

Narrative Technique In The Theme Of Escapism

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ABSTRACT

In 1933, the word "escapism" was first used in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences to describe someone who actively attempts to escape from their everyday life. Everyone agrees that Kurt Vonnegut is the undisputed king of postmodern literature. Vonnegut's original ways of storytelling, range of expressive tools, and dramatic creative results are what set him apart. His use of metafiction is blatant and very important, especially in his most recent books. The novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an excellent instance of how metafiction may be used effectively. Vonnegut's metafictional technique in *Slaughterhouse-Five* takes the forms of non-linear storytelling, collage, and parody. This paper uses postmodern narrative theory to examine in depth the ways in which these three separate narrative approaches are used. The focus of this paper is on the authors Michael Chabon, Jonathan Lethem, Thomas Pynchon, Junot Diaz, and Jennifer Egan, and their use of self-aware escapism in their recent books. In this thesis, I argue that the central texts offer escapism as an artistically respectable goal with significant philosophical and political ramifications, challenging long-held beliefs about escapism and escapist literature.

KEYWORDS Narrative Technique, Escapism, Novel.

INTRODUCTION

Readers and viewers of books, comics, and other forms of narrative media engage in separating themselves from their daily lives by immersing themselves in fictitious tales, is a central theme in the texts I will be analysing. These novels use this device to examine the act of escaping and its repercussions, including the risks involved as well as the rewards. These works reframe escapism as an artistically valid quest with substantial philosophical and political ramifications, challenging long-held beliefs about escapism and escapist literature. In my thesis, I want to chart the evolution and expressions of escape literature in modern American fiction. This paper will examine how these texts' discussions of escapism are intertwined with their calls for a re-evaluation of genre and popular fiction, and how this allows them to engage with many of the central debates of literary criticism, including questions of influence, intertextuality, and the nature of narrative immersion. To begin, my explanation of self-conscious escapism hinges on the idea that the subject of this thesis is not a subgenre but a predisposition. I do not claim that my central texts belong to any one school of fiction or even a genre; rather, their form and themes are intrinsically tied to their position in what Michael Chabon calls "the no man's land" of fiction (Maps and Legends 13).

CULTURAL AND LITERARY CRITICISM

According to a quote from 1921 by T.S. Eliot, "Poetry is not the manifestation of one's self but rather an attempt to escape one's own feelings and thoughts. The impulse to flee from such circumstances can only be understood by someone with a mind and a heart. According to Eliot

(1982), p. Though he did not use the word "escapism" himself, Eliot's writings seem to hint to a discussion of the function of literature as a means of evading reality. To properly appreciate poetry as a means of release, one must have a personality and feelings, maybe even a robust personality and emotional life. This was intended to be a praiseworthy facet of poetic expression. This beneficial use of egress would eventually go out. However, it shows that there is room for debate about whether "escape" is a desirable or bad literary trait.

In 1930, John Crowe Ransom, the founder of the Southern New Criticism School of literary criticism, reportedly coined the term "escapist" to characterize someone who actively wants to escape from reality. As the author puts it, "they betoken a defeated and escapist people, a people who fear the fullness of the inner life and prefer to rush into violent action, a people who take its work as an anesthetic, an impotent people building up a legend of power," Ransom raged in the British edition, describing his contemporaries as escapists blinded by progressivism and industrial power. They have a broad delusion of personal and social authority; According to Ransom (1931), these people employ work as a kind of anesthesia or analgesia, and they exhibit pathological forms of infantilism. Ransom's portrayal of escapism is consistent with this line of thought; he describes it as a blend of illusionism, anesthesia, and pathological infantilism. However, Freudian psychoanalysis provided a framework in which his contemporaries might make sense of pathological infantilism. John Crowe Ransom shared these concerns about the dangers of escapism and was similarly wary of mass media forms like radio and films (Ransom, 1931). A generation later, his student Robert B. Heilman would label the hippie subculture of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll as escapism.

In *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), a revised version of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1757), C. S. Lewis criticises Western culture by following the journey of an allegorical and autobiographical figure called John as he searches for an ideal, desirable island. John, a symbol of the Anglo-Catholic movement, confronts Angular with the question, "Have you ever seen my island?" To which Angular just says, "God forbid." When asked whether he was familiar with Mr. Halfways, John said, "And have you never heard of him as well?" To which Angular replies, "Never," Angular says. Simply said, I simply can't. Do you think I'm a complete make believer? A response from John: "Then there is at least one thing in the world that I know more about than you." What you call romantic nonsense, I have experienced; you have merely spoken about it.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF ESCAPIST FICTION

Like many of the literary concepts that will be discussed in this thesis, escapism seems straightforward at first glance yet has the potential to be shrouded in obscurity. Author unknown claims that "there are no clear definitions in literature" and that explanations of literary conceptions "are more like pointers drawing attention to an aspect of a work than a container to entrap it." (7) are two of Robert Eaglestone's most convincing arguments. To this point, I've been making assumptions about escapism's nature in order to go forward, but given how central the idea is to the rest of the thesis, it's crucial to establish some kind of 'pointer,' however tenuous and debatable.

According to Todorov v., Todorov found his candour to be one of his greatest weaknesses. Definitions that are too vague or nebulous provide room for debate, whereas those that are more precise or concrete leave less room for criticism. Since any act of reading is, to some extent, the first and most obvious issue to attempting to define escapism and escapist literature is the assumption that escapism is a pervasive, unavoidable, and hence unqualifiable and unquantifiable behavior since it involves escaping the unwritten world into a written one. The bulk of Richard Gerrig's *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (1993) is devoted to his argument that even the most innocuous fictional statement will take the reader's mind on a cognitive level to a different world, possibly to the point where the reader begins to question their own knowledge of the past and the nature of the universe. In the same vein, Linda Hutcheon argues that "all reading is a type of escape" since it requires a temporary shift in focus from the reader's actual surroundings to something more fantastical and less real-to-life than reality.

The first step in getting over these reasonable but oversimplified criticisms is to differentiate between escapism and escapist literature. Both concepts will be explored in this investigation. Almost any literature may be utilised as escape since escapism is a property of reading itself and not the fiction itself. An extreme case is the dentist patient who reads or scans any magazine in the waiting room rather than dwell on the impending pain. If we limit our discussion to literature, we may point to John Stuart Mill, who is often credited with recovering from a psychological breakdown after reading the poetry of Wordsworth (Heilman 454). Some readers may enjoy the works of classic writers like Jane Austen and Henry James as a pleasant getaway from the trials of their own life, proving that "high culture" may mean different things to different people (450).

While young adult fantasy books have often included limited third-person narration since the middle of the twentieth century The use of first-person narration by main characters is a new development in YA fantasy (Schuhmann 314). First-person narrative that is very introverted and focused with the narrator's psychological woe interacts with its teenage audience because of the inherent escapism of immersive fantasy works.

Since J.D. Salinger's groundbreaking *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), first-person narrative has been the standard in realism literature for young people. However, its usage in fantasy fiction has been more restricted. However, third-person narration predominates throughout the children's and young adult fantasy literature, from *The Hobbit* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* to the more modern *Harry Potter* series. A look at modern YA fantasy, however, indicates that the third-person point of view is losing favour as writers and readers alike warm up to the first-person point of view. Writing in the first person, with the focus squarely on the protagonist, has become more common in the young adult fantasy genre. First-person narrative has an immediacy about it that draws readers in for a chat, helps them connect on an emotional level, and takes them on a journey inside the protagonist's head, away from the world at large. This chapter will compare and contrast two popular contemporary young adult escapism fantasy novels, *Delirium* (2011) by Lauren Oliver and *Terrier* (2006) by Tamora Pierce, in terms of their treatment of time and tense in the first person.

A. Schwenke, Andrea As Wyile originally pointed out in 1999 ("First-Person Narration"), an interesting narrator is crucial to a story's success. In 2003, she elaborated on this idea by

arguing that readers "lose" themselves in a story because the characters make them feel like they know them. ("Engaging Narration" 118) in written works. As was discussed in the last chapter, escapism is not a novel idea in today's young adult fantasy. Wylie's thoughts on interesting narration provide a foundation for thinking about how narrowly focused narration might affect a reader's interest. Unfortunately, Wylie fails to analyse the importance and possible ramifications of the formativity obtained by effective escapism with an interesting narrative. The importance of narration for engrossing readers, who "must sit inside the heads of the protagonists, accepting what they know as the world" (59), is discussed by Mendlesohn, who also explains how narrative techniques are used in immersive fantasy to transport readers and foster engagement. Mendlesohn's seminal work, in which he grounds escapism in a deep literary tradition by linking contemporary works of strange fiction to the rediscovery of the odd (61), positions immersive fantasy inside the realm of Todorov's prodigious imagination.

NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

To keep the work from devolving into a standard memoir, Vonnegut was forced to look for a fresh angle from which to depict the brutality of World War II. However, this unique impression could not be achieved by the more conventional linear storytelling style. The plot of a realistic book follows a linear progression in most examples. The narrative time and the story's timeline coincide, which is a defining characteristic of linear storytelling. This approach to storytelling attempts to faithfully recreate a tale by sticking to its established timeline and geographical parameters. Because of this, readers are in a position to passively absorb and maybe even embrace the author's desired facts. Novels may be enjoyed in different ways by readers thanks to non-linear storytelling. Another hallmark of linear storytelling is that events in the story unfold in a reasonably logical order, whether that be chronological, via the transference of locations, or through the establishment of a cause-and-effect relationship. Even if the novel's sequences aren't always what they seem, readers will eventually find out the true order of events. In addition, the standard book uses either the first person or the third person to convey its plot. Otherwise, there is no strict sequence that a non-linear story must follow. It always depicts tales told from several perspectives or with a narrative perspective that jumps about in place and time. Using a non-linear narrative structure, a book may provide a more in-depth look into itself. Therefore, Vonnegut made full use of non-linear storytelling to convey human confusion and powerlessness in the face of conflict, resulting in a seemingly rough-and-tumble book. Therefore, this paper will concentrate on the purpose and justification for using non-linear storytelling.

A. The Reason of Adoption of Non-linear Narratives.

Vonnegut employed non-linear storytelling for a purpose, and that purpose directly prompted the use of non-linear storytelling in the first place. Vonnegut's embrace of non-linear tales may largely be attributed to his post-war experiences. The story can only be comprehended by those who share his experience of mental anguish after the Dresden Bombing.

While everyone is familiar with the Hiroshima disaster, the mystery of Dresden is still relatively unknown. Dresden was known as a city rich in cultural traditions but lacking in weapons production. The city was essentially undefended, according to Frederick Taylor's writings as

well. The blast was a surprise to almost everyone. But the bombing still took place. During the three-day bombing assault in February 1945, the British and American air forces destroyed almost 1,600 acres of Dresden, killing an estimated 25,000 people. When compared to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the attack on Dresden was much more cruel and callous.

Vonnegut's unique opening to *Slaughterhouse-Five* was often based on the tragedy of Dresden: "In the end, only one individual on Earth benefited from the astronomically costly and masterfully orchestrated catastrophe of Dresden." That individual is me. The money and notoriety I now enjoy are all because of this book I authored. For every individual I murdered, I received two or three dollars. Some kind of trade I'm involved in" (Vonnegut, 1981, p. He was there when the bomb went off. Because of this, his assessments of the conflict had greater weight than those of other critics. The bombing, however, provided him with no such "benefit" and just ongoing suffering. His non-linear story structure was grounded on this inescapable melancholy.

This evidence suggests that Vonnegut's military service was important to his decision to use a non-linear storytelling style. The bombing of Dresden left an everlasting scar on his mind. An individual who saw an awful and senseless killing may have difficulty recalling his memories in a logical and chronological fashion. The main character, Vonnegut, says thus of the novel: "In my opinion, this novel will never be finished. By now, I've probably written 5,000 pages and thrown them all away." (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 7). Even if he started, he doubted he'd be able to see it through to the end. Unresolved war trauma was what the conflict had left him with. Vonnegut's decision to adopt non-linear narrative structure may largely be attributed to the effects of combat trauma on the development of a spectrum of PTSD symptoms. One may say that this represents a "Dresden complex" of sorts.

According to the OED, "trauma" may denote both "both a physical injury" (a wound) and "a mental injury" (1989, p. 1252). The original meaning of the term "trauma" referred to actual injuries. After then, it may refer to any mental illness triggered by an emotional event. The study of trauma may trace its origins back to Sigmund Freud. What Freud means by saying that trauma "needs a complete revision of our understanding of the relationship between memory and time" is that the individual must reevaluate their understanding of the world. As Whitehead (2004) puts it, "In other cases, traumatic events go unrecognized until they trigger a severe mental crisis years later." In 1980, the periodical *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published the first formal definition of post-traumatic stress disorder as a collection of symptoms experienced by survivors of traumatic events. To this end, Vonnegut wrote: "People aren't supposed to look back." To put it bluntly, I have no intention of continuing to do so" (Vonnegut, 1969, p.11). He didn't want to remember the carnage, and it made him uncomfortable to think about it. One symptom of PTSD is an inability or unwillingness to think about the distressing event. Disorders of memory storage are a second. Vonnegut created a memory lapse and continued repeating certain details, such as the narrator's name, over and over again. As a result, Vonnegut's "Dresden complex" required a lot of blood, sweat, and tears before he could write a novel about the atrocity. To sum up his feelings on the war, he wrote, "And even if battles didn't keep pouring like glaciers, there would still be plain old death," in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Vonnegut, "an abnormal narrator" with PTSD, is the only one who could possibly portray him in such a confused and bewildered manner. Like Vonnegut, protagonist Billy is a survivor of the Dresden bombing who is unable to function normally due to his addiction to switching back and forth in time. Overall, Vonnegut used non-linear storytelling to correctly portray Billy's PTSD or his own psychological condition, unveil what the war brought to humans, and express his abhorrence of aggressive warfare.

B. Transformation of Perspectives

Vonnegut established a bold new approach to storytelling in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, giving readers a book with its own voice against the war. Vonnegut significantly altered the ways in which readers understood his combat experience. In the words of critic Gérard Genette: "Vonnegut fused the roles of author, character, and narrator, subverting not just the conventional narrative structure but also the rules governing the logic of storytelling." (1990, p.7). Vonnegut broke new ground in conventional fiction with his frequent use of self-discussion and self-reference. Vonnegut's distinct roles as author, protagonist, and narrator all allowed him to interrupt the story at various points. Within and outside the canon of the book, he served as the "narrator" who informed readers of Billy's tumultuous time travel. Meanwhile, he inserted himself on purpose into both the start and end chapters of the book, therefore turning himself into a protagonist.

As a first step, On the first page of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, author Kurt Vonnegut introduces himself, detailing his background and the inspiration for *Slaughterhouse-Five*. That is to say, Vonnegut's byline as author appeared on the title page of the book. The name Kurt Vonnegut, a writer, was mentioned next. But he had already told his audience about the catastrophe in Dresden, and he had done it in a character-driven way.

C. Chaotic Time-space Views

Another distinguishing aspect of Vonnegut's non-linear storytelling is its chaotic time-space perspective. The time and space that have been entangled are also referred to as time and space pieces. *Slaughterhouse-Five* has a very convoluted time and space structure. The story's setting often changes from Earth to the planet Tralfamadore, and its time period jumps about a lot. By fusing fact and fiction, synchronicity and diachrony, he invented a radical new kind of storytelling. It seemed as if the whole narrative was a work of fragmentary art. To paraphrase what James Lundquist said about Vonnegut's work, "The theory of relativity shattered the notions of absolute space and time; Vonnegut aspires to do the same with fresh perspectives." (Lundquist, 1976, p.71). It's possible that first-time readers of the work will be baffled by it. Over time, readers may come to understand the author's true intentions from a more lofty and expansive vantage point.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception in the 1930s, the word "escapism" has been used to describe a wide range of activities. T. S. Eliot saw escape as a desirable aspect of poetry even before the phrase was used. Narrative techniques, in a way, form the novel's skeleton. In postmodern literature,

metafiction is a common storytelling device. It's a major theme in postmodern fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut deftly employs metafiction to emphasise the novel's anti-war message. Vonnegut's groundbreaking work in metafiction combines elements of collage and satire with non-linear storytelling. His methods of storytelling flip the script on how books are typically told. In contrast to straightforward escapism narratives like Ernest Cline's *Armada*, which see their characters' commitment to fictional worlds as sufficient to solve all their problems, the self-aware escapist fiction I've focused on in this thesis acknowledges and is concerned with the limitations of escapism. People who devote themselves to fictitious escape are stigmatized by society since they can never change the course of history or avoid their own personal calamities.

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