
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Writing is one of the ways for veterans to express their feelings and view regarding their experience during war. Many veterans have written books about their experience during war in the form of memoir and fiction (Klempan, “A Veterans Perspective”). Kurt Vonnegut was one of the World War II veterans who had written his experience about World War II, especially about the firebombing of Dresden. Through *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut shares his experience regarding the meaningless destruction of Dresden and the glorified depiction of war that overshadowed such atrocity—these two things mostly shaped his view towards war.

In this research, I would like to analyze the reflection of Kurt Vonnegut’s view towards war in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the conveyance of his view in the novel. This research is significant to uncover how a historical event and personal experience influence author’s perspective regarding an issue. In this case, I argue that Kurt Vonnegut’s experience as a prisoner-of-war who witnessed the destruction of Dresden in the hands of Allies bombers influenced his view towards United States involvement in future wars and the depiction of war in books and films.

Kurt Vonnegut had served in the United States Army and fought during the Battle of the Bulge. He was also captured by the Germans and later interned in Dresden. During his time in Dresden, Vonnegut witnesses the Allies' firebombing of the city, which changed the way he viewed war. Vonnegut considered this bombing raid as an atrocity and as the result he opposed US' involvement in the future wars and rejected the depiction of World War II as a "good war" in the media.

Kurt Vonnegut then writes his experience during World War II in the form of novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*. However, in this thesis, I would use the simplified title, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in order to make it easy to refer to the novel. This novel was published during the height of Vietnam War and anti-war movement. This novel tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, a soldier and also a chaplain's assistant of the United States Army, who has been 'unstuck in time' and saw how his life progressed through flashbacks—from his early days to the postwar era. However, the central event of this story is Billy Pilgrim's experience during World War II and his surviving the Allies' firebombing of Dresden as a prisoner of war.

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut not only shows what Billy Pilgrim experiences during the war, but also how he lives after the war. By writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I argue that Kurt Vonnegut tried to show how the war looks like through the eyes of those who had fought on the frontline—specifically, the prisoners of war interned in Dresden—and what kind of horror and atrocities they had to witness. Furthermore, through this novel, Kurt Vonnegut also tried to

express his view about World War II—a war that considered as a “good war”—and to stress that there is no “good war”, no matter how justified it is. According Jacques Pauwels, the idea of a “good war” in United States perpetuated by the belief that American involvement in World War II was motivated solely by idealistic and altruistic reasons rather than based on the interest of the state and corporate profit (7).

In the United States, World War II has great impact on literature. The soldiers that served during World War II were mostly referred as ‘war heroes’. This portrayal of soldiers as ‘war heroes’ were later reinforced through books and films—most notably through John Wayne’s films such as *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Flying Tigers*, *Operation Pacific*, *They Were Expendable* (based on William L. White’s book), and *The Longest Day* (based on Cornelius Ryan’s book). These books and films not only served as a tribute towards the soldiers that have fought during World War II, but also were used by the government to encourage the youth to enlist in military. Michael Salevouris explains that books and films about war are effective to encourage young people to enlist (Salevouris 342). During World War II, US Government used books, films, cartoon, and poster as propaganda. According to the National WWII Museum, from the period of 1942 to 1945, the United States’ armed force saw surge of enlistments in all branches. About 38.8% (6,332,000) of its servicemen were volunteers while the others 61.2% (about 11,535,000) were draftees (“Research Starters US Military”).

World War II also has a role to shape the American public opinion about war. Campbell and Cain conducted a survey on how the American public

responded to their country involvement in the war and they discovered that public support for the war did not fall below 75 percent despite the number of casualties mounted over the years of United States involvement in the war (qtd. in Berinsky 73). Regarding this, according to Berinsky, the majority of American people regarded World War II as a “good war”, in which the reason behind the involvement was clear; to stop the massive atrocities conducted by the Axis powers (73).

However, one question arises from this. Weren't the Allies—particularly the United States of America—also conducted their own atrocities during the war? In the Pacific theatre of the war, many American soldiers mutilate the body parts of their enemies and then keep it as the ‘trophies of war’. The recruitment office in Tarawa for example fixed the skull of dead Japanese soldier alongside the “Tarawa Recruitment Office” sign to a coconut tree (Kuroski, “The Worst War Crimes”). Similarly, in the Europe theatre of the war, in what known as the Canicattì massacre, the U.S. military under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Herbert McCaffrey involved in the killing of Italian civilians despite the later had already surrendered when U.S. troops entered. However, perhaps the most controversial Allies’ atrocity during World War II is the firebombing of Dresden, of which the U.S. Air Force alongside the Royal Air Force conducted aerial bombing on the city of Dresden, Germany, which resulted in many civilian deaths and destruction to the city.

The death resulted from the firebombing of Dresden and the secrecy that surrounding it after World War II ended was Vonnegut’s main reason to write

Slaughterhouse-Five. Kurt Vonnegut had made several attempts to make a story about the firebombing of Dresden, but he found many difficulties during the process because there is not much he remembers about the event. In an interview with William Rodney Allen, Kurt Vonnegut said that the book is “a process of twenty years of this sort of living with Dresden and the aftermath,” (Allen 163). I found the novel to be interesting and also impressive because parts of the novel are based from Vonnegut’s own account about the firebombing of Dresden, making it a semi-autobiographical novel. The novel reflects Vonnegut’s own experience when he witnessed the firebombing of Dresden and also reflects the trauma he had to endure as the survivor after he returned to the society.

As a veteran who witnessed the firebombing of Dresden, Kurt Vonnegut has a unique view regarding war. In United States, World War II usually depicted as a war against evil and tyranny. It signifies heroism, patriotism, and masculinity. Vonnegut in the other hand depicted World War II in *Slaughterhouse-Five* in a darker tone with fragmented bodies, multiple shades of grey, and presented in a schizophrenic manner, which is usually signified Vietnam War. Since *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself was written during the height of Vietnam War, I believe that Kurt Vonnegut also shares the same anti-war idea with the majority of the people at the time. Vonnegut’s view particularly criticizes the romanticization of World War II as a “good war” in films and books. However, Kurt Vonnegut didn’t explicitly express his anti-war idea in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Instead of straight out saying that war is not good, Kurt Vonnegut conveyed it by showing the absurdity of the war.

1.2 Identification of the Problems

After reading *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I found out that Vonnegut's anti-war sentiment was mostly related to the glorified depiction of war in media, which overshadowed the atrocity conducted by the Allies in Dresden—namely the firebombing of Dresden. I also found that Vonnegut deliberately adjusted his writing style in order to convey his view towards war. There are many instances where Kurt Vonnegut expresses his anti-war sentiment by referring to his experience as a prisoner of war during World War II. One of the instances can be seen in the first chapter of the novel where the author replies to Harrison Starr—a moviemaker—that his book is indeed an anti-war novel (4). *Slaughterhouse-Five* also depicts how a veteran tried to fit in with the society after returned from the battlefield.

I assume that the use of napalm bomb and strategic bombing during Vietnam War contributed to the success of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, considering the novel itself was written during the height of Vietnam War and dealing the firebombing of Dresden, the most controversial strategic bombing carried by United States and Britain. Through Billy Pilgrim, Kurt Vonnegut tried to convey his view towards war; how World War II and the firebombing of Dresden had affected his life after he returns to society. I argue that through *Slaughterhouse-Five* Kurt Vonnegut tried to criticize the view that blindly regards World War II as a “good war”—a necessary war and a justified war against evil—without understanding its impacts towards the victims after the war ended, be it civilians or combatants.

In the novel, Kurt Vonnegut himself didn't directly say, "War is not good". Instead, he conveyed it in his novel through the life of Billy Pilgrim. Since *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself was written during the height of Vietnam War, I believe that Kurt Vonnegut's motivation to write the novel is to criticize US involvement in Vietnam.

1.3 Scope of the Research

In this research, I would discuss Kurt Vonnegut's view towards war and how he conveyed it in the novel. The focus in this research would be Kurt Vonnegut's experience during the firebombing of Dresden and how that event influenced his view regarding war. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is Kurt Vonnegut's most influential and popular work. It is not only shows us the different perspective about war, but also shows us what war can do to people and how it affects them when they return to society.

1.4 Questions of the Research

Based on the explanation of background research above, I would like to formulate the questions of the research as following:

1. What is Kurt Vonnegut's view towards war as reflected in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?
2. How does Kurt Vonnegut deliver his view towards war in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?

1.5 Objectives of the Research

According to the aforementioned research questions, the main objectives in this research would be going as following:

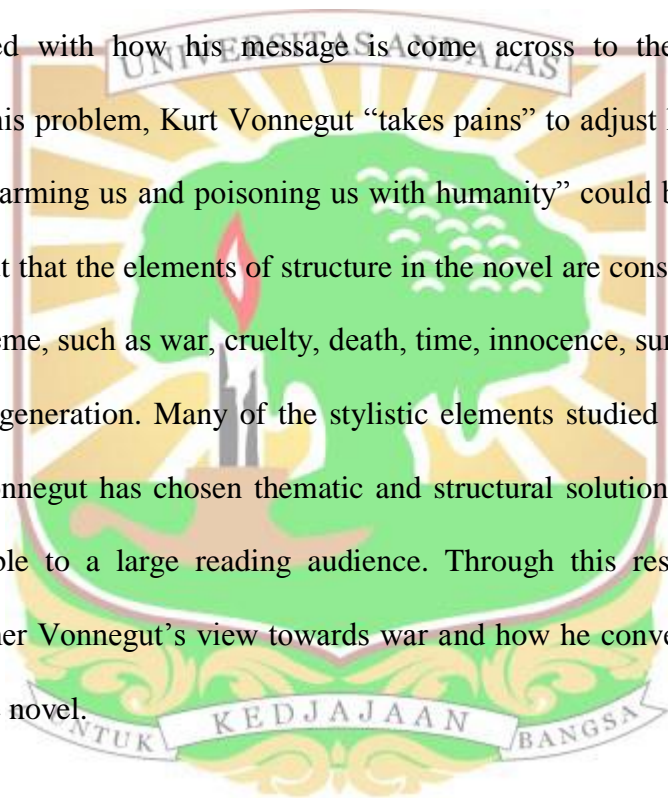
1. To analyze Kurt Vonnegut's view towards war as reflected in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.
2. To find out how Kurt Vonnegut deliver his view towards war in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

1.6 Review of the Related Studies

In conducting the research, I would use the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* written by Kurt Vonnegut as the primary data and writings related to the novel as secondary data. Several researchers had already analyzed *Slaughterhouse-Five*. However, their research mostly focused on the intrinsic elements of the novel and only mentioning slightly the significance of the novel as Kurt Vonnegut's expression regarding the issue of war. In this research, I would like to offer a different interpretation of the novel by uncovering the reflection of Kurt Vonnegut's view towards war and analyze the conveyance of his view in the novel. By doing this, I hope I could provide a way to understand the relation between literature and the external factors that shape it, especially about war and its impact towards Kurt Vonnegut. Nevertheless, in this research, I would refer to several sources that relevant to this thesis.

The first research is a study conducted by Monica Loeb, which titled *Vonnegut's Duty - Dance with Death Theme and Structure in Slaughterhouse-*

Five. In this study, Loeb investigate how effective Vonnegut's 'alarm system' in warning the reader about the gloomy picture of the world and what is lacking in society. This study also investigates how Kurt Vonnegut's didactic purpose has influenced the treatment of themes and structure in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Loeb states that due to the impact of television and film, the audience has been educated to 'quick cuts and very little exposition' (Loeb 2), which in turn affected the audience ability to process long and convoluted information. Kurt Vonnegut is very concerned with how his message is come across to the audience, so, regarding to this problem, Kurt Vonnegut "takes pains" to adjust his style so that his goal of "alarming us and poisoning us with humanity" could be achieved (2). Loeb found out that the elements of structure in the novel are constantly related to the novel's theme, such as war, cruelty, death, time, innocence, survival, free will, fantasy and regeneration. Many of the stylistic elements studied in this research reveal that Vonnegut has chosen thematic and structural solutions that make his novel accessible to a large reading audience. Through this research, I would elaborate further Vonnegut's view towards war and how he conveys his anti-war message in the novel.



The second study is an article titled "*All This Happened, More or Less*": *The Science Fiction of Trauma in Slaughterhouse-Five* by Amanda Wicks. In this article, Wicks explores how Vonnegut found a unique way to recount an experience that lies outside the bounds of normative human consciousness by turning to the generic characteristics of science fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut pays attention to the familiar/unfamiliar binary intrinsic to science fiction in order to create a narrative about the bizarre, frightening experience of

trauma in general and traumatic memory in particular. Based on Kaplan's explanation about the position individuals in the relation of an event, Wicks pointed out and explain how Vonnegut's position as the witness of the firebombing of Dresden prompted the "authorial obligation" that Vonnegut later felt to share with the public following the silence that surrounded the event (Wicks 329). Wicks later elaborated further, how traumatic events affect the ability of a person to remember those events. She noted that following a traumatic event, any memory associated with the experience is very subtle and that the traumatized person cannot recall that memory at will. In Vonnegut's case, he cannot recall precisely what happened during the firebombing of Dresden. Traumatic memories are mostly experienced as repetitions, flashbacks, and nightmares, which arises from the realm of the unconscious, caused by the inability of the brain to comprehend and express it through language (332). Wicks argues that Billy Pilgrim experienced in the novel—his 'unstuck in time' and his encounter with the Tralfamadorian—was a result of his traumatic experience as the witness of the firebombing of Dresden. She then concludes that in *Slaughterhouse-Five* science fiction offers new ground for how trauma depicted in fiction, because it mostly stresses in understanding the trauma itself rather than just comprehend it (338). This article is useful for me in order to analyze how the trauma that experienced by Billy Pilgrim in the novel is closely tied with the trauma that Vonnegut experienced after he returned from the battlefield.

The third research is a thesis by Rahmatika Ismael—an English Department student of Andalas University—entitled *Ernest Hemingway's Impression toward World War I as Seen in A Farewell to Arms*. In this thesis,

Ismael explains Hemingway's experience during World War I as an ambulance driver in Italian Army who tasked to save the life of injured soldiers on the frontline and bring them back to the first aid post. She pointed out how war has significant impacts in Hemingway's life. Using Abram's expressive theory and historical-biographical approach, Ismael explains Hemingway's feelings and emotions towards the destruction caused by war. She asserts that Hemingway's impression about World War I and the destruction it caused can be seen in his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. Ismael later concludes that Ernest Hemingway, through *A Farewell to Arms*, tried to convey his message about how war only caused suffering, deaths, and destructions. Through this thesis, I could analyze further, how Kurt Vonnegut conveys his message about war in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The fourth research is a thesis titled *The Reflection of Robert Louis Stevenson's Life in His Novel Kidnapped: A Biographical Study* by Martha Siska. In this thesis, Siska applies biographical approach in order to analyze how the main character in the Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, *Kidnapped*, reflects himself. She asserts that Robert Louis Stevenson is concerned with the events that often happened around human's life and that through *Kidnapped* Stevenson tried to tell how living in a "real world" is difficult and plagued by many misfortunes (Siska 2). Using biographical approach, Siska compares the life of David Balfour in the novel with Robert Louis Stevenson in order to see the reflections of the author and his surroundings in the novel. She concludes that there are many instances in *Kidnapped* where Robert Louis Stevenson's life and surroundings is

reflected in the novel. This research is useful for me in order to analyze how Kurt Vonnegut's experience during World War II is reflected in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Indeed, this research is quite different from those of previous studies since this research mainly focuses on how Kurt Vonnegut's experience as the prisoner of war who witnessed the Allies' firebombing of Dresden influences his view towards war, specifically World War II.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the novel, I would apply expressive theory by M. A. Abrams and historical-biographical approach from Guerin's book. I think that these theories are appropriate to analyze Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, since the novel itself is based from Vonnegut's experience and also contains Vonnegut's expression regarding war and its depiction in media. Therefore, through these theories, I intend to show how Vonnegut conveyed his view regarding war in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In order to do so, it is necessary to apply a good critical theory.

Abrams in *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition*, Abrams states that:

“A good critical theory, nevertheless, has its own kind of validity. The criterion is not the scientific verifiability of its single propositions, but the scope, precision, and coherence of the insights that it yields into the properties of single works of art and the adequacy with which it accounts for diverse kinds of art,” (Abrams, 3).

In order to analyze a literary work, we need a “good” critical theory that could account many criteria such as scope, precision, and coherence of the insights within different kinds of art. Abrams states that there are four elements of a work of art that can be ‘discriminated and made salient’, which later can be analyzed comprehensively using literary theories. First, there is a *work*, which is a product of art by an artist. Then, the second element is the artificer, which is the *artist* himself. The third element is the *universe*, which is the signification or the reflection of the people and actions, ideas and feelings, material things and events, or super-sensible essences in the work of art. The final element is the *audience*, which is the listeners, spectators, or readers to whom the work is addressed (Abrams 6). Abrams was influential in distinguishing four “orientations” by which literary works are examined. Those “orientations” are mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective.

Expressive theories view a work of art in relation with its author. This ‘orientation’ of critical theories regarded literary as the reflection of the author himself because it conveys the author’s feelings, thoughts, and view about certain event or situation in the society that affects him. In this research, I would apply expressive theory in order to find out the idea and view of Kurt Vonnegut, which is conveyed in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. According to Abrams, expressive theory can be defined as a theory that “holds the object of the artist to be the expression of the artist’s systems of emotions, impressions, or beliefs,” (22). This means that expressive theory sees a literary work as the expression of the author’s point of view, emotion and society that shape the author itself. Through this theory, I would trace the background behind the writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and find

out Kurt Vonnegut's view regarded war with the firebombing of Dresden as the center of this research.

In analyzing the novel, I would use historical-biographical approach and compare the novel with the author's experience. Historical-biographical approach views a literary work in relation with the author's life and times. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* states that the "most obvious cause of a work of art is the author" (78). It means that author has an important role in shaping a work of art. Historical-biographical approach is the oldest and well-established method in literary study. The application of this approach towards literary works could be traced back into the Renaissance era, specifically through Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. Kelley Griffith states that historical approach is a method of studying literature by "period of movement", which mean that in order to analyze how a literary work correspondent with the history, we should compare the novel with the factual data from historical sources (144).

Historical-biographical approach is a merge between two approach—historical criticism and biographical criticism. Wilfred L. Guerin in his book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* states that historical-biographical approach sees a literary work "chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work," (51). Its main goal was to provide 'context' for literary works in relation to the author's life and his or her historical period. This approach mainly derived from the works of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, a French critic whose phrase *race, milieu, et moment* bespeaks a hereditary and environmental determinism, as explained in his book,

History of English Literature. The phrase *race, milieu, et moment* roughly translates into “nation”, “environment” or “situation”, and “time”. According to Taine, these three terms were the principal motives or conditioning factors behind a work of art. By “race”, he meant the inherited disposition or temperament that persists stubbornly over thousands of years. The term “race” not specifically refers to a race, but rather to inherited characteristics of a nation or community that persists over generations and how an individual operates within those confines. By “milieu”, Taine meant the circumstances or environments that modify the inherited racial disposition. In this sense, “milieu” explains how particular factors affect the behavior of an individual and differentiate them from other individuals within the same “race”. By “moment”, Taine meant the momentum in which the individual conveys his message. The literature of a culture, according to Taine, will show the most sensitive and unguarded displays of motive and the psychology of a people. Taine’s view towards literature would become a cornerstone for historical-biographical approach towards literature.

Although Taine lays a basic foundation for historical-biographical approach, however, Rene Wellek, argues that, among the term *race, milieu, et moment*, only the term “milieu” that still relevant and preserved its ‘usefulness’, because it’s take into account conditions that contributed towards the making of literature, such as physical environment, political, and social conditions, while the terms “race” and “moment” were fallen into disrepute due to its obscure or superfluous concepts (2). Therefore, to analyze a literary work and its relationship with the author, I would only refer to Taine’s concept of “milieu” as a foundation to uncover the history behind Kurt Vonnegut’s writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Since one of the points to be discussed in this thesis is how Vonnegut conveyed his view regarding war in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I feel the need to uncover the narrative techniques that he employed in the novel and explain the implications behind those techniques towards the conveyance of his view. Monica Loeb explains that Kurt Vonnegut deliberately adjust his writing style in order to get his message across towards his readers. Therefore, based on this fact, I believe that it is relevant to analyze the implications behind the narrative techniques that Vonnegut used in *Slaughterhouse-Five* in order to understand his intention as an author who experienced war and witnessed the firebombing of Dresden first-hand. To elaborate this, I would refer to theorist Hayden White who states:

“Histories never to be read as unambiguous signs of the events they report, but rather as symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that ‘liken’ the events reported in them to some form which we have already become familiar in our literary culture [...] By the very constitution of a set of events in such a way to make a comprehensible story out of them, the historian charges those events with symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot structure,” (White 91-92)

In this respect, the consideration of figures and tropes, a critical awareness of the rhetorical elements of language and so on—the strategies and tools of critical analysis—are as appropriate to a critical study of history as they are to literary studies (Bennet and Royle 116).

Jackson J. Benson states that biographical criticism is a study of a communicative act where the author intends, whether consciously or

unconsciously, and the readers search to uncover that intention (110). He explains that recognizing the uniqueness of an author before we can comprehend fully his or her writings is one of the advantages of biographical criticism (108). However, it should be noted that biographical data discovered through the application of biographical criticism should amplify the meaning of the text and not overwhelm it with irrelevant material (Kennedy and Diana 1790-1818).

In order to analyze Vonnegut's view regarding war as reflected in the novel, I would mostly refer to Guerin's explanation regarding historical-biographical approach towards literary works. Historical-biographical approach does not only focus to the elements of the literary work, but also the contexts that construct said work. Historical-biographical approach can be applied in order to show how the author's experience could influence his works. Therefore, according to historical-biographical approach, the relation between the real life and the literary work is not as simple as cause and effects, but rather interconnected with each other. There is a close relationship between the author and his work. The work of art can be described as the author's experiences or understanding towards a certain event in his life. It means that the work of art contains what the author feel about what he experience or what he see based on his view. That is why the biographical background of the author can tell more about what underlies beneath his works of art. All of the events that the author faces can be explained through his works.

After reading *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I find out that a good amount of the story, specifically the parts where the firebombing of Dresden took place, are

based on the author's experience. It is worth to note that during World War II, Kurt Vonnegut served as a soldier and fought during the Battle of Bulge before being captured by the Germany and then interned in Dresden. He ultimately witnessed how the city firebombed into ruins near the end of the war. It's understandable that his experience as the witness and survivor of the firebombing influences his writing in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In that case, I found it appropriate to apply historical-biographical approach in order to see how the firebombing of Dresden is represented in the novel and how such an event influenced Kurt Vonnegut's view regarding war in general and World War II in particular.

1.8 Method of the Research

This is a library research. Library research works through many books and other references like articles, journals, and websites in order to support the topic. According to Elmer E. Rasmuson Library in *Research, Instruction, and Library Research Process Outreach Services*, library research involves the systematic process used to gather information in order to write a paper, create a presentation, or complete a project. "As you progress from one step to the next, it is commonly necessary to back up, revise, add additional material or even change your topic completely. This will depend on what you discover during your research" (Rasmuson, "Research"). The steps in conducting library research were collecting the data, analyzing the data, and presenting the data.

In collecting the data, I will take it from two sources, primary data and secondary data. Here, I would take the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut as the primary data. For secondary data, this research would use some

of the written materials like books concerning the topic, literature books, journal articles, and information from websites.

In analyzing the data, I would read the novel extensively in order to find specific information regarding the topic being analyzed. After that, I will identify how the firebombing of Dresden depicted in this novel and compare it to the historical records. After that, I would apply expressive theory proposed by M. H. Abrams and analyze the novel through historical-biographical approach in order to find out how the firebombing of Dresden influences Vonnegut's view towards war in the novel.

In presenting the data, I will use the qualitative method, which, according to Steven J. Taylor in the book titled *Introduction to Qualitative Research Method*, "qualitative research attempts to broaden and/or deepen our understanding of how things came to be the way they are in our social world" (qtd. in Hancock et al., 2007). It proves the analysis by emerging arguments and opinion since the data are words, statements or paragraph and not in form of number.

