*, contemporary fiction frequently continues to employ postmodern techniques such as the rewriting history, historiographic metafiction and intertextuality. Similar to Bolaño Quintero, Brian McHale (2005) also argues that "[l]iterary-historical change rarely involves the wholesale replacement of outmoded features and values by new ones, but more typically involves a reshuffling of existing features in the light of a new dominant function" (p.457). Like Bolaño Quintero, McHale (2005) also supports the fact that literature is not totally affected by the changes from old values to new ones. Instead, the existing ideas and features rearrange themselves. Therefore, it is not possible to conclude that post-postmodernism can be completely separated from either modernism or postmodernism. It always continues to carry their features either to support or to oppose. From a similar point of view, Virginia Pignagnoli (2023) also states that "the current 'reshuffling' is the blurring of boundaries between fiction and nonfiction in light of an interest in sincerity" (p.4). In this regard, it must not be forgotten that even though there is a clear shift to realism, humanism and sincerity, and the dominance of postmodernism is ceased over time, its literary techniques continue to be identified in the post-postmodern novels. Therefore, in spite of persisting on the postmodern features in the 21st century, post-postmodern fiction chooses to emphasize sincerity and true human experience. By doing so, it attempts to deeply challenge the notion of postmodern irony and cynicism. Considering Jameson's concept of the waning of affect, many theorists have linked a renewed academic interest in affect with the decline of postmodernism as the prevailing cultural framework (Labuschagne, 2022). With the new literary movement called New Sincerity, the works of contemporary authors begin to aim an emotional connection with the readers. From a different yet related perspective, Clare (2019) suggests that "post-postmodern literature does not simply 'return to affect' but that it simultaneously reflects upon the limitations and construction of affect in ways that recall postmodernism's penchant for metafiction and self-conscious textuality. Such writing might fittingly be called 'metaffective fiction'" (p.265). According to Clare, metafiction and metaffective fiction are similar. Considering that metafiction is a postmodern technique which makes its readers aware of being in a story. Similarly, metaffective fiction not only focuses on emotions but also considers about the limits and the creation of emotions. Moreover, according to Clare (2019),

Although [metaffective fiction] may indeed indulge in realist characters and sentiment, is nevertheless able to tap into or register affect and affective states that go beyond the seemingly 'shallow'

representation of emotions – indeed this is what the most successful examples of this literature accomplish. (p. 266)

In other words, metaffective fiction successfully delves into emotions that may seem superficial and therefore, it is able to explore and convey even more complex feelings. Furthermore, the critic also clarifies that metaffective fiction “does not involve emotion recollected in tranquility, but affect reconstructed in adversity” (Clare, 2019, p. 266). Emotional states can change depending on the intensity of the situation. When the intensity decreases, the depth of emotions may decline. Nevertheless, in order to articulate the heightened emotional intensity, metaffective fiction is not presented in a calm manner, instead it is created within the context of difficulties once again. Briefly, metaffective fiction expresses emotion while also acknowledging the limitations of that expression, even though it recognizes that fictionalized emotions are not real emotions, and that affect can never be fully accessible in language (Clare, 2019).

According to Adam Kelly (2016), in recent years, the term ‘New Sincerity’, which has been employed in conversations about pop music, movies, poetry, and visual arts, has come to refer to a noteworthy wave of cultural output that springs from and addresses contemporary times in American culture. Kelly (2016) continues his argument on New Sincerity as such:

In extending it to describe the fiction of a number of the most prominent novelists born in the generation after the US baby boom—including Michael Chabon, Junot Díaz, Jennifer Egan, Dave Eggers, Dana Spiotta, Colson Whitehead, and David Foster Wallace—I mean both to connect their work to broader cultural trends and to highlight the special characteristics that enable literary fiction to engage those trends in an urgent, complex, and dialectical manner. In popular usage, the contemporary turn to sincerity tends to be regarded as a sturdy affirmation of nonironic values, as a renewed taking of responsibility for the meaning of one’s words, as a post-postmodern embrace of the “single-entendre principles” invoked by Wallace in an essay now regularly cited as an early manifesto for the New Sincerity movement. (p. 198)

According to Kelly, in everyday language, the shift towards sincerity is seen as an endorsement of values and a renewed commitment to the meaning of one’s words. Moreover, it is also possible to state that the new generation of writers such as Saunders, who is one of the inheritors of David Foster Wallace, follows the footsteps of Wallace’s sincere affect and impact on contemporary writing. Thus, it can be argued that Wallace, who attempts to “renew sincere affect” (Jackson & Nicholson-Roberts, 2017, p.2) in his works, paves the way of a notion of New Sincerity in American literature, and with it, the concept of metaffective fiction. Furthermore, Matthew J. Balliro (2018) states that the New

Sincerity's primary goals have been to understand the meaning of a text or, in a more complex way, to interpret how a writer or text negotiates countless levels of performativity and artifice to convey a sincere idea, sentiment, or value to their audience. These studies have positioned the New Sincerity against sarcasm or any other form of expression that deliberately obscures meaning. In light of the insights gleaned from this statement, contemporary authors have grown weary of irony and ironical distance not only in popular culture but in literature as well. The usage of irony becomes powerless and banal. Consequently, as a counter to irony, the New Sincerity movement has emerged. The main focus of this movement is the negotiation by the author and the text through artificiality, aiming to convey sincere ideas and emotions to the readers. Following this explanation, in his article, Adam Kelly (2017) also states that "New Sincerity primarily names an aesthetic response by a generation of novelists to the challenge to older forms of expressive subjectivity that coalesced in the period during which they began writing" (p.5). This new movement is beyond the limits of a postmodern irony, and it invests in human emotions. Moreover, in his chapter which is called 'The New Sincerity', Kelly (2016) also argues that "[r]esponding to the range of historical, institutional, technological, and aesthetic contexts [...], contemporary American fiction foregrounds a theory and practice of sincerity that is forward rather than backward looking, new rather than old" (p.198). Furthermore, Kelly (2016) also adds that the best way to approach this newness is to start with describing the old sincerity and how it was thought to be inherent in literary texts. In this light, it can be suggested that 'sincerity' has taken the various forms from early modern times until the end of the 20th century.

In order to fully analyze the theoretical background of 'sincerity', first, the definition of the word should also be discussed. According to OED, 'sincerity' means "freedom from dissimulation or duplicity; honestly, straightforwardness" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.) and OED also defines 'sincere' as "containing no element of dissimulation or deception; not feigned or pretended; real, true" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Based on these definitions, Balliro (2018) shares his thoughts on what is implied in the definition of the word 'sincerity' by stating that anything that opposes sincerity is not merely in direct conflict, but also perceived as limiting and restrictive; this is likewise the case with the concept of 'freedom from'. It is hardly unexpected that the New Sincerity has been primarily defined in contrast to alternative interpretations. In line with this, it is impossible to separate the New Sincerity movement from the opposing forms and other intellectual traditions that have shaped it. Furthermore, Balliro (2018) continues to elaborate on it and adds that to show

how ‘sincerity’ resists staying a static concept and how it can be used again and again as historical, social, and literary conditions change over time, it is helpful to start with an examination of sincerity's role in the Romantic tradition of English poetry and how it developed during the Victorian era. To enlighten this issue, Balliro (2018) adds as follows:

This shift—from focusing on the value of poetry to focusing on the stature of an individual—is significant, and the tension between the two continued to resonate through discussions of sincerity in the twentieth century. Although my conception of The New Sincerity doesn't rely on aesthetic judgments—it's something readers do (and that a text can condition and lead a reader do), not something a text has—what's relatable here is this Victorian-era tension between how much to focus on the people behind the texts and the texts themselves; [...], the early scholarship on The New Sincerity has been held back by considerations of authors as central geniuses to its carrying out—moving away from this will open it up to even further study. (p.5)

In contrast to the Victorian era, characterized by a tension regarding the emphasis to place on authors and texts, the New Sincerity movement deliberately avoids an excessive emphasis on authors, allowing for more comprehensive search.

Sincerity and Authenticity by Lionel Trilling (1972) is one of the most persistent critical discussions on sincerity over the past century since as a classic account, he describes being sincere as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (p.2). Following his statement, Balliro (2018) claims that there are some similarities between Trilling's definition and the Romantic and Victorian ideas of sincerity, but the most obvious distinction is that Trilling's worry is not literary in nature. His concern lies in living a sincere life and emulating the quality in day-to-day activities. Moreover, for Trilling (1972), if the word ‘sincerity’ has lost its meaning and seems hollow, it is because it no longer suggests being true to oneself as a goal in and of itself, but rather as a means to an end. Additionally, Balliro (2018) elaborates on the discussion and suggests that playing sincere too often will lead to one's eventual discovery and subsequent judgment as being unauthentic. After coming to this conclusion regarding the flaws and contradiction at the core of sincerity, Trilling considers the paradigm that has supplanted sincerity in the twentieth century: authenticity. In line with this theory, Kelly (2016) also supports the argument by pointing out the fact that by the twentieth century, sincerity had fallen precipitously, having been supplanted by the ideal of authenticity, which views truth to oneself as an end in itself rather than merely a means.

After this confusing twist, in the second half of the twentieth century, the movement is called the ‘New’ Sincerity because it is positioned to examine all these complex concepts—sincerity, authenticity, subjectivity, and autonomy—in a fresh way that honors the various intellectual traditions without becoming overly fixated on any of them (Balliro,

2018). In addition to this, in the early 1990s, the New Sincerity breaks free from its hyper-local connotations, becoming a term that can be applied to much broader facets of American culture rather than just one very particular musical scene in one American city (Balliro, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that the rise of the New Sincerity movement becomes inevitable, and, in the end, it dominates the American culture. In this respect, the writers of the article ‘Wipe That Smirk off Your Face’ published in *Esquire Magazine*’s September issue in 1991, Kaplan and Stevenson, also attempt to explain the power of the New Sincerity movement in the contemporary world by clarifying what the Old Sincerity is. According to the authors mentioned above (1991), Old Sincerity means postmodernism because they accept it as “a culture where it is difficult to tell exactly what someone means (if they are expressing something that matters to them, or if it’s just language and phrases pastiched together with available materials)” (Balliro, 2018, p.38). Moreover, Kaplan and Stevenson harshly criticize the techniques adopted by postmodernism – aka Old Sincerity. To illustrate their point, they redirect their attention towards individuals in America experiencing distressing periods, such as wars and economic downturns. They argue that amidst facing a great deal of horrible events, the use of “irony [is] not only in bad taste but worse—not funny” (Kaplan and Stevenson, 1991, n.p.). It is not that humor is never appropriate; rather, the New Sincerity emerges during a time when it is important to recognize what can and cannot be joked about (Balliro, 2018). To summarize, in the post-postmodern world, as Wallace asserts that an effective fiction must explore the essence of human existence, thereby generating sincere affect (McCaffery, 2012). In pursuit of emotions, sincerity, empathy, and humanism, the New Sincerity movement emerges as a response to postmodernism. Additionally, postmodern literary techniques such as irony and metafiction are challenged by metaffective fiction.

All in all, this thesis will explore the use of postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Saunders’s *Lincoln in the Bardo* and it will also examine the shift from the ironical and detached tone in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to a constructive tone, which adopts kindness, sincerity, empathy and humanism in *Lincoln in the Bardo* in the post-postmodern world within the framework of the theories discussed above. Moreover, even though both Vonnegut as a postmodern writer and Saunders as a post-postmodern author introduce their critical opinions on two of the most important historical periods in America –the Second World War and the American Civil War –, they align with their respective times. Despite their similar approach to these events, their writing techniques differ significantly. Therefore, it will be highlighted that the clear expression of

feelings in *Lincoln in the Bardo* expands the postmodern term historiographic metafiction into metaffective fiction and becomes one of the inheritors of the New Sincerity movement in the post-postmodernist period. Furthermore, aforementioned postmodernism, historiographic metafiction, post-postmodernism, the New Sincerity and metaffective theories will serve as a basis for the claims made in the thesis.

Chapter 1 will focus on the representations of historiographic metafiction in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a postmodern novel and the postmodernist challenge towards the history writing through his work. Vonnegut, who is one of the witnesses of the Dresden bombing as an American soldier in a slaughterhouse, rails against the anguish of the people affected by the war in his anti-war novel. Although it is a postmodern novel and written in its culture of irony and ridicule and in a deconstructive tone, by not glorifying the war and creating an anti-hero who clearly has a post-traumatic stress order, the novel turns into one of the most humane works of art. To support this argument, in his essay 'The Moral Clarity of *Slaughterhouse-Five* at 50', Kevin Powers (2019) claims that "[i]t is concerned with and dedicated to the alleviation and prevention of human suffering in the face of its inevitability, and I can think of no braver moral position to take than that one" (n.p.). In order to emphasize on the morality of a devastating war and also to draw the attention to the human suffering, Vonnegut creates a protagonist from his own experience. Witnessing a senseless slaughter happened in Dresden, Vonnegut depicts the protagonist Billy Pilgrim as a victim whose understanding of what is real and what is true are completely distorted. To survive through this bloodshed, Billy develops a defense mechanism to help him to escape from the burden of war. Therefore, he begins to time-travel between his postwar life as an optometrist, second life in WWII and third life in Tralfamadore. Briefly, after the firebombing in Dresden, Billy, who has an unhealed wound in his memory, becomes a delusional man. His escapist fantasy makes him an anti-hero, and he challenges the traditional heroes in typical war novels. In brief, through the omission of war glorification and the portrayal of an anti-heroic figure, Vonnegut aims to reframe a particular historical period, shedding light on its traumatic facets. Additionally, the conceptualization of an idyllic planet Tralfamadore serves as a representation of an innocent world devoid of loss, grief and warfare.

Chapter 2, on the other hand, will dwell on the power of emotions and the representation of the metaffective fiction within the New Sincerity movement, which rises against postmodern culture of irony and ridicule. As an opposition to Vonnegut's postmodern novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, this chapter will be grounded in the examination of Saunders's first novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*. In his Man Booker Prize-Winning novel,

Saunders also uses rewriting history technique to create another story from a seed of truth about the death of William Wallace Lincoln at the age of eleven. President Lincoln loses his son to a fatal disease while there is a Civil War between North and South. Out of grief, the President returns to the crypt to create a connection between himself and his son again. Therefore, similar to Vonnegut's novel, Saunders's novel is also based on historical facts; however, having supernatural elements such as ghosts and a transitional state called the Bardo, *Lincoln in the Bardo* also blurs the sharp distinction between history and fiction. Moreover, although both authors aim to reevaluate and rewrite the significant historical periods to critique the political perspectives and decisions of the American government, Saunders, as a contemporary writer and an inherent of the New Sincerity movement, diverges from Vonnegut's approach. Unlike Vonnegut, who employs irony and black humor to depict human suffering and war trauma, Saunders embraces a more sincere narrative approach and thus, in his novel, an exemplar of metaffective fiction, he employs a constructive tone, directing his attention towards themes of humanity, empathy, sincerity and kindness in a divided country during the American Civil War. According to Hayes-Brady (2020), *Lincoln in the Bardo* is "a historical novel that works also to echo and refract the contemporary concerns of morality and morality that more usually concern its author" (p.74). In this regard, this chapter will analyze the similarities and differences between two writers whose only aim is to search for peace, kindness, empathy and humanity.

Thus, the conclusion is that Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo* lay out a criticism on the important wars in American history through rewriting them. Both writers aim to represent the deformities in the history of America. Vonnegut writes his anti-war novel within a framework of postmodern techniques of irony and black humor. However, beneath these techniques, unlike many other postmodern novels, there are concealed emotions that are anticipated to be identified by the reader. Saunders, on the other hand, attempts to repair a heartbroken and divided country by reminding the power of empathy, kindness, sincerity and humanity explicitly.

2. HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION IN KURT VONNEGUT'S

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

*"I feel the loneliness after death,
Death that need not have been –
I hear the muffled cry of millions,
The battle shriek in martial music;
I hear the scream of bombs
And see the small feet flying,
Fear-whitened faces staring,
Huddled in death,
Death that need not have been."*

(Hendricks, 1939, n.p.)

Kurt Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) to convey a critical view of the devastation of the fire-bombing of Dresden and also to provide his experience as an American prisoner of war. While Vonnegut was serving for the American cause in WWII, he was caught and prisoned in Dresden in 1945. Despite the firebombing, he miraculously survived; however, his traumatic experience of this massacre affected his postwar writings. Refusing to passively accept the destruction he experienced, "he asked the survivor's questions, 'Why was I allowed to survive when so many innocent, good people perished?' 'How could this terrible destruction have been allowed to happen?' 'How could human beings do such awful things to one another?'" (Morse, 2009, p.87). Vonnegut attempted to grapple these challenging questions and issues, addressing them either directly or indirectly in his novel as if it were a quest for him (Morse, 2009). In one of his interviews, Vonnegut states "I think as serious as it can get is contemplating the death of somebody else and the fact that we were able to do that so easily and without any qualms [...] something is wrong with us" (WFYI Public Media, 2010, n.p.). He writes his novels to reflect on the traumatic experiences of war and to criticize the political decisions made by the American government. In addition to this, in the first and nonfictional chapter of the novel, Vonnegut (1991) also highlights that "[n]ot many Americans knew how much worse [the raid on Dresden] had been than Hiroshima" (p.10) because "[t]here hadn't been much publicity" (p.10). Moreover, in the same chapter, he also informs the reader that he writes the Air Force to ask for details. He asks (1991), "who ordered it, how many planes did it, why they did it, what desirable results there had been" (p.11); however, he is told that "the information was top secret"

(p.11). When he gets an unsatisfying answer from the Air Force, he questions whom this information is kept from. Furthermore, Susan Lardner (1969) also supports this argument in her article 'So It Goes' for *The New Yorker* by stating,

In 1945, a German prisoner of war, [Vonnegut] lived through the American and British bombing of Dresden, in which a hundred and thirty-five thousand people died—nearly twice as many, he notes, as were killed by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, whose devastation was at least officially honored by a Presidential announcement. "Slaughterhouse-Five" is Vonnegut's tribute to the strain imposed on his conscience by the fact that he survived, and by his increasing awareness, since the war, of the scope and variety of death. (n.p.)

Therefore, following the footsteps of the critic, *Slaughterhouse-Five* can also be considered as a testament to Vonnegut's endeavor to inform the public about the harsh realities inherent in a deadly conflict. Hence, the novel is a way of dealing with the guilt he felt and expressing his awareness of the war. Moreover, in one of the interviews with Manufacturing Intellect (2018a), Vonnegut summarizes why he wrote the novel by stating that "*Slaughterhouse-Five* was the only book I felt I really should write because accidentally as a captured American soldier in Germany, I was present when Dresden was destroyed" (n.p.) and in the same interview, he also adds that "[w]hen I got home, there was nothing in the newspapers about the bombing of Dresden.[...] Since I had been there and since I was a professional writer, I thought I must say something about this" (n.p.). This leads him to write a politically motivated novel. In addition to this, after the prisoners were evacuated ahead of liberation in Dresden, Vonnegut sent letters to his father explaining his dark days in the prison for pages and added "I've too damned much to say, the rest will have to wait" (Guise, 2020, n.p.). He does have too much to say about the Dresden bombing and he wants his readers to confront the factual statistics to reveal the truth about the destruction in Dresden. Hence, he cites *The Destruction of Dresden* by David Irving in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to generate the number of deaths in such a meaningless war. In his novel, Vonnegut (1991) quotes Irving as follows:

The advocates of nuclear disarmament [...] would do well to read this book and ponder the faith of Dresden where 135,000 people died as a result of an air attack with conventional weapons. On the night of March 9th, 1945, an air attack on Tokyo by American heavy bombers, using incendiary and high explosive bombs, caused the death of 83,793 people. The atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 71,379 people. (p. 188)

Although the American government attempts to prevent Vonnegut from obtaining information about the war, he eventually learns the scale of the destruction. When he learns the Allies killed many German civilians as possible and according to the estimations,

135,000 people died in the raid, through the juxtaposition of real historical data from two deadly attacks, Vonnegut harshly criticizes the policy of American government in withholding such information from the civilian population. Moreover, according to Peter Freese (2009), surviving from this dreadful massacre took Vonnegut years to overcome the impacts of this traumatic experience and countless apocalyptic novels to help him dispel it. Eventually, his attempt to reconcile with his Dresden experience resulted in his “anti-war book” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.3), titled *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In brief, it can be concluded that all his personal experiences of being a soldier, a prisoner and a survivor of the war pushed him not to stay silent but to write an anti-war novel to lament, protest and reach all the civilians who evidently possessed limited information regarding the raid. When he is finally ready to narrate a historical atrocity of such immense scale, as Neil Isaacs (1973) puts, “Vonnegut portrays himself, his friends, his characters [...] as all victimized, brutalized, dehumanized by war. [...] *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a denunciation of war, written compulsively to denounce war, designed to denounce war, and fulfilled by the litany of that denunciation” (p.129). According to this statement, it can be argued that in his novel, Vonnegut parodically depicts the corruption of humanity, aiming to illustrate the consequences of wars. In this respect, Harriet Earle (2022) also argues that Vonnegut's goal is to depict the horror and cruelty of war in ways that not only make it more understandable to the reader, but also reduce it to the basic bones of the conflict: the human relationships at its heart. By doing this, he shows that he is fully aware of the ridiculousness of the work itself as well as how big of a task it is and how likely it is to fail. Consequently, a novel that discusses the trauma of war is also a novel about the author and narrator's own experience with that trauma.

Knowing the fact that “[t]rauma damages memory systems on both a theoretical (behavioral) and practical (biological) level, directly affecting the ability to recall and recount not only the traumatic event but also other memories not associated with the trauma” (Wicks, 2014, p.332). Therefore, although Vonnegut, who witnessed the devastation in Dresden firsthand, is obsessed with the idea of writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he faces challenges in writing for an extended period because he struggles to remember sufficient memories to write a book. In order to write the novel, he has to confront the memories of his time as a soldier in WWII. One important example about his obsession with writing an anti-war novel can be seen when he states, “I’ve seen lots worse than that in the war” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.10) and adds “[e]ven then I was supposedly writing a book about Dresden” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.10). However, despite having a plan for composing the novel, Vonnegut

encounters challenges in organizing his thoughts. Although he believes the subject is so important that “it would be a masterpiece or at least make [him] a lot of money” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.2) and he is tempted by the idea of writing on this subject since he has too much to say about it, he accepts the fact that “not many words about Dresden came from [his] mind then – not enough of them to make a book, anyway” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.2). Therefore, in order to be able to fully recall his war memories, he calls his old war friend to ask for his help; nonetheless, it is an unsuccessful attempt. Although O’Hare, the old war friend, is also awake, probably suffering from insomnia like Vonnegut, is unwilling to help. In the first chapter of the novel, during a phone conversation with O’Hare, Vonnegut recalls the senseless execution of Edgar Derby, marking it as the climax of his novel. He underscores on the irony of the execution, questioning its rationale. The arrest and trial of an American soldier for taking a teapot appear nonsensical to him in the context of the city burning, people dying. Therefore, he begins to question the justice system of the world. This process of questioning and his quest for answers compel him to confront his trauma and surmount his anxiety about writing the novel. Thus, articulating what he has witnessed serves as evidence of overcoming distress and dealing with the effects of trauma, or as Susanne Vees-Gulani (2003) puts; “his path to recovery” (p.176).

Slaughterhouse-Five is the story of a man who “has become unstuck in time” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.23). The protagonist Billy Pilgrim is depicted as “a funny-looking youth” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.23) who experienced the firebombing of Dresden as a prisoner and a survivor of this massacre at the same time. In the novel, after Billy’s graduation from Ilium School of Optometry, where he meets his future wife, Valencia Marble, he enrolls to the WWII and later, is captured as a prisoner. Before Billy becomes a prisoner, he starts to travel in time. After the firestorm by dropping bombs and the tragic deaths of thousands in a night, the prisoners of war are finally rescued. However, after his return from this meaningless and horrifying massacre, he suffers from nervous breakdowns, which result in having a post-war trauma, and he is given shock treatments in a hospital. After his release from the hospital, he and his fiancée get married and have two children, Robert and Barbara. He, as an optometrist, earns a lot of money and becomes rich. Although everything seems quite normal up to that point, on the night of his daughter’s wedding in 1967, Billy is abducted by two-foot-high aliens from the planet Tralfamadore, where he meets a movie actress named Montana Wildhack. In this planet, Tralfamadorians explain their perception of time and after a while, he continues to travel back and forth. A year later, in 1968, he miraculously survives from an airplane crash that everyone except him dies; however, he

loses his wife because of carbon monoxide poisoning after a car accident on her way to the hospital to see Billy after his airplane crash. After his survival and his wife's loss, he finally decides to reveal his experience being on a different planet on a radio talk. However, everyone assumes that he is delusional and no one, including his daughter, believes anything he says. Then, Billy makes a tape recording about his death saying that a vengeful man he meets at the war will hire someone to shoot him. Furthermore, he believes that after the shooting, he will skip back to some point in his life. To summarize, as Salman Rushdie (2019) puts it, Vonnegut's novel examines the inescapable nature of human violence and the effects it has on those who become enmeshed in it.

Vonnegut, who is admitted as a great master of postmodern writer, believes and in his interviews constantly states that there is nothing honorable or glorifying about the wars. Instead, in his novel, he addresses the moral confusing arising from the destruction of WWII. He draws a comparison between the war and biblical stories to underline the fact that the devastation of Dresden is resulted from human actions rather than divine intervention (Morse, 2009). Therefore, unlike traditional war movies or novels, which romanticize the violence, he rewrites the devastation of World War II to reflect on the mercilessness of it and the emphasis on the human cost. To be able to accomplish it, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut experiments with the use of postmodern literary techniques, historiographic metafiction, which includes intertextuality, as well as its sub-techniques of irony and science fictional elements with a nonlinear structure to contribute to the anti-war sentiment. In the novel, there are also drawings, limericks, child-like prose and humorous five-line poems to convey an anti-war message. Moreover, in addition to ironical distance and cynicism, Vonnegut also chooses a humorous style of writing in his novel. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the utilization of humor serves not as a means to elicit laughter from the reader, but rather to highlight the dearth of available facts in that specific historical time. To present a mocking critique, the author's intention is to examine societal shortcomings through humor because as he states in one of the interviews himself, he chooses to respond to grief with laughter (WFYI Public Media, 2010). Moreover, in his novel, he supports his preference for responding to sorrow with laughter by stating "I thought, the kindest and funniest ones, the ones who hated war the most, were the ones who'd really fought" (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 11). In line with these statements, in his article, Rushdie (2019) argues that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is full of humor, yet it does not view war as ludicrous. It considers war to be such a tragedy that maybe one can only look it in the eye while wearing a mask of comedy. In accordance with his statement, Vonnegut employs black humor as a tool to

confront and criticize the tragic aspect of the war, and to provide moral messages. Moreover, by using black humor, he allows himself to navigate through his emotions related with the destruction of Dresden. In addition to this, Vonnegut also distinguishes his novel from numerous other postmodern novels through the strategic use of black humor, which proves to be an effective means of conveying a spectrum of emotions to his readers. Similarly, Toff F. Davis (2006) also explains Vonnegut's use of humor in his book, *Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade; or, How a Postmodern Harlequin Preached a New Kind of Humanism* as such:

Through the use of what some have called black humor, Vonnegut combats the despair that leads to self-annihilation. [...] Vonnegut uses humor to face what for many seems impossible to face: the lack of definitive control over human existence. His humor entails the absurdity of everyday events that constantly thwart our intentions to make sense of the world, and perhaps what makes Vonnegut the master of such humor is his ability to build absurdity upon absurdity, story upon story, toward a thunderous punch line that in the end appears to be admonition to the reader not to journey down the dark path of absolutism, but rather to embrace free play of life in an attempt to help humanity. (p.57)

In alignment with Rushdie's viewpoint, Davis also highlights the fact that Vonnegut uses dark humor to confront the overwhelming feelings. In addition to these comments, Vonnegut's humorous approach also lays bare the ironical tone in the novel. To illustrate, Vonnegut employs a famous phrase "[s]o it goes" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.25), borrowed from the Tralfamadorians, each time a character passes away in the novel. Although this phrase might align with affectlessness, ironically it encapsulates important implications. Therefore, despite its usual connotation as a means of accepting life, it has a deeper significance when confronted with death. Since the author repeatedly uses the phrase to acknowledge death, it conveys a sense of acceptance towards the inevitability of death. However, beneath this ironic expression, the how and why of the deaths remain senseless for him. Moreover, his humorous approach continues with the usage of a limerick, which is a humorous and playful verse. While Vonnegut discusses how tempting to write about Dresden in the first chapter of the novel, he is reminded of a limerick:

"There was a young man from Stamboul,
Who soliloquized thus to his tool:
'You took all my wealth
And you ruined my health,
And now you won't pee, you old fool'" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.2-3)

This limerick humorously attributes the young man's misfortunes since he loses his wealth and health. Hence, it can be argued that the young man in the limerick symbolizes Vonnegut and his character, Billy, as they are also misfortunate to witness a devastation in Dresden.

Moreover, Vonnegut also uses science-fictional elements in his novel to support his humorous style and convey his ironical tone. With Billy's time travels and his abduction to a made-up planet called Tralfamadore as an exhibit in an alien zoo, the novel uses the power of science-fictional elements to remind its reader that it is a rewritten history of WWII, and it highlights the absurdity of it. Moreover, Michael Kokonis (1979) elaborates on it and states that *Slaughterhouse-Five* "utilize[s] one science fiction device that gives shape to a more flexible form" and adds "[t]he originality of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, however, is that its form allows the author's personal experience to be artistically arrested and integrated within a broader depiction of the human condition" (p.96) Therefore, it can be concluded that to criticize the political decisions about wars and the concept of humanity, science fiction is employed as a tool, serving a purpose rather than being an end in itself (Kokonis, 1979).

While employing science-fictional elements and black humor to highlight the absurdity of the war, Vonnegut deliberately maintains a sense of seriousness in his narrative. To be able to underline the never-ending violence, which reflects the dehumanizing impact of the war, Vonnegut also challenges the conventional war narrative to satirize and criticize the traditional celebrations of war. To illustrate this, in his novel, Vonnegut deliberately attacks the American politics, and this harsh critique comes in the form of a dialogue between his protagonist Billy Pilgrim and a surgeon:

There at the corner, in the front rank of pedestrians, was a surgeon who had been operating all day. [...] He had served in two world wars. The sight of Billy offended him, especially after he learned from the guards that Billy was American. It seemed to him that Billy was in abominable taste, supposed that Billy had gone to a lot of silly trouble to costume himself so. The surgeon spoke English, and he said to Billy, "I take it you find war a very comical thing." [...] "You thought we would enjoy being mocked?" the surgeon said. "And do you feel proud to represent America as you do?" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.151)

In this respect, it can be stated that this scene has a profound meaning as Vonnegut satirizes and criticizes the traditional celebration of wars and the representation of conventional wars in his novel. In this scene, the surgeon's questions reflect skepticism towards the notion of national pride because the festive nature of a parade through Dresden devaluates the significance and seriousness of the war. Billy has recently travelled through time, and he feels confused about the parade. However, based on his passivity and reckless attitude, the surgeon assumes that Billy also finds war comical and thus, sees him ignorant. Hence, he humiliates and insults him by blaming his national identity. However, in fact, Billy, just like the surgeon, sees the parade as a hollow and meaningless display. Additionally, it is worth

noting that with this specific scene, Vonnegut endeavors to foster political awareness in order to draw attention to social and national issues.

When all the points mentioned above are considered, it can be concluded that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an example of the postmodern literary technique of historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Hutcheon. In an attempt to bring together the best aspects of two worlds, historiographic metafiction, liberally employs fictional elements while blending them with historical events, potentially creating a framework replete with made-up characters and deeds. The link between fictional and historical writing becomes quite complex since they appear to partially blend, the relationship between them becomes extremely complicated. Therefore, historiographic metafiction engages with the historical discourse without being constrained by scientific representational norms. Moreover, intertextuality is the result of the blending of history and fiction (Schneider, 2008). In this regard, according to Ryan Wepler (2011), by considering the main historians as motivated by self-interest, Vonnegut raises implicit doubts about the objectivity and dependability of the historical information presented in traditional narratives. Therefore, in his novel, he aims to demonstrate the importance of having history retold by individuals who were there rather than by those who are likely to benefit from how it is remembered. Thus, as an example of historiographic metafiction, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, history, science-fiction and autobiography are blended all together since Vonnegut problematizes the fictional representation of a real historical event by the use of science fiction to retell that specific moment. Moreover, it is possible to argue that in his novel, Vonnegut reports history by using fictional elements and his own interpretations, and thus, he distorts the history self-consciously. Furthermore, in the novel, by concentrating on rewriting the escalating inhuman cruelty, he also deliberately problematizes the distinction between history and fiction by stating “[a]ll this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.1). Furthermore, as it is mentioned above, historiographic metafiction includes intertextuality as well since according to poststructuralist theories, it expresses conscious traces of other texts. The term can also be explained as such “poststructuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist theory that changed the concept of text, recognizing it as an intertext owing to the interrelations between texts and texts’ absorptions of other texts. Another novelty posited by intertextuality is the distinction between work and text” (Zengin, 2016, p.300). In this respect, Vonnegut begins writing his novel from reporting what he saw during the war and uses factual quotations and references from history books and the Bible, which are written in italic in the novel; however, he adds his imagination, observation and

criticism in the novel as well and hence, problematizes the ‘actual’ historical events. To illustrate, another postmodern literary technique of intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, can be identified in the opening chapter of the novel. The narrator reads from a book called *Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery* by Mary Endell, which is a real book written in 1908, and in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he uses two quotations from the book about Dresden. The first one, which is “[i]t attempts to give to an English-reading public a bird’s-eye view of how Dresden came to look as it does, architecturally; of how it expended musically” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 17), is taken to emphasize the beauty of Dresden before the bombing and to highlight how tragic and cruel it was to bomb the city. The second quotation is about the Prussian siege to remind the circularity of history. With these specific examples of intertextuality, it can be said that although these historical sources are there to verify true events that the novel is based on, the difference between reality and fiction cannot be identified clearly. In other words, Vonnegut once again blurs the sharp distinction between non-fiction and fiction and hence, problematizes the credibility of the historical event on purpose. All in all, according to the postmodern view, history writing can never present the truth of the past because a historian can only interpret the past events through a subjective eye. Civilians can only know historical events as they are documented; the rest is the mystery for them. In a way, they are forced to hear, read and learn only from the powerful side of the glorified war. However, in his novel, Vonnegut challenges the postmodern element of grand narrative and creates an anti-hero as his protagonist to be able to be the voice of the minorities blurred through the discourse.

Knowing the fact that a hero, who is ready to sacrifice himself for the greater good, is almost always accepted as a demigod at the time of the Ancient Greeks; however, with the rise of modernism, notable alterations can be identified in the portrayal of a traditional hero. Accordingly, it gradually turns into the portrayal of an anti-hero, who is lack of all the heroic values; but instead, protects moral values. The birth of postmodernism shakes the concept of traditional heroism at its core. During postmodernism, like everything else, traditional heroism loses its meaning as well, and also, postmodernism finds a way to criticize the idea by mocking it. Usually, war narratives, which concentrate on the manliness and strength of the hero, depict him as a patriotic soldier and someone who cannot be defeated. However, Vonnegut rejects to glorify the war, the soldiers and the concept of heroism because he believes the act of killing and causing death cannot be considered as something heroic. In this regard, in one of his interviews, he states that “when my generation went to war, we had two fears equal; one: we might get killed, two: we might have to kill somebody. Equally

terrible. Terrible thing to kill somebody” (WFYI Public Media, 2010, n.p.). Thus, in his novel, he demolishes the myth of war as a symbol of courage and the power of traditional war narratives by writing an anti-war novel with an anti-hero named Billy Pilgrim, who has the innocence of a child and deconstructs the representation of a traditional hero and an ideal soldier by playing with the concept of time. Moreover, from how Billy is portrayed to the reader physically to the representation of his mental state after the war, it can be argued that he is not a traditional hero. In order to be more specific on this argument, as an example of historiographic metafiction, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut gives voice to a minor character so that his point of view can also be heard loud and clear because he is aware of the fact that the reader can only reach the accepted truth and history coming from the powerful side. By giving a voice to the minor, he attempts to correct the false representation of war as something glamorous.

In complete contrast to a typical depiction of a traditional hero, Vonnegut describes Billy Pilgrim’s physical appearance as “tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.23). Moreover, Billy is also depicted as someone who does not “look like a soldier at all” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 33) instead, he is resembled to “a filthy flamingo” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 33). Furthermore, Rosemary Gallagher (2012) emphasizes the fact that “Billy Pilgrim is not only presented as an ineffective soldier, he is the antithesis of the American war hero” (p.77). With all these deliberate ironic portrayals of Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut uses his character as a means to illustrate the hopeless young soldiers who leave their homes only to face death for their country and to highlight the falsity of the heroic soldier archetype. In doing so, his aim is to criticize the idea of heroism, satire the absurdity of war and challenge the decisions made by the American government. In brief, as Gallagher (2012) states Vonnegut portrays the soldiers as pathetic, naive, or insane—flawed but wholly human—in an attempt to undermine the American military apparatus. Moreover, without any character development, Billy is portrayed as a flat, depthless and cartoon-like character and his qualities are not deeply analyzed or mentioned in the novel. However, how he is perceived by the other soldiers is highlighted throughout the story just to underline the fact that he does not fit into the typical description of a traditional hero. To illustrate this, in one of the scenes where Billy is wearing a coat that is too small for him and even clownish as well and thus, “[t]he Germans found him to be one of the most screamingly funny things they had seen in all of World War Two. They laughed and laughed” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.90). In this regard, it can be stated Billy’s sluggish physical description reminds that “those gilded heroes mislead the public” (Tekin, 2010, p.33) because not only *those heroes* but also young

men and children, who are very much the opposite of a masculine hero just like Billy, have to fight in the war as well. Thus, by presenting a weak and frail main character without physical qualities of a traditional hero, Vonnegut “portraits of a world that has lost its mind, in which children are sent out to do men’s work and die” (Rushdie, 2019, n.p.). Moreover, in the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Mary O’Hare, to whom he dedicated his novel, talks about how the war makes her angry because “[s]he didn’t want her babies or anybody else’s babies killed in wars” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.15) and after her accusation of him to write something to glorify the war and to be able to react against children dying in senseless slaughters, Vonnegut decided to call his work *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children’s Crusade*. In line with this, Gallagher (2012) states that “[i]n doing so he acknowledges the human cost of war, the imperfect but beloved sons: the insignificant cogs in the American war machine” (p.83). Additionally, these young men or children who are sent to the war, do not have any other option but to attend the war and most of the time, they do not even know why they are fighting for. To support his argument, in the first chapter, Vonnegut states “Children’s Crusade started in 1213, when two monks got the idea of raising armies of children in Germany and France and selling them in North Africa as slaves” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.16). Therefore, it is seen that the children are not given a chance to choose but, they are forced to follow the rules and die for nothing. Hence, Vonnegut underscores the lack of free will in America and questions the concept of free will in his novel by using a quote from a real poem called ‘The Waking’ by Theodore Roethke. He quotes:

“I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.

I learn by going where I have to go” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.20).

Although the first line suggests of a dilemma, the solution appears in the next two lines, where it is provided by fate but not free will. Therefore, Vonnegut underlines the fact that they are living in a world without free will. Moreover, the author continues to work on the same issue in the novel, by highlighting the fact that “[o]nly on Earth is there any talk of free will” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.86).

In addition to Billy’s physical appearance, he is also portrayed as a pacifist. Despite facing the brutality of war, he refrains from adopting the traditional heroic qualities. According to David Simmons (2008), Billy is a thoughtful and caring opposition to the war, not a petty rebellion. In fact, the novel implies that Billy's ability to maintain his sanity during a period of general lunacy is due to his persistence in innocence. Billy respects life instead of trying to end it because of his strong humanitarian beliefs. This comment is important in

both ways; first, with all his incapability and childlike portrayal, Billy is empathized with and understood by the reader, and the second one is Vonnegut achieves to draw the attention towards to humanity and what it means to be human by creating a pacifist anti-hero. In addition to this, by projecting a weak image without having any heroic qualities, as an American soldier, Billy is clearly unable to protect anyone, even himself. To illustrate this point, Vonnegut continues to project him as someone incapable by stating “Billy was chaplain’s assistant in the war. A chaplain’s assistant is customarily a figure of fun in the American Army. Billy was no exception. He was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.30). It can be also said that Billy is aware of the fact that he is incompetent and thus, he prefers to stay behind, and says “[y]ou guys go on without me” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 184) as if he wants to quit. Moreover, since Billy often “find[s] himself weeping” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.61), he harms the archetype of a traditional hero; hence, this can be accepted as another proof that he is an anti-hero. Additionally, unlike traditional heroes, Billy is depicted as all alone without any supporters and according to Kevin Brown (2011), he “suffers from a breakdown of mutual dependence, as he has no one to depend upon, and no one depends upon him” (p.102). In the novel, from his daughter to the retired brigadier general Rumfoord, no one understands him or supports him. Brigadier general Rumfoord even complains about him by stating “[a]ll he does in his sleep is quit and surrender and apologize and ask to be left alone” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.184) and openly thinks he is a boring man. Moreover, since Billy is criticized by having anti-heroic features, it sets the cat among the pigeons and almost makes him an enemy in front of the other soldiers. For example, “[i]t was difficult for Rumfoord to take Billy seriously, since Rumfoord had so long considered Billy a repulsive non-person who would be much better off dead” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.192). In addition to Rumfoord, Billy is also humiliated and harshly criticized by Ronald Weary, who is depicted as someone violent, strong and energetic, as well. Knowing the fact that as an anti-hero, he is incapable of saving even himself, and he proves it in one of the scenes where somebody shoots at the four soldiers including Billy from far away. The third bullet is for Billy who stops and stands where he is without moving an inch as if he is “giving the marksman another chance” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.33). When he is shot at again, he is saved by Weary who growls at Billy so that he stops waiting and gets out of the road. After this attack, Weary states that “[s]aved your life again, you dumb bastard” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.34) and makes Billy feel embarrassed and incompetent. Another example can be that when Billy gets sick during the war, Weary helps him as he “beats the living shit out of him” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 50) and since he thinks Billy is too

weak both physically and psychologically, he adds “[y]ou shouldn’t even *be* in the Army” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.51). In accordance with these quotations from the novel, it can be argued that Vonnegut’s ironic construction of an anti-hero challenges the traditional war narratives one more time. This is done with the intention of highlighting that children who are sent to wars are not ready to combat both physically and mentally. Therefore, Vonnegut questions the inappropriateness of the young soldiers forced enlistment in the military. In addition to these, in most cases, the traditional hero survives from the greatest threat, returns as a glorious man and the story reaches its ending. However, it is also possible for the traditional hero to die while fighting against the enemy and at the end of the story his death is seen as his sacrifice, which blazes his glory. On the other hand, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, when “Billy Pilgrim is dead” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.143), the novel does not reach its ending and the story is continued because Billy knows the manner and time of his death since the novel shifts through time and space. He, as a result of suffering from post-war trauma, can travel in time, thus, he believes that he will continue to live in different parts of his life; “I, Billy Pilgrim, [...] will die, have died and always die on February thirteenth, 1976” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.141).

Vonnegut, who is imprisoned in Dresden and thus, witnesses the bloodshed in his real life, uses his experience as an American prisoner during WWII in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and accordingly, creates a protagonist who shares almost the same traumatic experience in the same war with him. Hence, the novel is deemed to Vonnegut’s autobiography by most of the critics and it is also accepted as an example of metafiction, which means “a style of prose narrative in which attention is directed to the process of fictive composition” (Klinkowitz, 2017, p.1). To be more specific, although the narrator’s name is not mentioned throughout the novel, it is easily anticipated that the narrator is Vonnegut himself because he admits it repeatedly to his readers by stating “I was working on my famous book about Dresden” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.18) or in another scene where the narrator says “[t]hat was I. That was me. That was the author of this book” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 125). Moreover, in a whole different scene where the colonel is dying and staring into Billy’s eyes to say his last words, Vonnegut also appears in the novel by saying that “I was here. So, was my old war buddy, Bernard V. O’Hare” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.67). With this approach, Vonnegut constantly reminds the fact that it is a novel and with these abrupt disruptions in the novel, he shatters the illusion and declares the presence of a narrator who manipulates the narrative. In addition to his confession, another example of metafiction can be identified in the fourth chapter of the novel where Billy is in his daughter’s room when the phone rings. He answers the phone

and on the other end, there is a drunk person speaking. Through the phone, he “could almost smell his breath – mustard gas and roses” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.73). This specific scene reminds the opening chapter where the author makes drunken phone calls to his old friends with the smell of his breath mustard gas and roses. Therefore, these two scenes are the evidence of more metafictional elements in the novel. After these specific scenes in the novel, it is possible to argue that Vonnegut creates double narrators. In addition to writing about his personal experiences during World War II, Vonnegut creates a fantasy setting for Billy Pilgrim. Consequently, Vonnegut destroys the idea of reality as a distinct, cohesive totality by blending fact and fiction and arguing that both harsh realities and fantastical emotions must be included (Loeb, 1979). The critic Monica Loeb (1979) elaborates on it and adds:

This is the reason why there are two principle narrators in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: one who is the actual author, Vonnegut himself, and another impersonal, seemingly omniscient narrator. The first one corresponds to the factual side of the story, the other one belongs to the fictional world. However, the two narrators are joined by the technique of intrusion, directly as well as indirectly. (p.7)

To illustrate Loeb’s statement, in the first and last chapters of the novel, Vonnegut uses the first person ‘I’ to narrate, and there can be no doubt that it is Vonnegut himself. Throughout the novel, a shift in point of view takes place and between chapters two and nine, the story is narrated by a third person narrator, ‘he’ and talks about a fictional story about Billy Pilgrim. In addition to having two narrators in the story, it cannot be ignored that there are similarities between the author and Billy Pilgrim since they share biographical similarities. These similarities between the protagonist and the writer are obviously intentional, intended to have the reader automatically identify Billy with Vonnegut wherever feasible. Therefore, once again, Vonnegut demonstrates the fact that it is difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction (Loeb, 1979).

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut attempts to find an intelligent way to describe a massacre by dividing the narrative focus. Billy Pilgrim is the one whose emotional fuse is blown by the war, so the reader experiences it subjectively through him, while the narrator can present a more externalized version by talking about his drinking binges and his visitation back to Germany (Hume, 2009). Although the narrative focus is divided into two, Billy and the narrator, the most important commonality they share is the experience of war trauma. In the opening chapter of the novel, the narrator/himself is portrayed as someone who suffers from insomnia, drinks alcohol and desires to get in touch with his old friend from the war. While talking to his readers, the narrator is very direct about his disease when

he states that “I have this disease late at night sometimes, involving alcohol and the telephone” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.4). Despite being unaware of the influences of such a horrible experience on him, even after almost twenty years, he is still suffering from the war memories because he cannot resume the normal course of his life. In order to find a solution to the problems he has, he involves with drinking alcohol and reaching out his friends from the war, which are unsuccessful attempts; nonetheless, “traumatized people cannot ‘tune out’ the repetitive stimuli” (Herman, 2015, p.29). Furthermore, as another feature, the lack of concentration, can be traced in the narrator as well. According to the author of *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman (2015), “[a]fter a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment” (p.25). To illustrate this, throughout the first chapter, the narrator shifts from a period to another randomly and suddenly and thus, tells his lifetime events in a non-chronological order. For instance, while he attempts to explain how he feels about writing his book, suddenly, he jumps to a dialogue between him and his wife or to his education or something completely different. Briefly, being on alert all the time affects his thoughts as it damages his concentration, and he cannot say what he wants to say without jumping on different subjects.

Just like the narrator, the anti-hero of the novel, Billy Pilgrim, is also overwhelmed by the traumatic absurdity of war and hence, he finds life meaningless “partly because of what [he] had seen in war” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.101). Thus, as a complete contrast to the typical portrayal of a traditional soldier, Billy is depicted as a traumatized character after serving in WWII and witnessing the death of thousands in a senseless bombarding of Dresden. According to Jessica Hopkins (2023),

In a society that had elevated an abstracted narrative of bravery and heroism particularly associated with war, soldiers who directly experienced the unavoidable but strategically muted travesties struggled to reconcile the shame induced by the traumas of what they witnessed with the pride they were expected to demonstrate publicly. (p.27)

Therefore, it can be argued that Billy’s trauma narrative is Vonnegut’s response to the understanding of American heroism and through creating a traumatic character, he challenges the grand narrative and continues to be the voice of the minority. In doing so, Vonnegut enables his readers to empathize with the character and alter their mindset on the accepted idea of American heroism. In this regard, Billy is portrayed as a man who suffers from war trauma and similar to the narrator, he cannot continue the normal course of his life. Again, parallel to the narrator, one of the challenges Billy is also confronting is that he cannot

sleep. According to Herman (2015), patients with post-traumatic stress disorder suffer from anxiety and fear. Thus, individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder experience hard time to fall asleep, become sensitive to noise, and wake up more frequently in the nighttime compared to the general population. To illustrate Herman's point, in the novel, Billy's sleep disturbance is stated as such:

Billy took off his tri-focals and his coat and his necktie and his shoes, and he closed the venetian blinds and then the drapes, and he lay down the outside of the coverlet. But sleep would not come. Tears came instead. They steeped. Billy turned on the Magic fingers, and he was jiggled as he wept. (Vonnegut, 1991, p.62)

Following the footsteps of the critic, it can be argued that Billy cannot easily fall asleep because he cannot overcome the stress and pain of the war. His trauma interrupts his sleep. Moreover, it is a possibility that he is not able to fully understand what he is going through, and he cannot name his illness; however, he believes "[h]e [is] going crazy" (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 100). In addition to this, it should also be noted that unlike the narrator, who drinks alcohol and calls his war friend, when Billy cannot sleep, he weeps. He weeps without any apparent reason. One example can be that even though he has every right to be broken hearted, to feel frustrated and saddened by the loss of people especially after witnessing a war like this, he does not cry about "anything else in the war" (Vonnegut, 1991, 197). He becomes so traumatized, vulnerable and deeply fragile that he cannot hold his tears. Nonetheless, unfortunately, nothing can be undone to make him well again. Briefly, witnessing so many horrific events happened during the war like "the bodies of schoolgirls who [are] boiled alive in a water tower" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.116), it is not a surprise that he feels crushed under the evil attempts and horrific deaths.

In addition to these points mentioned above, it is also possible to argue that Billy Pilgrim is a wealthy man and a very successful optometrist with having two children, nevertheless, throughout his life, he cannot get over his sorrow and pain. Neither his friends nor his wife has any knowledge of anything that he has undergone or his mental condition. Moreover, his wife supposedly one of the closest people to Billy says, "I get a funny feeling that you're just full of secrets" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.121). Therefore, it can be argued that contrary to what is seen outside, inside, he cannot manage to overcome his war memories because as soon as he joins his regiment, he witnesses such a cruel act of war, the bombing in Dresden and as it is expected, for a young, naïve man, this burden becomes too heavy to carry. As a result, in the end, he suffers from "a mild nervous collapse" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.24) and he is also hospitalized to be "given shock treatments" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.24). Due

to the lack of treatment in the psychiatric hospital, he still feels “unenthusiastic about living” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.60). All the deliberate inclusion of traumatic effects of the war in Vonnegut’s novel is aimed at highlighting the voices of the minority suppressed by the grand narratives. Additionally, these traumatic effects lead Billy to have a fragmented state of mind, and he gradually loses his ability to control his own mind as well. Moreover, due to his lack of control over the chronological order and time, throughout the novel, he randomly jumps into a different state of his life as if he is not in charge of his own life. Consequently, his perception of what is real and what is true are deeply distorted. To support this argument, Alberto Cacicedo (2005) states that “Billy is, as it were, a guest at his own existence, a ‘specter’ in his own life, incapable of taking responsibility for himself or of acting against the horrors of existence for the same reasons” (p.364). As it is observed, throughout the novel, even in the war, Billy stays as a pacifist. He lives his life devoid of a specific ideology or personal convictions. Hence, he can be characterized as a flat person, who does not have any control over his life. Moreover, he clearly survives from death by chance. Additionally, it can be argued that from his name to his actions or decisions, he adopts the role of a guest in his own life. To illustrate this, although his name is William, he is referred to as Billy, a diminutive form of it because his father-in-law tells him “to encourage people to call him Billy” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.46). The father-in-law does not want him to go by his more professional sounding given name and he, like a specter, does not give any response but to accept to be called as Billy. In brief, the representation of Billy as a pacifist holds considerable significance because, despite being affectless in his own life, Vonnegut ironically underscores the effect of trauma on Billy.

Billy Pilgrim, at his young age, witnesses the real and cruel face of war, which leads him to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, although the mental condition of Billy can be analyzed under PTSD, it should not be forgotten that the term has not been known back then and it “has only been recognized as an independent psychiatric classification since its inclusion in the 1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)” (Vees-Gulani, 2003, p.176). In this respect, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1994), PTSD occurs when “the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others” (p.427) and “the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (p.428). Furthermore, knowing the fact that in most cases, individuals with PTSD make a great effort to avoid any kind of reminders of what they have witnessed and thus, their

responsiveness to the world is sharply diminished (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 1994). To illustrate this, even though Billy is “outwardly normal” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.175), he tries to suppress the past but unfortunately, continues to experience the terrible memories of the war. In this respect, in her book *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth (1996) elaborates on the issue and explains that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (p.8). One of the significant examples from the novel can be Billy’s reaction towards the barbershop quartet that plays at his anniversary party because it reminds him of the four German guards in Dresden who, upon witnessing the destruction of their hometown. Through this association, Billy remembers the moment when he is in the meat locker of the night that Dresden is destroyed and for the first time, in a very detailed way he states “[t]here were sounds like giant footsteps above. Those were sticks of high-explosive bombs. The giants walked and walked” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.177) and he adds “[t]he rest of the guards had, before the raid began, gone to the comforts of their own homes in Dresden. They were all being killed with their families” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.177). Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an anti-war novel that lacks graphic depictions of war, when Billy recalls this particular moment, it is vividly depicted. Thus, Billy’s recollection enables the reader to encounter the brutal side of the war for the first time. Furthermore, this recollection holds profound significance for Billy. Despite seeming outwardly normal, it is the first time where he embraces what he has suppressed for so long. Vees-Gulani (2003) elaborates on it and states that:

The memory of the German guards lies at the center of Billy’s trauma, the destruction of Dresden. The Dresden bombings and their effect are too painful to relive and at first even too frightening to remember. Thus the strong physical and psychological reaction to the barbershop quartet, which even disturbs Billy’s usually normal outward appearance, shows how deeply Billy has buried his Dresden memories. (p.178)

Following the footsteps of the critic, it is possible to argue that although Billy tries to suppress his war memories and his trauma, he cannot forget what he has experienced. Finally, the barbershop quartet evokes the Dresden memories and allows him to confront the recollections he wishes to forget. Additionally, in order not to remember his past, he even tries not to speak anything about the war or anything that can remind him of the war. He stays unresponsive to it. For instance, even though as a survivor of the Dresden war, it is expected to him to reach against the bombing of North Vietnam, “Billy was not moved to

protest the bombing of North Vietnam, did not shudder about the hideous things he himself had seen bombing do. He was simply having lunch with the Lions Club, of which he was past president now” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.60). In this respect, Gallagher (2012) explains what is behind after Billy’s lack of emotional response by stating “his childlike ignorance of the brutality of war, despite having lived through it, this scene serves to expose Pilgrim's lack of personal development, while subtly and humorously emphasizing the escapist time-travel motif in the novel” (p.79). In essence, the present for Billy is interwoven with the horrific war memories and trauma, and therefore, as a coping mechanism, Billy is unstuck in time.

Accordingly, he begins to travel in time to different periods of his life because it is the only response that he can give to the cruel world that he lives in. In this regard, in her book, Herman (2015) argues that a person may enter a condition of surrender when he feels totally helpless and that trying to resist is pointless. The self-defense mechanism completely breaks down. The defenseless individual escapes his predicament by changing his state of consciousness rather than taking action in the physical world. In line with this theory, it is possible to claim that the reason why he travels in time is that he wants to escape from what he has witnessed. For him, the only way is to fabricate an imaginary planet called Tralfamadore to leave his painful past behind. In other words, it is clearly seen that Billy cannot carry the burden of the war anymore and he develops a defense mechanism in order to be able to move on with his life or at least tolerate this horrible world. Moreover, similar to Herman’s opinion, Cacicedo (2005) also argues that “Billy’s time travel keeps him from having to confront the horrible event that has defined his entire existence” (p.363). As it is stated, time travelling prevents him from confronting his war trauma and it also gives him the opportunity to live in a realm opposed to the world, where never-ending chaos reigns. Consequently, without his control, he begins to time travel his postwar life as an optometrist, second life in World War II in Europe and third life in Tralfamadore, the planet that Billy makes up. From the novel, this argument can be supported as such:

Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren’t necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next. (Vonnegut, 1991, p.23)

Based on Vonnegut’s absurd portrayal of Billy, it is also possible to claim that like a guest at his own life, he finds himself dragging from a different state of his life to another because he has no control over his time travelling. At some point, due to his time travels, when he cannot remember his age or the year, he starts to get worried about his own mind because he notices that he loses the track of everything. In this regard, Martin Coleman (2008) states

that he is able to identify a series of events, but he is not able to discern the chronological relationships between them in order to comprehend the reasons behind one after the other. His experience is chaotic, fragmented and lacking in meaning for his personal growth.

Throughout the novel, as Billy cannot grasp the chronological connections between events, he travels back and forth unconsciously and he revisits moments from his past, present and future. In the novel, Billy's time travel story begins as such:

Billy Pilgrim has gone to sleep a senile widower and awaked on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between. (Vonnegut, 1991, p.23)

First, Billy travels in time to his death and after that, he travels again to revisits his pre-birth. In his third travel, he finds himself in a traumatic childhood memory where his father teaches him how to swim by the method of sink or swim. When his father throws him into the deep end, he has no other choice but to swim so that he can live. However, he feels that it is like "an execution" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.44) and out of extreme fear, he loses his consciousness and becomes numb. Furthermore, this memory with his father also shows that he grows up without the love from his parent and a familial comfort. When he loses his consciousness, "[h]e dimly sensed that somebody was rescuing him" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.44) and he "resented that" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.44) because he has no desire to live a life like his. Unfortunately, not only his father, but also his mother cannot give her love to Billy. To illustrate this point, "[s]he made him feel embarrassed and ungrateful and weak" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.102). Likewise, Brown (2011) elaborates on it and states that Billy's anomic alienation is actually caused by his parents' lack of love and his inability to love his wife, which makes Billy and his psychiatrists think he's lunatic. Following the footsteps of the critic, while the war can be recognized as one of the profound factors, Billy's isolation is traced back to a lack of love from his parents. Moreover, with the absence of love within his family, Billy is unable to communicate and establish emotional connections. This deficiency affects his interaction with other soldiers during the war, where he is defined as boring. Thus, he is all by himself and isolated from the others until he is abducted by a Tralfamadorian spaceship and placed in a zoo.

Billy is unable to find redemption on Earth and hence, he creates a planet called Tralfamadore to use it as a shelter protecting him from the burden of his Dresden story. After the plane crash incident, he attends to a radio program and tells the story that he has been abducted by Tralfamadorians and displayed naked in a zoo in Tralfamadore. Although no

one believes him, a month later, he writes a letter to the Ilium News Leader. In that letter, he describes Tralfamadore and the citizens of it, and shares what he has learned from them. While he is working on the second letter, his daughter Barbara interrupts him this time and they have an argument. She thinks that her father is insane and thus, she considers putting him in a mental hospital when she asks “[a]re you going to force us to put you where your mother is” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.29). After her accusation of him being delusional, about the letters, Barbara states that “[i]t’s all just crazy. None of it’s true” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.29). In doing so, Barbara tries to silence and disgrace her father like everybody else because she believes that “her father was senile [...] because of damage to his brain in the airplane crash” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.28). Although Billy’s only aim is to begin “a campaign to inform humanity of the Tralfamadorian concept of time” (Roston, 2021, p.55) as everything happens at once in Tralfamadore and “they prefer to focus on their happy [...] days” (Roston, 2021, p.55), his daughter gets frustrated. In brief, Billy seeks to convey the newfound knowledge from the Tralfamadorians to emphasize that there is still a possibility for individuals to center their attention on joyful moments without the existence of wars or their outcomes. Billy's perseverance is a poignant reflection of Vonnegut's philosophy, as both believe in the power to reshape the mindset of those who idealize warfare.

Billy’s imaginative fantasy involving flying saucers, time travel and a planet called Tralfamadore is inspired by Kilgore Trout’s science fiction novels. While Billy is recovering in the veteran mental hospital, Rosewater, who is the man assigned to the bed next to Billy’s, is the one who first introduces him to science fiction. In one of the scenes in chapter five, when Billy asks what Rosewater reads, he tells him it is Kilgore Trout’s *The Gospel from Outer Space* which is about “a visitor from outer space, shaped very much like a Tralfamadorian” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 108). In addition to *The Gospel from Outer Space*, Billy also reads Trout’s another novel called *The Big Board*, which is about “an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon-211” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 201). Based on the subjects of both novels, it can be argued that the books that Billy reads provide him with the imaginary material that he desperately needs to find a welcoming place and overcome his war memories. In this respect, according to Jesús Lerate de Castro (1994), except for the planet's name, the main character's journey is entirely consistent with the novel's plot. This suggests that as a coping mechanism, Billy may have imagined his encounters with the aliens and him being displayed in a zoo with Montana Wildhack. Moreover, as it is stated, the parallelism between Trout’s novels and *Slaughterhouse-Five* is undeniable. Therefore, it is possible to

argue that with this textual duplication, additional metafictional layer is introduced by the author. In this regard, Jesús Lerate de Castro (1994) summarizes that “Trout is [...] the prophetic voice speaking through the mouth of the author, transmitting to us the urgent need to combat human cruelty with compassion and solidarity: a message which Billy unfortunately never manages to grasp” (p. 121). Vonnegut utilizes the character of Kilgore Trout, a recurring character, to convey the message of halting violent wars through the lens of science fiction.

Knowing the fact that science fiction elements and novels of this genre mostly offer a new perspective of the world. Therefore, Vonnegut “broaden[s] the genre of science fiction to think about topics in an unusual way” (Sheilds, 2011, p.123) and according to Wicks (2014), “this broadening becomes especially evident in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, where science fiction becomes a lens through which to read the trauma of war in general and Dresden in particular” (p.331). In accordance with the argument presented by Wicks, Billy, who suffers from PTSD, creates Tralfamadore as an idyllic place where he is loved and appreciated. On Earth, he is loved by neither his family nor the fellow soldiers. During the war, he is always humiliated and criticized by the other soldiers as he does not have any *heroic* qualities. One of the examples can be seen in the scene where a German measures Billy’s upper right arm, he questions “what sort of an army would send a weakling like that to the front” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.83). However, in Traldamore, “[m]ost Tralfamadorians had no way of knowing Billy’s body and face were not beautiful. They supposed that he was a splendid specimen. This had a pleasant effect on Billy, who began to enjoy his body for the first time” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 113). Moreover, on Tralfamadore, he is the one who knows what is going and he helps Montana Wildhack, who is also abducted by Tralfamadorians, and he comforts her. Billy seeks to ease her anxieties on Tralfamadore, but on Earth, he is the one who is scared and sobs (Brown, 2011). Nonetheless, Billy creates Tralfamadore not only to find a place where he is loved and accepted as who he is, but also to escape the reality of the horrors he has experienced in the war and his trauma because he feels crushed under the weight of the distressing and dreadful deaths in a war devoid of meaning. Furthermore, Lardner (1969) states as such:

He invents an alter-planetary civilization called Tralfamadore, in which all events, including death, are perceived simultaneously rather than in succession. The hypothetical consequence of such a mode of perception is the ability to focus exclusively on pleasant moments and to be indifferent to the unpleasant ones, such as death. (n.p.)

To put it differently, as a coping mechanism, Billy creates various levels of reality in order to blur and soften the violent and cruel world. Tralfamadorians see everything simultaneously, erasing cause and consequence because there is just the present moment in their universe, and they only focus on the good moments. In line with this, in the novel, as Tralfamadorians explain “when a person dies, he only *appears* to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.26). When Billy learns this crucial information from Tralfamadorians, he endeavors to share it among those who likewise deal with bereavement after the loss of loved ones. For him, this insight from the Tralfamadorians is like a lifeline, allowing him to endure such immense suffering. In this regard, according to Oliver Ferguson (2009), “the conception of time enables Billy not only to endure the memory of the fire-bombing of Dresden but also to deny death its role as a basic fact of the human condition” (p.24). In accordance with this theory, through deconstructing the narrative by manipulating the concept of time, in a whole different planet, Vonnegut diminishes the power of death on individuals. Although he does not leave out the idea of death completely in his novel, to be able to manage his grief, he rejects death as an aspect of human existence. Additionally, “[w]hen a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in the particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.27). Therefore, it is possible to argue that with the Tralfamadorian perspective, the idea of death is reinterpreted so that Billy can achieve to withdraw from reality after a catastrophic bombing resulted in killing thousands of innocent people. Moreover, towards the end of the novel, it is seen that Billy adopts Tralfamadorian perspective on considering death, even his own death with a sense of acceptance as they advise him “to concentrate on the happy moments of his life, and to ignore the unhappy ones – to stare only at pretty things as eternity failed to go by” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.194-195). Similar to Billy’s new perspective after these ideas generated by the Tralfamadorians, Vonnegut also believes the fact that despite wars, life continues to grow out of from death and he supports it at the end of the last chapter by stating “poo-tee-weet” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.22), which “is not that of bombs falling, but of a bird chirping just after the war” (Allen, 2009, p.14). Consequently, with this last sound of the novel, Vonnegut ends it with a more positive image for the future.

Although Tralfamadore is created to escape from the horrific memories of the past, being too close to death leaves a trademark of both Vonnegut’s and Billy’s lives. In this regard, rather than a direct reference, in the novel, Vonnegut draws on a biblical story as a metaphorical way to demonstrate his and Billy’s struggle of being tied to the past. In this

respect, in the first chapter, the narrator reads from the Bible, “[h]e overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.21). This specific part from the grand narrative, the Bible, is the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the biblical narrative, Lot and his family are asked to flee and not to look back at the burning cities. However, Lot’s wife does not obey and looks back at the burning cities, and thus, she is “turned to a pillar of salt” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.22). This allusion in the novel captures both Vonnegut’s and Billy’s inability to move forward and it reflects their difficulty of escaping from the memories of the war since they also continue to look back at the destruction in Dresden. In this regard, it can also be argued that for Vonnegut and Billy, time stops on Earth because they cannot move forward while dragging their war memories with them. To illustrate this point, for Billy, although he travels in time, he is resembled to a bug “trapped in amber” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.77) to underline his unbreakable bound to history. Moreover, Wilson Taylor (2013) argues that Billy “lives everywhere but dwells nowhere, is totally overwhelmed by the trauma of history and the incomprehensibility of fate” (n.p). Just like Billy, in the first chapter of the novel, Vonnegut complains about his irreparable bound to history by stating “[t]he time would not pass. Somebody was playing with the clocks, and not only with the electric clocks, but the wind-up kind, too. As an Earthling, I had to believe whatever clocks said – and calendars” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.20). In this regard, although time is normally considered as a logical concept, Vonnegut destructs time to show the arbitrary nature of it and therefore, unlike the accepted concept of time on Earth, he creates Tralfamadore where time is not experienced sequentially and “[a]ll moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.27). Based on this idea, on Tralfamadore, all moments seem simultaneous. This means that since there is no linear development in the novel, the distinction between *now* and *then* is challenged. In this respect, Sam Jordison (2019) assures that “[i]nstead of a linear chronology, [the Tralfamadorians] see a series of moments – just as we do when reading *Slaughterhouse-Five*” (n.p.). From his point of view, it can also be argued that the non-linear narration of the novel mirrors the Tralfamadorian concept of time. In a novel with a linear structure, even a single word must be read in sequence and a reader must follow only one line of text at a time; however, in *Slaughterhouse Five*, just like the Tralfamadorian concept of time, the situations and/or scenes are “not one after the other” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.88) and it can be read “all at once” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.88). Therefore, it can be concluded that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is written in a non-linear narrative technique, and it results in great fragmentation.

As it is mentioned above, time in the novel cannot be viewed as a linear continuum because it follows the experiences of a traumatized self, Billy, who can travel in time. As Vonnegut depicts Billy with his employment of non-linear narrative structure, he “allows [...] Billy, go to and fro between past and present in the narrative for the sake of depicting mental disorientation, which is the most noticeable effect of war” (Kalecik, 2023, p.1241). Therefore, instead of progressing in a linear narrative structure, due to time travels between different moments in Billy’s life as a soldier, as an optometrist and as someone kidnapped by Tralfamadorians, the novel jumps back and forth to reflect the impact of trauma on Billy’s perception of time. Moreover, *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not only disrupt the conventional linear concept of time; however, it challenges the space as well since it also jumps from Germany to America and the Earth to the planet Tralfamadore. To illustrate this point, since Billy, as Vonnegut makes it clear, loses the ability to distinguish chronological timeline, he constantly switches between his war life and his after-war life and during his travels, he creates fragmentation in space as well. For instance, in one of the scenes of the novel where Billy goes to sleep as a soldier and travels in time and finds himself “stating into the glass eyes of a jade green mechanical owl. [...] The owl was Billy’s optometer in his office in Ilium” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.56). Another example can be when he is on Tralfamadore, a Tralfamadorian “sent him back to the war. When he regained consciousness, he wasn’t on the flying saucer. He was in a boxcar crossing Germany again” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.77). In this respect, these examples from the novel can demonstrate the fact that the flash-forwards or flashbacks distort the sequence of time and space, and they are the evidence of the fragmentation in Billy’s psychology. In addition to this, as a witness of Dresden bombing, Vonnegut also shares a similar tendency to constantly revisit the past and he deliberately employs his traumatic war memories as the foundation of a fragmented, non-linear narrative since they deteriorate the perception of time in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Moreover, William Rodney Allen (2009) supports Vonnegut’s narrative choice by stating that the traditional structure is not suitable for the novel Vonnegut aimed to write. In alignment with the statement, it is possible to claim that with the deliberate deconstruction of the narrative and manipulation of the timeline, Vonnegut aims to underscore the devastating effects of wars on innocent people, as he believes traditional narrative lacks the necessary impact to capture the reader’s emotions.

Knowing the fact that memory plays a significant role in *Slaughterhouse-Five* especially given its non-linear narrative structure. To provide greater specificity, experiencing a devastating bombing, which is resulted in the death of thousands, the narrator

struggles to recollect the events accurately. Thus, he needs assistance from his war friend to recollect some of his war memories to write a book about Dresden bombing. In the first chapter, Vonnegut phones O'Hare, his war comrade and says "I'm writing this book about Dresden. I'd like some help remembering stuff" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.4). Although he tries to recollect his memory in a sequential way, it is very challenging for him as a witness of a brutal massacre. In essence, Vonnegut harbors an intense and painful past; therefore, he has no desire to remember any memories related to the war. To illustrate this statement, in the first chapter of the novel, when Vonnegut thinks that his Dresden memories are useless, he is reminded of a song:

My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.
The people I meet when I walk down the street,
They say, "What's your name?"
And I say,
"My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin..." (Vonnegut, 1991, p.3)

This song, upon closer examination of the novel's introduction and conclusion, suggests a sense of repetition. In this regard, as the song is "so on to infinity" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.3), it reminds Vonnegut the fact that there is no escape from the war memories despite all his effort not to remember them. Furthermore, Shi (2019) explains the possible reason why Vonnegut remembers this song by stating he "generated a lapse in memory and kept repeating some content again and again" (p.555) and as it is expected, his memory problems lead to fragmentation and non-linearity in the narration. Additionally, Vonnegut also uses both first person and third person narratives in his novel to offer both personal and a reflective lens to the story. It can be argued that having both narrative perspectives create complexity for his readers since it affects the exploration of time and human condition and blurs the lines between him and the narrator as well. In other words, his choice of two different perspectives of narration impacts on the novel's examination of time relativity and the effects of living a life not constrained by a chronological timeline. Moreover, with the use of science-fiction elements such as time travelling and a creation of a whole different planet called Tralfamadore, Vonnegut steps aside from having a chronological order that can be easily followed by the readers. To illustrate this, the scene where Billy "fell asleep, and he traveled in time to 1967 again – to the night he was kidnapped by a flying saucer from Tralfamadore" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.71) can be a good example to discuss the power of

science-fiction elements in the narration because as it can be identified that they easily disrupt the linearity of the narration. To summarize all the mentioned points above, Shi (2019) concludes that “to accurately reflect Billy’s post-traumatic stress disorders or the author’s own psychological state, Vonnegut took non-linear narrative as a vital tool to uncover what the war brought to human beings, and to reveal his detestation to aggressive wars” (p.555). In line with this theory, it can be stated that Vonnegut aims to reveal humans’ helplessness and frustration to the cruel world through Billy’s war trauma. All in all, Vonnegut reveals the brutality of the war by disordering time.

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut uses non-linear and unconventional narrative structures, and he continues to highlight the fact that time is not necessarily a one-way trajectory and therefore, it can be manipulated. Hence, it is illusory, and it negates death, grief and loss. In this regard, according to Loeb (1979), “Vonnegut’s concept of death is thus closely linked with his concept of time. The two are mutually dependent. Death becomes an important theme as physical death pervades the book - and life itself” (p.42). To illustrate this, in one of his interviews, Vonnegut states that “I hope [time repeats itself] because I do not want to die and go away entirely. I would like to come back and come back and come back almost any terms” (BBC Archive, 2022, n.p.). Vonnegut’s inclination for time to repeat itself appears to have influenced the Tralfamadorian concept of time because in the novel, the Tralfamadorians believe that time is simultaneous rather than linear. Everything exists in a huge, omnipresent, eternal now, including past and future (Harris, 1976). Therefore, in the last chapter, when discussing the possibility of spending eternity, Vonnegut states that “I’m grateful that so many of those moments are nice” (Vonnegut, 1991, p. 211). In these lines, despite the presence of death, an inclination toward life and a positive perspective become evident. Furthermore, in the novel, to demonstrate the absurdity of the war, to depict the aftermath of destruction being undone and also to exemplify the reality that a fresh beginning remains attainable for the people, Vonnegut reverses history by playing with the chronology of the plot. In the novel, there is a scene where Billy is watching a movie about the American Bombers in the Second World War in reverse. The scene is described as such:

The American fliers turned in their uniforms, became high school kids. And Hitler turned into a baby, Billy Pilgrim supposed. That wasn’t in the movie. Billy was extrapolating. Everybody turned into a baby, and all humanity, without exception, conspired biologically to produce two perfect people named Adam and Eve, he supposed. (Vonnegut, 1991, p.75)

This scene where the movie plays backwards can be considered as symbolic since it reflects Billy’s desire for a world without the horrors of wars. Moreover, it also suggests the need of

a new place where the victims are free from their tragedies of war, and it contributes to the human longing for a world without the destructive impact of wars. According to Loeb (1979), “[t]his qualifies as a wish-fulfillment scene as well, since Billy continues by applying the backward motion idea on recent history” (p.40) and she adds “[h]e returns all the way to Adam and Eve after turning, everyone into a baby, including Hitler, thus protecting the world from evil” (p.40). In this respect, similar to Billy, despite being opposed to war, his expression of rebellion is limited to envisioning a better world devoid of war and to allow his readers to acknowledge the possibility of living in such an innocent world. Therefore, it is possible to argue that through playing with the concept of time, Vonnegut offers a new alternative and attempts to find salvation. Taylor (2013) also supports this by stating that Vonnegut “constructs a utopian eschatology, which, however unreal, allows the reader to reconsider the world, history, and the self. [...] Vonnegut implores the reader to re-sacralize the world and the human” (n.p.). Briefly, for Vonnegut, his rebellious imagination in his novel can rescue humanity and stop the decay of history (Taylor, 2013).

In light of the analysis mentioned above, in his novel, Vonnegut reinforces the idea that society has a promising future. Despite the destruction of innocence in a world ravaged by wars and countless funerals, the importance of rebuilding it remains a key part of Vonnegut’s efforts to heal the world (Tang, 2011). In this respect, it is possible to claim that in his novel, Vonnegut maintains a sense of optimism and remains hopeful, and he strives to foster a shared belief in a hopeful future for humanity. Therefore, it can be posited that in order to heal the world, he uses “literature as a narrative of redemption and as a rejection of fate” (Taylor, 2013, n.p.). Moreover, to rekindle the abandoned human essence, Vonnegut also explores the vulnerability of humans in the face of war through his protagonist, Billy. To support these arguments, in his autobiographical collage, *Fates Worse Than Death*, when he graduated from his school in Indianapolis, Vonnegut (2011) states that “each member of our class had to make a public promise as to what he or she would try to do when an adult to make the world a better place. I was going to find a cure for some disease” (p.44). Just like what he has said, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he endeavors to discover a solution for the ailing world, plagued by endless wars and fatalities. Knowing the fact that in the novel, both the narrator – Vonnegut himself – and Billy are portrayed as ill. In the first chapter, the narrator points out the fact that he has a “disease” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.4) as he drinks alcohol and calls his war friends to recollect his war memories. Similar to the narrator, Billy, who believes the war has been “hell on the ground” (Vonnegut, 1991, p.198), also suffers from an ailment. He goes through a mental breakdown and encounters difficulty in achieving

restful sleep. His wartime experiences disrupt his sleep and negatively impact his mental well-being. It can be concluded that after seeing a horrific massacre in Dresden, both Vonnegut and Billy suffer from psychological trauma, which is suggested to be a long-lasting effect of their experiences during the war. Moreover, just like Billy and Vonnegut, the society's illness is evidenced by the alarming symptomatology of massacres, poverty, and racial discrimination and to Vonnegut, the world "has not only been physically ill with its visible signs of disorder but also mentally ill or insane with its betrayal of its promises of freedom, justice and equality" (Tang, 2011, p. 56). In this regard, it is possible to claim that after such a horrific war, the American society has undergone physical repercussions, given that soldiers are either physically injured or deceased. Furthermore, the war has exerted a psychological impact on society, leaving indelible marks on both the soldiers and their families. Therefore, by creating Tralfamadore with a whole different ideology and philosophy, Vonnegut, as a veteran, highlights the fact that both he and his character Billy wish to escape from the real and wicked world, which has been destroyed by the wars. In doing so, for his readers, he opens the window of a new and innocent world – Tralfamadore – where the citizens "can live in peace" (Vonnegut, 1991, p.116). Vonnegut assigns Billy the role of a messianic leader as he is driven by a desire to heal the world through spreading Tralfamadorian beliefs. The purpose of the message is to enlighten everyone that, similar to the harmonious coexistence believed to exist on Tralfamadore, there is potential for the residents of Earth to live together peacefully. In other words, Vonnegut uses Billy Pilgrim to recreate the real world veiled by death, suffering, loss, and grief while providing his readers with the necessary remedy to open the path for a brighter tomorrow.

To sum up, the novel in discussion testifies to the traumatic experiences of people who have witnessed wars and loss and observes post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from these horrific experiences. Thus, the novel serves as an example of rewriting the Dresden bombing, achieved through the creation of an anti-hero who travels in time and explores a whole different planet. Moreover, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is also considered as Vonnegut's semi-autobiographical novel since the narrative mirrors Vonnegut's wartime experiences as he was captured by the Germans during the Battle of Bulge and was sent to Dresden. These experiences are reflected in the perspective of the narrator and are embodied in the main character, Billy. In an alternative expression, as an American soldier who served and witnessed to the devastating bombing in Dresden during WWII, Vonnegut takes up the challenge of rewriting and reimagining this specific historical period. The primary goal is to clarify the consequences of such a harrowing event on individuals who have experienced its

enormity. Vonnegut acknowledges that it is inherently impossible to alter the course of historical events or to prevent any future conflicts. Nevertheless, he believes in the capacity to portray not only the consequences of warfare on individuals but also to envision a better world within his novel, aiming to rekindle a sense of humanism and revive the fading innocence among his readers. Hence, instead of writing a traditional narrative which glorifies the wars, Vonnegut rewrites this specific historical epoch with an anti-hero, Billy, who represents the suppressed voices of the minority. Billy, in contrast to typical war heroes, experiences post-traumatic stress disorder after witnessing a devastating bombing as a prisoner. Seeking escape from the burdens of reality, he creates a new planet, Tralfamadore. There, Tralfamadorians advise him to focus on the joyful moments of his life while disregarding the distressing ones. This advice emphasizes the need of maintaining an optimistic perspective on life despite all the gruesome experiences. By conveying Tralfamadorians advice to Billy, Vonnegut seeks to highlight the vital importance of peace and to show beauty still exists in a world marked by turmoil. In this regard, the Jacob Weiner (2012) elaborates on this point and argues that instead of presenting his readers “the dead bodies in the ruins of Dresden, or the senseless execution of Edgar Derby, the novel’s final scene begins a retelling of Billy’s paradisiacal ride through the streets of Dresden – the happiest moment in his life” (p.63). Therefore, it can be asserted that for its readers, as a postmodern novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* generates an emotional and hopeful ending and opens a window into a realm of a better and more peaceful world, devoid of horrors.

3. THE METAFFECTIVE FICTION IN GEORGE SAUNDERS'S

LINCOLN IN THE BARDO

"You can shed tears that he is gone

Or you can smile because he has lived

You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back

Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him

Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday

Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember him and only that he is gone

Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back

Or you can do what he would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on."

(Harkins, 1981, n.p.)

At the turn of the millennium and especially after 9/11, which symbolizes the end of the postmodern world, the philosophical discussion about postmodernism has become more intense among many theorists. Nevertheless, according to Jesús Bolaño Quintero (2022), post-postmodernism appears in the titles of a great deal of scholarly publications, although it is not yet fully defined. Upon delving into greater granularity, Pignagnoli (2023) also elaborates on the same issue and states that "postmodernism, as it is generally agreed, ended sometime between the late 1980s and September 11, 2001" (p.3) and with the new era in literature what is being called post-postmodernism, the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction become blurred by sincerity (Pignagnoli, 2023). In this regard, with this new approach, it becomes apparent that the shift within literature becomes discernible not only with its aesthetic attributes but also with its economic and political dimensions. In line with this, as Robert L. McLaughlin (2013) puts, according to David Foster Wallace, one of the reasons why there is a turn to sincerity is because at the end of the century, postmodernists of the 1960s who used irony were left "inside a self-referring trap, unable to assert any belief, unable to connect with others, unable to make a new world" (p.285). With the decline of the use of irony and thus, postmodernism, by the end of the twentieth century, a significant number of authors, who are described as New Sincerity writers, begin to share a similar attitude and develop a common writing style different from postmodern techniques with the

desire to construct. The Man Booker Prize winning author Saunders stands as a prominent exemplar of a post-postmodern author. Similar to numerous contemporary writers, he endeavors to reconstruct elements that have been deconstructed by the postmodern world. In line with this, the editors of *George Saunders Critical Essays*, Philip Coleman and Steve Gronert Ellerhoff (2017) argue that Saunders, who is “a political author” (p. VII), is associated with the literary movement called New Sincerity since he attempts to “raise social awareness and a sense of hope” in his writings (p. VII). In accordance with their assertion, contrary to postmodern authors, Saunders fully embraces the influence of emotion on the readers and its capacity to resonate with them. While a postmodern author Vonnegut, for instance, employs irony and cynicism as literary devices to affect his readers, Saunders emphasizes a narrative strategy imbued with genuine and sincere emotions to underscore the thematic essence of his novel. Moreover, despite adopting different literary techniques, according to Coleman and Ellerhoff (2017), the shared objective of affecting readers remains remarkably similar. Coleman and Ellerhoff (2017) also state that “George Saunders writes with a strong sense of the moral agency of literature. Like [...] Vonnegut before him, he aims to appeal to conscience while tumbling his characters through traumas that run the gamut of disturbing to wacky” (p. VII) and they also add that Saunders “might be distinguished in terms of mystery and *kindness*” (p. VII). Therefore, both Saunders and Vonnegut, despite belonging to very opposite literary eras and using different literary methods, defend empathy, kindness and humanity while criticizing American politics and specific historical epochs in their writings. Through literature, which is used as a tool to rewrite these historical periods to underscore a better world with kindness and empathy, they question the moral compass. Nonetheless, in contrast to Vonnegut, whose narrative is characterized by irony and black humor, Saunders uses the power of emotions.

Given the comparisons drawn between Saunders and Vonnegut, with Saunders often being considered as a modern-day Vonnegut, it becomes evident that he appreciates Vonnegut’s literary contribution and is inspired by his perspective. To illustrate this point, in an interview featured in *The Australian Financial Review Magazine* in 2018, Saunders states that Vonnegut is a major influence on him. Additionally, what captures his attention most is the fact that Vonnegut “was willing to look at the meaning of life and not be embarrassed about that. [...] He represents a kind of decency and humanism” (Abadee, 2018, n.p.). Therefore, it is predictable that Saunders provides his insightful analysis of Vonnegut’s acclaimed novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* in “Mr. Vonnegut in Sumatra”, an essay included in his essay collection titled *The Braindead Megaphone*. After reading the novel, he clearly

admires what Vonnegut learned from experiencing the Second World War and how he shared it with his readers. Following his engagement with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Saunders underscores the fact that even in the aftermath of witnessing the harrowing realities of war, Vonnegut does not exempt himself from “the usual human obligations of being kind, attempting to understand, behaving decently. On the contrary, he [learns] the importance of preserving kindness in ourselves at all costs” (Saunders, 2017b, p. 77). Moreover, he discerns the fact that Vonnegut’s aim in writing an anti-war novel is to “soften the heart, to encourage our capacity for pity and sorrow” (Saunders, 2017b, p.79). He acknowledges that even if reading a novel like *Slaughterhouse-Five* will not stop the wars, “it is a comfort [...] to read an antiwar book this good, and be reminded that just because something keeps happening, doesn’t mean we get to stop regretting it” (Saunders, 2017b, p. 82) and he adds “massacres are bad, the death of innocents is bad, hate is bad, and there’s something cleansing about hearing it so purely” (Saunders, 2017b, p. 82). In accordance with his statements in his essay on *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Vonnegut, it can be argued that Vonnegut lays the groundwork for cultivating empathy, kindness and humanity, and Saunders walks the road that was taken by Vonnegut in his novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

In parallel with a postmodern author like Vonnegut, Saunders undertakes the rewriting of a very important historical epoch in American history, the Civil War and the grief-stricken President Lincoln, who is torn between leaving his dead son behind and fulfilling his duties as the President of the United States amidst a nation divided by the war. In his interview with *Financial Times* (2017), Saunders also explains the genesis of the novel by stating that he heard a story twenty years ago about how Lincoln was deeply mournful at the loss of his son Willy, to the extent that he went into the crypt and held the body. Saunders adds that “I heard that story back then and I thought. That is a book for somebody. But then over the years, I just could not shake it, and so finally I decided to try to tell the story” (Financial Times, 2017, n.p.). Similar to Vonnegut, who waited for a very long time to tell his own experience in Dresden due to the weightiness of the subject matter, despite having heard the story of Lincoln holding his son’s body after his passing years ago, Saunders also hesitates to write about it because he finds it too difficult and earnest to convey. Nonetheless, inevitably, Saunders, the short story master, decided to write his first novel, reimagining a night in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln visited the graveyard after losing his beloved son who had succumbed to typhoid fever. He builds his novel from this historical truth and creates a fantasia, one night in the graveyard, narrated by a chorus of ghosts.

Lincoln in the Bardo is the story of the sixteenth President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who grapples with a profound grief by the death of his third son, Willie Lincoln. In 1862, the Civil War is less than one year old and while the nation goes through a bloody struggle, despite predictions of a recovery, President Lincoln loses his son. When he is laid to rest in a Georgetown cemetery, according to the newspaper reports, Lincoln returns to the crypt to hold his son's body. During the course of the Civil War, Lincoln, consumed by profound grief, is unable to overcome the loss of his son. Willie, who continues to feel his father's love for him, resolves to stay despite admonitions from the ghosts, contending that children are not supposed to prolong their stay in the bardo. The three central narrators of the novel, Hans Vollman, who remarried and found happiness in life than died because of a heavy beam fell from the ceiling, Roger Bevins III, who slit his wrists and he regretted the moment he did it, and the Reverend Everly Thomas, who acknowledges being dead but refuses to leave the bardo, attempt to persuade Willie to move on as children do not belong in the bardo. Despite their efforts, as the ghosts have the ability to possess the living, when Willie spots his father in the graveyard, he enters his body and begins to feel his sorrow and to hear his promise to return to him. Therefore, throughout the novel, it is seen that the bardo, a term from Tibetan culture signifying a transitional state and within the narrative, holds both Lincoln characters in its grip: Willie's love for his father keeps him there, while Lincoln is caught in a state of mourning and the tumultuous Civil War (Éigeartaigh, 2018). Briefly, while Willie experiences a hallucinatory state alongside many other ghosts who are also unaware of their deceased status, Abraham Lincoln, who has been considered as a hero and emancipator, is portrayed as a president who transforms into a grieving father in the novel. Moreover, although the novel revolves around Abraham and Willie Lincoln, the father and the son, as well as the country and its president, the habitants of the bardo, the chorus of ghosts, also share their own stories as they are reluctant to depart from the world of living and confront the reasons behind their deaths. In brief, the novel in question emerges from reliable historical sources documenting Willie Lincoln's passing and evolves into an exquisite symphony of 166 conflicting voices that express individuals' deepest anxieties concerning their own morality, authority, and the everlasting consequences of unresolved affairs to present a modern perspective on a divided society (Hayes-Brady, 2020).

Despite belonging to different periods, Saunders and Vonnegut share a similar worldview. Particularly in their treatment of themes surrounding war, trauma, death and grief, both authors harbor strong ethical concerns. Therefore, through their literary works, they aim to engage the reader and foster an appreciation for humanism, kindness and

empathy. Moreover, Michael Basseler (2017) also supports this argument by stating “Saunders could thus be grouped as a proponent of a literary style that reconciles postmodern playfulness with strong ethical concerns, following in a line of tradition that includes writers like Kurt Vonnegut [...]” (p.154). Therefore, following the footsteps of Vonnegut, Saunders also employs postmodern techniques to rewrite a pivotal historical epoch in American history. In doing so, akin to Vonnegut, Saunders also challenges the established narrative of the past and allows voiceless communities to be heard. Despite the discernible presence of postmodern techniques within a contemporary novel, the absence of postmodern detachment therein serves to suggest its classification within the post-postmodern era. In parallel to the approach undertaken by Vonnegut, Saunders, in his reinterpretation of the Civil War, not only creates a realm of fantasy with eccentric characters but also adds some legitimate and some fictitious historical documents throughout the novel. Therefore, just like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Lincoln in the Bardo* “can be situated in the context of contemporary historical fiction, joining the ranks of Kurt Vonnegut [...] and others in Saunders’ use of radical formal experimentation as a means of disrupting conventional historiography” (Hayes-Brady, 2020, p.74). In accordance with this statement, it can be argued that the incorporation of Abraham Lincoln’s historical reality, along with the fictional elements such as the multivocality of ghosts and fabricated historical documents, creates a novel that can be scarcely examined within the framework of historiographic metafiction. In this regard, Huber (2014) explains this similarity between these two novels by stating “[p]ostmodernism is not simply rejected or ignored but made productive for a reconsideration of possibilities, functions and responsibilities of fiction” (p.17). In other words, instead of dismissing the postmodern techniques entirely, some contemporary authors like Saunders, prefer to use some of postmodern principles as instruments to explore uncharted territory in the 21st century fiction and to reflect on the responsibilities that fiction has in shaping readers’ comprehension of the world.

Whether real or fictitious, which is nearly impossible for the reader to discern, Saunders also includes references to the sources of information following each historical document. Both real and invented historical passages are written in the identical format, thereby, problematizing the idea of ultimate truth. Much like the contribution of the ghosts who express their viewpoints and thus create a multivocal narrative that undermines the idea of reaching the single truth about the past, regardless of their authenticity, these historical documents, with their divergent perspectives, also create a similar complexity. In order to be more specific, in the fifth chapter, various historical records are presented depicting the

night Abraham Lincoln and his wife hosted a state dinner. For instance, according to Ann Brighney, “[m]any guests especially recalled the beautiful moon that shone that evening” (Saunders, 2017a, p.19). On the other hand, Wickett claims that “[t]here was no moon that night and the sky was heavy with clouds” (Saunders, 2017a, p.19). When all the elements are considered, it can be summarized that with marginalized characters, various perspectives, and real and imagined written sources, Saunders underscores the complexity of historical narrative and challenges the traditional form as it is subjective. However, while *Lincoln in the Bardo* incorporates historiographic metafiction, labeling this distinctive text as a historical novel comes with a few obstacles, namely its formal characteristics (Hayes-Brady, 2020). In accordance with the statement, it is possible to argue that the narrative style of the novel, which is composed of direct speeches from various voices just like a play and quotations from real and invented historical sources, destabilizes the accepted history and problematizes the notion of ultimate truth. Nonetheless, what distinguishes *Lincoln in the Bardo* from merely being an example of historiographic metafiction and thereby positions the novel within the literary movement of post-postmodernism and examines it within the framework of metaffective fiction, is its emphasis on sincerity, empathy, kindness and humanity. As Clare (2019) puts, metaffective fiction indulges in sentiments and it transcends the mere representation of emotions. Moreover, according to the critic, metaffective fiction, “self-consciously calls attention to the ways in which emotion and affect are represented in order to interrogate the relationship between them” (p.266). To put it differently, metaffective fiction intentionally highlights how emotions, which refer to specific feelings, and affect, which means the intensities of feelings cannot be easily named, are portrayed in the story to explore the relationship between them. Saunders presents an affective reading experience by underlining the inner world of a well-known historical figure to raise an awareness about how racial issues are still dominant in contemporary United States.

Literary critics have recently shifted their focus to examining the affective aspects of literary works and the emotional responses they evoke in readers. Some contemporary literary critics, like Suzanne Keen, as well as authors, like Saunders, are especially interested in the ways how fiction can elicit empathy in readers (Labuschagne, 2022). Therefore, Saunders, considered as the part of New Sincerity movement, despite employing postmodern techniques, also detaches his novel from the use of irony and cynicism and adopts the transformative power of emotions and performs empathy, sincerity, kindness and humanity to affect the reader. Furthermore, unlike *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which is still not an affectless novel despite its extreme use of irony and black humor, *Lincoln in the Bardo* establishes a

pure sincere communication without any sort of irony or cynicism in it. In other words, while Saunders derives his strength from presenting strong emotions in a very honest manner and creating empathetic connections between the characters, Vonnegut's sarcastic and cynical approach tends to create a detachment between the characters and the readers. Nonetheless, both literary works endeavor to delve into ethical dimensions and demonstrate how death and grief resulting from massacres and wars can affect innocent individuals. In this regard, it can be argued that although both novels employ distinct techniques, their emotional responses elicited from the reader share similarity. In light of this, Saunders's use of language in the novel serves to promote empathy, generosity and humanism, effectively conveying these themes through an emotive tone. Henceforth, *Lincoln in the Bardo* directly shows President Lincoln's personal grief and his heartbreak over losing his beloved son. To illustrate this point, in the fifteenth chapter, where the ghosts Hans Vollman and Roger Bevins III discuss President Lincoln's presence in the cemetery, their choice of words indicate how deeply saddened Lincoln is after losing his son. When Vollman sees Lincoln in the cemetery, he states that "[t]he gentleman seemed lost. Several times he stopped, looked about, retraced his steps, reversed course" (Saunders, 2017a, p.43) and he also corrects Roger Bevins III, who claims Lincoln is *softly* crying, by stating "[h]e was not sobbing. My friend remembers incorrectly. He was winded. He did not sob" (Saunders, 2017a, p.44). Moreover, according to one of the historical documents, real or imagined, President Lincoln's "hair was wild, his face was pale, with signs of recent tears plainly evident" (Saunders, 2017a, p.56). His grief is also examined by another historical document as "[t]he impression I carried away was that I had seen, not so much the President of the United States, as the saddest man in the world" (Saunders, 2017a, p.201). In accordance with these specific examples, it is possible to argue that despite having strategies from the postmodernist practice, grief, one of the strongest emotions, is explicitly seen throughout the novel. In contrast to Vonnegut who harmonizes postmodern irony and black humor with ethical considerations, and his portrayal of the anti-heroic main character Billy, who is crushed under the devastating impacts of the war and adopts an escapist attitude, Saunders deliberately articulates Lincoln's grief and tenderness in a very honest and earnest way possible so that his sorrow and sadness can affect the characters within the narrative and the readers at the same time. In other words, it is obvious that each word that is used to depict Lincoln's grief has the power to evoke profound emotional distress in both the characters and the readers. Therefore, it can be inferred that by eschewing ironic detachment, through

its earnest portrayal of emotions such as love, empathy, sorrow and grief, *Lincoln in the Bardo* exemplifies metaffective fiction.

Knowing the fact that in the 21st century, with the emergence of New Sincerity movement, historiographic metafiction has evolved into metaffective fiction as contemporary authors shift their focus towards emphasizing emotions explicitly. By breaking from the cultural irony of the postmodern and embracing sincerity, they use literature as a vehicle to show the value of human connection, empathy and kindness. Additionally, according to Clare (2019), metaffective fiction highlights the depiction of emotion and affect, with the intention of exploring their correlation. Moreover, as Clare (2019) puts, although there is a ‘return’ to realism, character, emotion and affect in metaffective fiction after postmodernism, these stories are aware of the fact that how they reshape affect and emotion in a time of both cynical disengagement and fervent Millennial hope. Consequently, a study of metaffective fiction needs to center on the flow of emotions, sentiments and affects within, between and outside of post-postmodern texts that are produced, shared and consumed. In this respect, in the realm of metaffective fiction, *Lincoln in the Bardo* stands as a significant example, with its deeply moving narrative that explores the themes of empathy, kindness and humanity through love and sorrow. To offer additional specificity, in an interview conducted with Foyles Bookstore (2017a), Saunders also elucidates his deliberate departure from employing certain satirical techniques in his novel and his sharp shift into exploring the power of emotions and empathy. During the interview, he states that “because of the subject matter [of the novel], I had to leave certain of my habitual gifts at the door. [...] I had to allow myself to work with more sincere material, and more earnestly” (Foyles Bookstore, 2017a, n.p.). Hence, despite employing postmodern techniques, Saunders, as a contemporary author, maintains a belief in his novel’s ability to evoke empathy from the reader. By invoking empathy through showing the presence of love and grief, he seeks to resurrect humanity, kindness and sincerity. In other words, Saunders employs profound emotions to instill empathy, which is one of the central themes that he endeavors to implement in his readers. Similarly, the chairman of the judging panel of the 2017 Man Booker Prize, Baroness Lola Young supports this by stating that *Lincoln in the Bardo* “explores the meaning and experience of empathy” (Gilbert, 2017, n.p.). To support this analysis, it can be argued that the postmodern structure of *Lincoln in the Bardo* prioritizes affect, creating a fabulist space that connects the historical narrative and encourages the reader to empathize with the characters (Labuschagne, 2022). In this regard,

it can be concluded that in addition to the historical narrative, the presence of the fantasy plays a role of a bridge, and it enables both the characters and the readers to empathize.

Keen (2007), defines empathy as “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, that can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (p.4). Raising a similar point, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith (2009) also explains empathy as “[a]s we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (p.35) Moreover, Smith (2009) delves more into the meaning of the term and argues as follows:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (p.36)

In accordance with this quotation, it can be stated that through the power of imagination, it is possible for the individuals to empathize and hence, understand the other person’s discomfort, sorrow or pain. As they begin to feel the other person’s sorrow, gradually they start to internalize it, which leads to an emotional response and the birth of kindness. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the notion of empathizing through feeling intense emotions, such as love and sorrow, is explored in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. To elucidate further, the theme of empathy begins with the ghosts as they possess the ability of entering bodies, thereby gaining access to their thoughts and experiencing their emotions (Labuschagne, 2022). In one of the most striking scenes where the ghosts Hans Vollman and Roger Bevins III inhabit Abraham Lincoln’s body, they experience his grief and describe him as “[v]ast. Windswept. New. Sad.” (Saunders, 2017a, p.147). After entering Lincoln’s body, they empathize with his emotions, enabling them to understand his attempts to recall memories involving his son. Lincoln remembers a specific memory while he is inhabited and Vollman describes this experience as “[w]e ran one hand roughly over our face, as if attempting to suppress a notion just arising. [...] The notion washed over us” (Saunders, 2017a, p. 150-151). Considering this quotation, by crafting a fantasy realm where ghosts inhabit the living, Saunders allows his characters to empathize, and through this empathetic connection, they show kindness and become helpful to one another. Moreover, upon close reading of the quotation above, while inhabiting Lincoln’s body and recounting his actions, instead of employing third-person singular pronoun, Vollman prefers to use the first-person plural pronoun, which can be considered as evidence of Saunders’s way of pointing out their

empathetic connection. In other words, it conveys the idea that just like the other ghosts inhabiting Lincoln's body, Vollman is under the influence of his sorrow, grief and tenderness and he also cries alongside him.

As the ghosts inhabit Lincoln's body, both Vollman and Bevins III hear his words, which express his desire to free himself from this miserable, heartbroken state and become useful for his country. He continues saying "[t]hink of [Willie], when I do, as being in some bright place, free of suffering, resplendent in a new mode of being" (Saunders, 2017a, p. 158). However, the ghosts are aware that children should not linger in the bardo and because of this reason, Willie is neither in a state of brightness nor liberated from suffering as he disregards the advice of the ghosts due to his profound love for his father and the motivation of the possibility of reunion with his family. Thus, to actualize Abraham Lincoln's desire and fear what will happen if Willie stays, the ghosts need to formulate a strategy to persuade Willie not to linger in the bardo anymore. The plan is made "with the expectation that this access to each other's unspoken thoughts and memories will provide both with the impetus they need to let each other go" (Éigearthaigh, 2018). Therefore, according to the plan, the Reverend, Bevins and Vollman have to persuade Lincoln to return to the cemetery so that Willie can eavesdrop on his father's expressed desire and eventually be convinced to leave the bardo. Despite Vollman's attempt to enter Lincoln's body and influence him not to leave the cemetery, his power is not sufficient and thus, he asks Bevins and the Reverend to enter Lincoln's body as well. When the other ghosts in the cemetery also enter Lincoln's body to help Vollman, Bevins III and the Reverend, Bevins III states that "[w]hat a pleasure it was, being in there. Together. United in common purpose. In there together, yet also within one another, thereby receiving glimpses of one another's minds and glimpses, also, of Mr. Lincoln's mind. How good it felt" (Saunders, 2017a, p.253). In this regard, they all have the access to each other's minds, "no longer just listening to each other's stories but expanding far beyond their individual and limited capacities" (Chopelas, 2022, p. 38). In brief, this effort serves as a poignant demonstration of empathetic connection they all share. After all these efforts made by the ghosts, eventually, Willie as a ghost enters his father's body and says;

(Father Here I am
What should I
If you tell me to go I will
If you tell me to stay I will
I wait upon your advice Sir)
I listened for Father's reply

The moon swelled All became more blue ish Father's mind was blank blankblankblank
[...] He began remembering Reviewing Certain things About me Concerning my illness
(Saunders, 2017a, p. 281)

While he is still undecided whether he should stay in the bardo or not, he hears his father's thoughts. First, he witnesses his father recalling a memory of a woman he had encountered previously, who also revisited the location where her daughter lost her life due to being struck by lightning. She believed that by returning to the same spot, she could alter the course of events. In a sudden realization, Lincoln comprehends the true extent of the woman's sorrow and her longing for a different future for her daughter (Éigeartaigh, 2018). After noticing the resemblance between the woman's and his story, Lincoln finally accepts his son's demise by stating:

Now I understand.

That afternoon he brought in five rocks on a tray. Meant to try to find the scientific name of each. The rocks are on that tray yet. In the hallway windowsill near his room. (I believe I shall never be able to move them.) Toward dusk I found him sitting on the stairs, tray on his knees.

Well, I don't feel so good today, he said.

I put my hand on his head.

Burning. (Saunders, 2017a, p.281-282)

After hearing his father's words, Willie eventually learns the fact that he is dead by saying "[e]veryone, we are dead" (Saunders, 2017a, p. 296) and there is no possibility of reunion. This enlightenment allows him not to be persisted to stay within the bardo because finally this truth lets him free. Moreover, since Lincoln's grieving process also leaves him immobilized, after this realization, he leaves the cemetery "broken, awed, humbled, diminished. [...] Make less rigidly himself through this loss. Therefore, quite powerful. Reduced, ruined, remade. Merciful, patient, dazzled" (Saunders, 2017a, p.305). In this respect, it is possible to state that through this empathetic connection between all the characters, Willie is liberated from an eternal suffering and now, he can transition to a brighter place. His departure also brings liberation to Lincoln, while the ghosts Vollman and Bevins III, in their attempt to help Willie, discover empathy for one another, begin to heal from their unresolved traumas and also release themselves from the bardo.

Knowing the fact that although all the ghosts are supposed to accept that they are dead and pass on the next phase, like Vollman and Bevins III, many of them stay in the bardo until they experience a psychological healing. They are aware that during their stay, "the results are catastrophic: They deteriorate, mentally and physically, and become entrapped by a carapace of demonic souls that slowly drives them mad" (Grady, 2017, n.p). Despite

acknowledging this fact, their reluctance to move onto the next phase of after life can be traced back to their ongoing battle with unresolved trauma. Moreover, as a response to trauma, all ghosts in the bardo are convinced that they are only ill, and thus, they refer to their coffins as “sick boxes” (Saunders, 2017a, p.45) because they believe that they will be recovered and will reunite with their loved ones. Saunders explains this condition as “[t]hey are stuck kind of in the condition they were in at the moment of death, [...] they suddenly are in this other place and desperately trying to stay there” (PBS NewsHour, 2017, n.p.). In other words, these ghostly beings carry the weight of their unresolved trauma into the afterlife and as a way to deal with it, have disconnected from reality of their pasts. The only key to exiting the bardo lies in the acceptance of their passing and the resolution of any traumatic memories that hold them in place (Chopelas, 2022). However, similar to Billy in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, who suffers from PTSD as a result of witnessing the meaningless deaths of thousands during WWII and responds to his traumatic event by adopting an escapist mindset, until the empathetic bond between them gets stronger, Saunders’s ghosts, including Willie, who are trapped in the bardo due to having unresolved traumas, seek to escape from or deny their traumatic experiences that they have encountered. In other words, until experiencing psychological healing, they cannot leave the bardo despite its being catastrophic. Although they have finally experienced acceptance and psychological healing almost at the end of the novel through empathy and compassion, the expression of their emotional traumas remains limited, as words often fall short of fully capturing the depth of human emotion in such intense circumstances. As Clare (2019) suggests, “metaffective fiction might gesture toward affect as that which escapes language and signification altogether in the face of the ineffable or what cannot be adequately represented in language or emotional terms” (p.266). In light of the insight provided by Clare, as an example of metaffective fiction, some emotions and affects in *Lincoln in the Bardo* go beyond what can be expressed by language as the power of emotions surpass the limits of words. In his novel, Saunders attempts to convey a range of intense emotions; however, the characters’ traumatic experiences are too complex and difficult, and thus, mostly beyond linguistic representation.

After the ghosts Vollman and Bevins III attempt to enter Lincoln’s body to persuade Willie to leave the bardo, an empathetic bond between them deepens. Furthermore, according to Julia Dorothea Chopelas (2022), despite their ghostly existence, Bevins III and Vollman possess a profound psychological impact on the living, as they are fundamentally human, grief-stricken, and disoriented. In this respect, the manner in which Vollman and Bevins III narrate their deaths and the events leading up to their final moments highlights

the complexity of their existence exactly like humans. By this way, it is reminded that they are beyond ghosts because they were once humans, too. For instance, in the novel, Vollman, who is depicted as a naked man with an enormous erection, dies because of a fallen beam just before his young bride finally agrees to consummate their marriage, while Bevins III, a young gay man whose body is covered with extra eyes, noses, mouths and ears, commits suicide by slitting his wrists due to unrequited love. In this regard, it should be noted that Saunders provides background details about both characters, giving specific details about their deaths, to highlight the fact that individuals from minority groups – in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the ghosts – also harbor traumas, emotions, thoughts and memories similar to everybody else. Therefore, they, too, are expected to be understood and empathized with. To illustrate, in the novel, after inhabiting Lincoln's body, Bevins III sees Vollman completely different as he states "I found Mr. Vollman suddenly *clad*, his member shrunk down to normal size. His clothes were [...] decidedly *scruffy* [...] but nevertheless: a miracle" (Saunders, 2017a, p.256). Vollman also finds Bevins III "no longer a difficult-to-look-at clustering of eyes, noses, hands, et.al. – but a handsome young man, of eager and pleasing countenance: two eyes, one nose, two hands, ruddy cheeks, a beautiful head of black hair" (Saunders, 2017a, p.256-257). This can be explained as while inhabiting Lincoln's body, hearing his thoughts and allowing to be heard by the other ghosts, Vollman and Bevins III "discover the same empathy Lincoln demonstrated but for each other" (Chopelas, 2022, p.29). Furthermore, Chopelas (2022) explains this empathetic connection as in a state of inhabiting a body, "[t]hey see and feel each other's experiences as one and reassociate their lost memories of trauma which bind them in the bardo" (p.29). Henceforth, it can be argued that this connection with Lincoln enables them to confront with their own traumas and it also leads mutual understanding among them. As the victims of trauma, they not only empathize with each other but also help one another to heal from their psychological distress. Consequently, it becomes evident that they learn to be kind not only to themselves but also to each other and everyone they encounter. Therefore, in the novel, through accepting their traumas by showing empathy and kindness to each other, Vollman and Bevins III finally escape from the bardo as they put:

Shall we? Mr. Bevins said. Shall we go?

Yes, all right, Mr. Vollman said. Let us go Together.

And it seemed we had passed the point of choosing. The knowledge of what we were was strong within us now, and would not be denied. (Saunders, 2017a, p328-329)

It can be stated that even the presence of ghosts and a fantasy world, every supernatural element in the novel has a purpose for the reader. Saunders adopts a reconstructed language as it “attempt[s] to establish meaningful connections by renewing the [...] possibility of communication” (Huber, 2014, p. 48) and underscores the fact that regardless of being a ghost or human or belonging to the minority or majority, everyone encounters pain, sadness, loss, grief, which may result in having trauma. Demonstrating kindness and empathy to oneself, to each other and to everyone can help alleviating the effects of trauma.

During the Civil War’s turmoil, Abraham Lincoln, who is often remembered as the Great Emancipator, grappled with a profound process of mourning following the loss of his beloved son. To illustrate, in the novel, a poignant scene depicts Lincoln’s visit to his son’s grave for the last time, struggling to accept the reality of his son’s death and trying to convince himself it is “[t]ime to go” (Saunders, 2017a, p.244) and not to come back. In this moment, he accepts the fact that he is mistaken by stating “I was in error when I saw him as fixed and stable and thought I would have him forever. He was never fixed, nor stable, but always just a passing, temporary energy-burst” (Saunders, 2017a, p.244) and he also adds that Willie “came out of nothingness, took form, was loved, was always bound to return to nothingness. [...] The essential thing is gone” (Saunders, 2017a, p.244-245). In this regard, it can be stated that for Lincoln, it is exceedingly difficult to confront the fact that the spark of life in his son is completely gone and the inert body that he tries to embrace is “meat” (Saunders, 2017a, p. 246). In addition to being overwhelmed by the experience of death, he is also surrounded by the American Civil War. Knowing the fact that Lincoln struggles for an extended period to come to terms with the loss of his son. Following this traumatic experience intertwined with sorrow, like Billy in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Lincoln also embraces pacifism. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Lincoln feels stuck in time, and he refrains from participating in national affairs during the Civil War despite his responsibilities as president. Nonetheless, unlike Billy, he eventually realizes the necessity of maintaining his sanity and regaining his strength in order to fulfil his duties to the nation. Moreover, Saunders, who writes his novel based on these historical truths – Willie Lincoln’s death and the American Civil War –, elaborates on it and claims that Lincoln is a president who truly embodied virtues such as sorrow, defeat and a profound loss, and yet still managed to transform that sorrow into a kind of expansive empathy for everybody (PBS NewsHour, 2017). Thus, the author believes it is inspiring to observe such an important figure whose “response to fear or hardship was extensiveness instead of shrinkage” (PBS NewsHour, 2017, n.p.). To illustrate this point, in the novel, Saunders underscores Lincoln’s desire to

go back to work despite mourning for his son because he has “the tenderest heart for any one in distress, whether man, beast, or bird” (Saunders, 2017a, p.284).

Knowing the fact that Lincoln has always been anti-slavery as he (1864) declares “[i]f slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel” (n.p.) and thus, while lost on grief, it still feels like torment for him to be unable to help black individuals and abolish slavery. Furthermore, in accordance with Saunders’s statements and his description of Lincoln in the novel, Werner Roald Labuschagne argues that in the novel, after such a traumatic loss, Lincoln’s transformation is portrayed as the development of an empathetic connection towards his people who will also lose their loved ones in the Civil War (Labuschagne, 2022). After losing his son, he empathizes with the families of those who will die for the sake of the country and finally understands the sorrow, pain and grief they will also experience. Therefore, as Labuschagne (2022) puts, “Willie’s death makes Lincoln question whether he is emotionally capable of further pursuing liberation, as he directly confronts the loss of life his actions could cause, as well as the grief others would have to endure” (p.88). In other words, experiencing grief alters his perspective on death, as it becomes more than just statistics in the Civil War for him. Nevertheless, driven by the noble aim of fostering a nation free from slavery, Lincoln decides to pursue the war. In this regard, Labuschagne (2022) concludes that Lincoln’s understanding of others’ sorrows gradually expands throughout the novel. After he truly accepts the reality of Willie’s death, he begins to shift his focus away from himself and becomes more attuned to the feelings of those around him. Following the departure of Willie from the bardo, the ideas conveyed by Labuschagne are observed within the novel from Hans Vollman’s perspective:

His mind was freshly inclined toward sorrow; toward the fact that the world was full of *sorrow*; that everyone labored under some burden of sorrow; that all were suffering; that whatever way one took in this world, one must try to remember that all were suffering (none content; all wronged, neglected, overlooked, misunderstood), and therefore one must do what one could to lighten the load of those with whom one came into contact; that his current state of sorrow was not uniquely his, not at all, but, rather, its like had been felt, would yet be felt, by scores of others, in all times, in every time, and must not be prolonged or exaggerated, because, in this state, he could be of no help to anyone and, given that his position in the world situated him to be either of great help or great harm, it would not do to stay low, if he could help it. (Saunders, 2017a, p. 303-304)

It is possible to state that despite his sorrow, Lincoln recognizes that everyone has their share of suffering and tribulations in life. He eventually learns how significant it is to have compassion for other people and try to ease their suffering. He realizes that many others have experienced or will experience comparable emotions to his own grief. Therefore, given

his position in the world, he understands the need of overcoming his own grief to be of service to his people. Moreover, Hayes-Brady (2020) also supports this by stating “[w]hile Lincoln suddenly sees the world as composed of individuals united by sorrow, his commitment to the war is not motivated by a strong drive to racial equality, but by an awareness of individual suffering” (p.88). Hence, while the toll of the war continues to escalate, Lincoln, whose “heart drop[s] at the thought of the killing” (Saunders, 2017a, p.307) tries to make an important decision. His determination to end slavery and human suffering lead him to say: “I will go on, I will” (Saunders, 2017, p.310). With this decision, Lincoln liberates himself from the torment of repeating a deeply traumatic moment for him. When he frees himself from the liminal space, he shows how determined he is to unite the divided country. Consequently, “*Lincoln in the Bardo* can be read as [Saunders’s] attempt to move America beyond this stasis by identifying and learning from past mistakes” (Éigeartaigh, 2018, p.69). To conclude, as a metaffective novel, with Saunders’s sincere choice of vocabulary, Lincoln’s trauma and grief turn into a source of compassion for all human suffering, involving racism.

Acknowledging the fact that metaffective fiction “insist[s] on self-consciously establishing a particular affective relationship with a reader and text that both makes and breaks bonds, compels and repels identification” (Clare, 2019, p.266). To put it differently, metaffective fiction deliberately creates an emotional connection with the reader. Therefore, it can be argued that in the post-postmodern era, fiction has evolved to elicit profound and genuine emotional connection and empathetic responses and hence, engaging with literature enables readers to empathize with the characters portrayed within the narrative. Similar to many other contemporary authors, as he believes the transformative power of kindness and empathy, in his novel, Saunders employs deep emotions and unresolved traumas to create an empathic bond between the characters and the readers. According to Keen (2007), who believes naming a character may activate the notion of empathy in readers, “character identification often invites empathy, even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious way” (p.70). In other words, the reader can still connect with the character and empathize with him or her regardless of their similarities or differences. Therefore, although the readers are not familiar with the fantasy world and ghosts or may have no experience of grief or loss, a narrative can still evoke empathy in them. Considering this aspect, it can be stated that the empathetic connection established in *Lincoln in the Bardo* extends beyond the characters to the readers, thereby fostering an emotional experience between the novel and its readers. In this regard, Basseler (2017)

supports this idea by stating that “[t]he originality of George Saunders’s writing might be described in terms of how it involves the reader emotionally and engages her in a compassionate relationship with the characters” (p.153). Furthermore, in one of his interviews about *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders explains the position of this empathetic connection between the novel and its readers as:

At the end of the day, I want to happen is for the reader to kind of go ‘Ah!’. To make that happen by any means necessary is kind of what, I think, what a novelist’s job is. You are honoring the reader by saying, ‘I know you are busy, I know you are smart, I know you have lived; let me not waste your time by just merely being performative. But I want to engage you, and I want to somehow raise the questions that are actually on your mind. (Foyles Bookstore, 2017a, n.p.)

Through careful selection of vocabulary and strategic presentation of themes, the author aims to provoke specific responses or revelations in the readers’ minds. To support this argument, Chopelas (2022) also claims that this observation implies that even though the bardo is filled with fantastical and supernatural elements, every aspect of Saunders’s writing serves a purpose and adds meaning for the reader rather than just being superficial. His decision to incorporate ghosts into the story was not driven by a desire to be eccentric or unconventional, but rather to pique readers’ curiosity and spark meaningful discussions on important topics. Throughout the novel, facilitated by supernatural elements and the pervasive theme of grief and loss, characters – whether ghost or living, regardless of race – develop a deeper sense of empathy towards one another. In doing so, they convey valuable lessons on the importance of empathy and kindness to the readers. Moreover, Chopelas (2022) also underscores that like the ghosts Vollman and Bevins III, who gain insight into each other’s memories and traumas while inhabiting a body, Lincoln, as an inspirational American figure, shows the ability to understand his people, regardless of their race, who will lose their loved ones in the ongoing war. Through these two examples of empathy and kindness, depicted with emotional intensity, Saunders hopes his readers to be “emotionally jungled” (Morrow, 2017, n.p.) and “moved in some way” (Morrow, 2017, n.p.). He achieves this by inviting his readers to feel compassion for the personal grief of Abraham Lincoln, the heartbreaking relationship between a father and a son, the traumatic experiences of the ghosts and the divided state of the country.

Abraham Lincoln has been an iconic historical figure as he “craved unity and cherished democracy” (Masur, 2020, n.p.) in the 19th century. Therefore, by choosing Lincoln, one of the well-known and well-loved American presidents fueled by compassion and empathy for all people regardless of race, and determined to end slavery, not only does Saunders shed

light on the past, but he also brings attention to the ongoing racial discrimination in his nation during the publication of his novel. While doing research for *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders uncovered many disturbing truths about the experiences of slaves. In his interview with Zadie Smith (2017), Saunders shares what he has learned by stating “it was not unusual for the Northern soldiers to rape the former slave girls. There’s a whole unwritten history of this. And even the written history is poorly understood by most people” (n.p.). Moreover, he emphasizes that even the reported acts of racism were erased “[b]ecause the actual things that were going on were so unspeakable” (Smith, 2017, n.p.). Therefore, as Saunders believes racism is still alive and well in the 21st century, bolstered by the support of the 45th President of United States, with his novel, despite the common assertion that racial division was a long time ago, Saunders allows his readers to recognize racism “is a daily reality for millions of people for hundreds of years” (Smith, 2017, n.p.). Knowing the fact that *Lincoln in the Bardo* was published shortly after Donald Trump began his tenure as the 45th president of the United States and this period was characterized by Trump’s political decisions lacking empathy, tenderness and kindness.

From the moment Trump announced his candidacy for president in June 2015, he openly shared “his intolerant views especially on immigration” (Clayton, Moore & Jones-Eversley, 2019, p.708). Therefore, it is possible to claim that unlike typical presidential behavior, Trump deliberately sought to divide the country into two. During his presidential campaign, he declared that he wanted to build a wall on the border with Mexico “to keep illegal immigrants from entering the United States” (Felbab-Brown, 2017, n.p.). With this decision, Trump jeopardized “decades of improvement [...] to the U.S. – Mexican relationship. This threatens many domains of North American integration and cooperation” (Felbab-Brown, 2017, n.p.). Moreover, by adopting nationalist rhetoric, Trump utilized “race as a part of his campaign to win the 2016 presidential election” (Clayton, Moore & Jones-Eversley, 2019, p.708-709). In this respect, it can be stated that despite Trump’s repeated denials of racism, due to his speeches and actions, many Americans involving politicians, journalists, authors, and citizens considered him as a white supremacist and racist. In this regard, as a contemporary author, Saunders reveals the contrast between these two US leaders in his novel, unveiling a broader perspective on human identity that goes beyond race. Moreover, in stark contrast to Trump, Saunders presents Lincoln as he was, with a deep sense of emotion and empathy for all individuals regardless of their race, using fiction as an instrument to emphasize “what it means to be human” (Timmer, 2010, p.13). In the same vein, David Foster Wallace also says “I just think that fiction that isn’t exploring what it

means to be human today isn't good art" (McCaffery, 2012, p. 26). As Wallace suggests, a significant aspect of fiction's role is to highlight the enduring presence of humanity, despite the challenges, complexities and contradictions it faces. He also believes that fictions featuring characters lacking genuine emotion and depth are inherently devoid of meaning (McCaffery, 2012). Therefore, following in Wallace's footsteps, Saunders imbues his characters with emotional depth and the capacity for empathy, and also uses his narrative as a means to evoke contemplation on the human condition and the essence of humanity.

During his presidency, many Americans believed that Trump adopted a discriminator tone and fueled racism in the country. In validation of this claim, according to Andre M. Perry (2020) from a nonprofit organization The Brookings Institution, "[t]here is no debate: Trump is continuing a legacy of policy violence against Black Americans" (n.p.) and he supports his statement by providing a factual example that "[a]t times, President Trump has even openly encouraged violence against Black people. [...] He has also encouraged police to not to be 'too nice' to suspects during arrests" (n.p.). Despite all his discriminatory actions and orders, in 2020, just after George Floyd, a black man, was killed by the police officers due to excessive force, Donald Trump (2020) tweeted that he "has done more for the Black Community than any President since Abraham Lincoln" (n.p.). Although Floyd's tragic death led to protests for Black lives across the country, Trump's orders to the police officers about not to be too nice continued to be obeyed: in addition to George Floyd, "Breonna Taylor, Stephon Clark, Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, and Atatiana Jefferson are among those not alive today because of excessive force" (Perry, 2020, n.p.). Therefore, it is rather ironic that Donald Trump, who lacks kindness and empathy especially for Black people, compares himself with Abraham Lincoln who is known for his advocacy for the rights of Black individuals and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that "all persons held as slaves within any State [...] shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free" (The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863, n.p.). In brief, when all points are considered, it can be argued that Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo* allows his readers to contrast Lincoln, whose leadership aimed to unite the country and abolish slavery, and Trump, whose divisive rhetoric and discriminatory actions maintained racial tensions. Besides, like Vonnegut, who depicts a planet called Tralfamadore without massacres, wars and deaths, by rewriting the American Civil War and portraying how Abraham Lincoln's grief and sorrow transformed into kindness and empathy towards all his countrymen, in his metaffective novel, Saunders underscores the sharp difference between the two presidents of the US, thereby allowing this difference to be noticed by the readers. Furthermore, McLaughlin (2004) elaborates on it

and asserts that the value of literature lies in its ability to critique society, explore humanity, and foster authentic connections with others. By employing this approach, it is possible to argue that Saunders effectively critiques Trump and his presidency by portraying how a leader should behave, awakening readers' consciousness, and encouraging them to envision a better world through the power of kindness, humanity and empathy.

As Saunders clarifies that even though *Lincoln in the Bardo* was supposed to come out when the election was going on, he decided to wait, and it was published right after the presidential election was finalized in 2017. Nonetheless, about the publication date of the novel, Saunders said that he was "happy about the timing, given the rise of Trump" (Morrow, 2017, n.p.). Moreover, in his interview, Saunders also stated that it was "a good time to think about what greatness looks like in a leader (Lincoln), and to turn the mind toward what America is really all about" (Morrow, 2017, n.p.). In accordance with his statements, it is possible to argue that through his metaffective novel, infused with sincere emotions and a transformation toward empathy, humanity and kindness, by choosing Abraham Lincoln as a historical figure whose aim to unite the country, Saunders enables his readers to recognize Trump's harsh political decisions, especially those affecting non-white, non-male, non-Trump supporters and to criticize his discriminatory policies. Furthermore, Saunders also elaborates on the issue and delves into detail in one of his interviews, comparing the past and present situations of the country, and he considers the time when Donald Trump was elected as

A betrayal of the best American energy; this project of total inclusiveness that we started back in 1776, it has been a gradual expansion of the understanding of who an American is. And at the highest level, an American is anybody who says they are an American, and who is willing to sort of buy into that project. The current movement is [...] a constriction of that; it is kind of like you are an American if we say you are. (Foyles Bookstore, 2017b, n.p.)

From this comparison, it can be argued that according to Saunders, a new understanding of America emerges and by pointing out this new understanding, he enables his readers to discern the negative changes occurring within the nation's dynamics. Knowing the fact that as a result of Trump's campaigns in 2016, against Black community, "hate crimes increased over 200%" (Ray & Gilbert, 2020, n.p.) and "[f]or some blacks this is a sign of a new and alarming trend of reversion to some of the racial antagonisms that many thought had been buried in the past" (Williams, 2017, p.13). Abraham Lincoln (n.d.), on the other hand, during his presidency, spoke against slavery and after one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg, was fought, in 1863, he delivered a message at the

dedication of the Gettysburg Civil War Cemetery saying; “[f]our score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (n.p.). Drawing from these foundational truths, it can be stated that their political views and thus, actions were completely diverged. In this regard, in order to emphasize this distinction, in his Man Booker Prize acceptance speech, Saunders criticizes the political division in the US during the election of Donald Trump. He states that one should “respond with love, and with faith, that what seems other is actually not other at all, but just us on a different day” (The Booker Prizes, 2017, n.p.). In line with his statement, it is evident that in his novel, Saunders highlights the need of kindness and tenderness despite different views or beliefs. Furthermore, Labuschagne also elaborates on Saunders’s perspective and argues that authors like Saunders use fiction to connect opposing ideologies and viewpoints, fostering emotional comprehension and empathy among individuals. This theme is exemplified in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, a novel that takes place during the divisive American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln’s portrayal in certain historical texts featured in *Lincoln in the Bardo* reflects negative perception, attributing it to his ideological divide. The novel’s aim is to find a point of agreement between Lincoln and those who criticize him. It presents Lincoln as someone who understands and relates to his countrymen’s shared grief in the midst of this historic crisis (Labuschagne, 2022). To illustrate this, in the novel, despite facing criticisms, Lincoln stands firm behind his decision, continues to advocate for abolition of slavery and believes that “[n]o one who has ever done anything worth doing has gone uncriticized” (Saunders, 2017a, p. 236). Henceforth, it is possible to conclude that since Saunders believes that “empathy is a superpower” (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2017, n.p.) and he endeavors to engage readers with opposing political views by “occupy[ing] their mind space” (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2017, n.p.), he inspires readers to transcend fixed ideologies and develop a sense of empathy in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Contrary to the views of Donald Trump, regardless of their political view, the novel emphasizes the necessity for readers to embrace love, compassion and generosity, aligning with the beliefs of Lincoln.

While the main focus of *Lincoln in the Bardo* appears to be President Lincoln’s extreme sorrow after losing his son and the fundamental human experience of grieving the death of a child, through empathetic connection between the characters and the readers, the novel also raises questions about race and racism in the 19th century of America, as it is set during the American Civil War, a period marked by ideological division in the country, and the ongoing racial discrimination in the nation in the 21st century. Knowing the fact that

throughout history, black individuals have been marginalized and they have never attained the same rights as their white counterparts. Therefore, according to Hayes-Brady (2020), to highlight the issues of inequality and racism in the 19th century, the first thing Saunders does is deliberately employ diverse voices in his novel and create his characters from different backgrounds in terms of class and race. Therefore, within the novel, there exists a contrast among its characters; while some are depicted as white, others are described as black people who are sexually abused, dehumanized, suffered and died as slaves. Moreover, in order to put an emphasis on inequality between white and black individuals, Saunders “demonstrates that even in death there are striations of privilege and power; for example, the black denizens of this particular graveyard (Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington, DC) continue to be physically segregated from the main cemetery” (Hayes-Brady, 2020, p.86). Black characters are relegated to a mass grave on the opposite side of the fence from where the main events take place (Hayes-Brady, 2020). To illustrate this point, in the novel, one of the racist characters, the Lieutenant Cecil Stone, who refuses to allow black bardo-dwellers to interact with the white ones, shouts at them “[b]lack, SHARDS, get ye back” (Saunders, 2017a, p.222) while they also endeavor to share their stories in the spirit of equality. In this regard, according to Lisa Seuberth (2022), the Lieutenant uses the word ‘shards’ “as a metaphor for the collective of Black slaves, objectifying and reducing them to a homogenous assemblage of minor splinters” (p.7). As it is observed by the critic, it is possible to argue that the word ‘shards’ is used to symbolize all the black slaves as if they are a single group rather than individuals who have their own stories, ideas and feelings. By using ‘shards’, the Lieutenant emphasizes his perception of black slaves as being beneath human. Moreover, in the novel, the Lieutenant also “brusquely cleared the black supplicants away from the white stone home, pushing at them with fallen tree-limbs held horizontally at chest-height” (Saunders, 2017a, p.222). It can be noted that the vocabulary employed by the Lieutenant Stone and his act of yelling serve as evidence that even in death, racial divisions persist.

In addition to this, following Lieutenant Stone’s harsh treatment, Thomas Havens, a black character, responds with a phrase “Here, as there” (Saunders, 2017a, p.223) signifying the persistent experience of racism. In other words, after witnessing an act of racism, Havens questions the notion of inequality against black individuals extending even after death. Furthermore, the racial discrimination can be seen once again within the narrative; while the Lieutenant Stone tries to pin “the black contingent against the dreaded iron fence” (Saunders, 2017a, p.223), “dozens of (white) supplicants rushed opportunistically into the space thus cleared before the white stone home, bellowing their stories into the doorway, until it was

impossible to discern any individual voice amid the desperate chorus” (Saunders, 2017a, p.224). With these instances from the novel, it is clearly seen that within the narrative even after death, white individuals seem to maintain privilege while black people continue to be oppressed. In this regard, it can be argued that Saunders uses the graveyard as a symbolic representation in the novel, mirroring the racial divisions present in the contemporary American society. Moreover, it is also possible to claim that the portrayal of the Lieutenant Stone and the white supplicants in these specific examples, devoid of empathy, kindness and humanity, mirror the attitudes of white supremacists in contemporary American society. In summary, through this portrayal, Saunders prompts his readers to recognize the existence of racism in modern America and advocates for equality.

In rewriting one of the most significant historical epochs, Saunders conveys a poignant message of humanism, kindness and empathy in his novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, despite the presence of racism and slavery prevalent in 19th century America. To underscore racial division and enslavement intertwined with the erosion of humanity, Saunders strategically gives voice to the minority characters and allows them to share their experiences. In this regard, with the cacophony of confusion and rage from the black community, in his novel, while Saunders portrays a conflicted American society, he also questions the nature of humanity and explores how kindness and empathy might contribute to its salvation. In contrast to Vonnegut’s utilization of black humor and ironic tone in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to confront overwhelming feelings and to critique political decisions regarding wars and the notion of humanity, Saunders integrates genuine emotions. He also enables the black characters to share their heartbroken narratives even with anger and sadness. Moreover, unlike Vonnegut, Saunders refrains from employing black humor or irony as he adopts a sincere approach in his novel. In doing so, he explicitly presents the experiences of black individuals who are deprived of empathy and kindness, allowing his readers to question the concept of humanity. In this regard, it is possible to argue that by embracing the exploration of range of emotions and evoking sincerity and empathy, Saunders, detaches his narrative from postmodern deconstruction and aims to reconstruct. Moreover, Huber (2014) also elaborates on the issue and supports it by stating “reconstruction presupposes prior deconstruction” (p.47). To put it differently, in order to grasp Saunders’s work as reconstructed and understand its difference from Vonnegut’s novel, it is crucial to comprehend what has been deconstructed in the postmodern era.

Especially after the first half of *Lincoln in the Bardo*, black characters begin to share their own stories just like the other white ghosts in the bardo. Even though each narrative

differs from the next, they all share one similarity: the experience of enslavement. For instance, one of the most heartbreaking testimonies comes from a slave girl, Lizzie Wright. The abuse she has experienced is “so harrowing she is unable even after her death to verbalize them” (Éigearthaigh, 2018, p.79). As a mulatto slave girl,

What was done to her many times, by many. What was done to her could not be resisted, was not resisted, sometimes was resisted, which resulted, sometimes, in her being sent away to some worse place, other times in that resistance simply being forcibly overcome (by fist, knee, board-strike, etc.). What was done to her affected her not at all, affected her very much, drove her nervous shakes, drove her to hateful speech, drove her to leap off the Cedar Creek Bridge, drove her to this obstinate silence. What was done to her by big men, small men, boss men, men who happened to be passing the field in which she worked. (Saunders, 2017a, p. 222)

Just like other black people who share their stories, Lizzie Wright also wants to speak and tell everyone what happened to her. However, after going through repeated tragic experiences, she articulates what she wants to say as “*****” (Saunders, 2017a, p.221). According to Aoileann Ní Éigearthaigh (2018), “Saunders’ restraint in this passage allows her silence to express inexpressible horrors” (p.79). In accordance with these quotations, it is possible to argue that by writing about rape explicitly, Saunders enables his readers to learn more about horrific experiences of the slaves and feel uncomfortable. In doing so, he aims to evoke the feeling of empathy and kindness towards enslaved black people.

In addition to Lizzie Wright’s story, within the narrative, Elson Farwell is described as a rageful black man because despite being a faithful servant to his owners, when he collapses on the floor, instead of helping, they abandon him to die, which is an example of loss of humanity. When the youngest East child, Reginald, passes and sees him on the floor, he says he will send someone for him; however, according to Farwell “no one came. Mr. East did not come, Mrs. East did not come, none of the other East children came, not even Mr. Chasterly [...] ever came” (Saunders, 2017a, p.216) and he adds “I believe Reginald may have, in all the excitement about the fireworks, forgotten. Forgotten about me. Who had known him since his birth” (Saunders, 2017a, p.216). From his words, it is obvious that he is heartbroken and thus, feels frustrated against his former owners and states “I regretted every moment of conciliation and smiling [...] That my health might be restored to me, if just for one hour, so that I might [...] destroy them and tear down that tent and burn down that house” (Saunders, 2017a, p.217). In this respect, it can be argued that Farwell’s desire to harm his former owners is as a consequence of his prior dehumanization as he states, “for only a beast would endure what I had endured without objection” (Saunders, 2017a, p.217). When the former owners finally notice his absence, he is once again relegated to a status

beneath a human being as they do not bring him home and instead, they throw him “on a cart with several others” (Saunders, 2017a, p.218). Even though Farwell is highly emotional when he remembers the injustice done to him, the absence of humanity, empathy, kindness and love in the hearts of his former owners leads him to reject to leave the bardo and seek revenge. In addition to this, despite experiencing racism during his lifetime, like other black ghosts, he remains unfree in the bardo. This is exemplified when the Lieutenant who believes in white superiority, commands Farwell back to work assigned by a white person. Farwell fills with rage and throws the Lieutenant “roughly down upon his back” (Saunders, 2017, p.320). When the Lieutenant “demand[s] to know how Mr. Farewell dare touch a white man in anger” (Saunders, 2017, p.320) and kicks him in the chest, Farwell reacts by smashing his skull and after that, “head in hands” (Saunders, 2017a, p.320) he cries. As the Lieutenant is also a ghost, he revives and witnesses Farwell’s tears. However, he is not aware “a SHARD could weep, since to weep one must possess human emotions” (Saunders, 2017a, p.320). In accordance with these quotations, it can be concluded that even after death, black individuals like Farwell continue to struggle for their freedom. Regardless of lifetime or death, they are dehumanized, as evidenced by the Lieutenant’s belief that Farwell lacks human emotions. Furthermore, as Seuberth (2022) puts “[a]lthough the other White ghosts disapprove the Lieutenant’s Africanist claims, the lack of intervention shows just how established such racialized discourse is in the Bardo” (p. 8). In this regard, in parallel with the real-world dynamics of the 21st century, certain white individuals who do not support racism remain pacifist as well. This pacifist stance and the lack of pursuit of racial equality may be the reason of limited knowledge of tragic stories of black individuals or they just believe these issues are no longer relevant. In brief, with these two examples Litzie Wright and Elson Farewell, it is possible to argue that by sharing their harsh stories within the narrative, Saunders opens a way for his readers regardless of their political ideas to see the racial division that existed in the bardo still persists in 21st century American society.

Acknowledging the fact that *Lincoln in the Bardo* concludes with President Lincoln’s ultimate departure from the cemetery accompanied and inhabited by a deceased black slave Thomas Havens, instead of ending with the resolutions of Willie Lincoln’s troubles in the bardo (Hayes-Brady, 2020). Unlike Elson Farwell, who dreams of killing his former owners as they leave him to die, Thomas Havens reminisces fondly about the family he served and considers them as his own family. Although “Havens initially seems to embody the anti-Abolitionist stereotype of the happy slave” (Hayes-Brady, 2020, p. 86-87), in a very kind and calm narrative, he talks about freedom by stating

There was always a moment, just as an order was given, when a small, resistant voice would make itself known in the back of my mind. Then the necessary job was to *ignore* that voice. It was not a defiant or angry voice, particularly, just that little *human* voice, saying, you know: I wish to do what I wish to do, and not what you are telling me to do. And I must say, that voice was never quite silenced. (Saunders, 2017a, p. 219)

In accordance with Haven's statement, it can be argued that just like other black characters in the novel, his wish to be free is dominant than the family he served. He finally accepts that he has been deprived of freedom during his lifetime. Furthermore, Éigearthaigh (2018) also supports that Havens recognizes the need to confront the silence that defined his life. Therefore, while Lincoln leaves the cemetery for the last time, as he feels "a kinship" (Saunders, 2017a, p.311), he inhabits the President's body, implying that Lincoln's opinions on race will now be shaped by a black soul. During his inhabitation, Havens wants Lincoln to know him, his life and the black community. Moreover, he also insists that "if you are [...] as inclined toward us as you seem to be, endeavor to do something for us. [...] let us show what we can do" (Saunders, 2017a, p.312). To put it differently, Havens harbors a desire to be free and seeks liberation from the intangible constraints. Consequently, as Jon Baskin (2017) states, "at the time of his son's funeral, Lincoln had not yet written his Emancipation Proclamation, had not yet delivered his Gettysburg Address" (n.p.) and with the presence of Havens during his inhabitation of Lincoln's body, the conclusion of the novel demonstrates the President's political evaluation toward abolishing slavery for his people regardless of their race as he develops empathy and gains a deeper understanding of human suffering.

To sum up, the novel under discussion serves as a testament to the transformative impact of Willie Lincoln's death on a grief-stricken father, Abraham Lincoln, and the other ghosts in the bardo, catalyzing the development of empathy, compassion and humanity. This emotional evolution allows Lincoln as the President of United States to resolve to end slavery for all Americans, regardless of their racial background. Thus, the novel serves as an example of rewriting the American Civil War, achieved through the creation of a fantasy realm where ghosts must stay until they develop empathetic connection, find psychological healing and accept the fact that they are deceased. In a society marked by racial divisions and even supported by the president of the United States at the time of the publication of the novel, Saunders takes up the challenge of rewriting this specific historical period by centering his narrative around one of America's most iconic presidents, who advocates for equality. Through his work, by allowing the minority not to be suppressed anymore,

Saunders encourages the rest of the characters and his readers to empathize with them. In other words, he seeks to remind readers the transformative power of empathy, kindness and humanity against racial discrimination. Therefore, in a world where tenderness is perceived as weakness, Saunders employs his novel as a platform to embrace emotions, sincerity and the value of humanity.



4. CONCLUSION

In this study, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo* have been explored in light of the writers' postmodern and metaffective treatments of history in order to pursue how the postmodern technique of rewriting history has evolved into post-postmodern period of the twenty-first century. In fiction, rewriting history has been treated as a sub-genre, however, with the postmodern movement, it has become a prominent literary technique. Although rewriting history is associated with postmodernism, it can be traced in the contemporary literary works as well. In this sense, although *Slaughterhouse-Five* embodies characteristics of a postmodern novel and *Lincoln in the Bardo* aligns with post-postmodern conventions, in their rewritings of the Second World War and American Civil War, both authors challenge the grand narratives and explore the political and cultural issues at that time. This thesis also focuses on the effects of these wars on individuals and analyzes traumatic experiences on both collective and individual levels. Vonnegut and Saunders revisit and reimagine these periods not only to criticize the political decisions made at that time but also to articulate entirely new perspectives. Nonetheless, while both novels employ the postmodern narrative technique of rewriting history to offer readers an alternative world full of empathy, kindness and humanity, as one of the leading literary figures of postmodern movement, Vonnegut adopts metafictional elements with ironical and detached tone, Saunders, on the other hand, uses a constructive tone with a strong focus on empathy, kindness, humanity and expression of emotions. Moreover, when considering the structure of the novels, it is also crucial to recognize that despite the aforementioned similarities, a key difference between their novels lies in their narrative style. In contrast to Vonnegut's conventional prose style, Saunders's novel includes dialogues and is characterized by its theatrical structure, with over 160 ghosts speaking.

According to the postmodern theory, the existence of historical facts is inseparable from the historian because historical events are always filtered through the historian's perspective and thus, they cannot reflect the absolute truth. It is also believed that historians may either manipulate information from the past depending on whose history is being considered, or they may alter them. Consequently, this approach creates a gap between history and literature, giving rise to a concept known as historiographic metafiction. With this theory, which problematizes the possibility of historical knowledge, authors, such as Vonnegut and Saunders, use historical events and figures as a foundation for their novels, they create entirely different perspectives and undertake a critical examination of grand

narratives. In this regard, as a postmodern novel, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which is a rewritten historical epoch of WWII, Vonnegut subverts history by employing black humor and irony. Moreover, he also blends history and science-fiction to problematize the sharp distinction between truth and fiction. While rewriting this specific period in American history, by creating multiple realities, employing science-fictional elements and blurring the accepted definition of time, Vonnegut aims not only to exemplify the traumatic effects of war on innocent people but also to critique the political decisions of the American government and its participation in WWII. In doing so, Vonnegut prompts his readers to reevaluate their understanding of war and its consequences in the novel. Henceforth, it can be concluded that postmodern narrative techniques, science-fictional elements and ironical tones are used as pioneers for readers to understand the bigger picture. By rewriting WWII, the author becomes the voice of minority and offers readers an opportunity to envision a better world, devoid of such horrors. Aligned with Vonnegut's legacy, Saunders likewise rewrites a pivotal historical epoch, namely the American Civil War within his novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Similar to Vonnegut, Saunders deviates from conventional historiographical approaches by creating a fantasy realm inhabited by more than 160 ghosts. The use of the imaginary planet Tralfamadore in *Slaughterhouse-Five* mirrors Saunders's exploration of the bardo, where spirits must confront their past and come to terms with their own morality, challenging the boundary between fact and fiction. Furthermore, through the lens of this fantasy world, akin to Vonnegut's thematic exploration, Saunders also undertakes a critical examination of the issues of race and racism prevalent in the 19th and 21st century. Furthermore, similar to Vonnegut's aim, Saunders directs his narrative focus towards the transformative power of empathy, sincerity, kindness and humanity to enable his readers to criticize Donald Trump's contemporary politics by portraying Abraham Lincoln as a president who aims to unite his country and end construct an egalitarian society rather than dividing it with discriminatory ideologies. Similar to Vonnegut, who criticized the US government of his time due to its waging war on Vietnam, Saunders considers Trump's presidency as an alarming time and opens a door for his readers to discern the fundamental disparities between two the two US presidents. Moreover, through blending the story of a historical figure such as Lincoln with the stories of black ghosts in the novel, Saunders skillfully encourages readers to address the ongoing racial discrimination in the modern America.

Since Vonnegut was also a survivor of the fire-bombing in Dresden by chance, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is considered not only one of the major texts of postmodern literature

but also a semi-autobiographical account of Vonnegut's war experiences in Dresden in 1945. Therefore, to explore the complexities of war and human condition, the author deliberately employs metafictional elements in his novel. To be more specific, Vonnegut himself appears as the narrator, particularly in the first and last chapters of the novel. In addition to the nonlinear structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut's presence in the novel and his interaction with the protagonist Billy blur the line between fiction and reality. Furthermore, upon returning from war, Vonnegut discovers that only limited information about war is shared with the public. After witnessing the horrors of war, he wants to reveal the truth about the death toll of the bombing that is being hidden by the American citizens. After finally overcoming the traumatic experience himself, he writes *Slaughterhouse-Five* as an anti-war novel, criticizing American government's policy of keeping information secret from its citizens. In doing so, the author allows his readers to acknowledge the vulnerable and fragile state of a survivor of the war and the possibility of a better world. Like Vonnegut, Saunders invests considerable time in writing *Lincoln in the Bardo*, despite being inspired by the poignant historical event of Abraham Lincoln visiting the crypt to hold his deceased son's body. When faced with a significant challenge in translating the profound emotional weight into literary form, Saunders deliberately refuses to employ irony, cynicism and metafictional elements in his novel. Consequently, a key distinction in the writing styles of the two authors is their narrative methods. Despite both authors taking considerable time before writing their novels, Saunders, aligned with the New Sincerity movement, refrains from incorporating metafictional elements favored by Vonnegut. Instead, he prioritizes a direct emphasis on emotions. Thus, with emotional depth taking precedence over metafictional devices in the 21st century literature, Vonnegut's historiographic metafiction undergoes a transformation into metaffective fiction within Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo*. By departing from the prevailing irony of the postmodern era, Saunders embraces sincerity and explores the themes of empathy, kindness and humanity through emotions and affect.

Although the central themes of both novels are related to the harsh experiences of war, they diverge from traditional war narratives. *Slaughterhouse-Five* serves as a vehicle to elucidate the reality of the scale of destruction and to protest the futility of such massacres. Through the author's firsthand experiences and observations of destruction, in his novel, Vonnegut demonstrates a vivid portrayal of horrors and inhumanity of war. Moreover, he also illustrates absurdity of war by employing science-fictional elements and its psychological impact on the survivors. To convey this anti-war message, Vonnegut chooses to structure his novel based on humor and as the author puts, it is used as a response to grief.

Still, his aim is to provide readers moral messages. Henceforth, Vonnegut creates an innovative narrative structure with an innocent anti-hero, Billy Pilgrim. Billy is neither physically nor mentally applicable for being a traditional soldier. From his physical appearance to his inability to overcome the sorrowful memories of the war, like the author, Billy suffers from PTSD and adopts an escapist point of view as he cannot handle to live in a world where there is no empathy and humanism. Therefore, he begins to time-travel and comes to believe that he has been abducted by aliens from a planet called Tralfamadore, which serves as a symbol of an innocent world free from the burdens of loss, grief, sorrow and warfare. Moreover, while portraying Billy, by adopting a sarcastic manner with full of irony and black humor, Vonnegut aims to highlight the psychological condition and traumatic stance of a soldier who is alive by a chance. After witnessing such a horrific war, Billy seeks to escape and leave the burden of sorrowful reality. Similar to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Lincoln in the Bardo* does not glorify the American Civil War. Instead, it delves into the stories of black people who endured sexual abuse, dehumanization and enslavement and questions the act of racism in the 19th century. In this regard, it can be concluded that the principal contrast between the center figures in both novels lies in their responses to trauma and grief. In Vonnegut's novel, Billy struggles to bear the burden of war and traumatic experiences and this leads him to adopt an escapist attitude. In addition to this, within the narrative framework, Vonnegut employs the non-linear use of time aimed at emphasizing Billy's psychological state. This authorial choice mirrors the fragmented nature of Billy's consciousness. Conversely, unlike *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, follows a chronological pattern without employing non-linearity. Moreover, in the novel, Abraham Lincoln's personal grief enables him to empathize with others who have endured loss, including black individuals. Unlike Billy, rather than escaping from his own anguish, Lincoln confronts his grief and with love, kindness and empathy, endeavors to abolish slavery to stop human suffering and strives to unite the country divided by ethnicity.

In conclusion, this thesis has analyzed the evolution of postmodern narrative techniques, specifically focusing on the practice of rewriting history, and the transition from ironic and detached tones to emotional and constructive tones in the 21st-century literature. Through the use of this narrative approach, both authors offer critiques of the wars in American history and underscore the underlying problems within American politics. With the utilization of postmodern techniques such as metafictional and science-fictional elements, ridicule, black humor and irony, Vonnegut consciously refrains from glorifying the war by constructing an anti-hero figure to underscore the traumatic facets of the war. In

other words, the author seeks to convey the voice from a minority within the narrative and demonstrates the psychological impact of war on them. Thus, the deconstructive tone of *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not overshadow its reputation as a humane and compassionate work of art. In parallel to what Vonnegut wants to achieve with his novel, within the framework of metaffective theory, Saunders, embraces a sincere approach and demonstrates the power of emotions in every feeling. In his novel, he highlights how Abraham Lincoln utilized compassion, kindness and empathy as tools to unify a divided nation in the past. By following in Lincoln's footsteps and giving voice to black people within the narrative, Saunders makes his readers believe that there is a prospect of restoring an egalitarian society once again. In closing, this thesis showed that regardless of their divergent tones and stylistic approaches, in both texts, Vonnegut and Saunders underscore the fundamental value of human virtues, suggesting that their narratives are mediums for portrayal of kindness, humanity and empathy. This common thematic focus highlights the authors' shared dedication to illustrating how these virtues affect and change the future of the world for the better.

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