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SUBJECT OF SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

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DIAGNOSING KURT VONNEGUT: A RESPONSE TO SUSANNE VEES-GULANI ON THE SUBJECT OF *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

CIARÁN KAVANAGH

Winner of the 2015 WTM Riches Essay Prize

In “Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*,” Susanne Vees-Gulani proffers a systematic analysis of the exploration of trauma and its manifestation in the novel through the lens of psychiatric theory. In the course of this essay, Vees-Gulani attempts to synthesise psychiatric theory with literary theory in order to shed new light on *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s haunted protagonist Billy Pilgrim, as well as on his ostensibly traumatised creator, Kurt Vonnegut. Drawing on a host of psychiatric case studies and theorists, Vees-Gulani convincingly connects the “spastic in time” Billy Pilgrim, and Vonnegut’s unusual narrative structuring, with the symptoms and experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder. While she succeeds in aspects of this “diagnosis,” I argue that the essay as a whole struggles under significant overreaching, and a somewhat clumsy handling of supposedly central theories. Furthermore, I take “Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim” as indicative here of wider problems in trauma studies, and suggest an interpretive procedure that, while maintaining an awareness of the critical capabilities of trauma theory, is firstly rooted in literary rather than psychiatric analysis.

Principally, Vees-Gulani’s analysis suffers from a confused and ill-defined methodology. While her essay has been classified under trauma theory and does indeed draw on the work of a number of trauma theorists (Judith Herman and Lawrence Broer, among others), her primary methodological lens is actually *psychiatric* theory. Her engagement with trauma theory (a term she never actually uses) is minimal, her focus being instead on the rather sterile classifications of the DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) and a limited number of case studies which, while relevant to her thesis, do not bridge the disciplinary gap between the psychiatric and the literary. This is critical, as Vees-Gulani analyses the novel, its protagonist, its narrator, and its author, through the same psychiatric lens—a lens, it must be pointed out, crafted for psychologists rather than literary theorists. This is not to say that she finds no success with this approach; her contextualising of Billy’s experience suggests quite convincing links between the manifestation of his trauma in the novel and the psychic effects of PTSD. However, in going as far as to extend this to Vonnegut himself, Vees-Gulani makes the classic mistake of flying too close to the author, plunging into unsubstantiable analyses of his mental health. Vees-Gulani in fact goes as far as to diagnose Vonnegut with a “condition,” of which the writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* ostensibly cured him (182), a conclusion that will be seen to be based not only on a blinkered understanding and careless use of psychiatric theory, but also on what must be regarded as very questionable citational practices.

In light of these points, I contend that while Vees-Gulani’s essay succeeds in displaying the value of psychiatric theory in literary analyses of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it also exhibits the dangers

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of this particular synthesis of disciplines. In arguing this, I first address her analysis of Billy Pilgrim, whose trauma is best able to bear her theoretical ministrations. I then move to deal specifically with the fallout resulting from her extending of this methodology to both Vonnegut and the novel as a whole, and her privileging of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s personal significance over its literary and historical significances. I then address the issues surrounding her representations of sources, and the implications these problems have with regards to the essay as a whole. Finally, I synthesise my criticism of Veas-Gulani's analysis into an analysis of my own and suggest a more stable basis for analysing the manifestations of trauma in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Kurt Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse-Five* when trauma theory was just beginning to emerge, and indeed acknowledges a certain engagement with the field in his attempts to access his own memories of Dresden where, like Billy, he was held as a PoW (Gibbs 57). Even without an awareness of this fact, the novel represents a veritable playground for the trauma theorist. Billy Pilgrim specifically exhibits multiple symptoms of what we would now recognise as post-traumatic stress disorder, the 1980s handbook on which "reads like a character sketch of him," according to Klinkowitz ("Fiction" 388). While I have indicated a certain dissatisfaction with Veas-Gulani's handling of this subject, in this context "Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim" is by no means without merit, illuminating quite clearly the interpretative value which trauma theory can bring to such a text. Veas-Gulani draws on a host of psychiatric case studies which resonate with Billy's experience, and quite convincingly demonstrates that Klinkowitz is not exaggerating in his above comment; Billy Pilgrim appears to be a text-book sufferer of PTSD.

Veas-Gulani's methodology finds its greatest success in this diagnosis. She connects Billy's time travelling, the organising principle of the narrative, with the symptoms of traumatic arousal, reading his temporal spasticity as a metaphor for his constant, psychic re-experiencing of the traumatic events of World War II. She argues that the specific triggers which remind Billy of the war prompt his time travel in the way that they might reactivate traumatic memories and flashbacks in PTSD sufferers (178). Repetition of certain phrases, for instance, serves as both narrative and psychological linking device, continuously bringing both Billy and the reader back to the war: the smell of "roses and mustard gas," whose chronological first encountering arises from the corpse mines of Dresden (Vonnegut 176), or the siren announcing high noon where Billy works, which catapults him back to his time as a POW and the shriek of the Dresden air-raid alarm (47-48). In contextualising Billy's experience, Veas-Gulani draws on the portrayal in Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* of the experiences of former prisoners afflicted with PTSD. In Herman's words, imprisonment forces these captives to live in "an endless present." After their release, they "may give the appearance of returning to ordinary time, while psychologically remaining bound in the timelessness of the prison" (89-90). Like Billy, though they might appear normal on the outside, they continue to practice "doublethink" years after liberation, existing simultaneously in two realities, two points of time. According to Veas-Gulani, Vonnegut's narrative, where Billy can be "simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding his Cadillac in 1967" (Vonnegut 48), replicates this experience (Veas-Gulani 177-78).

While Billy's usual response to traumatic triggers is to travel in time, a telling instance of traumatic arousal occurs at Billy's anniversary party, where a Barbershop quartet perform "That Old Gang of Mine":

Billy had powerful psychosomatic responses to the changing chords. His mouth filled with the taste of lemonade, and his face became grotesque, as though he really were

being stretched on the torture engine called the rack. He looked so peculiar that several people commented on it solicitously when the song was done. They thought he might have been having a heart attack [. . .]. (142)

In this instance, Billy's reaction is not to travel in time, and the ensuing memory which he connects with the barbershop quartet is in fact written as a memory, that of the expression on the faces of the four stunned German guards upon seeing the newly destroyed Dresden. While Billy shows no great surprise or anguish when he finds that he has become unstuck in time, the actual remembering of an episode rather than its reliving proves eminently painful to him, causing him to realise that he "had a great big secret somewhere inside, and he could not imagine what it was" (142). Vees-Gulani argues that this instance is indicative of traumatic suppression, claiming that the Dresden bombing, the centre of Billy's trauma, is simply too painful to relive, and initially too frightening even to remember (178). To this she further links what she terms a "psychic numbing," which manifests itself as a "diminished responsiveness to the world around him" (179). Billy's passive temperament, along with his adoption of the Tralfamadorian "So it goes," acts as proof of this. The avoidance of stimuli connected with the traumatic event, such as Billy's monosyllabic responses to his wife's questions about his war experience, further compound this diagnosis (179).

The success of Vees-Gulani's thesis in such areas is evidence that psychiatric theory is indeed relevant to studies of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. If these can be considered models of success, however, her missteps should then be considered as warnings as to the particular pitfalls of such analyses. Consider, for example, her treatment of Billy's "visions." Vees-Gulani asserts that Billy's time travel is not the result of schizophrenia, with which others had either previously described or diagnosed him. Schizophrenia, she notes, is not caused by external events (176). While the appellation of schizoid or schizophrenic to narratives is not generally meant as a clinical diagnosis, her opposition to this term is, I would argue, justified. Her counter-proposal, however, that the visions are simply "the result of a vivid imagination that he uses as a sense-making tool to deal with his war trauma" (176), is completely groundless. That Billy fully believes he has been kidnapped by aliens is evident throughout the novel, not to mention the fact that his temporal spasticity is a literary mechanism, not a "symptom." This case is, however, symptomatic of the essay's wider-reaching problems, being that its blend of psychiatric and literary analysis far too often belies both Vees-Gulani's lack of training in the former, and its non-perfect meshing with the latter.

Vees-Gulani draws on aspects of psychiatric theory as they are represented in the DSM-IV but does not explicitly contextualise these within the critical canon of *trauma* theory. She freely draws on ideas of belatedness, amnesia, and literality without reference to the actual theories themselves, in either their critical extrapolation or controversies. The amnesiac quality of traumatic memory, with which she continuously diagnoses both Billy and Vonnegut, is, for example, greatly contested. Early definitions of PTSD in fact stressed that traumatic experiences were all *too* memorable, a proposition fully consistent with the scientific literature (McNally 8). Vees-Gulani's failure to engage with the theoretical context of her assertions isn't as evident a problem in her earlier arguments because Billy Pilgrim conforms so closely to the DSM-IV's definition. As she extends this analysis to Vonnegut the author, however, these flaws come quite critically into play, arguably collapsing the whole structure of her argument.

Vees-Gulani's characterising of *Slaughterhouse-Five* as having a therapeutic aspect does not constitute a tangential or digressive argument, but is an aim which takes prime position in her thesis:

A fresh look at *Slaughterhouse-Five* using psychiatric theory not only offers new insight into the work but also opens a window on the author himself. Vonnegut's writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be seen as a therapeutic process that allows him to uncover and deal with his trauma. By using creative means to overcome his distress, Vonnegut makes it possible for us to trace his path to recovery. We slowly narrow in on his condition using the novel as a conduit first to the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, then to the narrator, and finally to the author himself. (176)

Her portrayal of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in the manner of a psychoanalytical displacement exercise, the completion of which constitutes the "result of a successful self-treatment" for Vonnegut, is hugely problematic. Veas-Gulani argues that the process of writing *Slaughterhouse-Five* allows Vonnegut to integrate his Dresden experiences into his past and free himself from its "paralysing effect," while still allowing its later creative use (182). This characterisation, from its very language to its wider connotations, is highly reductive, and blinkers her analysis of the literary aspects of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which are far too complex in structure and purpose to rest easily under such a simplistic representation. Billy's trauma can arguably be "diagnosed"; however, the manner in which this trauma invades the narrative is literary rather than psychiatric. Veas-Gulani's reading reduces the surgical evisceration of Billy's eidetic core to the apparently unwished for consequence of the author's own trauma, a move which not only obscures the literary significance of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s narrative structure but does so at the expense of Vonnegut's creative agency.

We may grant that Vonnegut's interweaving of his personal war story with Billy's experience does not allow for a reading which completely removes the author. As a counterpoint to Veas-Gulani's representation, Kathryn Hume's approach finds a greater balance between Vonnegut as man and Vonnegut as captured in his own fiction, portraying his main characters as "projections of some part of his psyche," components rather than avatars (177). "Projections," she extrapolates, "can approach an allegorical degree of abstraction, and the more abstract they are, the more symbolic are the fictions they generate" (177). In relation to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, she notes that "Billy's mind can be reduced to rubble by Dresden, but Vonnegut's retrospective comments can be analytic and possessed of shattering personal simplicity and directness" (180). Hume's representation provides a far more stable basis for analysing *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a trauma novel, allowing Vonnegut's past to be integrated as creative inspiration but without asserting it as a dominating or restricting influence. It also forms an important counterpoint to Veas-Gulani's representation of Vonnegut, the author, as trying "not to face his suppressed memories directly but to get to the core by slowly uncovering layer after layer" (182). *Slaughterhouse-Five* does indeed orbit the Dresden experience rather than explore it directly, but to portray this as Vonnegut's *own* unwillingness or inability to approach the subject seems wilfully naive.

The picture Veas-Gulani paints of Vonnegut as creeping tentatively towards Dresden also belies the actual creative process of writing a novel. That Vonnegut has endeavoured to represent trauma creatively, whether his own, Billy Pilgrim's, or that of history, does not necessarily mean that he himself is specifically traumatised. While it is true that Vonnegut is not able to access memories of his Dresden experience, admitting, in fact, to doing "everything short of hiring a hypnotist to recover the information" (Musil 128), to specifically *diagnose* him as traumatised is not in the realm of the literary critic. It is also worth noting the strange binary within Veas-Gulani's diagnoses. While she applies the strictures of the DSM-IV (psychiatric theory) to the fictional Billy Pilgrim, her analysis of the real Kurt Vonnegut is based on literary theory. As will be seen later, this does not appear to be a diagnosis that Vonnegut himself would

accept. If *Slaughterhouse-Five* is representative of a trauma that we can call Vonnegut's own, then it should be understood that this experience has been shaped, edited, and recast. It is neither the guiding-hand nor the restricting neurosis of Veas-Gulani's representation.

The New York sequence at *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s close quite explicitly suggests that the various traumas woven throughout the novel are not to be read as purely or even predominantly personal. Here, Billy sits in on a radio discussion regarding the "death" of the novel, for which a number of literary critics have been gathered to discuss the medium's faults, and to suggest how it might function in contemporary society:

One of them said that it would be a nice time to bury the novel, now that a Virginian, one hundred years after Appomattox, had written *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Another one said that people couldn't read well enough anymore to turn print into exciting situations in their skull [...]. The master of ceremonies asked people to say what they thought the function of the novel might be in modern society, and one critic said, "To provide touches of colour in rooms with all-white walls." Another one said, "To describe blowjobs artistically." Another one said, "To teach the wives of junior executives what to buy next and how to act in a French restaurant."

And then Billy was allowed to speak. Off he went in that beautifully trained voice of his, telling about the flying saucers and Montana Wildhack and so on. (169-170)

Veas-Gulani's reading, which robs the novel of its literary and historical contexts, would struggle, it seems to me, to accommodate this scene. Metaliterary commentary simply does not fit in a novel dictated by its author's trauma and the limitations of dealing with such.

That Vonnegut is being deliberately metafictional here is obvious, but what is the significance? Klinkowitz sees Vonnegut as giving a hint as to how, in his own hands, the novel has been reinvented (*Vonnegut Effect* 82). "Tralfamadorian fiction," Klinkowitz claims, "answers objections from deconstructionists and death-of-the-novel critics alike. There is nothing here of conventional fiction's attempt at a totalizing effect, a fraudulent impression that life is orderly and unities of character and idea will, by virtue of systematic study, accrete themselves into some conclusive meaning" (83). Vonnegut's championing of such experimental models quite clearly goes beyond a literary mechanism necessary to narrate one specific set of events. Likewise, the radio scene is by no means the only time that the literary significance of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s form is asserted within the text. Note for example the explanation given to Billy of the Tralfamadorian novel, bearing in mind that this is the style in which the epigraph of *Slaughterhouse-Five* claims the novel is written:

each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message—describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. (72, emphasis added)

Given the context of this quotation, wider statements throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as well as Vonnegut's own words on the matter below, the literary complexity of the novel can, in this instance, be quite explicitly connected to its function as an anti-war novel.

Vonnegut, in an interview with C.D.B. Bryan, claims that he keeps his books short because he wanted to be read by men in power, men who neither have the time nor inclination to read thick books: "You catch people before they become generals and senators and presidents, and [...] *poison their minds with humanity*. Encourage them to make a better world" (Allen 5, emphasis in original). *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s importance as an anti-war novel specifically suffers under Veas-Gulani's interpretation. As argued later, many of the quotations used by her

as evidence of Vonnegut's trauma are either misread or misrepresented and can instead be understood as relating to the importance of writing about Dresden not because of its personal significance but because of its *historical* significance. With regards to *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s form, for example, while Vees-Gulani's linking of it with trauma theory and specific symptoms of PTSD is by no means extraneous, it is addressed within the text as relating to war. In conversation with his editor, Vonnegut (the character) says, "[*Slaughterhouse-Five*] is so short and jumbled and jangled Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre" (16). Vonnegut's inclusion of historical texts, his constant practice of defamiliarisation, his contacting of the Air Force, his horrifying depiction of war—all suggest a reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* focusing on the tragedy of history rather than the tragedy of Kurt Vonnegut.

Vees-Gulani is perhaps blinded by PTSD's ubiquity in the trauma genre, as she gives no consideration to other possibilities for *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s particular narrative arrangement. In fact, she goes into no real detail of this structure, content with analysing its symptoms rather than its underlying conditions. Taking the structure as our starting point (rather than extrapolating everything from Vonnegut's "trauma") produces a far more nuanced understanding of Billy's temporal spasticity. Deconstructing the novel into its various layers of realities (or ontologies) suggests that the base reality (outside of Vonnegut's authorial commentary) is Billy Pilgrim as a senile widower, after his plane crash. Understood like this, his time travelling (the vehicle through which he explores or possibly creates the embedded, secondary narratives) radiates from his *present*, which allows us to extrapolate that the trauma underpinning his temporal spasticity is likewise based here. Simply put, by this reading Billy coming unstuck in time is actually Billy coming unstuck in memory and is much more likely to be a function of his head trauma due to the plane crash than of his repressed psychic trauma from WWII. His head wound therefore causes him to re-experience his memories as "real life," with his Tralfamadorian fantasy as the explanatory basis. This destabilises the entirety of the novel, as the discourse is revealed to have been memory filtered through a fantasy. The fact that his friends and family appear completely perplexed by even the word "Tralfamadore" suggests that Billy's memory of travelling in time and his abduction are projections emanating from his present rather than a delusion he has maintained all of his life. His sadness and inaccessibility in his pre-crash life may likewise be due to the particular manner by which he relives these memories, meaning that this vision might not be analogous to Billy's original experiences. Even a reading which regards Billy's traumatic symptoms as true to his original experiences still entails separating those conditions from his time travelling. His weeping, psychic numbing, and emotional distance can be understood as being rooted in his WWII trauma, but may also be rooted in the fact that his father threw him into a swimming pool and then took him to the Grand Canyon, or may even be seen as simply genetic, like Vonnegut's psychological difficulties (discussed below). His time travelling meanwhile seems firmly rooted in his head wound. With this understanding, Billy's traumatic flashback to the four stunned guards in Dresden, for example, is a memory within a memory, and the only time he is disturbed in his otherwise passive journey through his past. Billy's head trauma therefore allows him to experience the WWII trauma (more than just memory) that he had otherwise suppressed. I do not, however, think that this can be considered positive or cathartic, as rather than internalising his experiences he fantasises them, weaves them into a deterministic grand narrative which he substitutes for his emotions. This is a structure which Veas-Gulani's ennobling of private trauma obliterates, a trauma which appears to be an invention of hers rather than a genuine condition of Vonnegut's.

While I have endeavoured up to this point to analyse Vees-Gulani's thesis with respect to the counterarguments within *Slaughterhouse-Five* itself, it is necessary here to move somewhat beyond the boundaries of the novel in order to contextualise her claims about Vonnegut as author. In her opening paragraph, Vees-Gulani quotes Vonnegut as saying, in a 1974 interview with Joe Bellamy and John Casey, "I came home in 1945, started writing about [Dresden], and wrote about it, and *wrote about it*, and WROTE ABOUT IT" (175). "This agony," Vees-Gulani appends, "is echoed in the first chapter of the novel." I would argue that the characterisation of Bellamy and Casey's various formatting as Vonnegut's "agony" is a reckless portrayal of the author in itself; however, this is by no means an instance in isolation. To back this statement up, Vees-Gulani quotes from the opening chapter of the novel, a quotation which is quite suspiciously truncated. Here I have quoted the extract in full, with the sections Vees-Gulani replaced with ellipses reintroduced, but bracketed, and the final sentence allowed to run to its end:

When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. [And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.]

But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—[not enough of them to make a book, anyway.] And not many words come now, either, [when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons fully grown.] (Vonnegut 2)

Whether intentional or not, Vees-Gulani's abridging of the above quotation completely changes Vonnegut's tone, appearing to legitimate and confirm her portrayal of him as a victim working through personal trauma. Such practice is unfortunately representative of a tendency which runs throughout "Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim."

The most extreme dichotomy between quotation and conclusion is evident in Vees-Gulani's final paragraph, where she characterises *Slaughterhouse-Five* as "the result of a successful self-treatment" (182). The ascription of "successful self-treatment" is not drawn from the section from which she quotes, however, but seems to be in reference to an earlier section of the same interview in *Playboy* in which Vonnegut discusses his periods of depression and mania, and the counselling and medication he receives for these. At no point does he connect this to Dresden, noting that he has experienced manic episodes since he was six years old (Allen 87-88). In fact, the entire *Playboy* interview might be read alongside Vees-Gulani's essay, not for the support it lends her thesis, but because it very explicitly details Vonnegut's own rebuttal to it. He quite frankly states, in response to a question as to whether his Dresden experience "changed" him:

No. I suppose you'd think so, because that's the cliché. The importance of Dresden in my life has been considerably exaggerated because my book about it became a best seller. If the book hadn't been a best seller, it would seem like a very minor experience in my life. And I don't think people's lives are changed by short-term events like that. Dresden was astonishing, but experiences can be astonishing without changing you. (Allen 94-95)

That Vees-Gulani ignores such a counter-argument, from a page from which she specifically quotes in support of her thesis, must be considered dubious critical practice. Given her extensive use of the interview, and this page in particular, her failure to address such an obvious and pointed contradiction must be considered as seriously denigrating the value to studies of *Slaughterhouse-Five* of "Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim."

The authority which Vees-Gulani grants what are essentially medical theories in an ostensibly literary analysis has not found its first critic in this essay. Both Stephen Brockmann and Bill Niven have commented on this tendency in their reviews of her study *Trauma and Guilt*, the former wondering whether Vees-Gulani sees literature as having a value outside of therapy (159), the latter characterising her analyses as lacking in attention to the stylistic and literary devices utilised by the fictions of her focus (297). While Vees-Gulani's drawing on psychiatric theory does much to illuminate Billy's condition and admirably connects his experiences to those of real PTSD sufferers, she significantly oversteps her bounds as critic in projecting her analysis onto Vonnegut himself. Outside of her discrepant citational practices, her missteps here must also be attributed to her patchwork methodology, a confused psycholiterary hybrid which attempts to analyse both person and text and, as a result, is suited for neither. This can partly be traced to Vees-Gulani largely ignoring the corpus of trauma theory in "Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim," leaning instead on an unsuccessful adaptation of the criteria found in the DSM-IV. It must also be seen as the result of a certain teleology, specifically in relation to her use of sources. Vonnegut's trauma proves blinding rather than illuminating in this regard, alternately obfuscating or exposing particular aspects of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in order to sustain Vees-Gulani's particular vision of the text.

While it is tempting to attribute such missteps to a lack of critical awareness, this paradigm is in fact one found within the halls of trauma theory as well. Trauma theory's particular concern is with the translation and representation of *extreme* human experience; however, it is unavoidable that trauma will be written and analysed by people without such experience. It is particularly vulnerable therefore to teleological analyses because it concerns the mediation of experience without the touchstone of actual experience by which to judge. Literary representations of trauma will always, therefore, represent a difficulty for literary critics. It should also be noted that trauma is intensely personal, and impacts individuals in strikingly different ways, so even those who have such experiences to judge by may not find themselves able to relate to the experiences of others. Psychiatric theory, as another mediation of trauma, another means of translating human experience, is therefore of intrinsic value to the trauma theorist. While it may be necessary for literary theorists to draw on psychiatric theory to construct a more rounded appreciation and understanding of these experiences, we must be reminded that the text is not the author, and the representation is not and can never be the experience. Vees-Gulani's analysis, being blind to this fact, can be seen to lose more to the classifications, compartments, and strictures of antiquated trauma models and check-list diagnoses than it illuminates through them.

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