

Comedy & Satire, Semester 2 Major 2 Joseph Curtis;

Topic: Considering your impressions after reading *Slaughterhouse 5*, what do you think Vonnegut meant when he told the 1970 graduates of Bennington College. “I beg you to believe in the most ridiculous superstition of all; that mankind is at the center of the universe, the fulfiller or frustrator of the grandest dreams of God almighty”? Explore relating to the text.

When Kurt Vonnegut told the 1970 graduates of Bennington college. “I beg you to believe in the most ridiculous superstition of all; that mankind is at the center of the universe, the fulfiller or frustrator of the grandest dreams of God almighty”. He meant that the notion that human beings are the most intelligent beings in the universe and that they are the most important, was quite a preposterous and ridiculous idea. The mere idea that humans were the fulfillers of God’s dreams and even more bizarre, the frustrators of these said dreams was but a superstition, and a ridiculous one at that. In *Slaughterhouse 5*, the Tralfamadorians say that everything is set and we can’t change it, it is and always will be that way. Therefore human beings have no actual control over anything, and something that has no control over the universe cannot be the center of the universe. Vonnegut was really expressing his own views and beliefs about the world at that time in the book. He was venting his frustration at the strongly patriotic and capitalist USA of that time. By calling it a superstition he implies that that this idea of man’s superiority is archaic and even silly.

The very idea that human beings are intelligent enough and important enough to be the center of the universe is proof enough that we are indeed not even close to being “the center of the universe”. In the infinite expanse of space only human beings are arrogant enough to assume that their own beginnings were a unique event, that we are in some way special, Vonnegut is expressing his immense disgust for the people that belong to this most ridiculous school of thought. In the text he is showing the apathy and the pathetic way that human beings treat each other and through this demonstrates the complete fallacy of the face that human beings are or could ever be the center of the universe. In the book, the Tralfamadorians believe that everything is set, and everything has already happened, we can’t change it because it is already done, they say, “So it goes”. This is Kurt Vonnegut saying that human beings will never and can never change. They will just always stay the same, with the same viewpoints and values, it is useless to try and change anything because it will happen anyway.

Vonnegut was ridiculing and satirizing religion by saying that we think that we are the fulfillers of God’s grandest dreams. He is saying that all the people that ever believed in religion are delusional in their beliefs that any god would choose us to fulfill any of their dreams, let alone the grandest. Human beings cannot even fulfill their own dreams and

most of us aren't fit to fulfill them because they probably involve the pain and even death of other people. Once again Vonnegut questions mans great arrogance at the fact that they think that they could frustrate or hinder the grandest dream of God or any other omnipotent being. He is implying that humans only hinder other human beings and could never dream of hindering the will of a mighty foe.

In referring to the belief that "mankind is at the center of the universe, the fulfiller or frustrator of the grandest dreams of God almighty" as a superstition, Vonnegut implies that it is an old and archaic belief that is somewhat silly, something to be scorned at and not upheld. He instantly strips this belief of all validity and reduces it to perhaps the incoherent ramblings of a demented child. The people who believe are to be pitied and not condoned, for they are as of simple peasant folk who know not what they do. Vonnegut means to degrade all who uphold such a preposterous doctrine and bring their foolishness into the light for all to see. Vonnegut is trying to get us to see the universe from the perspective of the Tralfamadorians, who see us as poor archaic children and take great pity on us because we cant see the fourth dimension. He means to make us see our err and try to correct it, so that we may better ourselves in our attitude to the universe. How can we pass such judgement when we only see a tiny piece of the entire universe, which stretches away to infinity in all four dimensions.

From the above it can be seen that when Kurt Vonnegut told the 1970 graduates of Bennington college. "I beg you to believe in the most ridiculous superstition of all; that mankind is at the center of the universe, the fulfiller or frustrator of the grandest dreams of God almighty". He was trying to get a point across to people that would become the leaders of the world. In this saying he meant that human beings are too stupid and arrogant to be the center of the universe and, that men or women couldn't hope to fulfill the greatest dreams of any omnipotent being because we never see the whole picture. Humans are archaic and will believe in anything that makes them feel good. Vonnegut wanted to show us that we are really not as great as we once thought and that we can never hope to amount to anything if we never see the whole picture and just care about ourselves all the time.