

“Making Nonsense of the Little Categories”

Slaughterhouse-Five and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* as autobiographical science
fiction

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Contents

Contents	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Abbreviations	v
Introduction	1
<i>Story and discourse order definitions and history</i>	3
<i>Autobiography definitions and history</i>	7
<i>Science Fiction definitions and history</i>	16
“Unstuck in Time”: Temporal Ordering and Trauma in <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i>	27
“The Last Walls Dissolved”: Space and Portals in <i>The Memoirs of a Survivor</i>	43
Pieces of the Carpet: The Autobiographical Impulse	61
Conclusion	74
Works Cited	76

Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) are both novels that blend autobiography with science fiction. In a review of Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, Lessing writes that he "makes nonsense of the little categories". The same applies to Lessing. These two novels live in the porous borders between genre—between fiction and non-fiction.

Vonnegut writes that he can't remember much of his experiences in the firebombing of Dresden in the Second World War. The war novel he writes about them has a protagonist who is "unstuck in time". I frame my discussion of *Slaughterhouse* around problems of temporal and narrative ordering. Through use of fractured time, repetitions, and the chronotope, Vonnegut finds a way to express his missing and traumatic memories of the war.

Lessing's memories are of her early childhood in Persia and Southern Rhodesia. These memories are warped, claustrophobic, and difficult to articulate. Like *Slaughterhouse*, *Memoirs* fractures time and space. I organise my discussion of Lessing's novel around the latter, focusing on a literalised porous border: her dissolving living room wall. Borders and portals between spaces in *Memoirs* blend the dystopian, science-fiction world of the city with the world of Lessing's memories; dreams with reality; and the static with the dynamic.

I pose several answers to the question of *why* science fiction and autobiography. A shared occupation of the two authors was a concern for the madness and dissolution of society, and science fiction engages in a tradition of expressing these concerns. Additionally, Vonnegut and Lessing use the tools of a genre in which it is acceptable for time and space to be warped or fractured. These tools not only allow for the expression of memories that are fragmented, difficult, and half forgotten, but produce worlds that mirror the form of these personal memories.

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List of Abbreviations

DLRH	Doris Lessing: The Reluctant Heroine
PQD	Putting the Questions Differently
SPV	A Small Personal Voice
WFG	Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon
UMS	Under My Skin
MWC	A Man Without a Country

Introduction

It may seem at first that in Kurt Vonnegut and Doris Lessing I could not have chosen two authors more diametrically opposed. Lessing is most famous for her realist fiction such as *The Grass is Singing* (1950) or *The Golden Notebook* (1962). A contemporary review of the former calls it a “remarkable psychological study” with “depth and maturity” (Barkham par. 1). A recent review of the latter by Margaret Drabble calls it a novel of “raw” emotion, while Ernest Buckler’s *New York Times* review in 1962 criticises it for “handl[ing] feelings at such length and at such bowstring pitch [that] they tend to go fetid” (par. 4; par. 5). A review of Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), meanwhile, calls it “irreverent [and] of a far more engaging and meaningful order than the melodramatic tripe which most critics seem to consider ‘serious’” (Southern par. 6). At this moment in the early 1960s, before Doris Lessing had started writing science fiction and before Kurt Vonnegut had begun to be taken more seriously with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the two authors seem remarkably different.

Shortly after I first considered an examination of the two, I opened my copy of *Slaughterhouse-Five* to the first page and noticed something I had previously missed: a quote from Lessing in praise of Vonnegut. Vonnegut, she writes, “is one of the writers who map our landscapes for us, who give names to the places we know best” (par. 9). The quote is taken from an article written by Lessing for the *New York Times* in 1973 that is called “Vonnegut’s Responsibility”. Vonnegut, Lessing writes, is “moral in an old-fashioned way” (par. 6).

A few years earlier, in 1969, Lessing told Joyce Carol Oates that Vonnegut was “a bloke [she] got on with very well” (*PQD* 36). Oates notes the similar concerns shared by the authors “for the madness of society, its self-destructive tendencies” (37). Vonnegut, Lessing writes in her review, “simply cannot bear what we are”—and neither can she, describing society as “haunted by the image of an idiot hand, pressing down a great black lever ... we are all of us, at times, this madman” (*SPV* 13). Yet she writes that the madman is “not so frightening as that other image: of a young empty-faced technician in anonymous overalls saying ‘Yes sir!’” (14). Lessing’s madman and empty-faced technician share a lot with the dictatorial “Papa” Monzano in *Cat’s Cradle*, whose ill-considered method of suicide by ice-nine, through a series of accidents, brings

an end to all life on earth. Vonnegut writes that his concern as an author is to “make mankind aware of itself”, and of its madness (*WFG* 228).

Lessing praises Vonnegut for more than just his abilities to write about this self-destructive madness. It is Vonnegut who, unlike other writers, “makes [her] remember”. Her word choice here emphasises—not coincidentally—that these authors write novels that often gesture towards autobiography. Vonnegut appears metatextually in many novels, particularly his later works like *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) and *Timequake* (1997). Andrew M. Butler writes that he is “perhaps the author who has most featured himself as a character within his own science fictions” (“Postmodernism” 137). Lessing’s early novels take inspiration from her life in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)—she tells Roy Newquist that authors “always have done and always will” include autobiography in fiction (*SPV* 55). Lessing felt that writing about oneself was also “writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions ... can’t be yours alone” (*SPV* 35). Writing about one’s self and one’s past involves an act (or acts) of memory. Vonnegut and Lessing write about remembering: remembering their own pasts, and reminding society of its history.

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) both blend this remembrance of self with science fiction. In my first chapter, I will examine the temporal ordering of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and how this offers a means of representation for the cognitively estranging experience of trauma. My second chapter analyses *Memoirs* as a novel of different spaces that divide the text along ontological lines, and I study the connecting portals that cause these ontologies to blend. In my third chapter, I examine the differences between a scene in *Memoirs* and the same scene in Lessing’s traditional autobiography *Under My Skin*, and finally bring the two texts and authors together.

These two novels make “nonsense of the little categories”—words of praise given to Vonnegut in Lessing’s 1973 article. The borders between nonfiction and fiction, between realistic and unrealistic, fall away in *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs*. The novels fragment time and space, allowing both authors to capture something otherwise inexpressible through the fractures: trauma, childhood, emotions. Lessing writes that Vonnegut is prone to being overlooked in the criticism precisely because he makes such nonsense of categories. “Vonnegut’s Responsibility” is in part a review of his novel *Mother Night*—a book that she notes “has not been reviewed anywhere, ever, because it was sold first into paperback” (par. 1). Lessing’s personal library

(recently catalogued by Nick Holdstock) included a copy of *Mother Night* that was a gift from Vonnegut after reading the *New York Times* article. The dedication reads: “For Doris Lessing, an unreviewed book” (qtd. in @NickHoldstock). Unlike Vonnegut’s, Lessing’s early work did not go without review. Yet it is apt for her to draw attention to how academics can “cling to the categories” as her career always blended autobiography and fiction, and would soon throw science fiction into this mix. I cling to the categories also, for later in this introduction I will examine how autobiography and science fiction function separately before a close study of how they work in tandem in my two novels. “Of course they [use the categories]”, Lessing writes, twisting Vonnegut’s most commonly used phrase, “they invented them. But so it has ever gone” (par. 8).

Story and discourse order definitions and history

I begin with the little categories of story time and discourse time. This distinction will be important for my thesis as I investigate the temporal ordering of my novels—particularly *Slaughterhouse-Five*—and so I offer a brief history of terms and explain how I will be using them. This distinction is predicated on the difference between the discourse and the story; the discourse being the manner in which the events of the narrative are represented, and the story being the abstracted reconstruction of the same events. It is entirely possible that time might be experienced identically in both discourse and story, but this is not often the case, particularly in written narrative. Fictional worlds are open to “radical deviations from the regularities of time in the actual world” (Ronen 202).

This taxonomy owes much to the work of the Russian Formalists. Shklovsky writes of the arbitrariness of literary time: “its laws do not coincide with the laws of ordinary time” (38). Thus, the need for a new system of laws. In the same study, Shklovsky begins to elaborate on the differences between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, terms that are roughly analogous to story and discourse—although originally translated as story and plot. He writes, “the idea of [*sjuzhet*] is too often confused with the description of events — with what I propose provisionally to call [*fabula*]. The [*fabula*] is, in fact, only material for [*sjuzhet*] foundation” (52). Shklovsky suggests that the “process of perception is an end in itself in art”, and therefore examines the *sjuzhet* as a means of frustrating and prolonging this perception (Schmid 177). The *sjuzhet* might employ “slowing down”, “staircase-like construction”, parallelism, or repetition as a means of

defamiliarisation and thus prolonged perception. Decisions regarding the story of a work might be a result of the needs of the *sjuzhet*: “In the same way, specific types of stone have a layered structure that makes them especially well-suited to certain arrangements” (qtd. in Schmid 178). Wolf Schmid writes that this conception of the terms “neglected not only the substance of the *fabula* but also the formed quality of the *fabula* itself” (178). Petrovsky takes up the same terms but reverses the meanings. He defines *sjuzhet* as “the system of events, of actions” and the *fabula* as “the *poetically* handled *sjuzhet*” (qtd. in Schmid 180; emphasis original). The *sjuzhet*, now analogous with story-order, is in Petrovsky’s definition something that is already formed before being written. He still “assigns artistic priority to composition” but, in contrast with Shklovsky, suggests that *sjuzhet* is “always a *transformation*” of life (181). Vygotski, continuing in the tradition of emphasising the discourse order, examines how a difference in temporal ordering between the story and the discourse is fundamental to the effectiveness of narrative. He compares this arrangement to music, writing that the “combination of phrases and sentences, of concepts ... is governed by the same rules of artistic association as are the juxtaposition of sounds in a melody” (qtd. in Todorov 404).

Boris Tomashevsky is perhaps the “most intensively read” theorist of the *fabula* and *sjuzhet* distinction in Western study (Schmid 184). He returns to Shklovsky’s positioning of the terms, rather than Petrovsky’s reversal. *Fabula* is the aggregate, regardless of the original order of introduction and arrangement in the work, told in “the actual chronological and causal order of events” (Tomashevsky 66; 67). *Sjuzhet* is “distinct” and arranged “according to the orderly sequence in which they were presented in the work” (67). In later editions, he would call this the “artistically organised arrangement” (qtd. in Schmid 185). He suggests that time in the *fabula* is inherent. A “causal-temporal relationship” is required for story (Tomashevsky 66). Tomashevsky suggests that *fabula* time, or story time, may be given in three ways: the first, “the moment of action may be dated absolutely ... for example, ‘at two o’clock on January 8 in 18—’ ... or relatively ... ‘after two years’”; the second through an indication of duration, “the journey continued for three months”, or being given a precise length of absence; and the third and final method of suggesting story time is through an “impression” that time must have passed, such as the length of a speech or “the normal duration of the action” (78). Tomashevsky also suggests that story time and reading time are distinct, and the “latter depends on the ‘size’ of the work” (78).

Günther Müller offers a similar approach to this analysis. He notes that narrators need “a certain span of physical time” to tell a story, and that there is “no basic difference between counting the time of narration in minutes or in the number of printed pages of a certain work” (75; 76). This is separate from the time of creation (76). Müller’s distinction is between the narrating, *Erzählzeit*, and the narrated, *erzählte Zeit*. He explores “time contraction”, or *Zeitraffung*, and temporal expansion, and notes that the time of narrating is “almost always shorter” than the narrated time, which may comprise many years (75-76). Three kinds of narrative time contractions are proposed in Müller’s work: the first is the skipping of time spans, the second the work of summary such as “veni, vidi, vici”, and the third a kind of iterative or durative contraction such as, “For weeks he could not free himself from the idea” (77).

Todorov returns to the work of the Russian Formalists, and elaborates on the differences between story time and discourse time. The discourse, he writes, “is obliged to put [the events] one after another”, while in the story multiple events can occur at the same time (403). The story need not correspond to an “ideal chronological order”, and it must be “an abstraction because it is always perceived and recounted by someone; it does not exist ‘in itself’” (385). He also distinguishes between the time of narrating, and the time of reading. The former he frames as a “literary element”, and the latter as an “irreversible time which determines our perception of the total work”, but might also become a literary element (406-407).

Genette synthesises many of these earlier ideas in his study on narrative discourse. He examines the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the narrative (or discourse) according to “three essential determinations” (Genette 35). These are order, duration, and frequency. Genette labels discordances between story order and discourse order narrative “anachronies” (36). Such anachronies between which Genette distinguishes are prolepsis (flash forward) and analepsis (flashback), which themselves can differ in distance and amplitude. Chatman takes up many of Genette’s categories, and it is Chatman’s terminology that I will use and have been using for much of this chapter. Chatman adds a fifth category to Genette’s taxonomy of duration:

Five possibilities suggest themselves: (1) summary: discourse-time is shorter than story-time; (2) ellipsis: the same as (1), except that discourse-time is zero; (3) scene: discourse-time and story-time are equal; (4) stretch: the discourse-time is longer than story-time; (5) pause: the same as (4) except that story-time is zero. (*Story* 68)

Chatman's additional category here is the fourth: stretch. Genette's classifications of frequency are similarly taken up by Chatman. To briefly note them, these are singular frequency, where a single story moment is represented once in the discourse; multiple-singular, "multiple representations, each of one of several story moments"; repetitive; and iterative (Chatman *Story* 78). Genette also suggests a third category in addition to story time and discourse time: narrating time. Narrating time might be subsequent, prior, simultaneous, or interpolated (215-217).

Of the most importance to my analysis of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in my first chapter is the discussion of discourse and story *order*. Genette's definitions rely on the supposition of a chronological story time that is reconstructable and comprehensible. Later critics have challenged these assumptions. Brian Richardson proposes a new set of categories of temporal construction that "cannot be contained within a Genettean framework" (48). These are: (1) circular: narratives that return to their own beginnings and "thus [continue] infinitely" (2) contradictory: in which "incompatible and irreconcilable versions" of the story are found; (3) antinomic; narratives that move backwards in time; (4) differential: narratives containing differing chronologies and temporalities that are superimposed one on the other; (5) conflated: in which "apparently different temporal zones fail to remain distinct", in which the "now" and "then" might become blurred; and (6) dual or multiple: such as the "double time" of Shakespeare (48-52). Richardson also notes that narratives might have "no recoverable story and therefore no story time" (52). Other critics that challenge Genette include Ricoeur, who disputes Genette's categories on a more general level. Ricoeur suggests that we read time backward in all narrative by "reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end" (183). He argues that narrative, history and memory should be understood in terms of repetition, or "the spiral movement that ... brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities" of the beginning (186). Herman proposes what he calls "polychronic narration" in order to reconcile narratives that contain indefinite or what Genette refers to as "unplaceable" events (73; 75). Polychronic events "root themselves in more than one place in time", in a way that Herman argues challenge "the processing strategies that predispose us to read stories in sequential ways" (75; 77).

Challenges have also been made to the story and discourse distinction itself. Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues against the existence of a distinct story, suggesting that there is "no single *basically* basic story subsisting beneath [any particular narrative]" (221; emphasis

original). One of the problems of these categories in terms of examining nonlinear narratives, then, is that they “imply that prior to and independent of the narrative in question there existed some particular determinate set of events in some particular determinate (untwisted) order of sequence” (B. Smith 228). Smith suggests that narratives may not and need not have this prior chronological ordering. This avenue of analysis suggests that the story-time and discourse time “distinction should be viewed as a more or less valuable heuristic device rather than a hard-and-fast rule dictating how to read stories” (Herman 72). Chatman’s response to such claims is that “narratology is not interested in the question” of whether a “real” story can be extrapolated from multiple versions of a text (“Reply” 803). Rather, in all stories there is “a portion which is *purely* narrative in structure, independent of [the] medium, that portion having its own structure” (804). Dan Shen also defends the classical concepts of story time and discourse time in his response to Richardson, suggesting that many of Richardson’s new categories can be reconciled with the Genettean definitions (237). Shen suggests that the “relation between story time and discourse time is only more complicated, not really impossible to determine” in narratives with dual or inconsistent chronologies, and ultimately that the “story-discourse distinction is still applicable” (238). Both Shen and Richardson agree that “we can reconstitute a story from the text” (Shen 237).

Slaughterhouse-Five and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* are kinds of texts that challenge the more traditional “fixed, retrievable, non-contradictory sequence of events” (Richardson 49). Yet these terms, in particular Chatman’s definitions, are of use precisely because they offer and suggest such an exploration. I approach my texts in the mode of the reader that, Smith acknowledges, “will usually attempt to construe some chronology of events, more or less stable or unstable, rough or precise”, and through this act of reconstruction find meaning in the degree of frustration and success of such an enterprise (230). Chatman’s terms offer the tools with which to construct such an investigation.

Autobiography definitions and history

Slaughterhouse-Five is built around Vonnegut’s experiences as a prisoner of war in Dresden, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is built around Lessing’s memories of her early childhood in Persia and Rhodesia. Both, therefore, contain writing about the self—but it is not immediately apparent whether autobiography is the most accurate term to describe

Slaughterhouse and Memoirs. The Memoirs of a Survivor: An Attempt at Autobiography

immediately makes the reader confront its classification by including two different terms for life writing in its title. The problem is complicated by the fact that these are terms of definition that are themselves difficult to define. William C. Spengemann writes that “the more the genre [of autobiography] gets written about, the less agreement there seems to be on what it properly includes” (qtd. in Abbott “Autobiography” 598). James Olney calls autobiography “the most elusive of literary documents” (qtd. in Abbott “Autobiography” 598).

The term autobiography, while widely used, raises certain complications that result in a critical discourse that lacks an agreed-upon term with which to name itself. The term autobiography did not enter use until the late eighteenth century, and it has since become the term that dominates the critical discourse around the genre of self-life writing. Autobiographical acts were performed much earlier than the term autobiography was used, known variously as “confessions” (St. Augustine, Rousseau), “the life” (Teresa of Avila), or “essays of myself” (Montaigne). Perhaps the most enduring of these earlier terms is “memoirs”. The difference between an autobiography and a memoir is the subject of much debate, and a particularly relevant one considering Lessing's use of both words in the title of her book. Georg Misch, in an early work of autobiography criticism called *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, writes that a memoir is focused on recording memory, while an autobiography is “about a person” (qtd. in Rak 487). These two definitions are not mutually exclusive. Roy Pascal, writing in 1960, suggests that “in the autobiography proper, attention is focused on the self, in the memoir... on others” (5). Yet even within the definition, he invites us to ask what makes something an “autobiography proper”. His terminology allows for memoir to be a kind of autobiography, yet one that—in its focus on others—fails to be a “proper” autobiography. Indeed, James M. Cox would later place memoirs in a “category of autobiography” (124). Autobiography and memoir seem to necessarily include elements of the other.

Lessing includes both terms in the title of *The Memoirs of a Survivor: An Attempt at Autobiography*. This title merely claims an “attempt” at autobiography, which implies that autobiography has a different set of criteria to a memoir. It is, after all, not called *The Attempted Memoirs of a Survivor*. Keeping Pascal’s taxonomy in mind, the inclusion of both terms reflects the focus of Lessing’s work, as it is both a deeply personal investigation of the author’s self, and

a critique of wider society. The divide between autobiography and memoir as a focus on self or the other, usefully categorises this text that does both and calls itself both.

Autobiography as a universal term for self-life writing is complicated by the fact that historically it has been used by critics to describe a canon that is predominantly Western and male. George Gusdorf's early definition of autobiography calls it the "attempt and drama of a man struggling to reassemble his own likeness at a certain moment of his history" (qtd. in Rak 486). Similarly, Phillippe Lejeune defines it as "the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence, when he puts the principal accent upon his own life" (qtd. in Smith and Watson 1). The man struggling with his existence was predominantly a white man, as autobiography was usually seen as something that was a "distinctive product of" or "peculiar to" the West (Albert Stone qtd. in Wong 3; James Olney qtd. in Wong 3). Felicity Nussbaum offers a thorough investigation of the limits of this critical approach in her *The Autobiographical Subject*, noting the dominance of Bunyan, Franklin, Gibbon, and Rousseau in the canon. To use the term autobiography in modern criticism is to acknowledge its history of exclusion.

Anne Goldman notes this historical exclusion—of the working class, people of colour, and particularly women of colour—yet she argues that the definition of autobiography should be expanded (ix; xv). This expansion allows her to continue to use the term to describe her chosen texts and refer to the authors of said texts as "autobiographers" (xvii). Goldman focuses on women, including working class women and women of colour, such as Jesusita Aragon's *La Partera: Story of a Midwife* (1980); Onnie Lee Logan's *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story* (1989); Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912); and Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* (1931). Autobiography has historically been open to this kind of flexibility. John Hunt and Cowden Clarke, the publishers of several early nineteenth-century collections published as *Autobiography. A Collection of the most Instructive and Amusing Lives Ever Published, Written by the Parties Themselves* would include diaries, multivolume memoirs, and works by David Hume (Nussbaum 3). Hertha Dawn Wong also suggests an expansion of autobiography as a term in her work on Native American autobiography (6). She brings it back to its etymological meaning, self-life writing, and argues that Native American works reflect this more expansive definition (6). Wong includes autobiographers such as Nicholas Black Elk, Charles Alexander Eastman, and Mountain Wolf Woman.

Conversely, Smith and Watson argue for continued use of autobiography to mean exclusively Western, retrospective narrative, while using “life writing” or “life narrative” to describe works that fall outside that definition. Julie Rak, too, suggests use of the term “life writing” through parenthesis, but she continues to use autobiography as a general term throughout her article on the genre (485). Smith and Watson’s division of terms is useful for specific and targeted discussion, but at times the use of “self-life writing” as a labelling term is too broad and becomes clunky rather than clarifying. It also does not reflect the popular usage, as one need only glance at the citations page of any work in this field of scholarship to see that “autobiography” appears far more often than “life writing”.

Autobiography, even in its exclusionary sense, offers a useful term for my chosen texts. Pascal calls autobiography an “interplay, a collusion, between past and present” which immediately brings *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* to mind as they are novels in which the past and the present (and the future) are in constant conversation (11). Similarly, despite his limiting description of autobiography, Gusdorf calls strict, logical coherence of chronological time the “original sin” of autobiographers (qtd. in Pascal 16). Temporal negotiations are strongly associated with texts called autobiography, and thus it is a term of usefulness when applied to texts that involve forms of travelling through time.

Gusdorf’s reference to chronological time as “original sin” indicates that, although autobiography may seem at its most basic level to be an account of life events told in order through time, the genre is much more complex than this. Janet Varner Gunn writes that the decisive feature of autobiography is “its anchorage in the phenomenon of temporality” (qtd. Eakin *How Our Lives* 173). Burton Pike suggests that the autobiographical impulse is itself linked to ideas of temporality. He writes that “writers who are especially obsessed with the linear brevity of their own lives” often turn to autobiography as a way of confronting said obsession, and “affirming their identity” (328). Questions of temporality might then be said to both inspire and inhabit the autobiographical form.

Smith and Watson provide an excellent appraisal of early modern autobiography’s interaction with time in their *Reading Autobiography*. Against examples such as Benvenuto Cellini, whose autobiography (1563) follows a chronological story of his life, they set works like Girolamo Cadano’s *The Book of My Life* (1570). While it does follow an overall chronology, Anthony Grafton notes that as an autobiography it is “fluid, chaotic, [and] endlessly digressive”

(xi). Montaigne's *Essays* (1580), which Smith and Watson call the "first specific, sustained self-exploration in Renaissance prose", is temporally interesting in the way that it attempts to marry the past and the present. Montaigne's present self is in an "ongoing dialogue" with his past, in a mode of writing that Smith and Watson call "interlinear" (109).

Autobiography is often linked with chronological order due to its close relationship with the diary form. Early examples of autobiographical writing were performed through journals or diaries. Diary and journal as distinct terms pose the same kinds of problems of exact definition as autobiography and memoir. Joanne Tidwell agrees with Thomas Mallon that the terms are "hopelessly muddled" and concludes that she will use them interchangeably to follow how the writers use them, a lead which I will follow (Mallon qtd. in Tidwell 35). On the face of it, a diary seems to be the epitome of chronological construction. Yet this rigid daily structure of the diary as a medium might be experimented with in order to produce something that is more narratively cohesive. Samuel Pepys, for example, wrote his diary in five stages that included much revision. While his diaries are a narrative of successive days, a more fluid narrative construction permeates them. For example, on the day before the Great Fire of London, Pepys is "horribly frightened" of people he sees at a Fair, whom he calls "young sparks" (qtd. in Daly 64). This is a moment of dramatic irony that would be too coincidental if he did not construct his diary with a more flexible chronology than the blank pages of the medium would suggest.

Contemporaneous with Pepys, John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, first published in 1666, was written as a way of witnessing God's grace (Bruss 34). It is arranged not according to time, but to topic, and Bruss notes that Bunyan preferred to "stress the logical rather than temporal coherence of his work" (47). Bunyan wanted his experiences to be understood in relation to the divine, and in order to do so he "ripped [them] from their temporal context" (Bruss 47). Similarly, we might look at Thomas De Quincey's *Autobiographical Sketches*, published in 1853, in which his chronological structure is based around "epochs" of his life rather than years (Bruss 96). Within this structure, he flashes back to the past to give an account of Irish history, or flashes forward to the future to relate the experiences of his younger brother. Bruss writes that in the middle of *Autobiographical Sketches*, Quincey is "almost constantly in motion, traveling through time and space in his physical adventures and his intellectual speculations" (100). This imagery recalls De Quincey's earlier *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), in which time is similarly irregular (Nadel 192).

Ira Bruce Nadel writes that the “only unifying autobiographical element” of *Confessions* is “that of the unconscious and its datebook, the dream” (193).

Burton Pike explores how the idea of mechanical time overtook the idea of eternal, divine time by the eighteenth century (328-329). History rather than religion, he writes, began to serve as a “cultural divinity” against which autobiographers could explore ideas of identity (Pike 329). This shift is reflected in the writings of Bunyan and De Quincey. Both are temporally experimental. Both authors explore their respective cultural divinities and do so in part by resisting chronological boundaries. Bunyan eschews chronology in order to witness God, while De Quincey eschews chronology in his *Autobiographical Sketches* to witness himself in relation to a wider history of Ireland and his family.

Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) also confronts this idea of mechanical time. Equiano explores how his past as a child in Africa is not temporally cohesive with Western ideas of time. Ian Finseth suggests that Equiano’s past is “outside history” (22). After Equiano’s conversion to Christianity, there is a temporal disjunction between his “original” sense of time and the mechanical one which he now experiences (Finseth 3). Similar ideas can be found in Frederick Douglass’ autobiography. Upon his escape, Douglass writes that he has “now reached a period of [his] life when [he] can give dates (qtd. in Soto 33). Lloyd Pratt contrasts how Douglass’ narrative of progress at this point leads him to realise that “the repetitive, unbroken and unremitting” slave labour that he experiences produces a “nonprogressive experience of time” (qtd. in Jackson 328). Along these same lines, Maria Troy suggests that while Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) is chronologically structured on the surface, different kinds of chronology permeate the narrative and give the impression of cyclical temporality (20). Troy relates this idea to the cyclical oppression that is an obstacle for the “forward impulse” of Harriet Jacob’s life and for the nineteenth-century African American community as a whole (20).

Just as the mechanical idea of linear chronology offered an incomplete understanding of the experience of time for authors such as Douglass and Equiano, Walter Pater would express similar frustrations in the mid-nineteenth century. In his “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* (1873), Pater apologised for the “impressions” that he “substituted for biography” (Helsing 3). Pater wrote that there is a “strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (qtd. in Helsing 3). In other words, “the road connecting the past and the present is no longer an

appropriate image for the self” (Helsing 3). Chronological narrative therefore offers an unsatisfying mold for autobiographical writing.

This weaving and unweaving of chronology can be seen in John Ruskin’s autobiographical *Praeteria*, published around twenty years later (1885-89). Ruskin includes episodes from his life in places where they do not make chronological sense (Nadel 197). Themes and ideas inspire his recollections rather than temporal consistency. Ruskin writes that he lets things “run on” and throughout the work he often pulls back to an earlier date after following a divergent theme (Ruskin 118). This imagery of running on and pulling back brings to mind a weaving and unweaving of chronology. Similarly, Leslie Stephen’s “memory pictures” intervene in the narrative of the *Mausoleum Book* (1895), resulting in an altered chronology (qtd. in Nadel 197). Nadel writes that Edmund Gosse’s *Father and Son* (1907) is also “conscious of how it orders, and re-orders, experience” (199). These works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suggest how autobiographical works might approach chronology as something to be worked, reworked, and explored.

In contrast to this concept of time as something that seems almost intimately lived-in and malleable, we might look at Alice James’ dairies of the late nineteenth century. She gives a retrospective description of her childhood as a time of “perpetual postponement” of hopes (qtd. in L. Anderson 24). Linda Anderson suggests that this experience comments on James’ father’s belief that women live in a different kind of time, an “ahistorical time without past and future” (24). Alice James writes within this narrative of temporal exclusion, not only as a child but as an adult mourning her parents’ death.

Virginia Woolf seems to approach this temporality from the outside as well, as if it is something visible and malleable. Her highly autobiographical *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, is chronologically curious. In the middle section, “Time Passes”, an entire decade seems to go by in the space of a single night. Meanwhile, the clock time of the first and last section seems prolonged. Suzanne Nalbantian suggests that it is a novel that “manipulates time dimensions” (156). Woolf has even played with chronology in the fact that she has shifted the events of her childhood in the late nineteenth century forward in time, so that the war years might “engulf her personal tragedies” (Nalbantian 156). Additionally, within the “Time Passes” section Woolf includes parenthetical insertions that communicate the fates of the characters as if they exist

outside of the distorted time of the novel. We are informed of Mrs Ramsay's death through the use of such parentheses.

Rudyard Kipling uses similar parenthetical statements in his autobiography *Something of Myself* (1937). These parentheticals function as constant reminders of the future, or of Kipling's present as author. For example, while describing an epidemic, Kipling parenthetically adds that "we did not know then that this epidemic was the first warning that the plague ... was on the move out of Manchuria" (63). He uses similar statements to almost prophetically predict the future death of his son, or the future change in Mr Balfour. Throughout the text, then, there is a kind of interwoven temporality that resists the overall chronological structure of the autobiography.

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein similarly follows a kind of overall chronological structure, as indicated by the chapter title, yet she experiments with temporality in different ways. She writes the work as if it exists in the "continuous present" (C. Anderson 34). Corrine Anderson compares this effect to photography, and writes that *Alice B. Toklas* seems to "continually [reproduce] a fleeing moment" (34). It is a novel with a "perpetual here and now" (C. Anderson 34). This seems to divorce it from the traditional signifiers of autobiography, and therefore it might be examined as a technique to help perpetuate Stein's ruse of authorship. It is an autobiography not discovered to be exactly what it is until the final paragraph. Additionally, this final paragraph adds to the temporal exploration of the novel. Anderson writes that the "point of arrival", or the end of the book, "perpetually dissolves into the point of departure, or the book's beginning" (35). This flattening of time, particularly regarding the perpetual present of the novel, can also be found in Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964), in which Stein herself appears. Tony Fong writes that Hemingway's indiscretions are not given a "veil of pastness" because of this perpetual present, and suggests that Hemingway refuses to distance himself from them (277). They are sharper and more present (Fong 288). Mechanical time seems elusive in these autobiographies of the here and now.

This dissolution of time can also be found in Vladimir Nabokov's memoir *Invitation of a Memory* (1951), which Andrew Field suggests is "more artwork than personal history" (qtd. in Bruss 135). He writes, "I do not believe in time", which unsurprisingly leads to an autobiography of unexpected temporal construction (qtd. in Bruss 147). Nabokov builds his past up as something vivid, cinematic and elusive. Once established, his past then falls apart with "wild

applause” (Nabokov qtd. in Bruss 135). Bruss calls it a “delicately worked chimera” that is built only to shatter at the end of each chapter (135). This image of the chimera is an apt description for the chronology of Nabokov’s memoir. He pays little attention to the rules of historical clock time. For example, in Chapter 6, Nabokov describes a butterfly hunt that starts in the Russian countryside of 1910 until “gradually, wordlessly” transforming into the American Rockies of 1943. Even as each chapter of his autobiography begins at a chronologically later date, within the chapter, Nabokov moves between past and present. Describing a telephone in a hotel in the past makes him wonder what would happen if he placed a call to it from his desk in the present. The image Nabokov wants to leave us with is one of a magic carpet that he likes to fold over on itself, so as to “superimpose one part of the pattern on another” (qtd. in Bruss 147). Thus the countryside of 1910 might become another geographically distant countryside in 1943. “Let visitors trip”, Nabokov, wittily writes—the word “trip” might suggest a fall, a visit, a hallucination, or all three.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Words* (1963) is an autobiography that seems particularly inclined to let visitors trip. Phillippe Lejeune and John Sturrock both use it as a leading example of an autobiography that is chronologically interesting (Eakin *Fictions* 166). Sartre’s childhood self, whom he calls Poulou, becomes infatuated with a biography of famous men which continually references their future while describing their past. As a result, he decides “to live backwards” (qtd. in Eakin *Fictions* 151). In a moment that is reminiscent of Stein, Mary Queen of Scots, and T.S. Eliot, Sartre writes that “[i]n my end is my beginning” (152). Of particular note to Paul Eakin, Lejeune and Sturrock is a scene where Poulou describes touching his tomb with one hand and his cradle with another (Eakin *Fictions* 154-155). Lejeune also suggests that Sartre “violated” calendar chronology in his childhood, while Eakin suggests that this is perhaps rather an attempt at fidelity to the “reality of remembered experience” (Eakin *Fictions* 66-167).

Slaughterhouse-Five and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* were published not long after Sartre’s *The Words*. Both Lejeune and Sturrock, writing in the 1970s, suggest that autobiography was too connected to chronology, and needed to experiment with new forms (Eakin *Fictions* 166). Sturrock suggested that autobiographers are scared to break chronological order because they believe that “random order means no order at all” (55). Not only are Vonnegut and Lessing’s texts examples of this chronological experimentation, but in their work autobiography has a more complicated relationship with temporality and linear narrative than might at first be

assumed. *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, then, occupy space in a genre that has a tradition of chronological innovation.

While I have discussed memoirs, diaries and other works that would be excluded from a limited definition of autobiography, it remains a consistent term for the genre in which chronological ordering is a kind of “original sin” (Gusdorf qtd. in Pascal 16). In my use of it, I also acknowledge that *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs* both adhere to even the narrow definition of autobiography used by Smith and Watson of autobiography as a “Western retrospective life narrative”. Doris Lessing is comfortable using the term to describe her own work, particularly in regards to *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*, her more traditional, two-part autobiography. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* includes the term in its subtitle, and it is not much of a leap to suggest that the kind of autobiography *Memoirs* is “attempting” was later realised in *Under My Skin*. At the very least, *Memoirs* is a book that is both an autobiography and a memoir, bearing in mind that any definitions of the two suggest that each somehow contains the other to various degrees.

Of course, my reason for choosing *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs* for this thesis is precisely because they are not typical autobiographies. It is autobiography, however, that they are gesturing towards. Autobiography is a genre of experimentation, and as such the relatively recent field of critical scholarship is still having trouble even defining what makes an autobiography. Michael Sprinkler writes that autobiography is fundamentally unstable and therefore unclassifiable, calling it a “shifting, borderless locale [where] concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text” (qtd. in Eakin *Fictions* 2). The confusion in the terminology, and difference in practice, reflect how confusing it is as a genre, and this makes my chosen texts even more fruitful as they exist in and alongside a genre that invites experimentation and boundary crossing in its temporal ordering and even within its own terms. *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs* inhabit these “shifting, borderless locale[s]”.

Science fiction definitions and history

Just as autobiography is a tricky term to wrestle with, I will also take some time here to explain why I am referring to each work as science fiction. Vonnegut famously decried being referred to as a writer in the genre: “I became a so-called science fiction writer when someone decreed that I was a science fiction writer. I did not want to be classified as one” (MWC 38). In

an early essay on “Science Fiction”, Vonnegut wrote that he was a “soreheaded occupant of the drawer labelled ‘science fiction’ ... and [he] would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal” (*WFG* 1). Eric S. Rabkin offers one explanation for not associating with science fiction: “a typical word-rate for publication of ‘fiction’ in a first-line magazine was about five cents; for science fiction two” (15). Additionally, the science fiction with which Vonnegut did not want to associate was science fiction of an earlier era than the one he was writing in by the time he published *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969. It is a matter of inevitability that his war novel will be called science fiction. It, after all, has aliens and spaceships in it.

Lessing is much more comfortable with the category. In the preface to *Shikasta* (1979) she writes that science fiction—or “space fiction”—is the “most original branch of literature now; it is inventive and witty” (ix). Her respect for the genre can be traced through her work: as in the preface in *Shikasta*, in *Under My Skin*, in her appearance in the BBC documentary “Doris Lessing: The Reluctant Heroine”.

For my father, who used to sit,
hour after hour, night after night,
outside our house in Africa, watching
the stars. ‘Well,’ he would say,
‘if we blow ourselves up, there’s plenty
more where we came from!’ (*Shikasta* iv)

Lessing’s early novels do not spend much time watching the stars. Beginning with *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), she began to move into a science-fiction mode which culminated in the *Canopus in Argos* series (1979-1983). Lessing’s writing moved closer to one of her favourite novels, read when she was young in Africa, at the same time as she and her father would stargaze: Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* (1930). Lessing called it “the only book worth reading that has been written since the war” (*UMS* 140).

Yet, is it appropriate to refer to *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Memoirs of a Survivor* as science fiction? How do these novels interact with a definition of science fiction? This requires some unpacking, just as the term autobiography did. Science fiction is an historically muddy area of criticism. Patrick Parrinder calls it a “confused concept and a confused field” (Introduction

vii). Adam Roberts writes that science fiction is a term that “resists easy definition” (*Science Fiction* 1).¹ He notes that while it is easy to define science fiction as a “fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature”, it is much more difficult to specify the ways in which science fiction is “different from other imaginative and fantastic literatures” (1). Edward James, Damon Knight and Norman Spinrad all offer definitions (or at least offer preliminary definitions) of science fiction as “what is marketed as SF”; “what we point to when we say it”; “anything published as science fiction” (qtd. in Roberts 1-2). Eric S. Rabkin in his chapter “defining science fiction” includes a link to a website that has collected fifty-two different, published statements that define the genre (15). Fittingly for a genre of ever-advancing technology, this website is no longer live—although a mirror can still be accessed through an archive. The author of the website notes that these definitions were collected “in the bad old days where [sic] there were no flashy www interfaces to the net” (Gökçe). Many of the scholars I will go on to discuss are included among the fifty-two. It is very apt. Their definitions of the genre were gathered through technological predecessors to the World Wide Web, later collated on a website that is now only accessible through an archival system named after a fictional time-traveling device: the Wayback Machine.

We might take our cue for defining science fiction from the Wayback Machine. Roger Luckhurst notes that an historicist definition of the genre “necessarily products a broader, more inclusive definition”; yet this raises its own problems (*Science Fiction* 11). As Roberts notes, there are “very many different histories of the genre”:

One might see SF as a predominantly male, adolescent, machine-orientated type of writing; another as a mode through which groups who have often been socially marginalized can find imaginative expression; [another] would be less interested in the content of SF texts than the form – not so much the aliens in the story as the textual strategies of alienation or metaphorisation. (3)

The starting point for any history of science fiction is also debated. Science fiction might have its beginnings thousands of years ago, with the ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c.2000BC) or Lucian’s 2nd century AD’s *Trips to the Moon* (Roberts “Science” 37; Tynm 41). Roberts notes that the difficulty with pre-1600s texts like the latter—and others such as Cicero’s

¹ Hereafter, all references to Adam Roberts are assumed to be from his 2006 *Science Fiction*, and references to his 2016 *The History of Science Fiction* will be specified.

The Dream of Cicero (51 BC); Plutarch's *The Circle of the Moon* (c. 80); or the moon voyage in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1534)—is that their version of outer space was “conceived as a pure and religious realm” (39). Roberts grants Johann Kepler's *Somnium* (1634, written c.1600) as a more fitting early beginning to science fiction, in which Kepler writes an “imaginary natural history of the moon” (39). Kepler, an astronomer, backed up his writing with scientific notes. *Somnium* was followed by a huge number of novels concerned with voyages around the solar system. For example, the works of Bishop William Godwin, John Wilkins, and Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac fit this mold (Roberts 40).

Other critics place the origins of science fiction within the gothic, itself a sub-genre of the Romantic movement. Brian W. Aldiss locates the birth of science fiction as occurring in the “heart of the English romantic movement with Shelley's *Frankenstein*”, and Paul Alkon simply writes “science fiction starts with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*” (qtd. in Tymn 42; qtd. in Roberts 42). Mary Shelley's novel, published in 1818, is like other works of gothic romance published during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but she turns to the scientific rather than the supernatural for her frights. Shelley is writing at the tail end of the Industrial Revolution, a revolution that gave rise to a “vision of the future altered by technology” (Tymn 42). Writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fitz-James O'Brien, Edward Bellamy, Ambrose Bierce, and Mark Twain also engaged with the nineteenth century's “fascination with ideas of science and progress” by experimenting with science fiction. Jules Verne and H.G. Wells did more than just experiment, and came to define the pre-history of the genre. Verne captured the hope and “optimistic spirit” of the nineteenth century in regards to technology, while Wells' fiction tended towards the pessimistic as he challenged unfettered technological progress. Parrinder calls Wells specifically the “pivotal figure [who] has done as much to shape SF as any other single literary influence” (qtd. in Roberts 45). The two authors gave a “measure of respectability” to science fiction (Tymn 43). Roberts notes that it was Wells and Verne who kick-started the “actual growth of SF as a category in its own right, which is to say as something more than the occasional single novel” (44).

Yet even at the close of the nineteenth century this genre still lacked a name. The term “science fiction”, although originating with William Wilson in 1851, was popularised by Hugo Gernsback. Gernsback used the term in June of 1929 in the first issue of *Science Wonder Stories*—evolving from his early label “scientifiction” (Bould and Vint 1; Tymn 45; 61). He used

the term to mean “the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (qtd. in Rabkin 17). Gernsback’s “scientifiction” is a prototypical definition, giving examples of authors that have certain aspects in common such that we might recognise a kind of “ideal which they all more or less closely embody” (Rabkin 17). Rabkin suggests that such a definition, while often “the best we can do”, leads to “arguing at the margins” over the specifics (17-18). Yet Gernsback’s definition is useful to him, as an editor of a science-fiction magazine, and the magazine itself worked to define the genre as science fiction in the 1930s was *what was found in the pages of Science Wonder Stories*, just as for George Hay it is “what you find on the shelves in the library marked science fiction” (qtd. in Rabkin 20).

Pulp magazines such as Gernsback’s *Thrill Book* (the first to “specialise” in the genre) and later John W. Campbell Jr’s tenure at *Astounding Stories* were the primary breeding ground for science fiction in the early twentieth century, (Roberts 51). Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories* was—fitting with his definition—filled with reprints of Verne, Wells and Poe, as well as newer works by writers such as E. E. Smith (whose *Skylark* series “invented” the space opera), David H. Keller, Ray Cummings, Stanton Coblentz, Jack Williamson, and Phillip Francis Nowlan (Roberts 54). A decade later, John W. Campbell became the editor of *Astounding Stories*, and his tenure at the magazine marked the “golden age” of science fiction—the period from 1938-1950 (Tymn 46). Campbell published authors such as Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke and A. E. van Vogt during this period. Roberts connects this period in publishing with the growing fortunes of America during the post-war period, noting that science fiction at the time was an “especially American mode of literature [that] took on some of the energy and ebullience of its national outlook” (56).

Campbell’s “demands for quality” in his publication contributed to what Tymn calls a maturation of the science-fiction genre, yet even as this golden age drew to a close in the early 1950s, the genre still lacked an academic or critical presence. In their own attempts to define the genre, Gernsback and Campbell Jr wrote of science fiction as a hybrid of nonfiction and imaginary romance (James 22). Gernsback, in addition to his early prototypical definition, wrote of it as a form that educated “the public to the possibilities of science and the influence of science on life ... science fiction would make people happier ... make them more tolerant” (qtd. in Roberts 52). Campbell shared this view that science fiction “should educate as it entertained”

(Roberts 52). In 1965, James Blish published a discussion of “the critical literature” of science fiction and includes only five texts (James 19). These are Damon Knight’s *In Search of Wonder* (1956); William Atheling, Jr’s *The Issue at Hand* (1964); Sam Mankowitz’ *Explorers of the Infinite* (1963); an essay collection, *The Science Fiction Novel* (1959), edited by Basil Davenport; and Kingsley Amis’ *New Maps of Hell* (1960). Amis’ work was based on a series of lectures he gave in 1959, only a year after the first Conference on Science Fiction was held in New York (Tymn 48). Of the five texts included by Blish, only Amis’ was widely published and read. Tymn notes that *New Maps of Hell* caused “various surprised popular media” to begin to reconsider their policies of “ignoring or denigrating the science fiction which had somehow reached their desks” (48).

The Knight and Atheling Jr volumes (the latter a nom de plume of Blish himself) are described by Edward James as “rigorous in their exposure of poor writing” but not concerned with how science fiction functioned “historically or critically within literature as a whole” (19-20). James also notes that Blish and other contemporary critics found Mankowitz to be a writer with “little critical sense ... and a startling ability to produce errors and misreadings” (20). While Amis’ *New Maps of Hell* is more widely read and more robust than these other texts, James notes that although Amis was an academic as well as a novelist, to locate him as a contrast to the other writers would be “wholly misleading” (20). James writes that the tone of Amis’ work is “that of a fan: despite his sophistication and his strong awareness of the poor quality of much science fiction, he was clearly inspired by the idea of making science fiction appear ‘respectable’” (20). Amis also focused, like Gernsback and Campbell, on science fiction as an instrument for social changes: “a literature of warning” (Amis 133).

Darko Suvin is the first critic to give science fiction what Edward James calls a “respectable language” (27). He famously defines science fiction as such:

SF in general—through its long history in different contexts—can be defined as a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment, and ... it is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional ‘novum’ (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic. (qtd. in Parrinder *Suvin* 36)

The connection of estrangement and cognition is key here. Suvin borrows the concept of estrangement from the Russian formalists, although Suvin employs it differently in that the estrangement can be achieved simply through a non-realistic plot (James 39). Suvin's concept of the *novum*—the “new” or “new thing” that causes a “point of difference” in science fiction, such as a time machine or a spaceship—is the main formal device of Suvin's definition, and is often the primary cause of this non-realistic world (Roberts 7-8). Suvin later clarified his definition, noting that the *novum* is “meaningful only to the extent that it effectively intervenes in the author's historical context ... [it] has revolutionary effect only if it functions in relationship to the changing, historically specific structures of feeling out of which it develops” (Moylan 57-59). Yet Roberts argues that the *novum* “need not necessarily be a piece of technology”, giving the example of “a different model of gender” as the *novum* in Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (7). Roberts also suggests the *novum* in *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a “character who has come loose in time, in some sense, and whose consciousness is hurtled backwards and forwards within the time frame of their own life” (22). Such a *novum* might just as easily be applied to *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. This *novum* often causes readerly estrangement from the world of the novel, although Parrinder notes the limits of this definition when he writes that “estranged fiction needs to change our view of our own condition rather than momentarily dazzle us with a superficially unfamiliar world” (Suvin 40).

The estrangement, in whatever form it takes, must necessarily be linked with cognition or else the novel would be incomprehensible. For Suvin, it is this “co-presence that allows SF both relevance to our world and the position to challenge the ordinary, the taken-for-granted” (Roberts 8). Suvin also defines science fiction as a genre of “cognitive logic”, that is “rational rather than emotional or instinctual” and that contains the “scientific method, the logical working through of a particular premise” (9). Suvin draws a line here that I resist drawing in my own use of the term as it would likely exclude *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs*, two texts that are hardly logical in their application of time travel. Bould and Vint note that Suvin's definition is restrictive, “dismissing works that are commonly considered to be SF” (4). They write, tongue in cheek, that disagreeing with Suvin is “a considerable part of SF scholarship” (17).

Robert Scholes, rather than stressing the “science”, focuses on the “metaphorical strain of SF” (Roberts 10). He employs the term “fabulation”, using it to mean “fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet [that] returns to confront

that known world in some cognitive way” (qtd. in Roberts 10). Scholes notes that this category can also include non-science-fiction writers, and that “structural fabulation” in science fiction is more specific: “[it is] neither scientific in its methods, nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science” (qtd. in Roberts 10).

The sticking point here, in regards to applying a definition of science fiction to *Slaughterhouse* or *Memoirs*, is that neither contains much in the way of actual science. While Suvin and Scholes orientate their definitions around earlier works in the genre, New Wave science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s—the decades in which my two texts were written—had a “decreasing emphasis on science as the defining feature of the genre” and an increasing use of “SF images, ideas and techniques to articulate urgent political concerns” (Bould and Vint 145). These works were often concerned with gender and sexuality, race relations, environmentalism, or the anti-war movement. Roberts suggests that “there has been a shift in the role of the scientific *novum*; it now connects its readership less with a particular discourse of ‘science’ and more ... with a materialist, symbolic fiction for reconsidering the world” (25). Sarah Lefanu, regarding feminist science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, defines it as a genre that “enabled explorations of alternative realities” (Bould and Vint 134). Roberts crystalises this question of definition when he writes that “[d]efinitions of SF, like histories of SF, are manifold not because critics and historians of the form are confused ... but because SF itself is a wide-ranging, multivalent and endlessly cross-fertilising cultural idiom” (2).

The New Wave of science fiction is a primarily British movement that began in 1964 with Michael Moorcock’s editorship of the *New Worlds* magazine (Merrick 102). It remains a period of some contention. For some scholars, it is the “single most important development” in the genre, which “transformed” the landscape (Priest qtd. in Merrick 102; Silverberg qtd. in Merrick 102). Yet there is a question of whether this New Wave also happened in the United States. Helen Merrick argues that over-privileging the New Wave can “obscure or ignore traditions of Campbellian sf and more counter-traditional works from the 40s and 50s” (104). Other critics argue that the New Wave as a whole is a “meaningless generalization”, or suggest that it never “really” existed (Delany and Russ qtd. in Merrick 102; Dozois, and Ellison qtd. in Merrick 102). J. A. Sutherland writes in the late 1970s that science fiction in general “has eroded as a self-evident category”—or perhaps if it was never quite self-evident, science fiction post-

1960s is no longer *whatever is published in the pages of Astounding Stories* (162). It is a period that, Andrew M. Butler writes, “clearly resists any label” (*Solar* 4).

Nonetheless, if science fiction is “what you find on the shelves in the library marked science fiction”, the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the paperback novel and as such these shelves were packed with more science fiction than ever before (Rabkin 20; Sutherland 165). Among these works were many that Brian W. Aldiss describes as “more land locked and cerebral ... with problems posed rather than solved” (qtd. in Butler *Solar* 3). Darren Jorgensen refers to the “social sf of the US” alongside the British New Wave (283). Regardless of label, these decades saw a “broadening of the style, themes, and tropes typical of sf” (Merrick 102). Brooks Landon notes that, in what he calls “soft agenda SF”, the attention is not on scientific *novum* but “ideological, political, and social issues” (qtd. in Merrick 110).

Alongside these social issues, the New Wave era is also framed by scholars as science fiction’s avant-garde—although this is couched in terms of the unsuccessful; for example, Rob Latham refers to it as “infamous” and Roger Luckhurst the “failed avant-garde” (32; qtd. in Butler *Solar* 6). J.G. Ballard wrote perhaps the “quintessential mission statement” of this era: “I’d like to see more psycho-literary ideas ... private time-systems, synthetic psychologies and space-times, more of the somber half-worlds one glimpses in the paintings of schizophrenics” (qtd. in Latham 33). In Ballard’s mission statement we can find a kind of science fiction that clicks with *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs*. Both are novels in which the protagonists have private time-systems. They time travel without the use of a Wellsian time machine, or the WABAC machine from *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*. Lessing called *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) a work of “inner space fiction” on its title page. Vonnegut too, Latham notes, was “already writing a form of cutting-edge sf prior to Ballard’s ‘inner space’ manifesto” (34).

Andrew M. Butler discusses *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Memoirs* in a chapter on metafiction and postmodernism in science fiction. This is one of very few examples of the two works being discussed on almost the same page. The use of metafiction, more obvious in Vonnegut but still found in Lessing, contributes to the “undecidability between reality and fiction” that Butler gives as a partial definition of postmodernism (“Postmodernism” 137). Fredric Jameson published his works on postmodernism several years after the later of my two texts (*Memoirs*) appeared in print. His notion of postmodernism as a form in which “stable identities collapse” applies to my novels, as does Jean Baudrillard’s description of the “divided

individual [located] in a kind of flux of all coordinates [such as] mental, spatial-temporal” (Butler “Postmodernism” 141-142). John W. Aldridge writes that in postmodernism almost “everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration ... characters inhabit a dimension of structurelessness” (qtd. in Lewis 123). This distortion of structure applies nicely to *Memoirs* and *Slaughterhouse*, and Barry Lewis notes that postmodern fiction “disrupts” the past, “corrupts” the present, and is “full of ... temporal disorder” (124-125).

Slaughterhouse-Five and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* are both texts that live on the borders. These are the same borders that Samuel R. Delany is discussing when he decries the “notorious” difficulties of categorising texts by genre (235). Vonnegut and Lessing make nonsense of these delineations—writing the “borderline” cases that Delany suggest arise “so often that all borders are finally obliterated” (235). Delany’s solution to this problem is to use instead “a set of distinctions between reading protocols, between ways of reading” (235). He is still writing of “distinctions” here, and as such his positioning of genre as a way-of-reading is perhaps only semantic. Delany’s reading protocols suggest the literalisation of metaphor in science fiction. Delany suggests that the science-fiction mode of reading is different from other modes of reading due to this literalisation. He quotes Harlan Ellison’s experience reading Heinlein: “‘The door dilated.’ I read across it, and was two lines down before I realized what the image had been ... It didn’t open, it *irised*! Dear God, now I knew I was in a future world” (qtd. in Delany 113). In science fiction, the door dilating “must be interpreted in terms of the physically explainable” rather than the metaphorical (113).

Ellison’s science-fiction reading experience is a perfect encapsulation of Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement. I return to it here to draw on a recent work of criticism by Seo-Young Chu. Chu posits that there are an “infinite number” of what she calls “cognitively estranging referent[s]” (245-246). She notes that “Fuji apples, pennies, maple leaves, toothbrushes” are examples of references that are “completely susceptible to cognition”—in other words, simple to describe and represent (245). They form one end of a spectrum for which the other end is referents that are “completely estranging” and unrepresentable such as the eternally remote past or future, and what happens after death. Chu focuses on the middle of the spectrum, where referents are estranging but still able to be represented. The means of this representation is science fiction. Chu suggests that metaphors are “systematically literalized, substantiated, and consolidated in science fiction as ontological features of narrative worlds” (11). In science fiction, apostrophe

becomes telepathy, synesthesia becomes a paranormal sensorium, personification becomes the animation of a humanoid artifact (Chu 11-12). This literalisation of metaphor occurs on a greater level in regards to the cognitively estranging referents that inform many works of science fiction: the representation of virtual entities (cyberspace), the sublime (outer space), traumatic memories that “escape immediate experience”, double-consciousness, spiritual doubt, dreams, imagination, the fourth dimension (Chu 7; 245-247). Science fiction can render these referents “both for representation and understanding” where realism cannot (Chu 7). Yet Chu suggests that realism is merely a “low-intensity variety of science fiction” — while its objects are “readily susceptible to representation ... to represent [a] pencil in all its unmediated pencilness ... is impossible” (Chu 6-7). Chu gives science fiction the ultimate broadening of definition, as works of detective fiction, gothic horror and fantasy are encompassed in a mode of literature that is defined by its “capacity to generate memetic accounts of aspects of reality that defy straightforward representation” (9).

What I have discussed so far has been an exercise in referents that defy straightforward representation. *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* are works of fractured, missing, and claustrophobic memories that similarly resist straightforward representation. Science fiction provides the tools for this inexpressibility to be expressed. Steven Connor writes that postmodernism reminds him of being told as a child that “the way to make out the elusive color of a faint star was not to look directly at it, but to look just to its side” (2). Autobiography and science fiction are both elusive stars. Extending this metaphor would place these genres somewhere far out in space. Delany’s approach to genre only asks: “Is it clear, or is it unclear, that a text reads richly under a particular protocol complex?” (Delany 236). *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs* read richly as science-fiction novels that generically treat time and space as malleable, unfixed. They also read richly as autobiographies striving towards expression of a self. Connor’s stargazing metaphor offers guidance in the sense that it tells us to look to the side—to the porous borders.

“Unstuck in Time”: Temporal Ordering and Trauma in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

At the end of the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut writes that his novel “begins like this: *Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time*” (22; emphasis in original). What follows is a narrative that, like its protagonist’s life, is not in chronological order. It is organised in such a way that a coherent story order is difficult to reconstruct. In exploring how *Slaughterhouse* is structured, I found myself necessarily resorting to alternative methods of examining the text that, while they could not solve all the difficulties, at least offered new meanings.

Vonnegut had already experimented with structure before writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*. His second novel, *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), makes use of a device called chrono-synclastic infundibulum, a point in which all of time and space exist simultaneously. His next novel, *Mother Night* (1961), contains dramatic shifts in space and time between many of its short chapters. Jerome Klinkowitz suggests that the structure of *Mother Night* remains coherent in part because it interacts with a “major international event”, as “the war’s history is generally known” (54). *Slaughterhouse-Five* might be examined in the same light, as the Second World War gives the novel a familiar historical backdrop in relation to which the time shifts can be positioned. Klinkowitz notes that *Mother Night* is a novel filled with repetitions, and much the same can be said about *Slaughterhouse*. Certain phrases are used and reused. Big dogs bark “somewhere” five times, and limbs are “blue and ivory” seven times.² Either breath or corpses smell like “mustard gas and roses”—or “roses and mustard gas”— four times.³ The bombed Dresden is compared to the surface of the moon ten times, and four times we are told, “If you’re ever in Cody, Wyoming, just ask for Wild Bob!”⁴ The phrase “so it goes” is used over one hundred times. It follows any moment of death, and is used to refer to such diverse things as Billy’s father, a glass of water, and literature (24; 101; 205). It is a phrase borrowed from the aliens of *Slaughterhouse-Five*—the Tralfamadorians—for whom all moments “past, present, and future, always have existed,

² Dogs bark: 42, 48, 75, 82, 168; blue and ivory: 28, 65, 72, 73, 75, 80, 148.

³ 4, 7, 73, 214.

⁴ Moon: 59, 178, 179, 180, 194, 195, 198, 213; Wild Bob: 67, 188, 206, 212.

always will exist”, and thus, a dead person is merely “in bad condition in that particular moment” (27). Their response is to say “so it goes” (27).

Being simultaneously alive and dead is a repeated condition in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. When Billy is on practice manoeuvres, his troop is spotted by a “theoretical enemy”, and thus everyone in the group is “theoretically dead” (31). Similarly, everyone is given a number when Billy arrives at the POW camp in Germany and, as a result of the process, Billy stops being legally dead and becomes legally alive (91). Later, thought to be in a coma, Billy is “dead to the world ... but not actually dead” (105). These repetitions reiterate the central conceit of the novel: that all time happens simultaneously, and therefore there is no right or wrong order in which to experience events. Life is not followed by death. A war movie and, by extension a war novel, might just as well be viewed “backwards”, as Billy does when he becomes “slightly unstuck in time” and watches American bombers fly over a German city to “[shrink] the fires” and heal the wounded (73; 74). The novel invites us to compare it to the reading experience of the Tralfamadorians, who read “all at once”, through a process in which discrete symbols when seen simultaneously “produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral” (88). Vonnegut calls *Slaughterhouse-Five* “somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore” on the title page.

What would it mean to read a novel in the “manner of tales” of Tralfamadore? As Wolfgang Iser writes, a “whole text can never be perceived at any one time” (108). It is an alien way of reading and, fittingly, as a work of postmodern science fiction, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, is generically estranged or defamiliarised (Suvin 375; Freedman 61). Shklovsky emphasises how defamiliarisation of story can arise because of repetition in the discourse (32-34). Such repetition and defamiliarisation prolongs the process of perception. The simultaneity of reading as the Tralfamadorians do—“all at once”—is, of course, impossible for the human reader, but the structure of repetitions in the novel help to generate a similar effect (88). Jerome Klinkowitz suggests that, in *Mother Night*, the repetitions mean that “the novel’s readers begin sensing, perhaps subconsciously, that somehow all this disconnected action is holding together” (56). The frequency of certain phrases in *Slaughterhouse* provides events with similarity where they are otherwise temporally and spatially distinct. Events cannot be read concurrently, but the structure of repetition acts as a reminder of previous—or future—events’ importance and existence. This

“holding together” acts as a kind of all-at-once-ness, wherein the process of holding suggests connection as well as a kind of continual retention of certain repeated moments.

Of course, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is still a novel with a beginning, middle, and end. It is in the difference between the beginning, middle, and end of the discourse, and the beginning, middle, and end of the story that my interest lies. There are different kinds of temporal ordering in the novel, or different kinds of time travel. The first are moments of analepsis or prolepsis where the narrative moves in time and space *without* Billy. We are told of Roland Weary’s past, or Edgar Derby’s future. These are anachronous moments and, although they are usually used to give information about other characters, early in the novel Billy’s life is briefly chronicled without him travelling in time to the events alongside the jumps in the discourse. This selective chronology of his birth, war service, and abduction also serves to help orientate the upcoming time-travel sections by giving the reader a few touchstones of historical order.

The time-travel sections are the most prevalent form of temporal ordering in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Billy travels *with* the narrative discourse. He opens his eyes, or more than once goes from “total dark to total light” and finds himself in a different time and space (90). Due to this method of travel, one of the first scenes in the novel is not taken up again until much later, when Billy’s daughter Barbara asks, “Did you hear what I said?” (131). What Barbara said—for Billy and in the narrative discourse—happened rather a long time ago, Billy having awoken in 1968 after falling asleep in the POW camp in 1945. In another example of this kind of time jump, Billy passes out drunk in his car and finds himself ready for death on the German front lines (47). If one takes the story of the novel to be Billy’s own experiences, then the story order and the discourse order mirror each other in this kind of temporal ordering. When Billy becomes unstuck in time it is not anachronistic. Seo-Young Chu writes that the “disorder of events is happening simultaneously at the levels of *fabula* and *syuzhet*. The events themselves occur out of chronological order” (177).

When Billy time travels, he experiences a chronology that is different to the chronology of historical time. David Wittenberg writes that a time-travel narrative “at once demands and refuses reconstitution as ‘historical’ sequence” (129). It is relatively simple to abstract a basic historical sequence from *Slaughterhouse*, as it is very similar to the one given in the first few pages of Billy’s narrative. He is born in 1922 in Ilium, witnesses the firebombing of Dresden in 1945, and dies in Chicago in 1976. Yet, unlike most classical narratives, the story order does not

correspond with the historical sequence. The first, anachronistic kind of temporal ordering alters the relationship between story order and discourse order, but does not alter the relationship between story and historical sequence. Billy, and therefore the story, does not move with the discourse. On the other hand, the second, non-anachronistic kind of temporal ordering *does* alter the relationship between story and historical sequence. In Billy's story, and in the narrative discourse, the German front lines in 1945 can directly succeed passing out drunk in 1961. For historical sequence, of course, and indeed for the three soldiers marching with Billy in Germany, 1945 must always *precede* 1961.

Slaughterhouse-Five, then, travels using mechanics that need not create anachrony, but might, and usually include a similar movement of the protagonist, but might not. This dynamic makes it difficult to abstract a coherent story order. Billy is present in almost every scene in the novel, but the question of whether he time travelled to that scene, at what point, from where, and in what iteration we find him, renders many moments chronologically incoherent. The shared universe of many of Vonnegut's novels—the character of Rumfoord in *Slaughterhouse* is a relation of the Rumfoord in *The Sirens of Titan*, and Kilgore Trout shows up in many of his works—only further complicates the story order of *Slaughterhouse*, if we take it to be a story that must also be abstracted from many of his other novels in order to be completely reconstructed. Brian Richardson posits alternative temporal categories to help make sense of narratives that “cannot be contained within a Genettean framework” (47). These categories are not necessarily distinct, and as such, I will employ the use of several to decode the chronology of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Richardson's first category is the “circular” narrative, in which an “ending returns to its own beginning, and thus continues infinitely” (48). This immediately prompts a connection with the Tralfamadorian novel, in which it can be said that the beginning *is* the end, just as death *is* life. Even more obvious is the song Vonnegut includes in the first chapter that loops “on to infinity” (3). Moments of this kind of infinity occur throughout the novel. Billy has “seen his birth and death many times” (23). Before he is shot giving a speech, Billy tells the crowd, “[f]arewell, hello, farewell, hello”, and says, “it is time for me to be dead for a little while—and then live again” (142–143). As Richardson notes, circular texts “problematize Genette's notion of frequency ... since they are infinitely [repeated] instances of otherwise singulative events” (48). The circular category is not a perfect solution for *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The events that are

repeated are different events insofar as, for Billy, each is a distinct experience. Even as he is powerless to change what happens, he retains his knowledge of previous iterations and indeed of future events. With full knowledge that Dresden will be firebombed, or that a plane will crash, he still serves in the army or boards the plane. Billy's consciousness travels in time through his own story, but Billy's body does not travel with him. Two Billys cannot be in the same place at the same time. Or, to complicate it, Billy can live the same moment over again, but there is only ever *one* Billy in the moment, and still they cannot readily be said to be *different* moments each time. There is only one firebombing of Dresden, and only one Billy experiences it, but he experiences it many times.

While the events of *Slaughterhouse-Five* are not precisely what Brian Richardson calls "singulative", they also do not result in the kind of incompatible storylines that are contained by his "contradictory" categorisation. Richardson employs the category to deal with non-mimetic narratives such as in which a man may die "in 1956 *and* in 1967", but Billy Pilgrim cannot change when he dies (48; emphasis in original). The laws of a Tralfamadorian universe would not allow it, just as the aliens themselves cannot stop one of their own from wiping out the universe with the push of a button: "He has *always* pressed it, and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him" (117). Additionally, this is an example of the generic rules that science fiction can impose on a text: the laws of a Tralfamadorian universe are entirely fictional yet they are laws that, once built, are immalleable and fixed. Billy cannot change "the past, the present [or] the future" as to do so would violate the laws of world that Vonnegut has built (60). Richardson quotes Ursula Heise and suggests that contradictory narratives "project into the narrative present and past an experience of time which is normally only available for the future ... branching off continuously into multiple possibilities and alternatives" (49). The inalterability of the events in *Slaughterhouse*—but the alterability of Billy—does not quite map to this category.

Richardson uses "differential" chronology to describe texts in which "one chronology is superimposed on another, larger one", giving examples of texts in which a character ages faster or slower than the world around him or her (50). At points in *Slaughterhouse*, time does seem to stretch or condense. "They're playing with the clocks again", Montana Wildhack says on Tralfamadore as the aliens adjust the mechanical clocks in order to disorientate the humans (208). Billy's mother asks, "[h]ow did I get so *old*?" and Billy himself in 1967 wonders,

“[w]here have all the years gone?” (44; 57; emphasis in original). Time stretches for Vonnegut himself in the first chapter, when “time would not pass” in a motel: “[t]he second hand on my watch would twitch once, and a year would pass” (20). These are all minor moments of differential chronology, as characters express the sensation of time moving at a different rate for them than it does for the rest of the world. A kind of differential chronology does occur on Tralfamadore; Billy is never missed from Earth as, “he could be on Tralfamadore for years, and still be away from Earth for only a microsecond” (26). Yet this category cannot be applied to *Slaughterhouse* as a whole. Billy is living much the same duration as everybody else, he is simply living it in a different order. He understands his life to be infinite, from a Tralfamadorian perspective, but this is the case for all living creatures. While *Slaughterhouse* does not exactly fit into these categories, together they provide a useful method of analysing the mechanics of different elements of the novel’s chronology. Richardson’s remaining categories are of less use, although antinomic narrative—in which the story order is “simply the opposite” of the discourse order—might be used to describe the backwards war movie (49).

I suggest another way of looking at story order in *Slaughterhouse* that, like Richardson’s categories, may not be all-encompassing but nonetheless offers another angle from which to analyse the novel. In *Timequake*, Vonnegut posits a kind of time distortion in which the entire planet travels back in time ten years, and “everybody and everything [must] do exactly what they’d done during [the] past decade, for good or ill, a second time” (xii). This concept is similar to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, which suggests that at death, life may be lived “once more” for eternity (332). Nietzsche offers a roundelay, a circular repetitive song called “Once More”, in his exploration of this idea. The lines “I slept my sleep / And now awake at dreaming’s end” bear a striking similarity to the Roethke poem quoted by Vonnegut in the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse*: “I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow” (Nietzsche 333; *Slaughterhouse* 20). This interaction between waking, in which one has control, and sleep, in which one has no control, is reminiscent of a timequake. Kilgore Trout describes theatrical plays as “artificial timequakes”, due to the fact that “actors know everything they are going to say and do ... Yet they have no choice but to behave as though the future were a mystery” (20). In this sense, Billy’s entire life is a timequake. Indeed, he is described as living in a “constant state of stage fright ... because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to *act* in next” (23; emphasis added). “All time is time. It does not change”, say the Tralfamadorians, adding, “[o]nly

on Earth is there any talk of free will” (86). Billy performs his life over and over again, enacting the same kind of repetition that occurs in the narrative discourse. Like the characters in *Valley of the Dolls*, the only “Earthling book” on Tralfamadore, he has his “ups and downs, ups and downs”; just as he involuntarily moves “up-and-down, up-and-down” with a lost heel behind German lines, and tells his supporters “Farewell, hello, farewell, hello” (87; 33; 142).

Alberto Cacicedo suggests that Billy is a “passive observer of his own existence”, yet this is missing the fact that he must still perform the events even as he cannot alter them. Billy is certainly an observer but he is not a passive one. Billy is an optometrist later in life, and measures “errors in eyes” (56). He wears tri-focals, which correct vision at all distances (62). Many people on Earth, Billy thinks, are “lost and wretched” because they cannot “*see* as well as his little green friends on Tralfamadore” (29, emphasis added). Weary literalises this metaphor in his layers of extra coats and hats in the army, as his vision is limited to a “narrow slit between the rim of his helmet and his scarf” (41). For the Tralfamadorians, Billy is just as visually impaired, as they envision his experience of time as if “his head was encased in a steel sphere” in which “there was only one eyehole ... and welded to that eyehole were six feet of pipe” (115). While Billy may not be able to see as the Tralfamadorians do, he sees more clearly than the other human characters. He is non-passive, in the same way that autobiography differs from biography as it is usually communicated by someone who participated in the events that are described. Billy as a non-passive observer suggests a new frame with which to view him. Wittenberg argues that “physical time travel and metanarrative juxtaposition are, in narratological if not generic terms, identical” (5). As previously discussed, while Billy’s consciousness travels in time, his body does not. Additionally, the narrative discourse moves through time and space to the same degree that Billy does during these temporal shifts. Billy’s experiences in the novel can be examined in terms of “metanarrative juxtaposition” instead of “physical time travel” (Wittenberg 5). He has “no control over where he is going next”, but must necessarily experience the events as given to him in order to progress with his story (23). In these terms, then, Billy is operating in the role of a reader. He is an observer who cannot effectively alter the substance of the events; yet similar to a reader, he is an “active participant” in generating meaning in the text, and must necessarily perform a kind of “reenactment” in order for the events to progress (Abbott *Narrative* 20). Without the reader’s “willing collaboration, the narrative does not come to life” (Abbott *Narrative* 86).

Billy is engaged in the same kind of work as a reader in that he is both active in generating the story, yet simultaneously unable to alter the substance of his experience. Additionally, he is subject to a kind of time travel that is “identical” to the structural possibilities of narrative discourse (Wittenberg 5). We might then reexamine the inalterability of the events, yet the alterability of Billy, from this perspective. I argued that each event in the novel is a distinct experience for Billy, and therefore the events could not be said to be entirely singular. This parallels the dynamic between reader and text, wherein although the discourse of most texts is concrete and unalterable, the meaning and, indeed, the story generated by the active reader is alterable and indefinite. Abbott notes that “almost invariably, we overlook things that are there and put in things that are not” (*Narrative* 86). Billy, in the role of a reader, can generate new meanings and understandings of events, even as the events remain fixed. While the story order of *Slaughterhouse* is difficult to determine, framing Billy as a kind of reader offers an alternative tool to describe and clarify some of the novel’s temporal problems.

Slaughterhouse-Five, then, is a novel with a temporal ordering that resists easy solutions. More answers can be found, however, when questioning what reasons there might be for producing this kind of time-travel novel. Thus far I have talked in little detail about the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse*. In it, Vonnegut describes many of the problems he faced while composing his war novel, and as such it offers another useful avenue of analysis in regards to the book’s structure. Vonnegut’s first account of his experiences in Dresden is in a letter he writes home in 1945. He relates the main events in chronological order. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, of course, is rather different. In the first chapter, Vonnegut explores different narrative possibilities by describing many kinds of meaning-making and storytelling. He includes an infinite song. He reflects on his education in anthropology in which he was taught that “there was absolutely no difference between anybody”, an explanation he later gives to his father when asked why his novels have no villains (8). The Air Force office refuses to release the official account of Dresden to him, as that information is “top secret” (11). He finds a history of Dresden, published before the war, and reads a history of the Children’s Crusade (17; 15). He discusses the kinds of war movies wherein the soldiers are played by Frank Sinatra and John Wayne, in which “war will look just wonderful” (14). At the New York World’s Fair, he sees “what the past had been like, according to the Ford Motor Car Company and Walt Disney” (18). He reads *Céline and His Vision*—in which Céline is “obsessed” with time—and he finds the Gideon Bible and reflects on

Lot's wife: "[she] was told not to look back ... But she *did* look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human" (21-22; emphasis in original). Vonnegut is engaged in the difficulties of looking back, and in confronting what version of the past—official record, historical nonfiction, World's Fair—matches his own memories. One of the potential problems of a time-travel narrative is that, in order for the past to be changed or even visited, one must decide on a definitive version of that past. If a time traveller can alter the past, it must be altered *from* something specific. If Vonnegut cannot settle on a precise version of events, then the time travel has nothing definitive to change from or to which to return.

The first chapter of *Slaughterhouse* gives the impression of a sensibility very much concerned with how and why one writes a story. I have already discussed much of the "how" of *Slaughterhouse*, at least regarding its temporal structure, but it will also be fruitful to explore briefly how else Vonnegut attempted to write his war novel. He mentions that the "best outline" he made—"or anyway the prettiest one"—was drawn on the back of a roll of wallpaper in crayon, and was composed of a series of horizontal lines that ran across the paper and hit Dresden, a band of vertical cross-hatching, "and all the lines that were still alive passed through it" (5). This outline seems altogether too linear for *Slaughterhouse*. Vonnegut also talks to a friend, Bernard V. O'Hare, about how to structure the novel: "I think the climax of the book will be the execution of poor old Edgar Derby", he says (4-5). Derby was killed by firing squad for stealing a teapot in the ruins of Dresden. Vonnegut calls attention to this climactic moment as early as the second sentence: "One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his" (1). Derby's execution is another of the many repeated elements in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Not only is it mentioned eleven times in the text, but Vonnegut often uses the same language, referring to the man as "poor old Derby" (105). He appears in the same boxcar as Billy as a forty-four-year-old high school teacher, who will die "in sixty-eight days" (83). As the narrative progresses, it seems that Derby is a particular obsession of Billy's own thoughts, and not just Vonnegut's writerly construction. Billy, in the prison hospital in 1944, has a "memory of the future" of Derby's execution (105). On Billy's honeymoon, his wife asks about the incident after hearing Billy describe it to her father. In a hospital in Vermont in 1968, Billy compares his daughter's "glassy-eyed look" to the one Derby wore before he was shot (188).

In one of the more moving moments of the novel, Derby stands up to Nazi propagandist Howard W. Campbell Jr, a character who first appears in Vonnegut's *Mother Night* and borrows

most of his name from John W. Campbell Jr, the editor of *Astounding Stories*—Vonnegut’s dig at the genre with which he did not want to be associated. Unlike the war movies mentioned in the opening chapter, Vonnegut writes a book without war heroes. Billy, in his civilian shoes and fur-lined coat, a “filthy flamingo”, is not such a character, and neither is Campbell in his “white ten-gallon hat and black cowboy boots decorated with swastikas and stars” (33; 162). Edgar Derby’s impassioned speech about “freedom and justice and opportunities and fair play for all” briefly elevates him into the role of the romantic war hero. Derby’s moment of heroism against Campbell is a climactic moment for the character; Derby’s death is almost perfunctory: “Somewhere in there the poor old high school teacher, Edgar Derby ... was tried and shot. So it goes” (214). Derby has a climactic moment of heroism, but it is not the narrative climax Vonnegut suggests he will use in the opening chapter.

The actual climax of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the firebombing of Dresden. This moment contains a kind of temporal ordering that is unique: Billy does not time travel to the event, and nor is the event given entirely in narrative analepsis. He remembers it—just as he does in his future memory of Derby, the only other moment of active memory in the novel. The account of Dresden, however, is much more detailed. He “remembers it shimmeringly”, and then talks more about it to Montana Wildhack (177; 179). He recalls the event after being confused by the “powerful psychosomatic responses” he is having to a barbershop quartet at his eighteenth wedding anniversary (173). The motif of the barbershop quartet is repeated three times in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. There is one singing on the plane of optometrists that crashes into Sugarbush Mountain in Vermont. This same quartet is the one that sings, years earlier, at Billy’s anniversary. Finally, there are the German guards who, upon seeing the ruins of the Dresden, “experimented with one expression and then another ... They looked like a silent film of a barbershop quartet” (178). This last association is what prompts Billy’s memory. The kind of narrative juxtaposition that has, thus far in the novel, been the result of time travel, at this point is the consequence of psychological association.

Billy’s act of remembering stands as a contrast to the difficulties of remembering that Vonnegut describes in the first chapter. He notes that he “thought it would be easy” to write about “the destruction of Dresden, since all [he] would have to do would be report what [he] has seen” (2). The difficulty was that “not many words” came to him (2). He visits his friend O’Hare to ask for “some help remembering stuff”, but O’Hare “couldn’t remember much” either: “we

could chuckle or grin sometimes, as though war stories were coming back, but neither one of us could remember anything good” (4; 13). The problem is that there is “nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (19). All Vonnegut can remember during their conversation is a story about Russian soldiers looting a clock factory. At a different point in the chapter, he describes the kinds of souvenirs taken by his fellow soldiers: diamonds and emeralds, a plaster Eiffel tower with a clock inside of it, and his own ceremonial Luftwaffe sabre. These tangible items endure longer than memories, or represent a different kind of remembering. Billy—like Vonnegut—retrieves a Luftwaffe sabre after Dresden is destroyed.

Vonnegut and O’Hare eventually return to Dresden physically in a way that they can’t mentally. Vonnegut’s plane is delayed and he stays overnight in a motel and experiences a kind of time that “would not pass” (20). In the motel, he feels that “[t]he second hand on [his] watch would twitch once, and a year would pass, and then it would twitch again” (20). He describes himself as a “non-person” (20). He becomes unstuck in his experience of time, and “[there] was nothing [he] could do about it. As an Earthling, [he] had to believe whatever clocks said” (20). This is the seed of the idea that would become Billy’s time travelling, non-chronological experience of his life. Moreover, Vonnegut’s problem of memory—a metaphorical darkness—is patterned in Billy’s travels. More than once, his return to wartime is signalled with imagery of illumination. From the pitch-black Calsbad Caverns, Billy goes from “total dark to total light” and returns to the POW camp. In the “darkness of the bathroom” in a hotel, Billy “[gropes] for the light” and finds himself in 1944 again (123). After hearing the barbershop quartet, Billy goes to his bathroom and “[leaves] it dark” (176). When he remembers the destruction of Dresden, it is “one big flame” (178).

In writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut was tasked with remembering what he could not remember. As critics such as Amanda Wicks and Cacicedo have done previously, I link the problems of construction here with trauma fiction, a genre that is a kind of “paradox” since trauma “resists language or representation” (Whitehead 3). Anne Whitehead notes that “novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only be adequately represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection” (3). She draws on Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, in which trauma is defined by an event that is “not assimilated or experienced fully at the time ... the traumatised ... carry an impossible history within them” (qtd. in Whitehead 5). Billy

demonstrates this kind of experience in *Slaughterhouse*. It is noted that during the war he “cried very little, though he often saw things worth crying about”, and yet after the war “[every] so often, for no apparent reason, Billy Pilgrim would find himself weeping” (197; 61). After hearing the barbershop quartet, he realises that “he [has] some great big secret somewhere inside” (173). Trauma, in Caruth’s terms, is a kind of “wound that won’t close up”, like the ones made by Roland Weary’s triangular-bladed knife (*Slaughterhouse* 37). Caruth is reworking the Freudian model of *Nachträglichkeit*, or “afterwardsness”, which provides a means of rethinking the “relation between memory and trauma” and thus offers tools for the construction of an “historical temporality which [departs] from the strictly linear” (Whitehead 6). From this, Whitehead builds an understanding of trauma fiction as a genre that departs from the linear. Susan Brison argues that trauma severs the connections “along remembered past, lived present and anticipated future” (qtd. in Wicks 333). Indeed, most narratives, *Slaughterhouse-Five* included, are a kind of “afterwardness” that offer tools for rethinking and reconstruction.

Vonnegut says “there’s nothing there” about his memory of Dresden, and in works of trauma fiction “[history] is no longer available as a completed knowledge” (qtd. in Wicks 330; Whitehead 13). Wicks explores how by “turning to the generic characteristics of science fiction”, Vonnegut can communicate an experience that “lies outside the bounds of normative human consciousness” (329). She notes that the time travel in the novel “moves closer to explaining the experience of traumatic memory than a more traditional literary narrative would” (335). Indeed, John Limon notes that *Slaughterhouse-Five*, along with *Catch-22* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, utilise “time-inversion” in how they communicate difficult wartime experiences (140). Cacicedo, on the other hand, draws a link between Billy as a “passive observer” and the traumatic experiences communicated by the novel, suggesting that Billy undergoes his own transformation such that by the end of his life the “time is ripe” for Billy to tell his own story, and more importantly, to have Rumfoord believe him (364; *Slaughterhouse* 30). Cacicedo’s argument is that *Slaughterhouse-Five* presents “the blockages, material and psychological, to ethical actions ... but [also refuses] to accept the idea that we are nothing but a hill of beans”—an allusion to *Casablanca*, which also lends the quote to title his article: “you must remember this” (367). One can contrast this with the Tralfamadorian sensibility, that since “[there] isn’t anything we can do about [wars and horrible events] we simply don’t look at them. We ignore them” (117). Vonnegut—like Billy and his optometry patients—is engaged in an act of *looking*.

Seo-Young Chu argues that science fiction is a genre in which metaphors are literalised. As a result, she notes that “[a]xioms taken for granted in everyday reality” and often associated with trauma—such as an “out-of-body” experience, reliving the event, or an “otherworldly” reality—cannot be taken for granted in science fiction (156, 153). Kirby Farrell specifies time travel’s connection with trauma, writing that both involve wandering “out of the conventional mind” and “into the oblivion of time” (qtd. in Chu 156). Roger Luckhurst connects gaps of “missing time” because of a traumatic experience with the missing time associated with alien abductions: “alien abduction is the science fiction that can articulate these gaps within a compelling narrative” (“Trauma” 47). While alien abduction is a specific example of science fiction’s capability of replicating and expressing traumatic memories, Chu argues that “trauma is always already science-fictionalized” due to science fiction’s ability to render the cognitively estranged—and trauma is inherently cognitively estranging (155). For *Slaughterhouse-Five*, “unstuck in time”, Chu writes, is a “figure of speech literalized as a narrative reality that enables Vonnegut to document his experiences of trauma” (160).

I return to the structural questions regarding the communication of trauma. While it is certainly true that science-fiction novels—or more specifically time-travel novels—offer a means of communicating the nonlinear, it is more complex than this. Whitehead suggests that trauma fiction is characterised by “repetition and indirection”, and as previously noted the former is certainly applicable to *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Whitehead examines W. G. Sebald’s novels in terms of repetition, writing that the repetitions exemplify a “vacillation between forward and back, advance and return”, or perhaps “ups and downs, ups and downs” (124; *Slaughterhouse* 87). She returns to Freud and explores how repetition “performs a mastery” over trauma (125). The most often repeated phrase in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is one associated with death—“so it goes”—and in its abundance it repositions death as something trivial, transient, and perfunctory. The proliferation of “so it goes” in *Slaughterhouse* in its very volume offers an amount of suffering that is difficult to comprehend. Therefore, the repetition both mirrors the distancing effect of trauma, and confronts a moment of potential trauma with brutal honesty. There is a double meaning at play: the “it” that “goes” might also be the human’s life. Humans become “other” at multiple points in the novel, with prisoners of war being referred to as “liquid” and as “machines” (81; 154). An audience of tired soldiers is collectively an “it” while listening to Campbell (163). Also repeated more than once in *Slaughterhouse* is the question “why me?”.

The Tralfamadorians inform Billy that “[it] is a very *Earthling* question to ask ... Why *anything*? Because this moment simply *is*”, and a German guard responds, “Vy you? Vy anybody?” (76-77; 91). The repetition of this question allays the possibility of “survivor guilt” after traumatic experiences by providing an answer in the negative: there is no why (La Capra xv).

The concept of the chronotope will be relevant in exploring how *Slaughterhouse-Five* represents events that “[resist] language or representation” (Whitehead 3). Bakhtin applies the term to narrative in his *Forms of Time*. Its literal meaning is “time space” and the “literary artistic chronotope” is used to describe situations when “[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). Bemong and Borghart are correct when they note that “a *definitive* definition of the concept is never offered” (5; emphasis in original). Bakhtin introduces many different kinds of chronotopes in his essay, and indeed notes that they are “mutually inclusive ... they may be interwoven” (252). One of the chronotopes described is that of “crisis” or a “break in a life” (248). Bakhtin posits a “moment of crisis” in which “time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time” (248). This kind of chronotope can be used to explain the moment of trauma, which Caruth defines as “not experienced fully at the time” (qtd. in Whitehead 5).

However, the chronotope is used more extensively by scholars of trauma fiction to explore methods of expressing that which defies expression. Michael Rothberg suggests that the phrase, “after Auschwitz”, in its “melding of temporality and place”, operates as a kind of chronotope (21). Ruth Ginsberg uses the chronotope to study Ida Fink’s short story, “Traces”, a post-Holocaust work. The work grapples with the problem of how to express the “traumatizing experience of the incomprehensible reduction to ‘nothingness’” (207). In other words, Ginsberg is analysing how to express “what it may mean to be *non-human* at a certain place and time” (210; emphasis in original). Vonnegut feels himself to be a “non-person” out of space—in an unfamiliar hotel—and out of time, and Billy is positioned as an animal in the zoo on Tralfamadore, a planet out of space and time (20). Ginsberg suggests that such a narrative would contain temporality that is “never the time of a full, gapless, teleological *fabula*” (212). She suggests that such works might be explored as “anti-fabulaic”, a term that can certainly be applied to *Slaughterhouse-Five* in its resistance to coherent story order reconstruction. The time in Fink’s ‘Traces’ is, like the time of *Slaughterhouse*, “experienced not in sequence ‘but as

explosive bursts” (213). The bursts of anti-fabulaic time negotiate with the time of trauma that is “essentially instantaneous”, or an “everlasting ruptured present” (Bakhtin 248; Ginsberg 212).

Ginsberg suggests that a moment of trauma of this nature can find expression in the other half of the chronotopic concept: space. The central photograph in Fink’s short story represents an empty space in which the traumatic memories might be enacted. It also functions as a tool of recollection itself, as the image “triggers the memory, the rising of the first scene (the past) from the second” (214). Billy’s memory of Dresden, as previously noted, is unique in *Slaughterhouse-Five* due to its being just that: a memory. Billy does not experience the same psychosomatic response when asked about the war, but the visual image of the barbershop quartet triggers the memory in a way that nothing else has. Indeed, it suggests to Billy the existence of a “great big secret somewhere inside” of which he lacks an understanding (173). This “second” scene of a barbershop quartet prompts the “rising of the first scene”, and the rising of the climactic moment of the novel (Ginsberg 214). It is a moment of spatial memory, rather than time travel, that offers the access to the traumatic moment of Dresden’s destruction.

The chronotope might also be used to explore the temporal ordering in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The novel’s non-chronological discourse order necessarily suggests that the reader attempts to “map” the timeline onto a kind of spatialised chronology. Additionally, as a coherent story order proves difficult to reconstruct, the events of the novel require a similar mapping onto an historical framework. In both cases, the disjointed story order renders the spatialisation difficult, but this very act demonstrates the connectivity of the chronotope. The dynamic between space and time in *Slaughterhouse* is not only traversed by Billy and the Tralfamadorians, it mirrors the “collapse” of temporality during traumatic events, and offers space as an alternative with which to attempt to recover the logic of the chronology, or the memories of the events themselves. A quote from Doris Lessing in the front matter of *Slaughterhouse-Five* catches the important of space: “[Vonnegut is] one of the writers who map our landscapes for us”.

“It begins like this: *Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time*”. The immediate temporal fracturing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* produces a novel in which different mechanics of ordering prevent a coherent story from being recovered from the text. In writing about something for which he has “no words”, Vonnegut produces a novel that continues to resist logical coherence on some level. In his war story, “temporality and chronology collapse, and [the narrative is] characterised by repetition” (Whitehead 3). The novel therefore mirrors in its

construction the experience of trauma. If we examine Billy Pilgrim as a kind of reader, then not only do his bouts of unexplained weeping suggest his own traumatic past, but he is also continually engaged in the same experience of trauma that is replicated in the discourse. Phrases and events repeat, and he cannot control his temporal location. By chronotopically turning to space as connected to this fractured time, Billy can “shimmeringly” remember Dresden (179). Dresden—unable to be recollected by Vonnegut at the start of the novel—finds expression as temporality collapses and Billy, Vonnegut, and Ostrovsky’s Céline’s time freezes, “once and for all! ... So that they won’t disappear anymore!” (21).

“The Last Walls Dissolved”: Space and Portals in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*

In examining *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s use of time and temporal order, I turned to the chronotope. This is a term that in its very etymology indicates the connectedness of time and space. Yet I focused most of my discussion of *Slaughterhouse-Five* on the former rather than the latter. This is often the default in narrative criticism, as “most definitions [of narrative], by characterizing stories as the representation of a sequence of events, foreground time at the expense of space” (Ryan “Space” 420). I will remedy this imbalance by prioritising space in my examination of *Memoirs*.

The Memoirs of a Survivor is a novel of distinct spaces, and the barriers and portals between them. The protagonist watches the city through the window in her apartment. Her living room wall dissolves and grants her access to another, dreamlike place. The three spaces—city, apartment, beyond the wall—separate different ontologies: fiction from autobiography, dreams from reality, safety from danger, the social and historical from the personal. The portals—wall, window—are porous, giving observational and physical access that blends as much it separates.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to commence a discussion of space in *Memoirs of a Survivor* without briefly touching on how it interacts with time. The novel opens with: “[w]e all remember that *time*” (7; emphasis added). The novel is narrated analeptically, as an unnamed protagonist relays her experiences in a crumbling society. The society belongs to a future that is not time specific. This is a future not unlike the 1970s London setting in which it was written, yet the dystopian city of the novel has regressed to a point such that it is falling apart. In a sense, the novel belongs to a kind of every-time. The specifics of the city’s problems are not given, and the narrator refers to only an “it”, or a “sign of crisis, of public anxiety” (8). At the novel’s opening, references to “it” have yet to creep into conversation, and the residents live in what the narrator refers to as the first stage: a “generalised unease” (9). This unease could be the consequence of any problem, any society, or any dystopia. We know that *Memoirs* takes place in the future, but no more than that.

Positioned in the future, the narrator is engaged in an act of memory: “we ... will look back over a period in life, over a *sequence of events*” (7; emphasis added). She is framing her life

in the same terms as a narrative: a “series of events” (Abbott *Narrative* 12). The narrator links her autobiographical memory with sequence, to a chronological ordering of time. The growing understanding of “it”, or the “crisis” of the city, is also linked to such ordering, as “[s]equences of words were crystallising events into a picture, almost a story” as awareness of the crisis grows (8). The dystopian world of the city is understood in terms of “[a]nd then this happened” (8; emphasis in original). Chronological time is foregrounded in the ways that the protagonist and other citizens work at interpreting the changing city around them.

The protagonist experiences temporality in these chronological terms when she is in the city. Time, for the most part, marches on. Events happen “hour after hour” and “day after day” (48; 56; 84). The narrator notes that life in the urban world “obeyed the unities, like a certain kind of play”, referencing the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action (134). The events of *Memoirs* take place over the course of around a year—the city experiences a summer and a winter—demonstrating this continuity. Within the chronological momentum, time for the protagonist does occasionally skip, accelerate, or decelerate. After Emily arrives, the protagonist feels time to “have gone on and on, yet in fact it was quite short, a matter of months” (70). The summer seems to “go on interminably” (84). Winter is also ceaseless, the characters wait for the season to end for “a long time, but not as long as our senses told us: an interminable time” (84; 181). The protagonist observes Emily’s adolescent development happening more quickly than usual, “time had so speeded up that years were not needed any longer” (49). These examples all offer a temporality that is chronological, but flexible. Life in the city is experienced in the same kinds of variable speed as are utilised in narrative. Narrative speeds indicate “the relationship between story time elapsed and amount of discourse time expended”, and Gérard Genette offers five such examples: gap, summary, scene, expansion and pause (Keen 92). For the protagonist, the time after Emily’s arrival is felt as expansion: it goes “on and on”, yet “in fact was quite short” (70). More specifically, the way that the protagonist herself experiences time resembles the temporal manipulation of narrative. In other words, her subjective view of time mirrors writerly constructions such as gaps and expansions. In my previous chapter, I discussed how Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five* experiences time as a reader: the anachronies between story order and discourse order in the novel are lived by him as a character. On a smaller scale in *Memoirs*, the narrator is not only consciously remembering and retelling, but when she

manipulates narrative speeds, it is to mirror her earlier experiences of the events. Time warps in the living, not just in the retelling.

I noted previously that the city is a location out-of-time, in the sense that it does not belong to a particular temporal setting or indeed might belong to any post-Industrial setting. It is also out-of-time in the way that the advancement of “hour after hour” and “day after day” becomes “interminable” (48; 56; 84). This creates an environment in which the act of *telling time* is difficult. More specifically, the mechanical system of hours and days loses its utility. The narrator begins “at a time before we were talking about ‘it’” (9). The protagonist “can’t set down a date or a time” for when she first travels through the wall in her living room. She thinks that it may have been “an affair of weeks, months, years” (10). Yet even as telling time is difficult, there is always the sense of time moving forward.

The absence of a mechanical system of measuring time invites inquiry into what other system of measurement might be used in the city. The road outside the protagonist’s window functions as a chronotopic marker of time passing or, perhaps more fittingly, of the *movement* of time. In road narrative, “time spent means ground covered”, and vice versa (Ganser 3). Mikhail Bakhtin notes that time in the road chronotope is felt as particularly “concrete” and “substantial” (120). In *Memoirs*, “migrating gangs” travel the road, and the protagonist watches them (13). Her view demonstrates the same chronotopic relationship between ground covered and time passing. Just as the traveller on the road “merely observes [the] life” that he or she is passing, so does the protagonist in *Memoirs* (Bakhtin 121). Not only does her changing view necessarily indicate a change in time, advancement along the road mirrors the advancement of society’s decay. The city is moving backwards. Machines stop working, and there is an increased focus on the agricultural as food becomes scarce. It is a reverse Industrialisation: the travellers along the road leave the city for hope of a better life in the country. Society is regressing to an earlier form. For Doris Lessing, born in 1919, a return to childhood would mean the loss of television, microwave ovens, the atomic bomb, spaceflight. The dystopian society in *Memoirs* mirrors this return to the world of her youth—without the rosy lens of nostalgia. The city’s journey backwards through technological developments and social order complements the protagonist’s dawning recognition that the place beyond the wall belongs to another kind of technological, historical, and *personal* past.

The protagonist journeys into the city very few times; she visits Emily's and Gerald's gang's house once when it is a small but thriving residence, and again when it has been overrun and abandoned. The excursion is not necessary, for she witnesses most of these changes from her window, in her view of the road and what takes place on it. Events such as "meeting [and] separation" take on "chronotopic significance" on the road in that they function as markers for both passage through space and passage through time (Bakhtin 121). In *Memoirs*, the gangs that travel through the protagonist's streets are replaced by gangs that originate in the protagonist's streets: "a phenomenon we had believed could belong only to the regions 'out there' was being born before our eyes" (54). These accumulations of people would soon "split into two parts: one part was about to take to the roads" (67). The protagonist's view through the window is one of meetings and separations, separations that always denote a new movement of people along the road. Meetings and separations not only take on "concrete" significance in the road narrative in regards to chronotopic movement, they also specifically function as markers of "age in the life of the individual" (120). In *Memoirs*, these perpetual partings delineate a kind of aging for the world of the city. The narrator notes the unnatural "forced growth" that all the groups undertake, a development that is accelerated through new social realities and "the crowd, the pack, the gang" (54). As those outside the window become more familiar to the protagonist, the meetings and separations along the road indicate the departure of the known rather than the unknown, and this development mirrors the increasing collapse of society. As it becomes more local to the protagonist, she can witness the changes to society in her view of the movements, meetings and separations along the road. In the absence of mechanical time in the increasingly deindustrialised world of the city, the road offers a different method of measuring time's movement, a system of temporal markers that can not only tell time but measure society's decay.

While time in the world of the city moves forward chronologically, time in the place behind the wall is much more malleable. The narrator notes that this is a world where "time [does] not exist" (157). The rooms "age" at a speed that does not match the time between the protagonist's visits (86). They also seem to belong to different historical periods: some rooms are "in style rather like the Cape Dutch" and others "French, Second Empire" (123; 134). Often, the rooms that the protagonist visits seem to exist out of time, or in a paused time. The protagonist sweeps and cleans the empty rooms, but senses that "the life that had lived there would continue the moment [she] left" (38). Yet she also feels that there is a "continuity to what [she does], a

future” (59). For example, she finds a room in which a group of people are working together on a carpet. The protagonist helps with one piece, and then loses the room: “I could not find it when I turned my head to see it again” (70). Yet, she “knows” that the room is “waiting” and that the “work in it continued, must continue, would go on always” (70). These rooms behind the wall seem to sit in a time that is both frozen and eternal.

This oxymoronic relationship is further complicated by another kind of temporal experience, as some of the protagonist’s encounters behind the wall can, at points, mirror the “unities” of the city (134). When the protagonist enters what she calls a “personal” scene, she and the figures within it experience time as “the clock with its soft hurrying” that is “obeyed by everyone” (40). In the personal scenes, “everything had its time and place ... nothing could change or move out of order” (59). Time is oppressive in these scenes; it is felt as a “thick heaviness” (41). Rooms, the narrator notes, have “time as [their] air” (76). Time “thickens, takes on flesh”, as it does in the chronotope (Bakhtin 84). These personal scenes are the most autobiographical scenes in *Memoirs*, and as such it seems only fitting that time should make itself particularly felt. Lessing was deeply concerned with time in her autobiographies, specifically the fidelity of time to truth versus the fidelity of time to memory. She writes that autobiographies “do have to be [true]. At least an attempt must be made” and as such “you sit there for hours, wondering. Is that true? Did I make it up? What is the truth?” (*Time Bites* 95-96). Yet the truth, for Lessing, is something other than facts—she notes that we invent our pasts (*UMS* 13). The fidelity is to atmosphere, altogether more “elusive”, and time as it was experienced (*UMS* 16). The “main reason, the real one” that Lessing feels “autobiography must be untrue”—a seeming contradiction to her earlier statement—is due to the “subjective experience of time” (*UMS* 109). In *Under My Skin*, she discusses “sorting out the time-segments” of a period of her schooling, and that she “ha[s] to concede that it was only a term. I have to. Impossible, but so it was” (84). This weight of experiential time versus calendar time is felt in the personal scenes in *Memoirs*. Time must be confronted, questioned, negotiated.

Memoirs is an act of memory, not only for the narrator—“We all remember that time”—but for Lessing herself (7). As a child, Lessing would run through the “events of the day over again” in her head before sleep (*UMS* 120). She refers to this as “fixing” moments and “making short work of Time” (*UMS* 13; 120). This fixedness can be found in the fabric of the personal scenes behind the wall. These scenes are places where “the puppets jerk to their invisible strings”

(129). During one of the visits, Emily's mother screams for food but the "time must pass before she was fed, [as] the strict order of the regime said it must be so" (128). Lessing as writer is revisiting scenes from her childhood, engaging in the act of cementing moments once again, and in creating the "strings" and a "regime" that her characters will follow "minute by decreed minute" (39).

The events behind the wall are attempts to represent not only "personal memories" but "personal dreams", for which a kind of solidifying or "fixing" might be more difficult (*UMS* 29). Lessing often discussed her preoccupation with dreams (*SPV* 71; *UMS* 119; *PQD* 92). Dreams, she notes, are used a "great deal" in writing her work ("DLRH"). Lessing writes that her fixation on dreams challenged her to write a "personal history, but told through dreams" and this "dream autobiography became the world behind the wall in *Memoirs of a Survivor*" (*UMS* 29). She notes that the nursery and her parents are both "exaggerated and enlarged, because this is appropriate for the world of dreams" (*UMS* 29). The shape of time is warped just as is the shape of her mother. The oxymoronic time beyond the wall, then, is the time of dreams. It is both frozen and eternal, and need not obey the laws of nature or indeed the laws of "a certain kind of play" (134). The personal scenes balance this warping by bringing a different kind of time to the forefront, one that is heavy and oppressive, a reminder of the historical and autobiographical weight of the memories.

Just as the city and the place behind the wall offer different experiences of time, they also offer different experiences of space. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is a novel that can be divided into three unique physical spaces: the city, the apartment, and beyond the wall. Indeed, it can be examined not only as a novel of different physical spaces, but as a novel of connecting portals. Marie-Laure Ryan examines narrative space as something that can be "described in terms of the partitions ... as well as in terms of the openings and passageways that allow these subspaces to communicate" ("Space" 429). The window divides the apartment from the city, and the wall divides the apartment from the world of dreams on its other side. These partitions function both as barriers and as portals, dividing different ontologies—fictional and autobiographical, real and surreal, personal and historical—that ultimately begin to blend together.

The protagonist's small apartment is a space of stasis rather than action. Those within the apartment usually engage in stationary occupations, it is a place where one can sit and stare at a wall for hours, or where Emily can "lie all day on the sofa" (44). Conversely, those on the

outside are either moving or preparing to move. Most of the narrative action is driven by events (such as the arrival of a new gang) outside the apartment, and as such it is also a place of narrative stasis.

The protagonist's apartment is a container, or "bounded space with an interior and exterior" (Turner, qtd. in Dannenberg 182). The contrast between this interior and exterior is key to my discussion of the first connecting portal: the window. The protagonist does not often leave her apartment, rather she spends most of her time observing the outside world. She does this through the wide window of her living room, which looks out onto the city street. The apartment is a place of stasis and safety, while the city is a place of constant motion and potential danger. The city is in motion due to the migrating gangs that travel past the protagonist's window, but also due to the degeneration of social norms: first, the "trouble would vanish, dissolve ... [s]lowly, we came to understand that it was our periods of peace ... which were going to be unusual now" (13). As the protagonist watches from her window, the world on the other side of the portal becomes less and less familiar. Her growing connection to Emily, who finds herself much more at home in the world of the city, seems at times set to draw the protagonist into this realm of the unfamiliar. She resists this pull—the window is a portal of observation for the protagonist, rather than a doorway from the inside to the outside. Indeed, by the end of the novel, the protagonist's apartment becomes a refuge for not only Emily, but also for Gerald, and for a brief time, the wild children that he takes into his care. She notes, "I cannot convey the normality of it, the ordinariness of sitting there" with these visitors who belong to the unfamiliar city (177). The apartment provides this normality while the window provides a view of the city's abnormality.

Lessing conceived of *Memoirs* in part as a work that would observe the "general worsening of conditions" that happened in her lifetime (*UMS* 28). The gangs who move past the window represent "waves of violence ... [t]hese are the wars and movements like Hitler, Mussolini, Communism, white supremacy" (28-29). Lessing felt war to have had a particular impact on her life, writing that she used to "joke that it was the [First World War] that had given birth to me" (*UMS* 10). Lessing notes that she wanted to write of these things through "parables and allegories" so that they might "[shadow] forth in a glass darkly" (28).

In Seo-Young Chu's terms, the history of Hitler and Mussolini is a cognitively estranging period that finds representation due to science fiction's ability to represent the complex, fractured, and

metaphorical. Watching through a “glass darkly” is a metaphorical approach to writing a text that is literalised in the protagonist’s perpetual gaze through the glass of her window.

The city is a place of movement in many senses. As I previously discussed, the gangs that pass through the protagonist’s view function as a method of measuring time passing and of measuring the societal decay as it approaches and then encompasses her neighbourhood. It is also a place of social movement, of expanding groups of citizens united against some increasing crisis. The crisis, referred to as “it”, is never named in *Memoirs*, and it is never given “any recognition on the part of the authorities” (12). These movements of people, in the dual sense of the word, are a response only to the “news that was ‘in the air’” (12). Lessing links the wars and violent regimes of history with a social movement that remains violent, yet is overwhelmingly tinged with the inevitable. Even the protagonist knows that she “would almost certainly have to leave this city” and join those on the road (11). Nonetheless, she remains immobile in her apartment and observes.

Ryan notes that in fairy tales, open areas often symbolise danger while closed areas symbolise security (“Space” 428-9). Dividing the protagonist’s spaces of security and danger is her large window. The protagonist can see much from this window, but what she does see is necessarily framed. She lives on the ground floor, and just as she lacks an understanding of the crisis that plagues the city, she does not have a bird’s eye view or macroscopic view of the events on the road. She can see less of the wider detail, and when large crowds gather, would only be able to see the first couple of layers of the gangs. Yet the protagonist is near to these crowds, and as such can observe minute and microscopic gestures that occur during the meetings in the street. When Emily attempts to join one of the gangs with her pet Hugo, the protagonist witnesses her “shouting, arguing” as the others threaten Hugo (34). She concludes from the gestures of the members, even before Emily’s quick return, that they “had not considered [Emily] one of themselves, even potentially” (34). The protagonist’s window-framed view mirrors *Memoirs*’ construction: it is not a novel concerned with explaining what occurs in the rest of the city, or indeed the rest of the country and the world.

The protagonist of *Memoirs* describes herself as “one of those who looked up” (9). She makes this comment regarding the position of her apartment on the ground floor of the building; she is not one of the upper class who occupy the more expensive residences above the ground. Even prior to “it”, to the “consciousness of something ending”, the city was in part defined by

this geographically-positioned looking (130). Vertical space in the physical city mirrored the verticality of the social ladder. The “higher regions ... admitted a finer air” (9). While the protagonist looks up, those at the higher levels exist in “some aerial village with invisible paths beaten from window to window by the inquisitive or the speculative eye ... while human affairs were far below” (9).

The protagonist also mentions the council-built houses, the “vertical streets” of the poor (9). As society falls apart, these spaces take on different definitions. The protagonist’s apartment building starts to hold “the people who had the enterprise to move into it ... every sort of person” (10). Society becomes divided between those who move horizontally through the streets, and those who remain in place, a relationship that chronotopically becomes the new measure of time in the city. Similarly, the horizontal “invisible paths” of observation between the higher regions become a downwards-orientated observation. When new gangs arrive in the streets, “hundreds of ... faces [pack] the higher windows of the block” (35; 35). Those in a static position inside observe the motion of the city outside.

The protagonist describes the block she lives in as a model of “solidity and decency” (9). The building is “heavy” and the walls are “thick” (9). The protagonist finds safety in the construction of the building, and this sense of safety makes the apartment a sanctuary from which she can observe the changes in the city. This sense of being one-who-looks defines her character. Emily and Hugo, when they join the protagonist, also engage in this act. Emily spends most of her time in the first few months after her arrival observing the street from the apartment window: “she sat for hours ... and watched, absorbed, everything that went on” (27). When Emily joins one of the packs of youths gathering on the street, the protagonist watches “endlessly” (51). Hugo, the danger of joining Emily outside too great, shares in this “watchful patience” at the window (56).

Windows can be both a portal and a “barrier” (Eitner, qtd. in Dannenberg 181). The window as barrier is that it divides the dangerous from the safe in *Memoirs*, yet the window is porous. It cannot entirely divide these spaces. The inhabitants of the apartment look from the inside outwards, and feel protected from the events of the street. The protagonist, Emily, and Hugo feel safe from the unwanted attentions of the gangs outside. Additionally, while the protagonist can watch Emily’s experiences outside, the window admits only this observation—it does not draw the protagonist out with Emily. Yet the window is also a visual threshold. When

Emily is courting the pack of youths, she spends her time “showing herself off” from the window (55). *Memoirs* is a world of watching and being watched. When this observational relationship is inverted, and the occupants of the apartment are those being watched, the window becomes dangerous. It functions as a portal through which the outside can invade. Members of the gang observe Hugo in this window and, recognising the danger, he moves down “along the outer wall of the room where he could not be seen” (66). A group of children from the gang visit the window one day, “trying to see” into the apartment (66). They are looking for Hugo, for although he is a pet to Emily, he is food to the children. One of them says, “I’ve seen him at the window” (66). Later in the novel, the protagonist contemplates how at night “hundreds of candle flames” in buildings showed “people at their windows, looking down” (166). Yet she extinguishes her own flame, and realises that the candles have not been lit elsewhere for some time: “I was standing there visualising the dark face of the building and a single candle flame alive in it ... I had been crazy” (166). The window offers a portal from interior to exterior that to the protagonist inside functions as a barrier, a barrier that loses its protective nature when it becomes clear that the city might be watching back.

The apartment is not untouched by its relationship with the city. The building itself transforms, as the upper floors become a kind of market in which the local gangs store and sort goods. Emily introduces the protagonist to this space, as the protagonist was ignorant of what was going on in the floors above her—it is a place outside her field of view from the window. On their visit, they take many of the protagonist’s appliances: “mixers, television, lamps” (98). These kinds of appliances are no longer seen as particularly valuable; they are not guarded like the food and the weapons. They will be broken down for parts, by adults with the “old skills” who are surrounded by crowds of “marveling barbarians” as they work (100). The protagonist realises that these goods “were different commodities for Emily ... in some ways more precious, because irreplaceable, but also without value” (102). As these “things” from the old world leave her apartment, they are eventually replaced by other machines such as an air purifier. Yet while the fittings in the apartment change, the nature of the space remains the same. When the protagonist returns home from a brief journey outside at the end of the novel, she notes that her apartment feels like “a strange little place of order, of old-fashioned amenities, of warmth” (166). The chaos and danger of the city never entirely permeate the apartment.

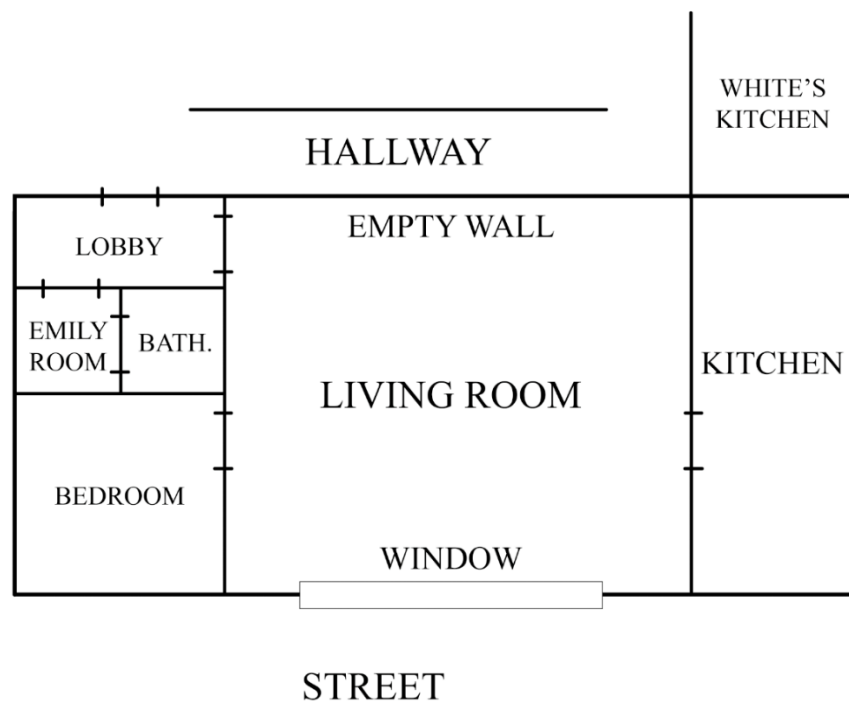
The enduring safety of the apartment means that its role as a place of observation is never

completely compromised. The window as a portal lets potentially dangerous eyes peer in, but the thin glass is never smashed. Watching and being watched in the living room can continue. This organisation of looking helps to define the physicality of the space. The topography of the apartment and the city can be understood in terms of line of sight. Windows, and other connecting portals, also play a “key role in the human mind’s perception of *three-dimensionality*” (Dannenberg 182; emphasis in original). The apartment and the city are given geographical order through this relationship with each other; in other words, the window’s function as a portal between the two spaces prevents each space from existing in a vacuum. It gives the spaces a dimensional relationship with each other. A sense of the three-dimensional in narrative contributes to what Ryan calls “spatial immersion”, or being “lost in a book” (qtd. in Dannenberg 185; 184).

Also contributing to the spatial immersion of *Memoirs* is the precise three-dimensionality that Lessing gives the apartment itself. She describes the apartment in specific detail:

The flat was on the front of the building, the south side. The living room took up most of the space ... At the end away from the entrance lobby, so that you had to walk through the living-room to get to it, was the kitchen, on the corner of the building. This was quite large ... From the entrance lobby went two doors, one to the living-room, one to the room I called a spare room. This room was connected with the bathroom. My bedroom was on the front of the building, reached from the living room. The bathroom, lobby, spare room, took up the same space as my bedroom, which was not large ... the spare room was very small. It had a small high window. (18)

Additionally, Lessing notes: the empty wall in the living room has a corridor on the other side; the White family’s kitchen is on the other side of a wall in her own kitchen; and the door to the living-room is on the “side wall” (11; 14). There is an abundance of detail, yet I found myself unable to mentally reconstruct a plausible floor plan for her apartment. The amount of detail felt overwhelming rather than informative. With pen and paper in hand it was easier, and I have attempted a potential floor plan for her apartment.



This follows most of the descriptions given, yet remains imperfect. Emily’s room contains a “small high window”, which would require the protagonist’s apartment to occupy the entire south face of the building as the kitchen is “on the corner of the building” (18). The room cannot be elsewhere, as the bedroom is “on the front of the building” (18). This aside, the protagonist’s apartment does have enough architectural detail to support an interpretation of a floor plan.

The third space in *Memoirs* is what lies beyond the wall. I have been referring to the three key spaces as physical spaces, but this term seems more troubling when applied to the large house and its grounds that the protagonist experiences on the other side of her empty living-room wall. It does not seem to exist in the world in the same manner as the apartment and the city. It is described “occupying the same space as, or rather, overlapping with, the corridor” on the other side of the living-room wall (11). Its location is thus physically impossible. The rooms on the other side of the wall belong to “another world” (135). When the protagonist first enters the beyond, she stands on the “margin” between the “two worlds” (15).

Betsy Draine, writing shortly after *Memoirs*’ publication, locates the space beyond the wall as belonging to an “inner life”, to the mind (54). This is not an inaccurate description of the space, as it engages and interacts with the world of dreams and memory. Yet the word “dreams”

does not appear in *Memoirs*. The protagonist thinks of the world as if it has some kind of, however illogical, physical presence: it can overlap with a corridor. As I will discuss in more detail shortly, it is also a world accessed through a “dissolving wall”, a metaphor deliberately used by Lessing in order to evoke the ancient and the fairy tale. I will treat the world beyond the wall as something more along the lines of this tradition, or the old “tales and stories” that Lessing is modelling *Memoirs* after, which is to say that I will approach it as a world with a degree of “real” presence worth examining (*UMS* 28). I also am mindful of the fact that I am approaching *Memoirs* as a work of science fiction, in which dreams, other dimensions, and memories find literal representation (Chu 246). Lessing’s “dissolving wall” is reminiscent of Heinlein’s dilating door—“meaningless as naturalistic fiction, and practically meaningless as fantasy” according to Delany (113). Perhaps it is too obvious that this dilating door is mirrored in a dissolving wall that leads to memories of early childhood.

Space is warped beyond the wall. In the protagonist’s first visits, she remains inside the house, but unlike her apartment it is a house that does not make architectural sense. She finds “room after room after room—there was no end to them” (25). Just as the time of this place can be eternal (“would go always”), the interior of the house becomes an eternity of rooms (70). The space also transforms, as specific rooms that the protagonist visits cannot be found in subsequent trips (25; 70). The house beyond the wall undergoes these transformations while the protagonist is not there. It does not shrink or grow in front of her. This is similar to the rooms that seem to jump through time and age rapidly, but only between visits. While the protagonist is in them, they are in a frozen state. It is the space of dreams, where objects and places make sense when you look at them but might shift in the corner of your eye, or vanish when you look away. The narrator calls it an “indefinite region, shifting and melting and changing, where walls and doors and rooms and gardens and people continually [recreate] themselves, like clouds” (67).

The place beyond the wall is a space of temporary substance. The protagonist encounters rooms with “unsubstantial walls” (86). The walls are “as impermanent as theatre sets” (37). This suggests a kind of theatricality or construction to the place beyond the wall. This is, after all, a place where “puppets jerk to their invisible strings” (129). The thinning of the walls, or the impermanence of the walls, is felt by the protagonist to be due to their losing “substance to the air, to time” (86). This impermanence, then, is not only dreamlike but also a function of the rooms as a kind of stage upon which events are remembered and retold—to lose substance to

time might well be to lose substance to memory. The theatre set of the house beyond the wall frames the edges of these memories. Time seems to solidify, to become a “thick heaviness”, just as the spaces of the memory lose substance (41).

The figures in these personal memories, “the players”, feel this oppressive time (133). The mother watches events as if she has “foreseen” them and is “living through [them] because she [has] to” (41). She is a theatrical player, in the sense that “[a]ctors know everything they are going to say and do, and how everything is going to come out in the end ... [y]et they have no choice but to behave as though the future were a mystery” (*Timequake* 20). This is, of course, Vonnegut’s description of a play as an “artificial timequake”, and one which I have already applied to Billy’s performative life in *Slaughterhouse Five* (20). It works equally usefully for the “players” in their “theatre sets” beyond the wall. In a small coincidence, the play that Vonnegut discusses as an artificial timequake is *Our Town*, in which the heroine is named Emily. This Emily dies and Vonnegut quotes her farewell: “Good-by, Grover’s Corners ... Good-by to clocks ticking” (21). He imagines himself as becoming “a sort of Emily” and saying goodbye to his own Grover’s Corners, which was “the first seven years of [his] life” (21).

The Emilys in *Memoirs*, that is the Emily of the city, the Emily of beyond the wall, and the latter’s mother—a representation of Lessing’s own mother who shares the name—also have a connection to childhood. I previously noted that Lessing’s characters beyond that wall are “exaggerated and enlarged, because this is appropriate for the world of dreams” (*UMS* 29). This is not only apt for dreaming, but also for the experiences of a child. When the protagonist encounters the “personal” beyond the wall, she feels that “being invited into this scene was to be absorbed into child-space” (40). The room and the mother are “immensely tall” (39; 40). She sees things “as a small child might ... enormous and implacable” (40). This experience of child-space is amplified during the personal scenes, but even on the protagonist’s first visit beyond the wall, she notes the great height of the rooms (15). Lessing wanted to capture her childhood experience in these moments of autobiography. She felt that a life story, “if it is being told true to time as actually experienced [would require] seventy percent of the book [to] take you to age ten” (*UMS* 109). Time and space are warped and exaggerated in Lessing’s childhood memories, just as they are in dreams. She claims that her childhood was “dominated” by the “world of dreams”, and the world beyond the wall links the two through its distortion of space and time (*UMS* 119).

This distortion of space and time is largely what makes it so difficult to devise a label for the location beyond the wall. It is a house, and there is a garden, but these descriptions seem both inadequate and inaccurate. The space is much too malleable. The protagonist herself struggles with this: “I talk as if they were a permanent, recognizable, stable set of rooms, as in a house or a flat, instead of a place which changed each time I saw it” (58). The most apt means of reference refers to the relationship of this place to the apartment: beyond the wall. I have examined the city as a location seen through a portal (the window), and it now seems fitting to examine this dream-like location as one that is beyond a wall.

The wall is large, empty, and on the northern edge of her living room. It is a “darkened” white, with old wallpaper of “flowers, leaves, birds” visible under the layer of paint (14). The protagonist spends a lot of time looking “quietly at the wall” until the “half-obliterated pattern showed so clearly that the mind followed suggestions of trees and a garden” (14). This imaginative act opens the wall into what lies beyond it. On the day the protagonist travels through, it appears to distort: “[the wall seemed] higher in the middle than at its end”, in a kind of foreshadowing of the warping of space that will occur on the other side (15).

Lessing writes in *Under My Skin* that “the dissolving wall is an ancient symbol, perhaps the oldest” (29). The wall in *Memoirs* is of the same tradition as the wardrobe that separates England from Narnia, or the brick walls in *Harry Potter* that are gateways to magical locations. Lessing’s symbolic wall, a choice she hopes will “strike the unconscious”, similarly separates the everyday from the unusual (29). Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Ryan as saying that narrative space could be defined “in terms of the partitions” (“Space” 429). I have discussed the window, which is a kind of horizontal partition as it “divide[s] the geography of the narrative world” at the same time as it offers a visual portal through it (Ryan “Space” 429). The protagonist’s empty wall does divide her living room from the shared corridor, but textually it functions as a vertical partition rather than a horizontal partition. Vertical partitions in narrative divide what Thomas G. Pavel calls “salient ontologies” (qtd. in Ryan “Space” 429). These might oppose “everyday life to a world of magic, dreams to reality ... the different levels of fictionality” (Ryan “Space” 429). While the wall is traditionally a horizontal partition, the “ancient symbol” of the dissolving wall fulfils a “figuratively magical role” and usually offers a means of traversing different ontologies in narrative (Dannenberg 181).

I have already noted the dreamlike nature of the world beyond the wall, but this is not the

only ontological opposition that can be found between the world of the apartment and the “indefinite region” (67). Movement through the wall is a transition between fictionality and nonfictionality as well as between reality and dreams. The personal scenes that the protagonist encounters in the shifting rooms of the house beyond the wall are moments of autobiography. There is an oxymoronic combination, then, of the city being the world of reality and fiction, and the place beyond the wall being the sphere of dreams and nonfiction. *Memoirs* distorts the autobiographical into the realm of dreamtime and child-space, and grounds the fictional dystopia in reality.

As might be apparent from these descriptions, the two worlds are not in easy contrast or opposition. The division between them is more complex than one being real and realistic, and the other unreal and unrealistic. The novel ensures that the two are inexorably linked, as they begin to blend into each other more and more as the story progresses. The wall with its “fruits and leaves and flowers” that are “shadowily present” is a porous border—another connecting portal—just as the window opposite it is both a barrier and a threshold (67). At first, the protagonist “[does] not expect the two worlds ever to link up” (25). Indeed, she notes that she would not have thought “at all of their being able to do so ... I would have said this was not possible” (25). Yet after the travelling gangs leave her street “blackened and cracked”, the rooms beyond the wall fall into disarray, and she senses that the “pavements that the fires had burned ... were part of the stuff and the substance of this room” (38). The state of the world of the city appears to impact on the state of the world beyond the wall. This also moves the other way. The protagonist begins to realise that “something of the flavor of the place behind the wall [does] continually invade [her] real life” (125). She hears the sobbing of a child, and the “complaint of the mother”, in a clear reflection of the scenes of early childhood rejection that she has witnessed on the other side of the wall (125). The child crying affects the way she looks at Emily, who at this point is “in short, a woman”, and the juxtaposition of the two causes the protagonist to reflect on the same kind of temporality that is present beyond the wall: child time (126). She thinks, “[t]hat was fourteen years ago, less, when you wept ... Fourteen years for me is so short a time ... in your scale, it is everything, your whole life” (126). Late in the novel, the protagonist feels that a “wind” blows “from one place to the other” (137). She begins to think that the place beyond the wall is “feeding and sustaining” the world of the city through this air, this wind. As the air of the city becomes harder and harder to breathe, the protagonist visits the garden beyond

the wall, and it becomes “[g]ardens beneath gardens, gardens above gardens ... doubled, trebled, endless”, which feed the world (136). She keeps this vision of life in her mind, and these gardens are the “wind” and air that sustain her in the city (137). For the first time, she begins to doubt that the view from her window is reality—perhaps it is a glass that darkly warps. Her “mind would sway” and she has to remind herself that “everybody would concur” that the world of the city is the true one (137).

For the protagonist and for Lessing neither world is reality. The dystopian city is fiction, and the place beyond the wall is a kind of dream. At the very end of the novel, the wall opens out beyond the protagonist and invites the other characters inside it, “through the screen of the forest” (181). The wall becomes a connecting portal between different ontologies—fiction and nonfiction, dreams and reality—for the other characters as well as the protagonist. As they all walk through, the world of the city and the world beyond the wall both “fold up” around the group and disappear, making way for “another order of world altogether” (182). Draine notes of this moment that the fusing represents a “shift in the hierarchy of the worlds” as the characters of the “real” world enter the protagonist’s “inner world” (57). She goes on to say: “[t]he reader, unwilling to accept this new frame as primary ... is forced to ... disengage himself ... This is experience as a repudiation of the text as a whole” (57). While I agree that the ending of *Memoirs* is jarring, Draine’s argument here is based on a view that the two worlds have been clearly demarcated throughout the novel. I suggest that the two are separated by a more porous wall. Each side informs and sustains the other. Additionally, Draine does not mention the autobiographical aspects of *Memoirs*, which contribute to a balancing between the two worlds. As I have previously noted, the city is real and fictional while the place beyond the wall is surreal and nonfictional. The world that is reality to the characters is opposite to the world that is reality to the author. The merging of these worlds is less jarring when one considers how naturally they fit together as two halves of a whole.

The vertical partition between dream and reality, fiction and nonfiction, social/historical and personal, is represented in *Memoirs* by a dissolving wall. The protagonist moves between these ontologies as she moves through the world, bringing the reader with her. I have spent most of this chapter discussing how space works in *Memoirs*. The three spaces (the apartment, the city, and beyond the wall) are spaces divided by porous borders, by connecting portals. The window offers visual access between the apartment and the city, and vice versa, and is both a

barrier and a threshold. The window as a barrier, as a wall, divides stasis from movement, safety from danger, and social/historical decay from personal memories. It divides the protagonist from the dystopic society around her, and simultaneously divides the society from the warmth and safety of her apartment. The novel's final sentence is particularly meaningful when one considers *Memoirs* as a novel of barriers: the story ends "as the last walls dissolved" (182). These might be the walls between "waves of violence" and a proverbial endless garden of Eden (*UMS* 28). They might also be the walls between dreams and reality, fiction and nonfiction. In its close, the novel moves into another space—some unknowable space—in which we hope that these contradictions might be finally negotiated into some kind of sense.

Pieces of the Carpet: The Autobiographical Impulse

The most obvious question asked when writing about *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* as autobiographical science fiction is this: why those two genres together? If autobiography is something about the self—about one's life—that must be communicated, then science fiction offers the tools of communication. Both novels fracture time and space. In my chapter on *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, I explored how fragmented physical spaces are divided by portals that, in the case of the window, separates the social and historical from the personal and autobiographical and, in the case of the wall, separates different ontologies such as fiction and nonfiction, dreams and reality. In my chapter on *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I examined how its narrative order and temporality could capture and express Vonnegut's traumatic and missing memories of the war—memories only able to find representation in a novel that is “unstuck in time”. In this chapter, I will compare a section of Lessing's more traditional autobiography, *Under My Skin*, with *Memoirs*, in a closer look at how the latter employs tools of science fiction to produce a different kind of autobiography. I also hope to suggest a few answers to the question that began this paragraph: why did these authors write works of autobiographical science fiction?

To answer this question, I am inspired by Lessing's penchant for “metaphors and analogies” (*PQD* 67). I compare Vonnegut and Lessing's work writing autobiographical science fiction with a scene from *Memoirs*. The protagonist encounters a moment in the “indefinite region” beyond her living room wall in which a group of people stand around an unfinished carpet (67). It is a “carpet without its life”, it has “potential” for wholeness—an “imminent existence” (69). The figures in the room seem at first “idle and undecided”, but they are engaged in a kind of work. There are colourful scraps and rags on the floor, and each person eventually chooses a scrap which they match to the carpet: “the pattern [of the scrap] answered that part of the carpet” (69). When the fragment of material is “laid exactly” on the carpet, it brings it to “life” (69).

These silent figures are working to create a life out of pieces, to create a whole out of many parts. I have examined *Memoirs* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* as works of fragments: fragments of space and time. *Slaughterhouse* tells its story in small pieces that are arranged out of chronological order as Billy Pilgrim is “unstuck in time” (23). *Memoirs* is a novel in which

space is unstuck—the place beyond the wall is filled with “walls and doors and rooms [that] continually [recreate] themselves like clouds” (67). These space and time warping elements are at home in the genre of science fiction. In the prologue to *Shikasta*, Lessing writes of science fiction that it “makes up the most original branch of literature”, a branch of literature in which the modern world—that “becomes daily wilder, more fantastical, more incredible”—can find expression. Science fiction “can afford to tell truths” (*Shikasta* ix). She tells Roy Newquist that “science-fiction writers have captured our culture’s sense of the future” (*SPV* 75). Lessing prefers the term space fiction to science fiction. For Lessing, space fiction captures the sense of the out-there—the outer space—that she and her father would spend “hour after hour, night after night” watching when they stargazed (*Shikasta* iv). Her father would comment: “if we blow ourselves up, there’s plenty more where we came from!” (*Shikasta* iv). Lessing’s use of the term space fiction not only captures a sense of life amongst the stars, it is also imbued with the problems of life on earth—that is, that some “idiot hand” may destroy the earth at the flip of a switch (*SPV* 13). Lessing uses the term interchangeably with science fiction, but space fiction seems particularly fitting for the manner in which she uses the genre. *Memoirs* is a novel of connected spaces that inform and influence each other: inside and outside, stable and unstable, inner space and outer space. Lessing writes that she is particularly fond of space fiction and science fiction because they offer a mode of storytelling in line with the “ancient” mode of “animal stories, magical stories, fables, and parables” (*UMS* 29; *PQD* 183). *Memoirs* is a novel in this mode: it “shadow[s] forth in a glass darkly” (*UMS* 28).

Vonnegut “learned from the reviewers” that he was a science-fiction writer, rather than setting out to write in that mode (*WFG* 1). The reviews were for *Player Piano*, which is one of several novels he wrote based on his experiences working for General Electric. It was his answer to the problems, fears, and “the implications of having everything run by little boxes”, while *Cat’s Cradle* was a response to his brother Bernard’s work in General Electric’s “House of Magic”, feeding dry ice into clouds in an attempt to create artificial weather (*WFG* 258; see also Strand). There was, he writes, “no avoiding [this subject matter], since the General Electric Company *was* science fiction” (*WFG* 259; emphasis added). Similarly, there seemed to be no avoiding it for *Slaughterhouse-Five*; Vonnegut tells David Standish that he never tried to deal with Dresden realistically because he “couldn’t” (*Conversations* 94).

There was no avoiding science fiction for Vonnegut, but Lessing's growing use of it demonstrates a different relationship with the genre. Lessing embraced science fiction and space fiction, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is one of her earliest forays into the field. Autobiography, on the other hand, is threaded through Lessing's novels from the beginning. *The Grass is Singing* (1950) takes place in Southern Rhodesia, where she grew up and was living during the time of writing, and she uses the places and people she knew there as inspiration (UMS 136). *Martha Quest* (1952), Lessing writes, is not "the literal truth" of her life in Southern Africa, but rather is "true in atmosphere" (UMS 162). One of Lessing's final works, *Alfred and Emily* (2008) pairs a reimagining of her parents' lives without the influence of the First World War, with a more factual account of what happened to them. Lessing also wrote a more traditional autobiography in two parts: *Under My Skin* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade* (1998). The first of these covers the same events as *Memoirs* and as such it is fruitful to examine the differences between them. Like *Martha Quest*, *Memoirs* seeks "truth in atmosphere", and takes a fragmented form that remains legible due to the tools and reading modes of science fiction.

In both *Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Under My Skin*, Lessing recounts her experiences being tickled before bed as a child. In *Under My Skin*, we learn the specifics of these memories. This happened in Tehran, before her family moved to Rhodesia. Lessing describes it as a "ritual" that also included a pillow fight with her parents and brother. They were "being taught how to be good sports ... being a good sport was necessary for the middle-class life" (31). The tickling was done by her father, and it is described in the language of a rape: her face "forced down into his lap" (31). *Under My Skin* captures some of the overwhelming intensity of these memories, as Lessing describes herself as "helpless, hysterical, desperate" (31). She notes that "this was before easy dry-cleaning" and her father's clothes smelt "horrible" (31). The same scene can be found in *Memoirs*, but it is presented differently. We have the same language of a rape, the child is "being explored and laid bare by this man" (76). Her body is described as "contorting and twisting" (76). Yet, in *Memoirs*, the experience of the tickling is more focussed on the atmosphere. Like the other "personal" scenes that the protagonist encounters beyond the wall, her exterior observation takes on the perspective of a child: "this was again the child's view" (75). The drawing room in Tehran becomes a "hot close place", a "world whose air was irritation, confinement, littleness" (75). The air of the room is "thick, heavy, absorbing" (75). Everything in the room is "very large, over-lifesize" (75).

The largeness of the room and her parents in it is “appropriate for the world of dreams”, and Lessing writes that this ritual of tickling was the basis for her worst nightmares as a child (*Memoirs* 29; *UMS* 119). She did not stop having the nightmare until she was seven or eight (*UMS* 31). She writes that although she remembers the nightmare well, the “emotion has long gone away” (*UMS* 31). The scene as it occurs in the dream-like place beyond the wall in *Memoirs* takes on the quality of the nightmare just as it takes on the quality of “the child’s view” (*Memoirs* 75). That is, the emotional nightmare of the child, rather than the emotionless recollections of Lessing as a grown woman. In *Under My Skin*, Lessing explains the scene—that it was designed to teach one to be a “good sport”—and she reflects that the invasive teaching experience has ostensibly failed as it has not left her a woman who will “submit to physical suffering” (31). This adult perspective is missing from *Memoirs*, even though the protagonist functions as a physical manifestation of the grown author Lessing revisiting the scene in her memories. The protagonist feels as the child feels, and thus offers no logical explanation for the tickling. The space and time in the room beyond the wall capture her with their heaviness—this is the first scene which we are told has “time as its air” (76).

The autobiography in *Memoirs* is fragmented compared to the autobiography in *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*. Yet around four times as many words are given over to the tickling scene in *Memoirs*, in part a reflection of Lessing’s view that an autobiography with a focus on time “as actually experienced” would take “seventy percent of the book” to reach age ten (*UMS* 109). However, the tickling scene, compared to the tickling scene in *Under My Skin*, is disconnected from an autobiographical timeline. *Under My Skin* recounts Lessing’s life for the most part in chronological order, and as such the night-time “ritual” scene is preceded and succeeded by other descriptions of her early childhood in Tehran. Additionally, it is given chronological context as Lessing discusses both her parents’ motivation for the ritual, as well as potential consequences: she wonders if the stories in the paper every day “about women being physically bullied by men” are related to the “disguised bullying” of her nightly ritual (*UMS* 31). The scene in *Memoirs* is a scene pulled out of this consequential temporality. Even the preceding pillow fights are not mentioned. Reasoning and explanation are removed, just as they are for the child’s experience. Unlike Lessing, *metaphorically looking back* and finding new and adult perspectives on the scene, the protagonist *physically looking* at the events feels as the child does. For her, the experience of being tickled seems to swell, to take over the room. It is the fragment

of a memory as it was lived, or a nightmare as it was dreamed. When the protagonist leaves the scene, it fades “like a spark of a nightmare” (77).

The personal scenes that the protagonist encounters beyond the wall are all fragments that exist separately outside of causal temporality. There is also another kind of fragmenting of autobiography that occurs in *Memoirs*. The autobiography in *Memoirs* is split between several characters. The protagonist, Emily, and the younger Emily beyond the wall, are all such fragments. Lessing discusses this in an interview with Francois-Olivier Rousseu in 1985:

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, what the narrator believes she is seeing behind the wall ... actually represents her own life, her own childhood. In the tangible world, Emily whom she sees growing up represents the image of her adolescence. Thus, reality and dream, marked off by the wall, complement each other and give an all-encompassing vision of the narrator’s past. (*PQD* 148)

Autobiographical elements, while more directly translated than the personal scenes beyond the wall, influence the events of the city. The protagonist and Emily are both fragments of an autobiographical whole, although they are more occluded through the shadowed glass of metaphor than are the scenes beyond the wall. Lessing, of course, did not grow up in a dystopian city. Yet the protagonist finds unspeakable resonance in the scenes beyond the wall. The very first time she travels there, it is described as such: “and then I was through the wall and I knew what was there” (15). She “knew” this place, recognised it but “from where, though?” (15; 37). The narrator does not know the answer to how she recognises these rooms. On her first visit, she also encounters a “face” that is “familiar to her”—the same face that she glimpses as the last walls dissolve at the end of the novel (16). The narrator wonders whether she truly saw the face during her first visit or whether “it had reflected itself back”, using as a “host” or “mirror”, the “emotion of sweet longing” she felt during that first visit (16). This face is never revealed to us, and when the protagonist sees the inhabitant at the end of the novel she describes her only as “beautiful: it is a word that will do” (16; 182). The “rightful inhabitant” of the world beyond the wall could well be said to be Lessing, to whom the memories that exist there belong. Yet the face also owes its existence to the “sweet longing” of a kind of familiar nostalgia that relies on the protagonist recognising the rooms and knowing them “in her bones” (16; 38). The face of the inhabitant reflects the protagonist’s own memories and nostalgia. Lessing and the protagonist are linked through observation—they look at scenes of memory and dreams at a remove, but

nonetheless recognise themselves. Both are helpless to change what has happened, and the protagonist feels bodily the sensations felt by the child—claustrophobia, invasion. While Lessing herself has lessened the emotional impact of her memories—“fixing” them in her head every night—they come to bear on the protagonist (13). These emotions are examples of what Chu calls “cognitively estranging referent[s]”, and in science fiction they can find representation (245). The warping and shrinking walls of claustrophobia is expressed in science fiction as rooms that can shift and change shape. The tickling—a rape—becomes an invasion of dangerous exterior forces that corrupt a dystopian city. The form of the personal scenes mirrors the out-of-body experience, as the protagonist watches a version of her young self from the outside. Science fiction in *Memoirs*, just as it does in *Slaughterhouse*, “mirrors the forms” of trauma to represent them—and it is the tools of science fiction that allow for this literalisation of metaphor, this expression of the cognitively estranging (Whitehead 3).

Another fragment of autobiography in *Memoirs* is the Emily of the city, who is less directly linked to Lessing’s memories than the Emily found beyond the wall. However, as Gillian Dooley writes, “the adolescent Emily ... is recognizable as the clever, polite, uncommunicative teenager who would spend the day with neighbouring farming families in Southern Rhodesia” (158). This Emily also operates as more of a universal image of adolescence. Late in the novel, Emily has become an “eternal woman” (145). When June, a younger girl in Emily’s care, leaves her, Emily cries “as a woman weeps ... as a grown woman cries” (144). The final scene that the protagonist visits beyond the wall also demonstrates this growth. It mirrors the new womanhood of the Emily of the city, and it is therefore quite fitting that the scene involves a literal mirror—another literalised metaphor. The Emily of the dream world is trying on a scarlet evening dress and examining her appearance. It is a tight dress of “blatant vulgarity”, and yet “non-sexual” as it “made her a doll ... both provocative and helpless” (158). The narrator notes that in the city in Emily’s lifetime, “the fashion had never been thus” (158). While this scene of growth has no direct parallel in *Under My Skin*—Lessing does not write about owning a scarlet dress—she does often note clothing choices, such as a “black velvet evening dress” that is “fitted to the thighs” (204). These fragments are both results of a kind of forced maturity: Emily in the city weeps in “dreadful grief” over the loss of a child in her care, society asking of her a kind of early motherhood; Emily beyond the wall is sexualised not by herself but by the clothing society demands of her (145). Emily as “eternal woman” becomes every-woman, and Lessing frames

development as something achieved through grief (“the sobs which are being torn out of her are one of the pillars on which everything has to rest”), and sex (“this monstrosity of a dress ... worn by hundreds of thousands of women within my lifetime”) (145; 158). While Lessing writes that *Memoirs* is about “[a] middle-aged person—the sex does not matter—[who] observes a young self”, it is a novel that focusses on the female experience.

This female experience is supported by the imagery of eggs that is threaded through *Memoirs*. Eggs are a uniquely female possession, and while this imagery reinforces the novel as one of growth and development, it also cements it as a female growth or a female nurturing. When the protagonist first begins to sense something different about the empty wall in her living room, she compares it to “holding an egg to one’s ear that is due to hatch” (14). The white walls of the rooms beyond the wall are like “eggshells” (58; 86). On one visit, the protagonist encounters Emily, Emily’s parents, and the girl who Emily looked after as a child, gathered around a “brilliant white egg ... full of delight” (124). Just as the protagonist did with her wall, they are all touching the egg, as if waiting for something to hatch. In the novel’s final scene, everyone moves beyond the wall and encounters “a giant black egg of pockmarked iron” (181). This egg, made of the now obsolete industrial metal of the city rather than the whiteness of the rooms beyond the wall, “[falls] apart, and out of it [comes]... a scene, perhaps, of patterned materials on a carpet that had no life in it until that moment when vitality was fed into it by these exactly-answering patches” (182).

The patterned materials with which Lessing weaves her autobiography in *Memoirs* are the characters—the protagonist, and the two Emilys—who combine to bring a sense of Lessing to “life” (*Memoirs* 69). The materials are also the personal scenes found beyond the wall, fragments of a childhood that are pulled out of time and thus devoid of cause and effect. *Memoirs* creates an autobiographical whole, but it is a different kind of wholeness from the one in *Under My Skin*. *Memoirs* gives us the sense of a person, who is at once the static and observant protagonist, the rebellious and brave Emily, and the child oppressed by her surroundings.

Betsy Draine notes in her examination of *Memoirs* that the dissolving wall divides the outer experience of life from an inner experience. She draws on Jungian ideas here, which Lessing is also doing, particularly in the sense that “a reintegration of the psyche” is possible in Jungian therapy through the “world of dream and fantasy” (Draine 56). Draine notes that the personal scenes beyond the wall act as “visions of suffering” that are “so ridden with the clichés

of depth psychology that they could be packaged for educational television ... Sibling Rivalry; Oral-Anal Regression; Sexual Tension between Father and Daughter” (56). This Jungian connection is not to be ignored—indeed, the six-sided room in which the carpet is being assembled draws on a Jungian symbol of “coming into being, of wholeness” (Jaffé qtd. in Draine 56). Lorelei Cederstrom published a work on Jungian patterns in Lessing’s novels. Yet Cederstrom turns away from science fiction in her examination, and N. Katherine Hayles calls her application of a Jungian framework “relentlessly programmatic” (132). *Memoirs* does not correspond perfectly to a Jungian structure for all its psychological “clichés”, and the ending offers an incomplete “suggestion as to the course of treatment” for the sufferings (Jung qtd. in Draine 56). Draine’s pursuit of this framework in part contributes to the “repudiation” that she feels at the novel’s end. In focussing on Jung’s concept of the inner and outer worlds, these critics have neglected to focus on the autobiographical. I argue that the world beyond the wall is more than inner dreams, it also draws heavily on Lessing’s experience of childhood, and the border between it and the city is more porous and dynamic than a mere manifestation of Jung’s theories.

The ending of *Memoirs* is surprising, but if one reads the text using the protocols of science fiction—in which walls can dissolve, different ontologies can interact, and doors can dilate instead of opening—then the fractured pieces of autobiography hold together. In science fiction, someone can meet their young self through time travel. The protagonist can encounter a young Emily who does not fit with the chronological logic of the Emily she knows without rejecting what she sees, and can simultaneously see herself in the girl. This can also be said for the illogical world of dreams—of course, Chu argues that any work that represents the illogical and estranging is a work of science fiction (6-7). Reading *Memoirs* as a work of science fiction not only gives the novel a foundation for its warping of time and space, but also allows me to draw on Lessing’s described reasons for writing science fiction.

I have been writing a lot in this chapter, and indeed in my thesis as a whole, about the intentions of my two authors. I am applying these intentions to the flesh and blood writers of my texts, and have held off using the term implied author for my discussions. While many of the critics that I draw upon are advocates for use of the implied author—H. Porter Abbott, Wayne Booth, Brian Richardson—others such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal and Hans-Harald Müller are critical of the concept. I do not argue against the role of the reader in determining unique and

individual meanings in a text, and nor do I suggest that the views of a text will always mirror the views of an author, but in the case of my discussion of *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs*, I rebuff the structuralist and post-structuralist approach to the author. Marie-Laure Ryan notes that use of the implied author to discuss authorial intention “erects a protective shield ... that prevents the import of extra-textual information in determining the meaning of the text” (“Meaning” 30). Even recent proponents of intentional readings, such as John Farrell, want to avoid “the reductions of biography” (11). Nonetheless, he suggests that biography has been an “embarrassingly indispensable analytic resource” (9). A study of these texts as autobiographical science fiction is only enriched by remembering the views of the authors. Ryan writes: “I see nothing wrong with constructing an author-image; but if readers are interested in the author as a whole person, there is no reason to exclude other data in the construction of this image” (“Meaning” 42). I am, if not interested in Lessing and Vonnegut as whole people, interested in the different images of wholeness that they create in their fractured autobiographies. Vonnegut and Lessing speak substantially about what they write and how they write. I will be using this evidence in support of an intentional reading of my two texts.

Lessing creates an autobiographical whole out of pieces of “patterned material” in *Memoirs* by both separating autobiographical moments from their chronology and placing them in the disjointed timespace of science fiction, and sharing elements of autobiography between the characters in the novel—the protagonist, Emily, the girl beyond the wall. Vonnegut’s autobiography is similarly fractured in timespace in *Slaughterhouse*, and—like Lessing—he also scatters pieces of autobiography throughout his other writings. Early works such as *Cat’s Cradle* and *Player Piano* were directly inspired by experiences in his life, and as his career progresses, Vonnegut disperses more and more fragments of himself between his works. Dresden is mentioned in other works beyond *Slaughterhouse*. He describes his experiences in the introduction to *Mother Night* (1962): “the war came, and I was in it, and I was captured [and] high explosives were dropped on Dresden” (vi). It is a brief account, more like his letter home than it is like *Slaughterhouse*. In *Timequake* (1997), Vonnegut references his experiences a few days after the fire-bombing: “[t]housands of prisoners of war like myself had been turned loose [south of Dresden] with death camp survivors ... lunatics and convicted felons” (35). This period is briefly mentioned in *Bluebeard* (1987), as “Old Soldier’s Anecdote Number Two” (252). He describes the man who oversaw the dwindling food supplies as remaining “sleek and contented-

looking while the rest of us became skeletons” (252). Vonnegut calls *Bluebeard* a “hoax autobiography” (np). It is the autobiography of Rabo Karabekian, not of Vonnegut himself, and it includes little of Vonnegut’s personal history besides the fragment of his experiences after Dresden.

Elements of Vonnegut’s life other than the war are also threaded through his works. His narrators often adopt his own voice, and recount events from his own life. *Timequake* is a particularly autobiographical work. He encourages us to think like his Uncle Alex and exclaim, “if this isn’t nice, what is?” during “simple occasions ... maybe drinking lemonade on a hot afternoon in the shade” (4). Alex is mentioned in the prologues to *Slapstick* (1976) and *Jailbird* (1979), where Vonnegut tells us about his alcoholism and death. In *Timequake*, Vonnegut also writes about his sister Alice, who “died of cancer of the everything” and is quoted several times (1; 9; 16; 25). His brother Bernard worked in the House of Magic at General Electric doing the kind of science that inspired *Cat’s Cradle* (1963). Bernard is also quoted in *Timequake*, and Vonnegut describes how he became an artist (“the poor man’s Jackson Pollock!”) later in his life (43; 49).

Another way that Vonnegut weaves himself through his works is in the character of Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer who is Vonnegut’s alter ego. He appears, among other places, as a guest at the part in which Billy remembers the bombing of Dresden. He suggests that Billy has seen through a “time window”, and tells a fellow guest that he puts “everything that happens to [him] in books” in a joke that, in the middle of an autobiographical work, is at Vonnegut’s expense (174; 172). Yet Trout is less autobiographical and more of a parody. He was, for example, a “hobo for much of his life”, and unlike Vonnegut his books belong to the realm of the trashy paperback rather than the science-fiction canon—in which *Slaughterhouse-Five*, at least, must safely have a place (*Timequake* xiii). One of the most important aspects of Trout, however, is that he is a prolific writer. He wrote “thousands of stories” over his eighty-four years (*Timequake* xiii). Vonnegut wrote significantly less than Trout, but this compulsion to write is found in the real author just as it is found in his alter ego. It is useful to return to the carpet here. The figures working on it do so out of an impulse—“some pressure”—that is not explained (70).

Vonnegut and Lessing both discuss a kind of autobiographical impulse. Vonnegut felt a compulsion to write about his experiences in the war even though he can not remember them. He

tells David Standish that it was a kind of therapy, and once he had finished *Slaughterhouse*, he “didn’t have to write at all anymore if [he] didn’t want to” (*Conversations* 108-109). It was, he says, a “categorical imperative” that he should write about Dresden (*Conversations* 23).

Vonnegut says that “[t]he pursuit of writing is the pursuit of one’s own condition”, and the condition he pursued in *Slaughterhouse* was the condition of “astonishment and grief” that left Billy Pilgrim and the other POWs like a barbershop quartet and left Vonnegut without memories of the bombing (*Conversations* 45; *Slaughterhouse* 179). Writing *Slaughterhouse* took “a long time and was painful [as he] remembered nothing about the bombing of Dresden” (*Conversations* 230). Vonnegut notes that fellow POWs would refuse to help him recover these memories: “[t]hey did not want to think about it” (230). Vonnegut, on the other hand, *did* want to think about it—and to write about it—because of some impulse or “imperative”.

This autobiographical impulse—this “categorical imperative”—contributes to the text’s form as autobiographical science fiction. Vonnegut was asked whether he considered a more realistic genre for *Slaughterhouse*, and he responded: “I couldn’t” (*Conversations* 94). He added, “[t]hese things are intuitive. There’s never any strategy meeting” (94). Lessing shares this sense of intuitive form. She tells Thomas Frick, “[i]t’s not that you say, ‘I want to write a space-fiction book.’ You start from the other end, and what you have to say dictates the form of it” (*PQD* 161). These authors both credit the impulse itself, the “have” to say, with the nature of the text. Vonnegut adds that *Slaughterhouse* was “largely a found object. It was what was in my head” (*Conversations* 94). What Vonnegut and Lessing had to say in the respective works on which I have based this thesis, dictated a form that blended science fiction and autobiography. Their memories—Vonnegut’s of the war, and Lessing’s of her early childhood—were warped, fractured and distorted. Chu writes that “trauma is always already science-fictionalized”—in other words, the memories “dictate the form of it”, it is a “found object” (Chu 155; *PQD* 161; *Conversations* 94). Both authors had things they need to write, and because of the nature of these things, they wrote works of autobiographical science fiction.

Vonnegut and Lessing collect their own patterned materials out of some unnamed imperative, to bring a whole to life. I have discussed this impulse as an impulse towards the personal, but for both authors this impulse is also defined in regards to history, or the world. Vonnegut gives his reason for writing as: “I think writers should serve their society” (*Conversations* 45). Vonnegut perceived himself to be writing in Asimov’s third stage of science

fiction: sociology dominant (WFG 83). Writing about the bombing of Dresden was not only a form of therapy for himself, but a way to inform readers of the “largest massacre in the history of Europe”, something he felt he had to do considering that he, “a writer, had been present” (*Conversations* 94). A writer’s purpose, Vonnegut argues, is to “make mankind aware of itself ... [w]e have no choice in the matter” (WFG 228).

Lessing feels much the same social impulse. She says that she felt compelled to write autobiography as she was “part of an extraordinary time, the end of the British Empire in Africa ... [p]eople no longer know what that time was like” (UMS 160). Additionally, she writes that “we are all of us made by war ... but we seem to forget it” (UMS 10). While her African novels engage more with the particulars of the “extraordinary time”, *Memoirs* engages with her need to remind society of war—the same need that is felt by Vonnegut. In 1971, Lessing told James Mossman that she felt she was living in a “collapsing society”, like the kind in *Memoirs* that mirrors the “waves of violence” of wars during her lifetime (“DLRH”; UMS 28). In the same vein as Vonnegut’s drive to “make mankind aware of itself”, Lessing writes to make “readers look at a situation more sharply” (PQD 44).

The social concerns of Vonnegut and Lessing are mirrors in an aspect of science fiction’s history: the tendency towards social criticism. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr writes that science fiction is often concerned with “implying critiques of contemporary conditions [and] possible future outcomes” (113). This view of science fiction can be found in the early magazine days, with John W. Campbell Jr referring to the genre as a “thought experiment about the future” (qtd. in James 23). Or, in Patrick Parrinder’s words, “by imagining strange worlds [in science fiction] we come to see our conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective” (Introduction 4). This is, he writes, the “essence” of Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement—and Parrinder titles his book *Learning from Other Worlds* (4). To say that science fiction is confined to social criticism would be reductive, but Lessing draws on this history when she writes that the genre “can afford to tell truths”, and that it “described our nasty present long ago, when it was still the future” (*Shikasta* x). Billy Pilgrim feels this as he and his roommate at the veteran’s hospital read Kilgore Trout novels in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: “they were both trying to reinvent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help” (128). Vonnegut and Lessing find fitting expression for their social concerns in a genre with a history of just that.

I return to the carpet metaphor for the final time. In the six-sided room, myriad figures search for and choose a single fragment of material to add to the carpet. The protagonist finds her own and, when she matches it to its spot on the carpet, it is “fulfilled, perfect” (70). The protagonist realises that everywhere, in all other rooms, are people who will “in their turn drift in here ... find their matching piece—would lay it down, and drift off again” (70). It is a work that “must continue, would go on always” (70). The work is “important not only to the people actually engaged in this work, but to everyone” (70). Lessing and Vonnegut, in their impulse to make us “aware”, or to see more “sharply”, are bringing their own fragments that will “bring life to the carpet”. Vonnegut’s experiences in Dresden and Lessing’s in Africa both shape them as kinds of authors who write to inform and remind the world of its darker corners. Lessing told Joyce Carol Oates about meeting Vonnegut in 1969: he is a “bloke [she] got on with very well” and whose “writing she admires immensely” (*PQD* 36). Oates’ surprise here—“to me Doris Lessing’s writing is of a much more substantial, “literary” nature”—is tempered when she realises their “similar concerns for the madness of society, its self-destructive tendencies” (*PQD* 35-36).

Lessing and Vonnegut each find their “matching piece” that can bring the communal art to life, to fulfillment, from their own experiences. They want to write, both for themselves and for the world, and “what [they] have to say dictates the form of it” (*PQD* 161). For both authors, what they *have* to say is fragmented, difficult, and in part forgotten. The works they produce fragment time and space to reflect this, and in doing so engage with science fiction in a way that other works of autobiography usually do not. Additionally, they turn to science fiction as a form that can confront the chaos of the planet—the madman with his finger on the black lever—and through a glass darkly reflect the banal oppression and repetitive lunacy of the world they live in. That is, “if we blow ourselves up, there’s plenty more where we came from!”

Conclusion

Science fiction in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a broadening of the “styles, themes, and tropes” that had dominated the genre since the 1930s (Merrick 102). This broadening is found in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Memoirs of a Survivor*, written five years apart, and utilising this new softer science fiction for autobiographical concerns. Namely, the tools of science fiction offered Vonnegut and Lessing the means of representing memories that were fractured, missing, claustrophobic—somehow inexpressible. *Slaughterhouse* and *Memoirs* are not the only works of this kind. Georges Perec’s *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975) is composed of sections of autobiography from his life in Nazi-occupied France, and entirely fictional sections on a utopian island. Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* (1981) is in part an autobiography, and in part a hellish, surreal dystopia. More recently, Jeffrey Ford, M. Rickert, and Kelly Link are among those who write works that often begin with the real and autobiographical, and veer into the horrific and science fictional.

Yet what would it mean for a work of autobiographical science fiction to be written in 2017? This is not to say that none *are*—Michael Moorcock’s *The Whispering Swarm* blends an account of author’s adulthood in London with parallel universes, and is described by the author as the “kind of novel [he] hasn’t seen before” (Flood par. 3). It is more to say that there is a change in what it means to write science fiction and what it means to write autobiography. Gary K. Wolfe argues that science fiction in the twenty-first century is “evaporating” (49). It has “leaked into the atmosphere” and become “so diverse and ubiquitous [that it seems] part of the fabric of contemporary culture” (49). Adam Roberts extends this, noting the dominance of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* among young adult literature—all fantastical, the latter dystopic science fiction—and the prevalence of science fiction in twenty-first-century film and television (*History* 479-480).

Something similar is happening with autobiography. Laurie McNeill coins the term “auto/tweetography” to refer to a new kind of life writing produced by the rise of the internet (149). Autobiography in this mode concerns the “networked self”, which is “responsive, regularly updated and serial” (149). Users of Twitter, Facebook and other short-form social media platforms share life stories in minute pieces. It is a “synecdochic rather than definitive take on a whole life” (161). McNeill notes that engaging with social media is a communal act of “reflection and affirmation” (150). Like science fiction’s “evaporation”, the proliferation of

“auto/tweetographies” through their “accessibility, brevity, and informality ... embed autobiographical acts in cultural consciousness” (151).

What does it mean to write straight science fiction in a cultural climate that has so “thoroughly dispersed” its tropes and modes into the mainstream? (Roberts *History* 482). How does one write autobiography in a time when almost everybody is engaged in an act of continual, piecemeal “auto/tweetography”? Is it possible to write autobiographical science fiction in a thoroughly twenty-first-century mode? If it is, I look forward to reading it.

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