

Meremezi Iroaga  
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### Satire Comparison Essay

“Questioned repeatedly over the decades about whether he thought Dresden should have been bombed, Vonnegut's most significant response was that it had been bombed; the question for him was how one behaved after that,”<sup>1</sup> writes Alex Clark in his article, *Kurt Vonnegut: So it Goes*. This statement paves the way for an analysis and comparison of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a novel that follows the story of Billy Pilgrim, who was present during the bombing of Dresden during World War II. The novel outlines this character's experiences of being in the War, his life after war, and even being brought into the presence of Vonnegut's otherworldly creatures called the Tralfamadorians. In the play, *Rhinoceros*, a town is hit with an unexpected circumstance where people begin to turn into rhinoceroses, which represents social pressure and conformity. By looking at these two works together, we see examples of situational or social forces and pressures that can press us on all sides. While it is important to discuss why these forces happen, Vonnegut and Ionesco suggest that it is more important to look at our response to these pressures, and the type of ways that we deal with and react after experiencing trauma.

To start, the first way that someone could deal with trauma is to accept it and give in to it. To let it make us into whatever it wants or affect us in any way that it does. In *Rhinoceros*, Berenger and the woman he loves, Daisy, are the last two people who haven't transformed into rhinoceroses. As Berenger speaks to Daisy about saving the world and regenerating the human race, Daisy begins to pull away from the fight against the rhinoceroses:

[Berenger] How can we save the world, if you don't?

[Daisy] Why bother to save it?

[Berenger] What a thing to say! Do it for me, Daisy. Let's save the world.

[Daisy] After all, perhaps it's we who need saving. Perhaps we're the abnormal ones. . .

There aren't any more of our kind about anywhere, are there? . . . Those are the real people. They look happy. They're content to be what they are. They don't look insane.

They look very natural. They were right to do what they did (Ionesco 102-103).

From looking at this instance, Daisy begins to feel the pressure of the social force to conform with everyone else. As the trauma begins to overtake her thoughts, she looks out and realizes that she and Berenger are the only ones left. In that moment, she feels the pressure of the forces around her, and feels the need to give in to it in hopes that she won't have to resist anymore. When she takes her guard down, her mindset changes about the rhinoceroses, and she begins to admire them and see *them* as the normal people, viewing herself and Berenger as the strangers to the world. Here, there is some dramatic irony at play. Berenger is still slowly catching on to the fact that Daisy might turn to a rhinoceros, and he is still fighting to get her to get away from that way of thinking. But, from the audience's perspective, from seeing many others turn to rhinoceroses, we know for a fact that she will turn into one. As soon as she says "Why bother to save it?" we know that she has surrendered to the power of the social pressure to a point where she doesn't value her life in the world. This dramatic irony also makes Berenger's attempts to fight the pressure even more visible and clear for the audience to see how heroic while also useless it is for him to keep fighting. The response to trauma and social pressure that

Ionesco uses Daisy to convey really reveals that when we feel the pressure or experience a traumatic experience, we are going to be extremely tempted to give in to it and let it overtake us so we don't have to fight or feel the pain any longer.

Another way that some choose to respond to trauma is to ignore it or pretend the trauma isn't there. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim is with the Tralfadorians, and he asks them on how to prevent war so that he can go back to Earth and save it. But, they end up telling him that it isn't possible to overcome the monstrosity of war:

“So,' said Billy gropingly, I suppose that the idea of, preventing war on Earth is stupid, too. '

'Of course.'

'But you do have a peaceful planet here.'

'Today we do. On other days we have wars as horrible as any you've ever seen or read about. There isn't anything we can do about them, so we simply don't look at them. We ignore them. We spend eternity looking at pleasant moments-like today at the zoo. Isn't this a nice moment?'

'Yes.'

'That's one thing Earthlings might learn to do, if they tried hard enough: Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones'" (Vonnegut 117).

Here we can see that these creatures look at war, or any other trauma and then turn their cheek. Instead of dwelling over death and pain, they overlook it and then look toward the good

things in life instead. It seems Vonnegut is telling us that one way that we can truly move on from traumatic situational and social events is by looking past them and appreciating the happy and encouraging moments. Sam Jordison writes about the same concept in his article, *Slaughterhouse-Five blurs time – and increases the power of reality* saying that “It’s also possible that this spacecraft is a figment of Billy’s imagination. Most of the times Billy goes to Tralfamadore, he does so in response to trauma, or stimuli in the real world. It’s his way of escaping and reconfiguring a reality that hurts him. He is struggling to come to terms with the horrors he witnessed in the second world war. It’s easier to think about genial aliens who put forward interesting ideas about time and human mating habits” (Jordison). Clearly, Billy had experienced great trauma while being in the war, experiencing such horrifying events and facing awful circumstances. It’s possible that all he could really do was imagine another world, one that is more peaceful and is out from under the control of the evilness of war. Vonnegut may be giving us the advice and option to tune out the negative in our lives and focus on the positive so that we are able to move on from the hardships we may face.

Lastly, we are given a third option in how to react to trauma. Some may choose to fight the force, and make the situation right again. A perfect example is Berenger in *Rhinoceros*. At the end of the story, everyone has turned to rhinoceroses, and he is left alone. At the very end of the play, he makes a couple strong statements: “People who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end. . . I’ll take on the whole of them! I’ll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them! I’m the last man left, and I’m staying that way until the end. I’m not capitulating!” First, Berenger claims that hanging on to our individuality is extremely difficult in the face of conformity. It will lead to feeling alone and defeated, which makes it very hard to

stay true to yourself and resist the temptation to go along with everyone else. Despite this, he goes on to say that he will fight all of the rhinoceroses and that he will never stop either. That could mean that when trying to cling to our individuality, we are always going to have to keep fighting, no matter what. Lastly, he says, "I'm not capitulating," which basically means that he will not ever surrender or give up. Ionesco also used a comedic tool by giving Berenger the "Non-Hero" type of character. He was someone that drank because of his dull and purposeless life, but by the end he is the last one standing, refusing to give up no matter the circumstances. Unlike the other two ways of dealing with trauma, this response will not accept and give in to it, and it also will not look it over. It will stare it in the eyes and fight its temptation.

From looking at the ways that the characters in Vonnegut and Ionesco's works respond to trauma and pressure, we learn that there are three main reactions that someone can have when facing these situational and social forces. While we can either give in to the force, overlook the trauma, or fight the pressure, these authors don't necessarily give us a clear answer on which is the best. What they do is give us insight on the fact that everyone reacts differently, but their humor comes from the fact that no matter what our reaction is, we will still have hardship and the trauma will still be there. This is the reality that these authors want to expose. Our own responses to the forces of the world and from people will never result in stopping the force, but what really matters is whether or not we keep getting up after these traumas hit us over and over, no matter what our initial response is.

## Works Cited

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## COMPARISON ESSAY RUBRIC

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Comparison Focus	Argument is vague, off topic, or doesn't include both required works.	Argument draws a clear yet fairly obvious or limited comparison of the two works.	<u>Argument succeeds in comparing the two works, delivering some insight, but could gain more complexity by addressing thoroughly all parts of the prompt.</u>	Thesis makes an insightful, nuanced comparison of the two works, indicating highly significant similarities and differences, and responding thoroughly to the prompt.
Organization and Analysis	<p>Essay only has one-two paragraphs that mostly summarize one or both works.</p> <p>Transitions are incorrect or missing.</p>	<p>Introduction mentions authors and titles of works, but does not hook reader's attention. Body paragraphs provide more plot summary than analysis. Conclusion simply restates points made in introduction.</p> <p>Transitions are effective sometimes, but in other places they are incorrect or missing.</p>	<p><u>Introduction contextualizes authors and their works, introducing them in a general way. Body paragraphs are organized to provide some comparative analysis. Conclusion sums up argument.</u></p> <p><u>Transitions are used effectively most of the time.</u></p>	<p>Introduction contextualizes authors/novels in a thought-provoking way, engaging the reader. Body paragraphs deepen comparisons, raising different facets of the thesis. Conclusion sums up argument concisely and leaves the reader with compelling thought.</p> <p>Transitions link sentences and paragraphs smoothly, clearly indicating connections between ideas and establishing a sense of "flow."</p>
Support and Citation	No examples or quotes are	Examples are provided but they do not	<u>Most selected quotations support the</u>	Selected quotations support the thesis thoroughly and are

	<p>given to support thesis.</p> <p>No Works Cited.</p>	<p>always support the thesis. Writer uses more examples than direct quotes.</p> <p>Incorrect in-text page citations or Works Cited.</p>	<p><u>thesis. Some quotations are not integrated smoothly into paragraph.</u></p> <p><u>In-text page citations are nearly all correct.</u></p> <p><u>Works Cited page is nearly correct by MLA standards.</u></p>	<p>integrated smoothly into paragraph.</p> <p>All in-text citations are correct and Works Cited page is perfect by MLA standards.</p>
Grammar/Mechanics	<p>Essay cannot be understood due to many errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.</p>	<p>Essay contains some errors. These errors affect the reader's ability to understand the material.</p>	<p><u>Essay may contain a few errors. These errors do not affect reader's ability to comprehend material.</u></p>	<p>Essay is free from errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.</p>

**Grade: b-**