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□ 7 . . . Narrative disruption is a literary technique that many prose authors use to describe an impediment, detour, diversion or digression in the plots of novels or short stories. It is used to alter the flow of the plot to add ~~and~~ other elements to ~~the plot~~^{the plot}. In both of the novels Atonement by Ian McEwan and Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut, narrative disruption acts as a vital component of the plots. Neither of these stories follow a conventional chain of events because of various ~~and~~ embedded disruptions. In Atonement, McEwan uses Paul Marshall's character and Briony's character as ~~the~~ impediments to the fairy-tale-like romance between Robbie and Cecilia, and in Slaughterhouse Five, Vonnegut uses detour and diversion to describe how Billy Pilgrim is unstuck in time.

Robbie and Cecilia are both characters who have lived near each other their entire lives, and who attended college together. They never really interacted because of the subliminal limitations of class difference; Robbie relied on Cecilia's family funding for his own medical education and there was obvious guilt attached to that. However, the summer after college, the two of them were confined within the isolated estate of the Turners, and this confined quality of the setting provoked ^{their} interaction. At ~~the~~^{this point} ~~the~~ ~~end~~ of the novel, each ~~and~~ detail of their budding relationship was contingent on the preceding detail, and everything seemed to flow chronologically. For example, Robbie and Cecilia engaged in a small argument by the fountain which slowly escalated into the physical breaking of Cecilia's family vase: an important vase removed from



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Ancient China. This fight led to heightened tensions between the two of them because there was importance attached to the vase. Following this event, Robbie composed an apologetic letter to Cecilia and sent it to her, but accidentally sent her a more risqué message. This led to Cecilia's changed perception of Robbie, which ultimately led to their making love in the library.

McEwan takes the reader on a chronological journey through their relationship. The reader is left feeling tense during their argumentative scenes, and is fully curious as to ~~what~~ how this relationship will unfold. The ~~very~~ slow, chronological nature of this first part leaves the reader rooting for the success of Robbie and Cecilia. However, McEwan does not continue writing the story with this hyper-focus on chronology. He puts the love story in the eyes of Briony, Cecilia's sister and rewrites this exact chain of events focusing on her perspective. She views the fight that Robbie and Cecilia have from the small window in her room. The small size of the window symbolizes the limited sense of this relationship that Briony holds. She is an eleven-year-old girl who is motivated solely by her selfishness and desire to grow up. Naturally, she uses ~~her~~ this perspective to interpret the fight at the fountain to be about a different topic than it actually was about. She ~~accidentally~~ receives the letter from Robbie to deliver to Cecilia, and ~~accidentally~~ with a childish curiosity, opens it up before it gets to Cecilia. This is the first time Briony is exposed to the sexual vocabulary in the letter, and immediately assumes that if Robbie is using these words, he is a deranged man.

This change in perspective but repetition of events is McEwan's way of diverting the plot and tampering



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with chronology. The reader knows that the nature of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship was from mutual love, not from Robbie's insanity. However, this lack of clarity that Briony has causes her to obtain a false sense of certainty. ~~She~~ Her perception of Robbie as an insane man causes her to ultimately accuse him of raping her cousin, Lola, when it was really Paul Marshall who did it. ~~But~~ Briony's uncertainty acts as an impediment to the plot of the story, and Robbie and Cecilia's fairytale-like relationship is cut short.

McEwan strengthens his use of impediment by describing Robbie's steep decline in satisfaction from the beginning of the novel to the middle/end of the novel. At the beginning of the story, during the scene when he is in his room composing the letter, he remarks on his own sense of freedom and daydreams in great depth about his future as a doctor, and his future with Cecilia. He goes off on a long tangent about the books that would fill the shelves of his ^{future} home, and how he would expose himself to human suffering through literature. This ^{stands} in stark contrast to his ~~disposition~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~army~~ ~~where~~ ~~he~~ ~~is~~ ~~spending~~ ~~time~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~army~~ ~~(the~~ ~~punishment~~ ~~for~~ ~~"~~ ~~raping~~ ~~"~~ ~~Lola~~ ~~.)~~ He describes the myopia of the war and how he was never taught how to live with the common sense and need for survival that he currently lives with. He is directly exposed to human suffering, in contrast to when he daydreams about his literacy. ~~But~~ He is later killed off by the war. This is all due to Briony acting as an impediment to the story because she was guided by selfish motives.



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In "Slaughterhouse Five," Vonnegut also uses narrative disruption because Billy Pilgrim's entire perspective is non-chronological. Billy Pilgrim is suffering from hallucinations that take him to his life before, during, and after his time in World War II. He hallucinates as a coping mechanism as to what he was exposed to in ~~the~~ the war. The diversions that take place in the novel through time symbolize the vast ~~devaluation~~ change in mentality a soldier gets ~~after~~ after fighting in a war. This use of disruption shows how the story goes against the conventional chronology of a war story. At the beginning of the story, Kurt Vonnegut himself narrates it in first-person, explaining his motives for telling Billy Pilgrim's story. ~~Before~~ Before the narrative even begins, Vonnegut speaks to a man who believes war to be inevitable, and that war will always come based on the chronology of life. The man compares war to glaciers, and says "writing an anti-war story is about as impossible as writing an anti-glacier story." This man's fervent conviction that war cannot be either satirized or avoided in a novel is bolstered by his comparison to glaciers. However, Vonnegut disproves this by his use of diversion throughout the story.

Billy Pilgrim's hallucinations often take him to the planet of Tralfamadore, a place where ~~they~~ ^{Tralfamadorians} do not believe in the chronology of time and view every event in life to be occurring at once. They describe



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their view of ~~the~~ events as being the same as a human's view of a mountain range: seemingly unlimited, vast, and jagged, but everything is occurring at once. The Tralfamadorians view the human perception of time as absurd ~~because it is not real~~ and they are pitying of the humans' inability to predict death, war, and the end of time itself. Billy Pilgrim adopts his values from those of the Tralfamadorians, and they influence the way he lives the rest of his diverted life. This ~~is~~ perspective allows him to devalue death, symbolized by his frequent use of the phrase "so it goes" after any character in the story dies. Billy Pilgrim no longer feels the insatiable need to reason events out chronologically.

Pilgrim's ~~own~~ affinity toward diverted time is outlined when he watches a war movie forward and backward. As he is watching the movie backward, Vonnegut describes ~~the~~ ~~the~~ details of the movie. He notes the bombs being sucked back into the planes, the soldiers turning in their uniforms and going back to high school, and he describes Billy Pilgrim extrapolating these events to the beginning of human existence, Adam and Eve. Vonnegut again satirizes the idea of the inevitability of war in this scene. He strengthens ~~the~~ ~~ability~~ ~~to~~ ~~alter~~ ~~time~~ ~~to~~ the idea of being able to alter time to find an inner peace by showing how Billy Pilgrim altered the time in the movie to eventually



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lead him to the peaceful images of Adam and Eve - pure biblical figures.

Narrative disruption is used in *Atonement* to show how a child's selfish motives can ruin the relationship of two adults. Briony's impediment and the use of diversion to her perspective shows how an entire plot can be destroyed by misinterpretation. This story could have been told chronologically, but ~~the~~ Briony's ~~outside~~ perspective ruins this sense of chronology. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, narrative disruption is used to satirize the idea that war is inevitable. It is used to show that war can be avoided if people are not so focused on chronology. Narrative disruption is an important tool in both of these novels to show how chronology does not necessarily define a story.



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