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VIETNAMIZING THE TRALFAMADORIANS IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*²

The goal of the paper is to explore Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a means of social criticism of the Vietnam War. Prior to analyzing the novel, we must establish the relation between Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of engaged literature and Darko Suvin's view of science fiction as an ultimate literary alibi. Contrary to previous interpretations, the novel is viewed as a comment on the author's contemporary society rather than the distant historical period of World War II or the spacially displaced world of the Tralfamadorians. Of primary interest will be the Tralfamadorian subplot of the novel which, by presenting the Tralfamadorians as American politicians, brings to attention the lack of interest and empathy for the lives of not only those who do not belong to their race/culture, but towards American citizens. The Tralfamadorian catchphrase "so it goes" is perceived as the government's reaction to others' suffering during the war, as well as its habit of ignoring issues, concealing information and showing complete disregard for its soldiers. Connecting the Tralfamadorian subplot to Vonnegut's contemporary society, we aim to discover similarities between the attitude of the Tralfamadorians and the stance of American politicians during the Vietnam War, thus establishing a new reading of Vonnegut's novel.

Keywords: Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, engaged literature, American society, Vietnam War

1. Introduction

When discussing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the main point of disagreement among critics is the role of the Tralfamadorians. Stanley Schatt (1976: 91) views the Tralfamadorian sections of the novel as "a form of comic relief from unbearable tension that builds as Billy approaches the day of the actual fire-bombing." On the other hand, Josh Simpson (2007: 90) argues that the Tralfamadorian experience was all in Billy's mind and as such "must be approached as an escape mechanism grounded in mental instability [...]." All of these interpretations have in common that they are grounded in the experience of World War II and identify *Slaughterhouse-Five* as "Vonnegut's Dresden novel." On the surface, Vonnegut presents readers with a universal story that depicts the suffering of humankind and its behavior in wartime. By turning to the Tralfamadorian subplot we may discover further layers of the text, directing our attention to social commentary. In order for an in-depth analysis of the Tralfamadorians' connection to Vonnegut's contemporary society to take place we must consider the role of science fiction within the broader concept of

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engaged literature. Vonnegut uses the aforementioned genre as a means rather than an end itself. We propose that the science fiction elements of *Slaughterhouse-Five* serve to express Vonnegut's criticism of the United States' manipulative government and belief in its superiority and supremacy. The Tralfamadorian subplot is thus a representation of the American government's actions regarding the Vietnam War. Focusing on the subplot, we shall present the Tralfamadorians, namely their behavior towards Billy Pilgrim, as politicians' lack of interest and empathy for the lives of not only those who do not belong to their race/culture, but towards American citizens. By connecting the Tralfamadorian subplot to Vonnegut's contemporary society, we aim to discover similarities between the attitude of the Tralfamadorians and the stance of American politicians during the Vietnam War.

2. Kurt Vonnegut's Science Fiction as Engaged Literature

In the essay *What is Literature?*, Jean-Paul Sartre presents compelling arguments for the necessity of what he terms *committed writing*. He defends the view that *every* writer is engaged, whether he is aware of this or not. The author's main concern is his own era (SARTRE 1988: 37), so each literary work will reflect the contemporary society in some way. The most prominent characteristic of committed literature is the author's awareness that "words are action" and that "to reveal is to change" (SARTRE 1988: 37). The author appeals to the reader with his work, hoping that it will be useful and essential for the condition of society. Thus the goal of engaged literature³ is to illuminate, educate, and eradicate unwanted actions. Both the aesthetic and utilitarian function of literature must be taken into consideration in order to understand engaged literature, which "has to be seen as an art, which becomes a prerogative and obligation of every human" (VLAŠKOVIĆ-ILIĆ 2017: 253).

Humans cannot be separated from the society they live in and its pressing social and political issues which are a necessary aspect of the human condition that cannot be disregarded in literature. So when Michel Foucault was asked about his interest in politics he answered:

"Your question is: 'Why am I so interested in politics?' But if I were to answer you very simply, I would say this: why *shouldn't* I be interested? That is to say, what blindness, what deafness, what density of ideology would have to weigh me down to prevent me from being interested in what is probably the most crucial subject to our existence [...] The essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves" (CHOMSKY & FOUCAULT 2006: 36-37).

Language is used as a tool for building a new literary world, but the social/po-

3 According to Brian M. Stableford, literature may perform three communicative functions – restorative, maintenance, directive. The directive function, as the most relevant for a study of science fiction as engaged literature, deals with "information which is intended to remain with the recipient of the literary message – to be, in some cases, incorporated into his consciousness" (STABLEFORD 1978: 38). In order for content to be directive, it must be unfamiliar to the reader (STABLEFORD 1978: 46). It may seem that newness and unfamiliarity of a text will drive the reader further away from the intended message, but in fact it will only present the readers with the challenge of deciphering the allegorical meaning and arriving at the connections with their own society. Whether it is removed or disassociated from contemporary events, each novel is an attempt to inform or educate readers, ultimately trying to inspire them to take action. The difference between science fiction and other literary genres is in the way it achieves this aim.

litical message underpinning the text must be carefully reconstructed. The meaning of a work “though realized *through* language, is never given *in* language” (SARTRE 1988: 52, original emphasis). Authors of science fiction make use of language to create parallel universes, make-believe planets, scientific inventions ahead of their time, new species and much more. Because there are no straightforward facts and overt displays of the contemporary society, it is up to the reader to utilize his critical thinking skills and draw parallels between the text and contemporary society. Authors of science fiction skillfully hide their message by spatially and/or temporally removing the setting, thus making their work seem superficial, escapist and not engaged.

Isaac Asimov (1977: 54) raises the question: “Can a literary form such as science fiction seriously be considered to have any likely effect upon society?” Science fiction was a commercial success, especially among the younger population, because “in commodity production, the product’s newness is indispensable for stimulating sales” (SUVIN 1988: 8). The reasons for these attitudes towards science fiction lie mainly in the fact that it was regarded as escapist literature which had no particular aim. However, Suvin (1979: 12) ushers in a change in perception by pointing to the fact that “[i]n the twentieth century SF has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and—most important—a mapping of possible alternatives.” The idea of science fiction being able to mirror the author’s contemporary society is thus established. Understanding the works of some of the most famous authors of science fiction would be “completely impossible without sociological, psychological, historical, anthropological, and other parallels” (SUVIN 1979: 13).

As science fiction is “*a literature of cognitive estrangement*” (SUVIN 1979: 4), it must include “a strange newness, a *novum*” (SUVIN 1979: 4). Not only does science fiction visually transform the environment and protagonists of a literary work, but it also influences people’s perception of the world and subsequent ideas of it. The *novum* of a work is a “feedback oscillation between two realities” (SUVIN 1988: 37), implying a two-way process of influence. Just as the environment inspires the author to write, the work is also intended to impact the author’s empirical world. While understanding a naturalistic work⁵ is straightforward since it conveys its message in surroundings the reader finds familiar and easy to access cognitively, readers of science fiction must take additional steps in the process of interpretation. The author’s contemporary world, along with its social issues, is presented through an estranged environment serving as an “alibi” (SUVIN 1979: 29). Science fiction is in fact one of the most suitable mediums to express social criticism, which is why critical theory privileges this genre (FREEDMAN 2000: 30). An artist is free to express his opinion and convey any message he wishes, but each critique of contemporary society and going against the norm presents a certain risk. The fact that the author’s Suvin’s (1979: 64) definition of *novum* is as follows: “A *novum* of cognitive innovation is a totalizing 4 phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality.” The reader must accept the premises of the author’s world in order to be able to comprehend the message that goes beyond the science fiction elements. The author may introduce elements that are as minor as a new scientific invention or change the surroundings completely. No matter how far removed from the author’s environment, “[t]his new reality overtly or tacitly presupposes the existence of the author’s empirical reality” (SUVIN 1979: 71). Suvin thus reminds us of the connection between the fabricated reality and the author’s own contemporary social experience.

5 Suvin (1979: 11) uses the term “naturalistic” to refer to works having to deal with the author’s empirical reality, the opposite of which would be “non-naturalistic” works.

contemporary society is not directly exposed provides him with the ability to express his criticism, getting the message across even further and in a more powerful manner since science fiction allows for exaggeration. The journey to a new reality becomes a catalyzer, which then induces changes in the author's and reader's environment (SUVIN 1979: 72).

Works of science fiction are significant within the context of engaged literature because they are "indistinguishable in quality from other superior contemporary writing" (SUVIN 1979: 30). The value of science fiction as engaged literature is thus not diminished due to the fact that it deals with imaginary settings, future times, extraterrestrial beings, and so on. Science fiction is indeed "a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context—often resulting in a surprisingly concrete and sharp-sighted comment at that" (SUVIN 1979: 84).

Science fiction is a recurring element in Vonnegut's novels. Due to the fact that many of the traditional elements of science fiction are visible in his work such as time travel, aliens, robots, futuristic gadgets and inventions, etc. Vonnegut is frequently dismissed as purely an author of science fiction. Vonnegut (1974: 1) himself took issue with this classification as he believed that he had been "a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled 'Science Fiction'" which he frowned upon as "many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal." With this statement, he does not mean to disregard the science fiction elements of his works. Rather, he wishes to differentiate himself from the majority of science fiction authors whom he believes write without a purpose. Tim Hildebrand (1973: 128) reminds us that "[t]he difference between Vonnegut and science fiction writers is that Vonnegut is essentially a preacher, a moralist, a man with a message." Science fiction in the hands of Kurt Vonnegut not only conveys the intended message, but does so in a tangible way.

Slaughterhouse-Five centers on Billy Pilgrim who "has come unstuck in time" (VONNEGUT 1971: 23) and his experience during the bombing of Dresden. As is the case with war, Billy has "no control where he is going next" (VONNEGUT 1971: 23). He is transported through time, hopping from one period to the next without any particular pattern, helpless to stop it. The story of Billy Pilgrim is encapsulated within the opening and closing chapters of the novel which deal with the author himself. This autobiographical frame sets the tone of the novel and prepares readers for a truthful account of real events. The elements of science fiction in the novel are time travel and the existence of the Tralfamadorians, a species of aliens "two feet high, and green, and shaped like plumber's friends" with "a little green hand with a green eye on its palm" (VONNEGUT 1971: 26) at the top of each shaft. Elements of science fiction are introduced seamlessly and presented by Billy as the truth, leading to the conclusion that, since "[t]he true things were time-travel" (VONNEGUT 1971: 157), the key segment for analysis may be found in the moments when Billy travels in time and visits the Tralfamadorians.

Time travel, as one of the most famously used devices of science fiction, has a dual purpose in the novel. Narratively, it allows the author to compress events from Billy's entire life into a single novel. As Billy travels through time erratically, visiting the past, present, and future without any particular pattern, the readers start to feel lost and confused, thus simulating the helpless situation of soldiers during the war. The reader becomes "spastic in time" (VONNEGUT 1971: 23) along with Billy. Billy is kidnapped by the Tralfamadorians and taken to their planet on a flying saucer. The act of kidnapping raises the question of

free will, as the kidnapped have no choice in their being taken. The subtitle of Vonnegut's novel – *The Children's Crusade* – invokes ideas of the thirteenth century campaign to spread Christianity during which youth were manipulated and “compelled to fight for a cause that ultimately left them alienated and adrift” (KUNZE 2012: 45). Billy's abduction may be seen as the deployment of thousands of young soldiers, going off to foreign lands to fight wars they did not know nearly enough about. People enlist in the army and thus are not kidnapped in the same sense as Billy was in the novel. The issue that may be discussed is how aware these young men were of the circumstances of war. They were not educated about foreign policy or foreign cultures, making them unprepared to ship out. Even more significant in the kidnapping episode is the fact that Billy, a human, is taken against his will by non-human figures whose manipulation and selfishness is emphasized throughout his entire stay on Tralfamadore. The contrast between Billy's humanity and the Tralfamadorians' inhumanity further illustrates their cold and calculating nature. This is just the first step of establishing the Tralfamadorians as representations of American politicians who show complete disregard for the well-being and safety of others so long as it suits their interests.

3. Vietnamizing the Tralfamadorians – American Politicians' Stance towards the Vietnam War

Billy is the typical representative of a young, naïve, optimistic boy, listening to what his country has told him and blindly following its instructions. He is nothing like the stereotype of the ideal, manly warrior. Instead, he is “tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola” (VONNEGUT 1971: 23). On Billy's trips to Tralfamadore, the Tralfamadorians reveal to him the truths of the Universe and Billy later feels it is his responsibility to spread awareness. They are shocked by the Earthlings' customs and they frequently attempt to teach Billy about the “correct” way of thinking. They are all-knowing, as they can “see in four dimensions” (VONNEGUT 1971: 26). Much like the Tralfamadorians, American politicians see not only what is presented to the public, but have insight into the decisions behind the actions. In this sense they are all-knowing, which makes them believe in their superiority while simultaneously assuring their political power. As the government looks down on people, it systematically keeps information from others and chooses how much should be revealed at a given time.

Interestingly enough, the scenes depicting Billy's memories of Dresden and his life in America after the war are taken as factual events nobody doubts for a moment. When Billy starts writing letters and going on radio shows to discuss his Tralfamadorian experience and to share what he has learned, he is considered crazy and an embarrassment to his family (VONNEGUT 1971: 24-25). Going against the norm, speaking out against those in charge is a dangerous task which often brings about the label of insanity. Billy's task is to spread the knowledge he has learned with the Tralfamadorians, namely, their view towards life and death, which he sincerely believes to be the truth. This may be connected to the construction of a science fiction work (and other literary works in general) as the author, fearing ridicule or censorship, places his message underneath a layer of text only to be decoded by a careful reader. Just as *Slaughterhouse-Five* serves as Vonnegut's scientific alibi to express the callousness of those in power, Billy's stories serve the same

function of exposing the Tralfamadorians.

Throughout the novel we encounter a catchphrase: “So it goes” (VONNEGUT 1971: 32). Having learned it from the Tralfamadorians, Billy incorporates it into his own beliefs by simply starting to shrug at death⁶. When used by the Tralfamadorians, the phrase has a more sinister meaning, expressing the insignificance of death. The Tralfamadorians ignore death and chaos while focusing on the more positive aspects of life. Their overall attitude towards war, inequality, injustice and suffering is apathetic and their solution is that they “simply do not look at [wars]” (VONNEGUT 1971: 117). They build the world as they see fit and pay attention only to what they deem significant. The Tralfamadorians are ruthless politicians who risk the lives of young men only to serve their own agenda, a fact which is then hidden or ignored. The government silences those who try to expose injustices, while remaining silent themselves. The government does not take responsibility for its actions. Wrong-doings are not made public or admitted to, rather are concealed or presented in a manner that suits the political leaders. *So it goes*.

After *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published in 1969, there was a peculiar situation in court regarding the novel as it was

“[...] introduced as testimony in the trial of a young man who had destroyed selective-service records – his way of protesting American involvement in the carnage of the war in Vietnam. The defendant, his copy of the novel in hand, testified that he had committed the act of ‘violence’ against the draft system because he could no longer be a Billy Pilgrim” (TILTON 1977: 69).

This situation shows the strength of literature and its ability to spark social change. It also testifies to the strong connection between Vonnegut’s novel and the Vietnam War. Numerous references to Vietnam are made throughout the novel, providing readers with a firm grasp of which time period is considered Billy’s present. The references to wars, assassinations, cruelty, and torture show that violence is still very much active in Billy’s (and Vonnegut’s) contemporary society. Vonnegut is seen as “a necessary spokesman of the times – as someone who could contemplate the horror of current affairs, face this horror without disguising it, and yet provide readers sufficient comforts and strengths to make it bearable” (KLINKOWITZ 1990: 14).

In the first chapter of the novel Vonnegut openly discussed the fear of his novel becoming just another war story that represents stereotypical characters in masculine roles such as Frank Sinatra or John Wayne (VONNEGUT 1971: 14). This war book is indeed not like the others because it represents soldiers as babies who pretended to be men (VONNEGUT 1971: 14), as traumatized individuals in mental hospitals and scared boys in a foreign land. The representation and treatment of soldiers presents an important aspect of the novel as it alludes to their naivety and ease with which they may be manipulated. “It is astonishing how often American GIs in Vietnam approvingly referred to John Wayne, not as a movie star, but as a model and a standard” (BARTIZ 1985: 37). This stereotypical, fearless, manly soldier is in stark contrast with the reality of the young, inexperienced, confused soldiers who are often barely of age. War is represented as something attractive and by glamorizing it in the media (either by concealing gruesome images or purposely

6 Billy says: “Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people” (VONNEGUT 1971: 27).

putting forth appealing ones) the government perpetuates the idea that all young men should fight for their country. In fact, the soldiers are merely “listless playthings of enormous forces” (VONNEGUT 1971: 164), losing their identity while being controlled by their government. P. Kunze (2012: 51) highlights the symbolism of the protagonist’s name as he is “unable to enact an acceptable example of American masculinity.” Billy, a diminutive of William, suggests immaturity and shows that he is powerless against the control of the government⁷.

The term “Vietnamization” becomes necessary in describing the era in which Vonnegut published his novel. The concept of Vietnamization was introduced by Richard Nixon on November 3rd, 1969, as the idea that American boys should not be fighting in the war⁸. Instead he proposed to train Asian boys so that Americans can safely withdraw and return home. When dealing with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, another type of Vietnamization appears and that is Christina Jarvis’ (2011) notion of Vietnamizing World War II in American literature. This means that Vietnam is equally relevant in changing the past perception of World War II, just as World War II helped shape the perception of the Vietnam War. The narratives about World War II were hence reconfigured and presented through the prism of the Vietnamese aggression. With this, yet another version of the Tralfamadorian subplot arises.

“*Slaughterhouse-Five* was not only to fracture American narratives about the ‘good war’, but also to create a different kind of war story – one that will not produce other conflicts. While the novel clearly charts a larger pattern of violence in Western civilization, linking multiple conflicts from the Crusades to the fictional Tralfamadorian-initiated destruction of the universe, Vonnegut’s primary goal is a specific revision of World War II narrative” (JARVIS 2011: 82–83).

When discussing the position of soldiers in World War II, their humiliation, fear and confusion, Vonnegut could be referring to the Vietnam War. Vonnegut’s pacifism is evident in his literary techniques and themes covered in the novel. Billy’s time travel is once again a useful narrative tool as he frequently jumps from memories of World War II to 1967, in the midst of the Vietnam War: “[H]e was simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding his Cadillac in 1967” (VONNEGUT 1971: 58).

The most notable connection with the Vietnam War is the speech held by a major in the Marines at the Lions Club meeting. He emphasizes that “Americans had no choice but to keep fighting in Vietnam” (VONNEGUT 1971: 59). Americans should, in his opinion, bomb North Vietnam back into the Stone Age (VONNEGUT 1971: 60). There is a connection between the fictional speaker and Curtis LeMay, general and commander of the Air Force who made the same suggestion about Vietnam. By alluding to LeMay, Vonnegut continues to build parallels between the Vietnam War and World War II, as LeMay participated in the bombings of both (JARVIS 2011: 86). Figures such as LeMay encapsulate American ignorance and egotism. Of the American ignorance regarding other cultures speaks the fact that “America was involved in Vietnam for thirty years, but never understood the Vietnamese” (BARTIZ 1985: 3). The customs, traditions, relations and

⁷ The protagonist’s surname is significant as well as it opens an array of questions about the similarities between Vonnegut’s novel and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (see SCHATT 1976: 83–84).

⁸ Richard Nixon, as all of America’s political leaders, deeply believed in the greatness of the nation and perpetuated the myth that America was the world’s strongest and most powerful nation.

overall significance of the Vietnamese culture were not points of interest for the American Government.

We may observe a familial connection between Billy, a World War II veteran, and his son Robert, who is in the Green Berets in Vietnam. War is represented as something parents leave behind for their children; a type of heritage. War is America's cultural heritage. When describing Valencia's pregnancy, Vonnegut refers to it as "assembling the materials for a Green Beret" (VONNEGUT 1971: 121), pointing to the fact that the war shaped Billy as much as his parent's genetics. Soldiers are regarded merely as bodies, a collection of objects the state uses for its benefit.

The dehumanizing aspect may be discussed not only in regards to the way countries treat their POWs, but in the way America treats its own citizens. By not educating them, by perpetuating masculine stereotypes, the American government strips soldiers of their individuality and enters them into the machinery of war. These boys are untrained and innocent just as Billy and his fellow comrades were during World War II. While Jarvis (2011: 88) sees the lack of detailed descriptions of the war as Vonnegut's desire not to contribute to the already-existing sea of violent images, we propose that the lack of depicted violence in battle is yet another one of Vonnegut's social commentaries. Silence, as previously mentioned, can be just as strong a social criticism as overtly displayed words and actions.

The amount of details in the novel corresponds to the scarce representation of war in the media. There is a general lack of awareness among the majority of the population sitting at home in front of their television screens, enjoying their American "culture" while a war is fought on others' territory. "And everyday my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam. So it goes" (VONNEGUT 1971: 210). The casualties of war are just numbers – no details, no descriptions, no evidence. Numbers keep increasing without explanation as people are expected to believe the justifications of American leaders. America had to uphold a certain image of itself. In the Nobel Prize speech given in 2005, Harold Pinter expressed criticism of America's habit of ignoring, deferring and failing to own up to any of its wrongdoings. In such a society, literature which would openly express its criticism towards the government would risk being censored.

"It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but *very few people have actually talked about them*" (PINTER 2005: 6, my emphasis).

This image was „at the center of thought of the men who brought us the Vietnam War“ (BARTIZ 1985: 10); it was the American myth of supremacy. This myth became central in forming the beliefs of generations of Americans who, by rigidly conforming to highly set expectations of themselves, created limits for the rest of the world (BARITZ 1985: 13). Due to this view, Americans believed that they „had a superior moral claim to be in Vietnam“ (BARITZ 1985: 17). In fact, "[t]he moral superiority of Americans is so clear, that the only thing that remains unclear is how the Vietnamese have not realized it yet"⁹ (RADOVANOVIĆ 2012: 142).

The Tralfamadorians, much like American politicians, hold absolute power in

9 My translation.

their fictional universe.

“How–how *does* the Universe end?’ said Billy. ‘We blow it up, experimenting with new fuels for our flying saucers. A Tralfamadorian test pilot presses a started button, and the whole Universe disappears” (VONNEGUT 1971: 117).

Flying saucers, in this analogy, are viewed as bombs the American government threw both during World War II and the Vietnam War. The Tralfamadorians ultimately believe that they hold the power to end the world due to their control of fuels and weapons. They stand behind their actions, even those which may be ethically questionable. They hold the ultimate power over the universe since they are the ones making decisions. The alarming fact is that they genuinely believe in their supremacy and “responsibility” to teach those who do not share their opinions. The goal of the United States in Vietnam was to “educate and improve” – or at least that is how they defended their actions. America was believed to have acted with utmost altruism as President Nixon emphasized the selfless motives of America’s conquest (BARTIZ 1985: 28). Of course there were hidden agendas, as is the case with all military conflicts, one of which was the profitability¹⁰ of war. Not only can there be an increase in profit based on weapon productions, but “the U.S. Army goes to war with Burger King and Pizza Hut in tow” (KLEIN 2007: 13), spreading their companies and promoting consumerism. American culture permeates each environment where American soldiers settled down. By “bringing Burger King and Pizza Hut to the war” they prioritized their own needs and comfort while expressing the stance that their culture is superior and as such should be established in the foreign environment. America considers itself the world’s most powerful nation who has not only the right, but the obligation to instruct those who are not yet aware of this.

4. Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut’s use of science fiction elements in *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not take away from the quality of the work, as the previously mentioned critics have expressed, but rather adds another interpretive layer based on social criticism. Vonnegut carefully places his criticism of the American society and its treatment of soldiers during the Vietnam War within the parts of the novel which are regarded by many readers as purely fictional. This provides him with a scientific alibi so that he may openly write without fear of consequences such as censorship. The true purpose of all literary works, as Sartre concluded, lies in their ability to reflect society and inspire change. Despite being seen mostly as escapist literature, science fiction, and especially that of Kurt Vonnegut, has the distinct ability to present the problems of the contemporary society without being accused of doing so. Science fiction by definition is a genre of estrangement, newness and exaggeration and as such it may contribute to conveying the seriousness of its message. The process of Vietnamization of World War II literature allows us to interpret Vonnegut’s previously established Dresden novel as a work about the Vietnam War. As science fiction uses covert

10 Naomi Klein (2007: 6) researches “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events” which cause “exciting market opportunities.” She entitles this phenomenon “disaster capitalism” (KLEIN 2007: 6) and presents the benefits the government seeks to gain in the midst of disasters such as floods, storms, terrorist attacks, wars, and more. The government profits from people’s suffering and uses these situations to their own advantage.

methods to express social criticism, we search for meaning in the subplot pertaining to the Tralfamadorians whose attitude can largely be equated with that of American politicians who believe in their superiority and supremacy, placing themselves at the center of the Universe. The fact that they are all-knowing contributes to their beliefs and strengthens their power. Just as the Tralfamadorians have the power to end the Universe with the press of a button, American politicians can send soldiers to war and then control the flow of information regarding the war. The suffering of other nations and soldiers is deemed irrelevant compared to the government's grand plans for success and profit. Just as the Tralfamadorians taught Billy the correct way of thinking about death, the American government sends young soldiers without proper education or preparation to distant parts of the world all under the guise of "education." Callously and ruthlessly, deaths are ignored as the American government seems to follow the Tralfamadorian motto – *So it goes*.

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VIJETNAMIZACIJA TRALFAMADORIJANACA U ROMANU *KLANICA PET*
KURTA VONEGATA

Rezime

Cilj rada jeste predstaviti roman *Klanica pet* Kurta Vonegata kao oblik društvene kritike Vijetnamskog rata. Da bi ovakva analiza mogla da se primeni, prvo moramo uspostaviti vezu između pojma angažovane književnosti Ž. P. Sartra i teorija D. Suvina o naučnoj fantastici kao savršenom alibiju za kritiku društva. Dok su se prethodna tumačenja ovog romana osvrtna na istorijski period Drugog svetskog rata, u radu ćemo ispitati roman u kontekstu autorovog savremenog društva. Od najvećeg značaja za istraživanje biće epizode koje se tiču Bilijevog odnosa sa Tralfamadorijancima, kao i njihovo ponašanje i pogledi na svet. Predstavljanjem Tralfamadorijanaca kao američkih političara ističemo njihovu nezainteresovanost i odsustvo empatije za život svih koji ne pripadaju istoj rasi/kulturi. Izraz koji se ponavlja tokom čitavog romana, javljajući se kao vid lajtmotiva jeste „Tako mu je to“. Ovaj izraz se može shvatiti kao vladina reakcija na patnju drugih, njihovo ignorisanje problema, prikrivanja informacija i potpunog zanemarivanja potreba američkih vojnika. Navođenjem sličnosti između epizode sa Tralfamadorijancima i stavova američkih političara tokom Vijetnamskog rata, teži se uspostavljanju novog tumačenja Vonegatovog romana.

Ključne reči: Kurt Vonegat, *Klanica pet*, angažovana književnost, američko društvo, Vijetnamski rat