

John D. Kroft

Dr. Richardson

ENGL 324

30 October 2018

“I been hungrier than this”: Food Finances in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

*Slaughterhouse-Five*, originally published in 1969 and authored by Kurt Vonnegut, is an anti-war novel set primarily in and around Dresden during World War II at the time of the bombings. The narration focuses primarily on Billy Pilgrim’s experience in a non-chronological order, focusing on Billy’s time during and following the war. Food is mentioned, directly or indirectly, 69 times during the course of narration. These references may be grouped into three primary categories: cultural references and sustenance (e.g. eating snow to stave off hunger or Kilgore Trout’s novel about a world-renown chef); insults and metaphors; and economic displays of power. The third category is preeminent, though the other categories are worth mentioning because there is significant overlap in several instances. Primarily, food is used to depict the nearly total appropriation of food resources from the German public to the Nazi military and as an economic medium in lieu of printed or pressed monies when food would be more valuable, or the hassle of exchanging monies would cause suspicion. In a total institution such as military service or internment, both of which Billy Pilgrim experiences, food is a commodity with an exchange value for goods and services like any other currency would normally hold. When food is not being exchanged, it is used to entertain literally or as a metaphor, either in narration or dialogue, to insult and demean characters. Overall, this paper argues that, in the absence of money, another medium will take its place.