
Kurt Vonnegut: The Transformation of a White American Male

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Kurt Vonnegut, a World War II survivor and acclaimed American author, is a man who has learned throughout his life experiences. Vonnegut is not a perfect human being, yet his imperfections also make him human. Many of Vonnegut's works are complicated because of his combination of satire and controversial social topics. Vonnegut does not shy away from talking about religion, technology, pornography, sex, or women in his satirical narrative, and that is what makes his authorship so unique.

Women and gender roles are especially interesting topics that Vonnegut considers in his narrative works, in part because he focuses on the evils of men to comment on gender issues. Vonnegut's writing evolves over the course of his lifetime, going from stereotypical depictions of women to a closer focus on the problems that men create. The female stereotypes within Vonnegut's works are combatted with his evaluation of males. Vonnegut's narratives "More Stately Mansions," "Welcome to the Monkey House," and *Breakfast of Champions* illustrate his growth as an author, as his writing moves towards critiquing the white American male perspective through his characterization and the voice of his narrators. Furthermore, Vonnegut becomes a more complex author throughout this transformation because he begins to outgrow the misogynistic mold that originally created him.

Understanding the problem with Vonnegut's depiction of women begins with an examination of how feminism has changed over time. More specifically, the postmodern feminist perspective in America grew as a result of the first and second waves of feminism. Deborah L. Madsen, an expert in Feminist Critique Theory, discusses the evolution of feminism in her book *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* by breaking down the different waves of feminism. The First Wave of feminism began in the 1840's, at the time of the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848, and was primarily focused on moving away from the idea that women were property (like children and slaves were considered at the time). Madsen continues describing the First Wave when she communicates that "There was some progress in the reform of property laws and gradually educational opportunities became available, although job opportunities were restricted to teaching and nursing—extensions of traditionally feminine domestic and nurturing roles" (3-7). First Wave feminists wanted to break out of the mold of ownership, to be considered human beings, and to integrate themselves into the workforce. At the time of First Wave feminism, women were restricted from being anything but bearers of children and objects of masculine sexual desire.

The placement of women in society during First Wave feminism led to the growth of Second Wave feminism. If the First Wave put women in the same world as men, the Second Wave threw women into that world with other men, while drawing more attention towards female sexuality. Madsen finds that this Second Wave emerged in the early 1960s and focused upon an indictment of male sexism and the domestic oppression of women. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) called for women to renew the struggle of the first wave which had culminated in female suffrage in 1920, but now feminist attention was focused on the exclusion of women from the public sphere and sex-based discrimination in the workplace (7).

Similar to the First Wave, a specific event marks the spark of a new feminist perspective: the publishing of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. The publication happened at the same time as Vonnegut's authorship, thus resulting in the presence of many Second Wave feminist ideas in his works. Throughout the Second Wave, "The use of sexual violence by men as a strategy for sustaining patriarchal control of women rose to prominence as a major feminist issue in the 1970s" (Madsen 12). Vonnegut utilizes this Second Wave feminist focus by implementing topics like pornography, sex, and masturbation along with marriage, relationships, and gender issues in the workforce. While Vonnegut does evoke some Second Wave feminist issues, it is also important to consider how these ideas are manifested in his writing. Madsen communicates that one needs "to look at how female characters are portrayed and in what positions/situations they are placed in 'great' literary works... [so that one can produce] a picture of the attitudes towards women that characterize the work of a particular author or genre or period" (15-16). Looking further into how Vonnegut portrays women will be essential in understanding how his works conflict with Second Wave feminism and point more towards postmodern

feminism. Although Vonnegut initially includes some Second Wave feminist's ideas in his fiction, it is not until the postmodern era of feminism that his work rises out of misogyny.

Unlike First and Second Wave feminism, postmodern feminism is not truly marked by one specific work or event, but rather by multiple. Postmodern feminism moves away from the grouping of women that Second Wave feminism included, and transitions to a new focus on the individualized woman. Madsen explains such a concept: "The postmodern challenge to the idea that there is a single and coherent feminine experience to which feminism can appeal is grounded in the perception that to seek such a unitary viewpoint is to adopt the patriarchal preference for singularity, coherence and unity" (22). Instead of having women band together to stand against the overtly sexualized perception of females, postmodern feminists aim to focus on the difference of each woman's experience in life. Postmodern feminists find that "contemporary feminism has overregulated sexuality, confused career advancement with true personal liberation, and put at risk fundamental civil liberties" (Madsen 23). By grouping the viewpoint of women into a generalization rather than individualized experiences, contemporary society has ignored how experiences like rape and domestic violence can change and affect individual women. Furthermore, this generalization has left a stigma on tough subjects like mental health, suicide, rape and domestic violence. Postmodern feminists no longer want to victimize the female individual. Rather, postmodern feminist critics focus on the experience these stigmas create precisely because it draws attention to the processes that weaken women. The move towards a focus on the individual in postmodern feminism also applies to Vonnegut's individual characters and narrative voices. Explicating certain female and male characters will show how Vonnegut grows through the postmodern feminist era.

Vonnegut was a man who loved to talk to other people and make them laugh. One of his professed life goals was to bring a little bit of joy back into the world. However, Vonnegut's humor is a distinct indicator of his life in the 1950s era because of how he chooses to comment on women. Vonnegut's 1950s humor is evident in his commencement speech at Albion College. When Vonnegut explains "How to Get a Job like Mine," he gives multiple examples of how finding happiness is a truly simple act. For instance, he describes a woman working at a post office as the nicest woman because she would change her appearance in order to keep the customers entertained. Vonnegut also proclaimed that he loved this woman because of her generosity. While Vonnegut's main point was to exemplify how simple finding happiness can be, he chose to portray such a process in a manner that centered on the physicality of a female. The male 1950s era mindset is clear throughout this description because the woman is given value through her appearance. Praising the post office woman's physicality is just one example of how Vonnegut is a product of his time. Vonnegut continues to use outdated male humor when he communicates that happiness can be found between men and women because women want someone to talk to and men want more pals. Explaining this mutual benefit as each gender fulfilling the other's central desire reinforces stereotypes. Although his message for his audience is to be happy with simplicity and try to be kind to others because the world is filled with unkindness. Vonnegut's intentions are outshined by the boxes he puts each gender into. This commencement speech is just one example of how his reputation as an author is shaped by his era's sense of humor, and his attempts at humor are further seen in his satirical narratives as well ("Kurt Vonnegut: How to Get a Job like Mine").

Vonnegut's war history, marriage, and overall home life seeps into his novels, stories, and characters in a way that attracts and captures his readers. While Vonnegut's early life included a somewhat happy marriage and a few early novels, it was not until later on in his life, after divorce, that he began to see literary success. Vonnegut's transition to success is encapsulated through Charles J. Shields' description: "He was bored by his twenty-year marriage to his first love, the former Jane Cox, whom he'd married barely five months after his release from a prisoner-of-war camp at the end of World War II" (6). Vonnegut's war experience affected his life in such a way that his marriage and mental state suffered. Shields later writes, "His temper was getting the better of him, ...rubbed raw by too much drinking and fears of being a permanent loser" (7). Vonnegut's fear drove him not only to write, but also to write in a way that made his readers laugh while critiquing the world around him. War, politics, love, marriage, and the pursuit of technological advancement are just a few of the many things that Vonnegut chose to write about through his genre of choice: satire.

Understanding Vonnegut's use of the satiric narrative is essential in analyzing the gender dynamics of his writing. Satire is different from other genres because it allows the author room for evaluation through an attempt at humor. Gilbert Highet's work *The Anatomy of Satire* outlines different essential qualities of a satiric monologue, parody, and narrative. First, Highet notes that "To write good satire, he must describe, decry, denounce the here and now" (17). Vonnegut's fictional works comment on the unkindness of the present world by creating fictional environments that exaggerate such unkindness. For instance, Vonnegut's 1968 short story "Welcome to the Monkey House" takes place in a future version of the world where overpopulation is an extreme problem combated with ethical suicide parlors with hostesses to assist people in killing themselves. Additionally, in "Welcome to the Monkey House" overpopulation has reached such an extreme point that it requires medical treatments to obstruct people's sex drive and make reproduction

nonexistent. Vonnegut's leading female character, Nancy, is a suicide parlor hostess who is kidnapped by a rebel "nothinghead" (someone who doesn't take the extreme birth control), Billy the Poet, and raped to have her sexual desire restored. In order to critique the negative aspects of his present 1968 world, Vonnegut enhances the negative aspects of his male characters and narrators.

Highet notes that satire "tries always to produce the unexpected... [with] typical weapons of satire—irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, exaggeration" (18). Vonnegut, as an author writing in the satiric form, wants to shock through his exaggerations. For instance, Vonnegut has Nancy describe her own rape as "eight people holding me down on that table, while you [Billy the Poet] bravely hold a cocked pistol to my head—and do what you want" (47). The violence, vividness, and exaggeration that Vonnegut gives his characters and narrators is meant to critique humanity. Detailing Nancy's rape is inherently problematic, and Vonnegut knows this. The meaning of Nancy's rape is to convey the evils that lie within some males. Vonnegut seeks to use the exaggeration within satire for a greater purpose: to criticize the male rationalization of violence. Therefore, the typical interpretation of Vonnegut as a misogynistic author is misleading, because it ignores his use of narrative in the satiric mode.

Satire in the form of narrative greatly differs from that in a monologue or parody. Vonnegut's "More Stately Mansions," "Welcome to the Monkey House," and *Breakfast of Champions* all take on this more difficult narrative form. Highet notes that "In narrative fiction,... this shape [satire] is highly important but is easy to misunderstand" (156). In order to better understand the complexities of a satiric narrative, Highet breaks down different forms of narrative fiction into Out of This World, Animal Tales, and Distorted Visions of This World. For the purpose of focusing on the three listed Vonnegut works, Out of This World and Distorted Visions of This World are of more importance. Highet comments that Out of This World narrative fiction with visions of the future is "difficult to describe as satires, since they usually arouse neither laughter nor contempt nor disgust, but merely wonder and horror" (171). Vonnegut's "Welcome to the Monkey House" exemplifies the evocation of the disgust impulse and horror because of Nancy's and the text's apparent sympathy towards her perpetrator. In terms of Distorted Visions of This World, "More Stately Mansions" and *Breakfast of Champions* fit this mold of satirical narratives. Highet finds that [Satire] must display their more ridiculous and repellent qualities in full flower, minimize their ability for healthy normal living, mock their virtues and exaggerate their vices, disparage their greatest human gifts, the gift of co-operation and the gift for inventive adaptation, treat their religion as hypocrisy, their art as trash, their literature as opium, their love as lust, their virtue as hypocrisy, and their happiness as an absurd illusion. And it must do all this while protesting that it is a truthful, unbiased, as nearly as possible dispassionate witnesses (190).

Vonnegut's distorted visions of this world in "More Stately Mansions" and *Breakfast of Champions* create an extreme environment through his characters and narrators. *Breakfast of Champions* introduces an exaggerated environment in two characters' journeys, Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover, to Midland, Indiana. Vonnegut describes this location when he writes, "As for the suspicion I express in this book, that human beings are robots, are machines: It should be noted that people, mostly men, suffering from the last stages of syphilis...were common spectacles in downtown Indianapolis and in circus crowds when I was a boy" (3). Equating the male population that Vonnegut chooses to evaluate with circus folk distinguishes his environment as oddly humorous yet concerning. Vonnegut's satire opens the door for evaluation through irony in violence and vividness as well. It is through this genre that, by stressing the flaws of men, Vonnegut disrupts his original reputation of misogyny.

One of Vonnegut's earlier 1951 narratives, "More Stately Mansions," illustrates how his characters stereotype women. In the narrative, Grace, a housewife, is painted as crazy after a trip to the hospital for a viral infection. Vonnegut highlights her insanity through illustrating her obsession with interior design. Throughout Grace's hospital visit, George (Grace's husband) and their neighbors, Anne and the narrator, work to make Grace's interior design dreams a reality. Vonnegut contrasts male and female values throughout this design process, illustrating his stereotypes of women and his critiques of men.

Grace's apparent neuroticism is evidence that Vonnegut is a product of his time. Grace's unique mentality is described at the beginning of the narrative when the narrator first enters Grace and George's home. Mental instability is hinted at when the narrator writes, "I noticed every time she entered or left the living room, she made a jog in her course, always at exactly the same place.... I think it was then that she first alarmed me, made me feel less like laughing" (136). The obsession Grace has with interior decoration leads her to fantasize about what pieces of furniture, color patterns, and styles she has in her home. However, Grace's fantasy is not merely imaginary. For Grace, everything she envisions for her home is real. The text boxes Grace as a mental case through this obsession to a point that outsiders are uncomfortable around her character. Grace's characterization shows a stereotype of women as neurotic and paranoid. This idea is solidified at the conclusion of the narrative as Grace comes home to her newly decorated house and says, "Well, how else

can you explain it? That material held its color just perfectly for years, and then, poof, it fades like this in a few weeks” (Vonnegut 146). Grace’s craziness is now revealed to have been present throughout the whole story because she believes the new interior design objects have been in her house for years. Vonnegut gives his female character a history of mental illness that aligns him with non-feminist perspectives that depict women as neurotic and take away their individuality. Furthermore, the assumption that Vonnegut is a misogynist is encouraged through Grace’s stereotype because it makes her character appear lesser than the reasonable male characters.

Interestingly, in the same story Vonnegut plays with the idea of feminizing men. Before Grace’s hospitalization, the male narrator explains that “George and I ignored them [Grace and Anne’s conversations about interior design], and had a pleasant enough time talking about everything but interior decoration” (Vonnegut 143). The narrator, like George, is used to ignoring feminine conversations about home life. Vonnegut clearly divides gender dynamics here with female chief concerns on interior design and male chief concerns on anything but interior design. In literature and in reality, male figures often used this ignore tactic when at social gatherings. Today, Super Bowl parties, tailgates, and many other social gatherings often have male and female groups separated by conversation and interest. However, an interesting twist happens in the story when George’s character changes once his wife is hospitalized. When Grace is in the hospital for two months, George “now talked interior decoration with fervor and to the exclusion of everything else” (144). Without Grace there, George begins to understand and appreciate his wife’s role in his life. This appreciation sparks a new passion within George that leads to him redecorating the entire house before Grace returns home. George’s former suppression of interior design also begins to burst out of him as he digs into his more feminine side to create a thoughtful surprise for his wife. George’s newfound interest and caring nature indicates that Vonnegut believes that the male perspective of the era should become more feminine, because such femininity positively changes George and his marriage. Here, Vonnegut jumps out of the misogynistic category by both detailing the flaws of masculine identity and providing feminization as a solution to an overtly male perspective.

“Welcome to the Monkey House” produces a shocking and disturbing end through its characters, Nancy and Billy the Poet. Vonnegut fan and literary expert Kathleen Founds describes her experience after reading “Welcome to the Monkey House” as: “If I had a Kurt Vonnegut saint candle, I would light it every time I opened a Word Document. That was until I had my own experience akin to opening a box in my literary grandfather’s attic and finding something utterly derailing. I read Vonnegut’s ‘Welcome to the Monkey House’ (Founds). Founds communicates that many women are initially appalled at the depictions of women in “Welcome to the Monkey House.” The violence and rape in the story are key to analyzing most people’s initial reaction to the piece. Similar to other Vonnegut satiric narratives, “Welcome to the Monkey House” takes place in a dystopian future with pills that numb away the lower halves of people’s bodies so that sex is no longer a desire, but a crime. Suicide parlors with suicide hostesses also exist in Vonnegut’s future world, thus making death a welcome invitation rather than a fearful event. As Founds communicates, the reputation of “Welcome to the Monkey House” “appears to celebrate a rainbow of rape myths: the myth that a woman who dresses provocatively shouldn’t be surprised if a man forces her to have sex. The myth that women unconsciously desire to be raped. The myth that proud, stuck-up women must be humbled through rape. The myth that rape is corrective, a cure.” This work is one of the more disturbing pieces in Vonnegut’s literary history. His apparent encouragement of rape culture and male dominance over women solidifies his reputation as a misogynist. Nancy’s journey throughout “Welcome to the Monkey House” is the voice of the female struggle in this dystopian world.

In “Welcome to the Monkey House,” Vonnegut’s problematic descriptions essentially come from the way he characterizes Nancy. In most instances, Vonnegut chooses to describe Nancy by equating her to other suicide hostesses, which actually takes away from the individuality that is encouraged in postmodern feminism. Vonnegut begins his negative imagery of Nancy when he describes the sexuality of all suicide parlor hostesses: “All Hostesses were virgins. They also had advanced degrees in psychology and nursing. They also had to be plump and rosy, and at least six feet tall” (32). While Vonnegut’s addition of the mental requirements of suicide hostesses may be an attempt to give his women some form of intelligence, his specificity of the psychology and nursing degrees further generalize women into only those categories of learning. Also, the nursing profession is traditionally a degree associated with women as caregivers, which furthers Vonnegut’s stereotypes of women as nurturers of men. These generalizations move directly against the values of postmodern feminism. Additionally, Vonnegut’s clear image of these women emphasizes the physical qualities of the female body. Plump, rosy, and six-foot-tall are each characteristics that can be found individually, but Vonnegut’s fantasy is communicated through the difficulty of finding all of these female characteristics together in one person. The mental value of the suicide parlor hostesses is diminished because of Vonnegut’s focus on their physicality. Even though the characters within the story may not all have a sex drive, Vonnegut knows his audience does and these descriptions of women potentially arouse audience members in a way that aligns Vonnegut with sexism.

Glossing over the mental characteristics of female characters is another problem that Vonnegut's writing faces. Physically, a suicide hostess has to fulfill five requirements in order to get the job: be pretty, a virgin, plump, rosy, and at least six feet tall. When one looks only at these physical requirements, it appears as though Vonnegut is setting up some sort of rape fantasy about these suicide hostesses instead of trying to relate to his female readers. Even setting the physical descriptions aside, Vonnegut only refers to Nancy as an individual when she speaks, or throughout the event of her capture and rape. Vonnegut creates a sense of irony by making Nancy's rape exactly the way she describes it, with the addition of her fellow ex-suicide hostess sisters holding her down while Billy the Poet completes his task. This irony, mixed with the exaggerations of Nancy's rape, establish the story as a satire. However, this does not make Vonnegut's message ok. After her rape, Nancy is painted as a submissive victim when she "sat down quietly and bowed her head" (50). Vonnegut lets the women of this story lose through Nancy's rape, and gives Billy the Poet a victory. All of the women lose at the end of Vonnegut's story because of the way in which Vonnegut paints Nancy, the only specific female in the narrative. Even before Nancy's submission, "She understood the tale. It frightened her to understand so easily that, from gruesome beginnings, sexual enthusiasm could grow and grow" (Vonnegut 48). For Vonnegut, Nancy's tragedy is her liberation. And, instead of making Billy a victim, Vonnegut aligns him with more heroic qualities by describing Billy as a sexual liberator. Vonnegut's stereotyping of women is consistent at this point in his writing because of his enhancement of the female characteristics and the negative positions he puts his female characters in. However, his portrayal of Billy the Poet involves a closer look at problems within the male psyche, thus indicating that his characterization is more dynamic than it appears at first glance.

Unlike Nancy, Vonnegut describes Billy the Poet in a manner that suggests pity even though rape is a morally corrupt deed. Billy the Poet begins with his overall perspective that women are only women when they are sexualized: "A woman's not a woman till the pills [extreme birth control] wear off" (Vonnegut 41). Billy the Poet does not seek out to rape women for his own pleasure, but in order to free them from the controlled government. Nancy has to be able to feel her first sexual experience in order for Billy the Poet to force himself upon her. Typically, a rapist seeks out women for his own pleasure, but Billy the Poet's desires have a deeper meaning. This creates a different dynamic in Billy the Poet that almost makes the readers pity him. Vonnegut emphasizes sympathy for Billy when writing, "He didn't hurt her. He deflowered her with a clinical skill she found ghastly. When it was all over, he didn't seem cocky or proud. On the contrary, he was terribly depressed" (47). Vonnegut paints Billy the Poet in a dream-like way that makes rape seem acceptable. While it is debatable whether or not Vonnegut is fantasizing about rape, it is clear that he is not describing rape in a graphic manner. The uniqueness of Billy's character is found through his depression, caused by his mission to bring sexual freedom to this futuristic world. In the end, Vonnegut even gives Billy the Poet his own sense of heroism when he says, "I have spent this night, and many others like it, attempting to restore a certain amount of sexual pleasure to the world, which is poorer in pleasure than it needs to be" (49). Billy's mission is to restore sexual pleasure through violence. This attempt at restoration communicates that men sometimes have a deeper reason for their violent actions, thus rationalizing unacceptable male behavior.

Vonnegut's motives do not make Billy's actions morally sound, and Vonnegut's exaggeration on sexual assault should not be taken as an example to live by. Instead, one should take an overall look at Vonnegut's attempt to communicate that men are corrupt. Billy the Poet receives the audience's pity because of the outcome his actions have on his mental state. The pity from the audience makes Billy a lesson learned rather than an outright villain. From this lesson, Vonnegut grows out of misogyny and into an evaluator of the ugly. He does not paint men as better than women, but rather illustrates the flaws of men and the negative outcomes that their violence has on their victims and on them. Although Nancy experiences the life tragedy of rape, Vonnegut does not victimize her through the process, but attempts to sexually liberate her instead. This portrayal of men's negative effects on their environment due to their violent choices is furthered in *Breakfast of Champions*.

Published in 1973, *Breakfast of Champions* parallels the lives of the two central male characters, Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover, alongside one another until they meet at the violent and criminal end of the novel. Vonnegut uses these two characters, along with female characters Patty Keene and Francine Pefko, to evaluate the unkindness of men through their obsession with sexuality, violence, and control. Vonnegut's characterization of Patty Keene and Francine Pefko continues his trend to stereotype women, but some postmodern feminism is evident through the individualization of these women. Furthermore, Vonnegut's focus on Dwayne Hoover's absurd violence and Kilgore Trout's twisted male perspective complicates Vonnegut's reputation as a misogynist.

The survival of Vonnegut's Patty Keene and Francine Pefko, despite the climactic violence and oppression from male characters, reflects more postmodern feminist ideas than previous Vonnegut works. Patty Keene's character exemplifies a woman successfully working through life despite many of her negative circumstances. Leeds describes Patty's character as "The seventeen-year-old blond waitress at Dwayne Hoover's Burger Chef restaurant...[who] help[s]"

pay off hospital bills accumulated by her father's fatal bout with colon cancer...[and] She previously became pregnant when raped" (363). Vonnegut creates Patty Keene's character in such a way that establishes her as a victim but does not victimize her. This non-victimization directly represents postmodern feminism. Vonnegut communicates that he realizes the world is not the same for men and women. On one hand, Vonnegut can be seen as encouraging the hardships females face because of his creation of Patty Keene's character. On the other hand, Vonnegut can be portrayed as having a sense of gender awareness. Unlike his previous novels, here Vonnegut begins to acknowledge that women are more complex creatures, just as men are.

Vonnegut further emphasizes the difficulties women face when he observes that by saying, "[Patty] was stupid on purpose.... The women all had big minds because they were big animals, but they did not use them much for this reason: unusual ideas could make enemies, and the women, if they were going to achieve any sort of comfort and safety, needed all the friends they could get" (140). Vonnegut acknowledges the inequalities that women face in the world, and gives his female characters power through this knowledge, instead of victimizing them. Yet Vonnegut continues stereotyping women as a weaker sex because women need comfort and safety. Vonnegut makes progress in his creation of Patty Keene through her individualization, but holds himself back from becoming a feminist ally when he paints women as the weaker sex.

Francine Pefko is another female character in *Breakfast of Champions* who exemplifies Vonnegut's progress in portraying women. Unlike Patty Keene, Francine Pefko is created to distinguish the positivity and kindness that women tend to have more than men. Francine's character begins as Dwayne Hoover's secretary and sexual partner at the beginning of *Breakfast of Champions*. Her character is focused solely on fulfilling the pleasure of men. However, Francine's character grows as the novel continues and Dwayne's mental capacity breaks down into violence. Francine's first instance of kindness is her decorations at Dwayne's office. These decorations include "many comical signs which Francine had put up on the wall in order to amuse people, to remind them of what they so easily forgot: that people didn't have to be so serious all the time" (Vonnegut 117). Francine's character is concerned with the well-being of all the people around her, especially Dwayne Hoover after his wife had committed suicide. Vonnegut's creation of Francine shows that he values women in a different way than he values men because Francine is kind while Dwayne is cruel. Postmodern feminism ideas trickle through Francine because she represents the value of women through their kindness. Vonnegut begins to complicate Francine's value later when she says, "I wouldn't want to be a man—they take such chances, they work so hard'.... 'If I was a man, I'd be tired and nervous, too. I guess God made women so men could relax and be treated like little babies from time to time'" (Vonnegut 158). Vonnegut points Francine back to her original purpose: to please men. While Vonnegut's depiction of Francine makes her a more complex female character, he still puts her into a box. However, next to Vonnegut's continuation of female stereotypes is his deeper focus on the flaws of men.

Vonnegut first shows the flaws of men when he brings up the physicality of women in the male perception. More specifically, Vonnegut talks about "wide open beavers," which is "a photograph of a woman not wearing underpants, and her legs far apart, so that the mouth of her vagina could be seen" (Vonnegut 22). At first glance, Vonnegut's description seems to be a generalization about how the private parts of women's bodies look. These sexualized thoughts of women are a result of the bad "chemicals," or thoughts, that Vonnegut describes in the brains of humans. At the beginning of the novel, Vonnegut explains, "I tend to think of human beings as huge, rubbery test tubes...with chemical reactions seething inside" (4). As the novel continues, Vonnegut illustrates how the male brain has more of these bad chemicals in their brains than females do. The male brain chemicals set up the convoluted minds of Vonnegut's men in *Breakfast of Champions*. Additionally, Vonnegut's exaggeration of the female bodies puts his work into the satire genre. Therefore, readers can infer that however Vonnegut continues to describe his male characters is meant to be critical rather than praiseworthy.

Dwayne Hoover is the first example of how Vonnegut describes the flaws of men through Dwayne's obsession with sex and physicality. Dwayne's obsessions and villainous characterization is set up when "He [Kilgore Trout] put the bad ideas into a science fiction novel, and that was where Dwayne found them" (Vonnegut 15). The transference of bad chemicals, or ideas, from male to male is what causes the violence and destruction in this novel. Dwayne's absurdity is painted when Vonnegut writes, "He [Dwayne] needed a woman, too, or a bunch of women who would fuck him hundreds of times a week, because he was so full of lust and jism all the time" (95). Again, we see Vonnegut giving value to women through their purpose of pleasing men and the distorted ideas that exist in Dwayne's male mind. Yet Vonnegut's exaggeration of Dwayne's need for sexual women is meant to be taken as a critique of Dwayne's character rather than taken seriously, because the text is in the genre of satire. Dwayne's twisted mentality, violence, and obsession with sex are his character flaws. Vonnegut emphasizes Dwayne's villainous nature at the climax of the novel when he brings ultimate destruction to the world around him:

Dwayne wanted to give her a beating in public, which his bad chemicals made him think she richly deserved. Dwayne had already broken her jaw and three ribs in the office. When he trundled her outside, there was a fairsize crowd.... ‘Best fucking machine in the state,’ he told the crowd. ‘Wind her up, and she’ll fuck you and say she loves you, and she won’t shut up till you give her a Colonel Sanders Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise’ (Vonnegut 280). Dwayne has reached absolute absurdity after beating not only Francine, but four other people. Vonnegut emphasizes Dwayne’s beating of Francine more than others, which further distinguishes the effects of male violence on women. Dwayne is Vonnegut’s example of man at his worst because he beats and demeans women at the same time. Men can be inherently evil at their core because of their resorting to violence and their convoluted minds’ bad chemicals. Because the exaggeration of the event makes it satirical, Vonnegut does not agree or empathize with Dwayne’s character. Instead, Vonnegut paints Dwayne as his only true villain.

Kilgore Trout is another specific male character in *Breakfast of Champions* who receives critique from Vonnegut. Kilgore’s character is known to have appeared in many of Vonnegut’s other novels, such as *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, *Jailbird*, and *Timequake*. Kilgore’s numerous appearances are a result of his character representing “Vonnegut’s self-acknowledged alter ego” (Leeds 619). Vonnegut uses Kilgore’s character to insert some of his own thoughts. In *Breakfast of Champions*, the science fiction character, Kilgore, is “asked to come to a Midland City Arts Festival as one of the honored guests” (Leeds 619). As Kilgore makes his journey to the Midland City Arts Festival, the other leading male character, Dwayne Hoover, is caught up reading one of Kilgore’s infamous science fiction novels, which ultimately gives Dwayne Hoover a mental breakdown. This huge crisis is the climax of *Breakfast of Champions* and happens towards the end of the novel.

Kilgore Trout depended on his three previous marriages in an attempt to save him from his own pessimistic mindset. Vonnegut describes Kilgore’s character flaw as “each of his wives had been extraordinarily patient and loving and beautiful. Each had been shriveled by his pessimism” (113). Instead of placing the failure of Kilgore’s marriages on the women, Vonnegut entirely blames Kilgore because of his pessimistic male attitude. By placing the blame on men, Vonnegut redeems himself. Acknowledging the mistakes of men is a new step in Vonnegut’s work that pulls him away from the woman-hater club. Another male character in the book, hotel worker Milo Maritimo, sees through the flaws of Kilgore Trout: “I see a man who is terribly wounded—because he has dared to pass through the fires of truth to the other side, which we have never seen. And then he has to come back again—to tell us about the other side” (Vonnegut 240). Not only does the reader see the flaws of men, but the reasons for their flaws. Vonnegut communicates that the truths of this world are ugly. When men experience this ugly, they, too become ugly. Sadly, Vonnegut is unable to distinguish what happens to women when the ugly is encountered, primarily because he lacks the female perspective and empathy.

Vonnegut’s journey as an author begins with a lack of feminist values because of the female stereotyping. However, a shift from female stereotyping to a focus on the problems seen in males causes Vonnegut to develop a voice that does not fit his typical misogynist title. “More Stately Mansions” discusses marriage and social dynamics, “Welcome to the Monkey House” brings up rape, birth control, and overpopulation, and *Breakfast of Champions* weighs in on the flaws of masculinity and violence. Vonnegut’s tendency to exaggerate and satirize these topics is what sets him apart as an American author because he is not afraid to talk about profane subjects in a profane manner. Yet without Vonnegut’s profane honesty, his readers would be left in a world that hides the ugly environment. Instead of encouraging the taboos of the world, one should embrace the ugly so that one can know what is coming and face the realities of this world, like Vonnegut does in his literary works. The ideas of postmodern feminism require special attention, especially as the Feminist Movement continues to develop in new directions. Sexual abuse and domestic violence are two hot topics that drive the Feminist Movement at present. These topics take place in Vonnegut’s fictional narratives, despite the fact that these works were published decades ago. Looking into the future of the Feminist Movement, women and men must take a look at the ugly, like Vonnegut does, so that improvement can be made in the relationships between sexes.

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