

Spatio-Temporal Hauntings and the Catastrophic Mourning in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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Abstract

This paper employs hauntology as a theoretical lens to explore spatio-temporal hauntings and catastrophic mourning in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It first analyzes temporal hauntings manifested in Billy Pilgrim's "time spasm" (a trauma-informed analogy to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD]) and survivor's guilt, then examines spatial hauntings embodied in spectral spaces like the crypt of Dresden's repressed memory, moon-like ruins, and the liminal shady street. The study highlights Vonnegut's innovative expansion of science fiction, which he adapts as a sense-making tool to depict war trauma through nonlinear, fragmented narratives and spectral devices like re-corporealization of revenants. Ultimately, the paper argues that the novel responds to Derrida's mandate to "learn to live with ghosts", subverting ideological interdiction and the interdiction of catastrophic mourning via spectral writing and reading, while honoring disavowed war victims and forging a just, active relationship with history to exorcise repressed specters.

Keywords

Hauntology, Mourning, Spectrality, Catastrophe, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

1. Introduction

Hauntology, as a theoretical lens, gained its legitimacy within literary criticism in the late twentieth century. First introduced by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1994), hauntology replaces classical ontology—the logic of static presence—with a temporal disjunction wherein the present is perpetually haunted by the ghosts of unfulfilled futures and disavowed pasts. Crucially, Derrida's hauntology must be distinguished from a generic literary metaphor of ghosts or Freud's psychological uncanny (*Unheimlich*); rather than a mere subjective projection or supernatural trope, hauntology signifies an ontological and ethical disruption that calls for

justice toward those who are no longer or not yet present (Derrida, 1994). The writing of ghosts and specters, therefore, operates not merely as a figurative motif, but as a structural engagement with historical trauma and unresolved mourning (Blanchot, 1982: p. 32).

This paper further illustrates that historical specters symbolize the “remains” with a productive force that calls for mourning, which in turn unearths the repressed traumas, bespeaks the loss and bestows historical subjectivity to the oppressed and forgotten (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003: p. 5). Seen in this way, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (hereafter *SF*) is a perfect sample that shows how writers as witnesses to, or, survivors of artificial or natural, personal or collective (often national) calamities narrate spiritual hauntings in aid of mourning the remains, emancipating them from and turning them against the ideological violence that seeks to conceal and falsify the memories.

There are mainly three focal points in previous literature on *SF*: thematic studies (anti-war, historical writing, etc.), postmodern features (narrative techniques, nonlinear narrative, etc.) and trauma studies; of these three aspects, trauma is inextricable with hauntology, for it originates from violence and is often the root cause of haunted experiences. While existing scholarship mainly invokes hauntology to study works of gothic, postcolonial and even cyber literature “as practiced by William Gibson, Iain Banks and others” (Punter, 2002: p. 259), it should be noted that “the memories of those who died unjustly in wars and the psychological trauma left by scenes of bloodshed, which are externalized as ghosts, specters, illusions, etc., all linger in modern texts in the form of uncanny dread” (Shen & Jin, 2020: p. 141). The point of departure for this paper, thus, is to investigate the time-space hauntings in *SF*, the renowned anti-war novel and meanwhile, to labor on the ethical and affective registers of hauntology—mourning, or grief, which I regard as Kurt Vonnegut’s core appeal but was almost, if not completely ignored by critics.

2. Time Spasm and Survivor’s Guilt as Temporal Hauntings

In *SF*, we follow the hero Billy Pilgrim, through what Kurt Vonnegut frames as “time spastic” visits to all the events in between his birth and death: his service in the regiment against Germany, sufferings in the prison camp ensuing capture by Germans, the outrageous Dresden bombing, and his well-to-do life as an optometrist with a happy marriage after surviving the war, juxtaposed by his adventures on the planet Tralfamadore. “The voices we overhear in our dealings with history are spectral without exception, they spectralize the possibility of knowledge” (Punter, 2002: p. 262). The accounts of WWII and the Dresden bombing are the accounts of the dead that were overheard, and Billy’s “anachronic” (breach in temporality) time travels are spectral moments with presence-absence tensions/hauntings.

2.1. Time Spasm as a Trauma-Informed Interpretive Analogy

Time travel is a central motif in American science-fiction works, from Washing-

ton Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819), H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), to Ted Chiang's "Stories of Your Life" (1998) and Stephen King's 11/22/63 (2011). Vonnegut's innovation, however, is to blend time travel with trauma, framing Billy's experience through the non-clinical concept of the "time spasm." Rather than offering a retrospective clinical diagnosis of Billy Pilgrim, this temporal disorientation is best understood as a trauma-informed interpretive analogy. As Flexer (2020) notes, "[t]emporal 'spasticity' is inherent to working clinical and research formulations of PTSD, albeit in more conservative and circumspect terms, with dissociative reactions such as 'flashbacks' mentioned explicitly" (p. 450). While Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was only formally introduced into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in its third edition (DSM-III) in 1980—eleven years after *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published—drawing an interpretive parallel between Billy's "time spasm" and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5) criteria illuminates the novel's narrative logic.

For example, Billy's moment where "[h]e had lost track momentarily of where he was or how he had gotten there" aligns analogously with dissociative reactions and partial loss of surrounding awareness (Criterion B3; American Psychiatric Association, 2013: p. 271). Similarly, his admission that "[h]e 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, 2010: p. 29) reflects the persistent sense of threat arousal and emotional avoidance (Criterion C2 and Criterion D6; American Psychiatric Association, 2013: p. 272). Furthermore, his spontaneous weeping—"Every so often, for no apparent reason, Billy Pilgrim would find himself weeping" (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 78)—parallels persistent negative mood states and affective dysregulation (Criterion D4; American Psychiatric Association, 2013: p. 272). Beyond specific symptoms, the core phenomenon of trauma—recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive memories—pervades the novel. Billy travels through haunted memories even during moments of surface tranquility, moving disjointedly from his wedding night to the prison camp hospital, from his daughter's wedding to the German prisoner train, and from his optometry office to the Luxembourg battlefield. This temporal breach creates "some disjointing, disjunction, or disproportion" for "the specter to return" (Shaw, 2020: p. 7), haunting Billy for the rest of his life since he first "came unstuck in time in 1944" (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 38).

2.2. Survivor's Guilt: Billy Pilgrim and Kurt Vonnegut

Highest rates of PTSD are found among survivors of military combat and captivity, and ethnically or politically motivated internment and genocide, and in turn, they may develop a syndrome of "survivors' guilt" and the traumatic event "returns to haunt the survivor" (Caruth, 1996: p. 4). The reason behind such hauntings, in the light of further research by Amanda Wicks, is that "the survivor often fails to understand his experience, since a traumatic event does not merely linger as a shocking disruption in his past; rather, it forms an absence in the

mind”, so that “the event has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions—terror, fear, shock” (Wicks, 2014: p. 329), and a disruption of normal feelings.

Billy’s survivor’s guilt is inscribed in his physical and social presence during the war. Described as a “lanky, awkward figure” with “shoulders and chest like a box of kitchen matches”, he is a caricature of incompetence—unarmed, friendless, and “ready for death” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 41), unable to protect himself, let alone others, and whose survival, therefore, feels arbitrary and unjust. After witnessing the deaths of his fellow soldiers, those slain by German ambushes, or incinerated in the Dresden firestorm, a sense of culpability overwhelms him, since “he had no energy to help his friends” and “feeble will to survive” (Vonnegut, 2010: p.193). This guilt is amplified by his later postwar success: as an heir to his father-in-law, Billy becomes “rich as Croesus”, owning an optometry practice, a share of a Holiday Inn, and a Cadillac El Dorado (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 233). The material prosperity stands in stark contrast to the memories of deaths and atrocities, which becomes a spectral reminder of the lives lost. Billy’s weeping, thus, bespeaks the guilt that haunts him—guilt that the dead are absent while he, the unworthy survivor, thrives.

If *SF* should be Vonnegut’s retelling of the war, in which the occurrences bear much resemblance to his correspondence to his family, then Billy serves as his literary double: the author suffers a lot from survivor’s guilt himself. “Similar repetitions [of traumatic memories] recur in Vonnegut’s early personal writing and fiction, bespeaking a sense of survivor’s guilt” and “‘But not me’ becomes a recurrent phrase for Vonnegut, who, stunned from his time at war, cannot make sense of what he has been through” (Wicks, 2014: p. 332). Similar to the refrain of “so it goes” everywhere in *SF*, “But not me” recur multiple times in *Kurt Vonnegut: letters*, after narrating the death toll from air raids by the Americans, the R.A.F. and the Russians (Vonnegut, 2012: p. 8); “But I didn’t” appears after “The Germans herded us through scalding delousing showers. Many men died from shock in the showers after ten days of starvation, thirst and exposure” (Vonnegut, 2012: p. 7). Such recurrent refrains are spectral echoes of trauma that materialize Vonnegut’s unresolved guilt, letting the past haunt his writing as an inescapable ghostly burden for the survivors/present.

3. Crypt and Spectral Spaces for Spatial Hauntings

It needs to be clarified that spectrality in essence connotes a space-time continuum, “The spectral suggests a space-time in which past, present and future co-exist and interact in unpredictable ways” (Hill, 2017: p. 70). But just as Jacques Derrida (1994) posits, the question of the specter consists “always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead” (p. 9), one has to know the spectral spaces to conduct mourning, as Hamlet has to know “to whom the grave belongs” (Derrida, 1994: p. 10). It’s safe for us to find out “where?” and “whither?” in order to follow a ghost and ascertain its demands behind the intrusive and elusive hauntings.

3.1. Crypt: The Ideological Interdiction and Collective Aphasia

Emblematic of the psychic space for specters to inhabit is what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (2005) introduce as the “crypt”—“the repository of the secrets of the past [...] the site on which are stored all the stories which have been too painful, too embarrassing, too revealing to tell” (as cited in Punter, 2002: p. 263). The core event of *SF*, the firebombing of Dresden, is described as “a fossilized memory, sinking ever deeper into the tar pit of history” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. vii). Why did the Dresden bombing become a crypt?

First, ideological interdiction suppressed its memory. The narrator of *SF*, Yon Yonson, once wrote the Air Force “asking for details about the raid on Dresden, who ordered it, how many planes did it, why they did it, what desirable results there had been”, only to be answered “the information was top secret still” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 14). Similarly, a retired American officer writes that he finds it difficult to sympathize with those weeping over enemy civilian casualties while ignoring Allied combat losses, arguing that rather than the 135,000 deaths cited in early postwar accounts—a figure long contested by modern historians, who estimate the actual casualty count between 22,700 and 25,000 (Historical Commission for the Dresden Air Raids, 2010)—he “regrets even more the loss of more than 5,000,000 Allied lives” in the effort to defeat and destroy Nazism. Such stance brings us back to Judith Butler’s (2004) concept of “grievable life” as to how “sovereign power and hegemonic national unity” glorify some deaths while disavowing the others through “the logic of exclusion” and “practice of effacement” (p. 38). Those who risk mourning the dead in the firebombing of Dresden face the same conundrum as Antigone, who “risked death by burying her brother against the edict of Creon, exemplified the political risks in defying the ban against public grief” (Butler, 2004: p. 46).

Second, the collective aphasia. An impressive remark Yon Yonson gets when talking to his friend about the anti-war book, is that “Why don’t you write an anti-glacier book instead?” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 4)—expressing protest at the war is as futile as stopping the glaciers, while the writer himself also acknowledges that “there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 24). Theodor Adorno’s proposition that “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric” still looms over artists and writers alike. And few, if any, would sincerely empathize with the people irrelevant with their lives; in fact, modernity works precisely in this intricate way on the Nazis’ minds when carrying out the holocaust (Bauman, 1989: pp. 203–204).

3.2. “Poo-Tee-Weet?": Prosopopoeia or Re-Corporealization of Revenants

Though a repository of repressed memories, the crypt remains home to specters that emerge to haunt the living, giving strange signals and subjecting the survivor

to unexpected sensations (Abraham & Torok, 2005: p. 130). Anne Whitehead (2005) notes that such signals often take the form of prosopopoeia, “the fiction of the voice-beyond-the-grave [...] an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity” (p. 361). This corresponds to Derrida’s (1994) “visor effect,” wherein the specter presents itself through an intermediary body (pp. 6, 126). In *Spectral Spaces and Hauntings*, Tascón (2017) discusses how human and non-human bodies can serve as sites for re-corporealizing the disappeared and dead (p. 182). Vonnegut, on the other hand, adopts animal bodies for re-corporealization of the revenants.

In *SF*, unresolved war trauma materializes most vividly in the bird’s enigmatic utterance “Poo-tee-weet?” at the novel’s conclusion. This echoes the earlier observation: “Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like ‘Poo-tee-weet?’” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 24). The human victims, rendered voiceless by death, speak through the bird’s chirp. Another example occurs when Billy observes the suffering wagon horses with bleeding mouths and broken hooves: “The Americans had treated their form of transportation as though it were no more sensitive than a six-cylinder Chevrolet” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 251), prompting Billy to burst into tears—his only tears during the war (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 252). The horses’ brutalized bodies re-corporealize the suffering of Dresden’s victims, exposing the dehumanizing cruelty of wartime logic.

3.3. Haunted Landscapes: Surface of the Moon and the Shady Street

As Wylie (2007) asserts, “as well as exploring forms and fabrics of spectrality, spectral geographies should themselves be spectral” (p. 184), spectral spaces are liminal spaces between the live and dead, presence and absence, and between destruction and renewal, becoming “the site for an encounter with broken time” (Fisher, 2012: p. 19). One representative landscape in *SF* has been Dresden after the firestorm, it “was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 227), Dresden, once dubbed as “Florence on the Elbe” for exquisite Baroque architecture and some of the best galleries and cathedrals, becomes ruins—“surface of the moon”—standing on which we would have the same phantomatic hallucination as Freud did of Rome that is now “taken by ruins”: “In Rome the palaces of the Caesars and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus would still be rising to their old height on the Palatine” (Punter, 2002: p. 263). Therefore, haunted experiences do not always point to personal memories or collective histories, but can also be induced by physical remains, by sheer contrast before and after the rupture of time and space. “Ruins evoke a melancholic spirit of mourning. It is not a retrogressive mindset that refuses to acknowledge loss or delays reflection, but an elegy-like historical gaze that lingers on the past with every step rooted in profound affection for what has been lost” (Chi & Yang, 2020: p. 72). Even though Dresden was re-

built with “a new Ilium Government Center and a Pavilion of the Arts and a Peace Lagoon and high-rise apartment buildings” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 76), and has in fact been selected as one of the “eleven German charming big cities” rated by the German National Tourist Board and ranked among the top ten tourist destination cities, it is the lure of “phantasmagoria” in Walter Benjamin’s sense—spectacles of capitalism with specters beneath, “persisting with more profound and unsettling effects” (Andreotti & Lahiji, 2017: p. xiv).

I’d also like to use the term “phantasmagoria” in its literal meaning, “gathering of the ghosts” to refer to the unsettling effects the revenants pose to Billy Pilgrim when he walks on the shady street, which is also the ending of the novel:

Billy and the rest wandered out onto the shady street. The trees were leafing out. There was nothing going on out there, no traffic of any kind. There was only one vehicle, an abandoned wagon drawn by two horses. The wagon was green and coffin-shaped. Birds were talking. One bird said to Billy Pilgrim, “Poo-tee-weet?” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 275)

Revenants lingering in the liminal space between destruction and renewal; the bird’s meaningless cry becomes a spectral voice, giving form to the inexpressible grief that haunts the shady street (see 2.2) where coffin-shaped wagons and leafing trees coexist as symbols of death and fragile rebirth.

4. Spectrality as a Call for Catastrophic Mourning

Catastrophic mourning is somewhat self-reflective, an oxymoron, so to speak, in that the Catastrophe shatters speech, sense, or meaning. “The violence that broke out here was a violence without any assignable measure. That is why it forbids mourning [...] There is mourning only where there is a measure” (Garabedian, 2025: p. 146). In the opening pages of SF, Vonnegut confesses his shattered speech towards the Dresden event:

When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. [...] But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 2)

However, the untimely return of ghosts must produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, ways of narrating the Catastrophe and so forth because spectrality, “far from being locked into the repetitions of neurosis and obsession, is energetically future-oriented and active” (Jameson, 1999: pp. 59-60). Hauntology and the Catastrophe converge when “[a]fter the Catastrophe, thinking is only structured as thinking in ruins, fragments, remnants, and marked by the untimely return of irrecoverable loss, by ghosts and revenants” (Garabedian, 2025: p. 148). That is where spectrality penetrates the vacuum of sense and meaning, calling for catastrophic mourning.

4.1. The Ethical Affects: Mourning to Be Done

The apparition of ghosts has both affective and ethical registers. For one thing, while it sparks shock, fear, or disbelief, it also carries a distinct cognitive weight; ghosts act as a catalyst for reexamining the boundaries of knowledge and truth—indeed, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s terms, “it stirs us, from our passive existence in a reified world to see it as it truly is: a prison world” (Landsberg, 2004: p. 151). For another, specters from repressed history haunt the living to “demand their due”—their attention to excavate alternative narratives and truths, “for this reason, the act of haunting has an ethical imperative” (Landsberg, 2004: p. 152). As Derrida (1994) distinctly clarifies, spectrality speaks with responsibility and respect for “those who are not there [...] who are no longer or who are not yet present and living” (p. xviii). Only in this way can we know what our loss is and genuinely mourn for it and its remains, thus exorcising the specters and in reflection, avoiding the cycle of injustices from recurring on ourselves. Vonnegut intentionally intervene his narration with historical accounts: the assassination of Robert Kennedy (“two nights ago”) and Martin Luther King (“a month ago”), and the Vietnam war: “every day my government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam” (Vonnegut, 2010: p. 31), which are to some extent indirect manifestations of what a national entity looks like without satisfactory mourning that learns from its past and its loss throughout nation building.

What consists of a “satisfactory mourning”? How to incorporate grief into a resource of politics? Butler’s post-9/11 work tackles this topic head-on: she suggests we “vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered” by “an apprehension of a common human vulnerability” (Butler, 2004: p. 30), while in the introduction of *Mourning Remains*, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian propose a macro-perspective based on Walter Benjamin’s view: to mourn is to “establish an active and open relationship with history”, a creative process to relive an era by forging a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living, and entering a moment of production (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003: p. I). Narrating repressed and marginalized historical specters in a seemingly science fiction form, Kurt Vonnegut manages to achieve both the apprehension of Dresden civilians’ vulnerability regardless of their nationality and their government’s political evils at that time, and the moment of production when he finally works out a narrative mode—nonlinear, “anachronic”, “telegraphic schizophrenia”—for catastrophic mourning and self-catharsis.

4.2. The Spectral Mourning through Writing and Reading

In order for a writer to restore the traumatic experiences, the narrative form itself must cohere with the structure of trauma, bearing a sense of spectrality: writing in ruins, fragments, remnants. As Anne Whitehead argues, “trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection” (Whitehead, 2004: p. 3), Billy Pilgrim’s arbitrary and involuntary re-

visits to the hospital in the prison camp, where there're candles and soaps made from the fat of Jews and other enemies of the state, to the Tralfamadore, where he learns Tralfamadorians' sense of time—to look at all the different moments, past, present, and future—and other time and places, are Vonnegut's means of “disintegration of conventional narrative forms” to “adequately convey the spectral” (Hill, 2017: p. 71). As Garabedian concludes that “[t]he Catastrophe cannot be said, but it can be written as literature, composed as music, transformed into art, as long as it opposes the interdiction of mourning and bears witness to the impossibility of speaking. Meaning does not emerge from history, but from fiction” (Garabedian, 2025: p. 154), it is this deliberate formal subversion that enables catastrophic mourning and the articulation of what defies direct linguistic expression: the unspeakable core of trauma. By destabilizing the sense of time, place and self, Kurt Vonnegut enters the liminal space between presence and absence, thus exorcising the specters: for Vonnegut, *SF* served as “an act of literary exorcism whose threads of suffering, flight, discovery and healing touch on each other at every stitch of the writer's loom” (Wicks, 2014: p. 333). After finishing the novel, he found reinventing a way to narrate his experiences quite recuperative, saying, “It was a therapeutic thing. I'm a different sort of person now. I got rid of a lot of crap” (Wicks, 2014: p. 333).

In a similar vein, the act of reading serves for the readers as a spectral mourning for the remnants, which has gained increasing realization in spectral criticism with Maurice Blanchot's writing as its root. In *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot (1982) argues about the act of reading and its “inevitable encounter with what is dead, with what is not yet dead, and with what ineffably fails to declare its status in relation to death, resurrection and the phantom” (as cited in Punter, 2002: p. 259). The act of reading, therefore, is a kind of dialogue with the specter, “conversing with Lazarus”, as Blanchot puts it, and the text is a field where the voices of the dead return (haunt). As readers follow Billy's disjointed journey through the seemingly incomprehensible structure, their conventional understanding collapses; they cease to be passive recipients of a war story and instead become participants in the spectral dialogue with the historically marginalized specters, engaging in a mourning for the war's disavowed deaths, the text a medium for the return of the forgotten voices, embodying reading as an act of remembrance and reflection.

5. Conclusion

Instead of mere documentation, *Slaughterhouse-Five* suggests a paradigm shift of trauma writing by depicting spatio-temporal hauntings consistent with the traumatic structure of PTSD and schizophrenia, exemplifying how to expose often hidden, repressed and unregistered (personal and historical) traumas under the empathy-deficient modernity. By way of both formal and literary spectrality, Kurt Vonnegut “broaden[ed] the genre of science fiction to think about topics in an unusual way” (Wicks, 2014: p. 331). Blending science fiction with trauma writing

into a style of “telegraphic schizophrenia” and turning the structure into a sense-making tool to let the bizarre/ghost take on properties through Prosopopoeia or Re-corporealization, Vonnegut manages to subvert the ideological interdiction and the interdiction of catastrophic mourning, enabling collective mourning and completing the unresolved ones. Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* was still banned multiple times during the Vietnam War period, Vonnegut was considered the voice of American anti-war sentiment in the 1970s and the novel has been hailed as a masterpiece that helped bring an end to the Vietnam War.

A postmodernist himself, Vonnegut narrates the secret of Dresden through fragmented narratives of trauma and metafictional techniques such as the carnivalesque refrain of “so it goes”, which deconstructs the inhumanity of the massacre. His aim is to dissolve the writer’s authority and inspire readers to interpret both the text and the depressed and concealed history. History within the text carries a meaning different from conventional understanding: it is not linearly progressive, but rather a space haunted by various intrusions, foreign bodies, and lingering specters. The act of reading is a dialogue with the dead, and the text is a site where the voices of the deceased return (haunt). The haunted subject, whether Billy Pilgrim or Kurt Vonnegut, fulfills Derrida’s mandate to welcome and converse with specters—“learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with them” (Derrida, 1994: p. xviii). The disavowed victims of the Dresden bombing, the silenced traumas of war, the novel’s specters, do not haunt to torment but to claim recognition. Vonnegut answers this call by reimagining science fiction as not just a genre of fantasy, but also as an active, ongoing relationship with history, one that honors the dead by refusing to let their stories sink into the “tar pit of history”.

Author Contributions

The author Chen Jianfeng was responsible for the conceptualization, literature search, analysis and interpretation of the literature, and writing and revision of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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