

KURT VONNEGUT'S PORTRAIT OF THE FEMALE:  
HER CHARACTER, STATUS, AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE NOVELS

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## PREFACE

My earliest exposure to Kurt Vonnegut's fiction was of a purely recreational nature; at first, his works provided a necessary mental escape from the highly challenging literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance with which I had been so thoroughly saturated. As I consumed one compact novel after another, I became increasingly interested in Vonnegut's intricate and diverse plots, satiric style, and his humor, but even more than any of these, I was intrigued by his "apparently" minimal and seemingly derogatory use of female characters.

The popularity of Vonnegut's novels was unquestionable, and I thought it odd--in view of his overall unfavorable attitude toward the members of the female sex--directly in the midst of possibly the most intense women's movement in history. Thus began my investigation of Kurt Vonnegut's fictional women, which is, to my knowledge, the only such study ever attempted since the female characters are overwhelmingly devalued and generally ignored by both literary critics and their creator himself. I am now convinced that this rather negative opinion is a great injustice to Vonnegut's fiction, and that a thorough knowledge of the author's

composite view of the female sex is, indeed, a necessity for the total comprehension of his novelistic themes and their depth.

I would like to thank the members of the English faculty at Emporia Kansas State College who encouraged me in this project, especially Dr. John Somer who unselfishly devoted much time and effort to helping me with the monumental task of writing a Master's thesis through the mail, and Dr. James F. Hoy who urged me to begin graduate study originally. I am also grateful to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his critical and stylistic expertise, Mike Lancaster for his patience, and Ms. Barbara Ivy for her graciously professional librarianship.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: KURT VONNEGUT, JR.'S STATUS AS A CONTEMPORARY NOVELIST AND CRITICAL OPINION OF HIS FICTIONAL WOMEN

During the mid 1960's, the literary world had scarcely heard of an author named Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., nor had it seriously considered reviewing any of his published writing. His work was simply not believed to be worth a critical effort, probably because his novels were published in paperback form and had strange, bizarre covers which hinted of standard science fiction fare; his short stories were published in such periodicals as Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal, and Galaxy Science Fiction. Eventually this critical attitude changed and now in the mid 1970's, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. has established a place for himself in the midst of the literary world that once refused to acknowledge him. Selling steadily, his once-scorned paperback books are currently familiar sights in prominent bookstore displays, in the hands of college students and professors alike, and even on literary critics' desks.

It was college students who first constituted Vonnegut's general readership, and the critics were slow and very reluctant to recognize him as a genuine literary

talent, possibly because they were wary of an author so avidly read and admired by young people. Criticism and reviews of his works were sparse if non-existent for many years, but as his popularity increased, so did the acknowledgements of Vonnegut's real literary existence. In 1973, a number of critical essays were collected in a volume entitled The Vonnegut Statement,<sup>1</sup> which has since become as familiar on college campuses as one of the author's own novels or his short story anthology. Various personal interviews with Vonnegut have also been printed in the last several years and he has appeared on the CBS news program, 60 Minutes--all of which would indicate a growing public interest in a long-neglected contemporary author. Recently, a descriptive bibliography and annotated secondary checklist appeared,<sup>2</sup> and a perusal of it reveals that over one hundred critical discussions and more than 150 reviews of his sundry works existed as of December 1973.

This criticism has studied Vonnegut's work from many viewpoints. His writing has been variously identified as Pop Art, science fiction, black humor, absurdist humor,

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<sup>1</sup>Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, eds., The Vonnegut Statement (New York: Delta, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Asa B. Pieratt, Jr. and Jerome Klinkowitz, comps., Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: A Descriptive Bibliography and Annotated Secondary Checklist (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1974).

gallows humor; his style has been described as apocalyptic, satiric, moralistic, sentimental, pessimistic, fantastic, nihilistic, and eschatological by such critics as C. D. B. Bryan, Leslie Fiedler, William Godshalk, Charles Harris, Ihab Hassan, Alfred Kazin, Jerome Klinkowitz, Robert Scholes, Max Schultz, to name only a few. The majority of the published criticism is concerned with placing Vonnegut's novels within a certain labeled category, generally science fiction (although Vonnegut rejects this label vehemently), black humor, and satire. Authors with whom Kurt Vonnegut is most usually compared are Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, Terry Southern, John Barth, Mark Twain, and H. G. Wells. However, his fiction has also been discussed in relation to certain works of such diverse authors as Sinclair Lewis,<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway,<sup>4</sup> and William Shakespeare.<sup>5</sup>

Because the major concern of Vonnegut's critics has been to find a niche for his fiction, they have neglected often crucial, in-depth character studies which could make this categorizing simpler and perhaps more meaningful. There

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<sup>3</sup>Mary Sue Schriber, "You've Come a Long Way, Babbit! From Zenith to Ilium," Twentieth Century Literature, XVII (April 1971), 101-06.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Todd, "Breakfast of Champions: This Novel Contains More Than Twice Your Minimum Daily Requirement of Irony," Atlantic, CCXXXI (May 1973), 105-09.

<sup>5</sup>William L. Godshalk, "Vonnegut and Shakespeare: Rosewater at Elsinore," Critique, XV, No. 2 (1973), 37-48.



have been a few, to be sure, such as Philip Jose Farmer's study of Kilgore Trout;<sup>6</sup> William Godshalk's comparisons of Eliot Rosewater to Hamlet and Sylvia Rosewater to Ophelia;<sup>7</sup> and David Ketterer's discussion of Malachi Constant.<sup>8</sup> Billy Pilgrim and Howard W. Campbell, Jr., along with the three previously mentioned male characters, have been discussed superficially by many of the critics. However, Vonnegut's characters are not considered to be of much importance in his novels in comparison to the ideas that are presented therein. Vonnegut has his own opinion on the lack of interest in his characterization:

Maybe it's because many of my readers are reading for ideas and concepts. If you're dealing with ideas, with machinery and all that, the characters are very likely to suffer. I have never done an extraordinary job of character development or character explication. <sup>9</sup>I don't think I could. I'm not really interested in it.

Nevertheless, his characterizations cannot be critically ignored, because they are integral and indispensable

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<sup>6</sup>Philip Jose Farmer, "The Obscure Life and Hard Times of Kilgore Trout," The Book of Philip Jose Farmer (New York: Daw Books, 1973), pp. 218-31.

<sup>7</sup>Godshalk, "Vonnegut and Shakespeare: Rosewater at Elsinore."

<sup>8</sup>David Ketterer, "Vonnegut's Spiral Siren Call: From Dresden's Lunar Vistas to Tralfalmadore," New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 296-333

<sup>9</sup>Art Unger, "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr./Class of 71," Ingenue, December 1971, p. 16.

components of his fiction.

Scholarly critical comments on Vonnegut's characters are usually very general, random, and isolated. Charles T. Samuels calls them "one-dimensional grotesques impersonating people,"<sup>10</sup> and Gerald Weales describes them as "mostly cartoon sketches, seen briefly but vividly, designed to make a simple satiric point."<sup>11</sup> Charles B. Harris writes that Vonnegut "seldom depicts a 'well-rounded' character at all. Almost none of his characters actually develops in the course of the novels."<sup>12</sup> Harris elaborates even further on this subject:

Vonnegut's reluctance to depict well-rounded characters and to supply them with conventional motives for their actions serves as a conscious burlesque of the whole concept of realism in the novel. By peopling his novels with oversimplified, two-dimensional figures, Vonnegut mocks the belief that human beings can be understood in all their chaotic complexity, much less on the printed page.<sup>13</sup>

To Edward Grossman, Vonnegut's characters are "mechanical contrivances bathed in stroboscopic glare--fleshless robots galvanized by his will, moving jerkily toward the next joke,

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<sup>10</sup>Charles Thomas Samuels, "Age of Vonnegut," New Republic, CLXIV (June 12, 1971), 30-32.

<sup>11</sup>Gerald Weales, "What Ever Happened to Tugboat Annie?" The Reporter, XXXV (December 1, 1966), 55.

<sup>12</sup>Charles B. Harris, Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd (New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1971), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup>Harris, p. 74.

moral or plot-advancing surprise."<sup>14</sup> Josephine Hendin in a recent critical article discusses Vonnegut's technique:

With brilliant tenderness he reproduces the talk of car dealers, salesmen, beauticians, optometrists, whose astonishing verbal flatness is their strength. Through such simplicity Vonnegut builds characters who are American Everymen, whose sheer banality is what saves them. Vonnegut makes out of their trivia a necessary burden, an anchor that keeps them from flipping out from the force of their unhappiness.<sup>15</sup>

These are representative of the comments about Vonnegut's fictional characters by critics intent on discussing in their respective essays something usually far removed from characterization. In a group of novels in which people-as-people appear to be so very important, it seems strange indeed that critics have passed over the characters so readily. In an age of growing awareness by and toward modern women, it is also curious that the female characters in Vonnegut's novels, although abundant, are almost never even mentioned by literary critics. Vonnegut himself shrugs them off in an interview printed in a teen-age girls' magazine:

About half my mail is from girls and I think it is interesting that in my stories I handle women very poorly. The women I have done have been very sketchy and not deep, not particularly interesting people.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Edward Grossman, "Vonnegut & His Audience," Commentary, LVIII (July 1974), 41.

<sup>15</sup>Josephine Hendin, "The Writer as Culture Hero, the Father as Son," Harper's Magazine, CCXLIX (July 1974), 82.

<sup>16</sup>Unger, p. 15.

At this point in the interview, the author reveals his theory about the "ideas" dominating the characters in his novels. It is true that Vonnegut's ideas stay with a reader much longer than any of his fictional personalities, but on examining these characters in depth, one notes that the ideas become that much more profound and lucid for they take on concrete dimensions when they are associated with names, places, and personalities.

The female characters are especially interesting because--although poorly delineated--they are abundant and essential to the plot of each of the novels. Upon close examination of all these characters, I was able to group them into five stereotypical categories according to personality type and corresponding status in their respective novels. I have given these stereotypes the following titles:

- 1) The Soul-Mate<sup>17</sup>--an inspirational consort who is a sort of Eve-before-the-Fall.
- 2) The Matronly Companion--a fat, housewifely person who is generally a bland "mamma" figure.
- 3) The Peculiar Mother--a strange, eccentric maternal figure who appears to fail horribly as a mother.
- 4) The Temptress/Traitress--a deceiving, conniving

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<sup>17</sup>This term is borrowed from Wilfred L. Guerin, et al., A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 120. This is the only term of Guerin's which applies to Vonnegut's female characters.

female who will prostitute herself sexually to get what she wants and is usually disloyal either to herself or to a male character.

5) The Bizarre Vignette--a grotesque sketch of a female characterized by incongruous distortion which is used to point out quirks and frailties of human nature.

These groups are not placed in any order of importance or appearance; in fact, since no one group appears to be any more important than the others in Vonnegut's stories, they have been arranged in topical order.

The examination of Kurt Vonnegut's fictional women from the preceding five viewpoints provides valuable insight into his novelistic themes. This study will examine each female character in Vonnegut's novels in the light of these stereotypes, as well as in the light of the author's comments on the female in general as they are revealed through the narrator's voice, in an effort to establish the relative importance of the female in Kurt Vonnegut's novels.

CHAPTER II  
THE SOUL-MATE

Ever since the beginning of human existence, man has been in search of the perfect female to supply him with needed companionship, as well as spiritual and physical fulfillment. This paragon of femininity appears throughout all literature, and Vonnegut's novels are no exception. According to A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, this archetypal woman can be defined as "The Soul-Mate: the princess or 'beautiful lady'--incarnation of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment."<sup>18</sup> This particular female character with variations appears in all of Vonnegut's novels excepting the first, Player Piano, and the last, Breakfast of Champions. These Vonnegut-styled soul-mates are topically listed as follows: Mona Aamons Monzano,<sup>19</sup> Montana Wildhack,<sup>20</sup> Helga

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<sup>18</sup>Guerin, p. 120.

<sup>19</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Cat's Cradle (New York: Delta, 1963). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text and identified by the abbreviation CC.

<sup>20</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five: Or the Children's Crusade (New York: Delta, 1969). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation SF.

Noth Campbell,<sup>21</sup> Sylvia Rosewater,<sup>22</sup> Emily Hoenikker (CC), Claire Minton (CC), Eunice Rosewater (RW), and Beatrice Rumfoord.<sup>23</sup>

Although these characters all fit into the one general category and have some similar characteristics, they vary individually from each other, both in demeanor and in effectiveness of being a true soul-mate. Curiously, each woman is talented in some area of the fine arts--music, writing, acting--which seems to suggest that a soul-mate has some aesthetic aptitude and appeal. Although each one is an inspirational consort at some time to a male character and usually brings about a spiritual fulfillment of that male, it is not always a lasting one because of disillusionment or death, as will be revealed in each individual character study that follows.

In a discussion of the perfect woman, the first of Vonnegut's females to come to mind would surely be Mona

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<sup>21</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Mother Night (New York: Delta, 1966). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation MN.

<sup>22</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater: Or Pearls Before Swine (New York: Delta, 1965). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation RW.

<sup>23</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., The Sirens of Titan (New York: Delta, 1959). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation ST.

Amons Monzano (CC), the paragon of spiritual and physical beauty combined in one perfect specimen as viewed by the narrator and the entire island republic of San Lorenzo: "She was the one beautiful girl in San Lorenzo. She was the national treasure . . ." and was adopted by "Papa" Monzano "in order to mingle divinity with the harshness of his rule" (CC, 119). Her beauty, coupled with her ability to play the xylophone, enchant all who encounter her as if she were a diety, and indeed the narrator designates her as a "sublime mongrel Madonna" (CC, 73). This "reluctant goddess of love" (CC, 104) is even mentioned by name in the bible of the island Bokononists, The Books of Bokonon: "'Mona has the simplicity of the all'" (CC, 119). Inasmuch as Bokonon, the author of this religious handbook, freely admits that all his writings are lies, this statement about Mona must be taken as a deliberate falsehood. Mona is not the perfect, simplistic woman that the narrator Jonah takes her to be, as he eventually discovers.

In the beginning, Jonah's instant "love" for Mona is mostly induced by her physical demeanor. To him, she appears "heartbreakingly beautiful," and "very young and very grave, too—and luminously compassionate and wise" (CC, 72), although all of these impressions are generated solely by her picture on the cover of a Sunday news supplement. When Jonah does actually meet Mona he is not disappointed in her,



but he is sorry that she is betrothed to another islander.

Through a series of bizarre happenings, Jonah and Mona are eventually thrust together, and he experiences one of the great joys of his life "as he plays footsie with the blonde negress, Mona, who he and everyone else loves: their naked soles touching in the ecstatic union called by Bokononists 'Boko-maru'."<sup>24</sup> But Jonah soon discovers--much to his chagrin--that Mona practices boko-maru with all persons indiscriminantly, and he bitterly realizes that "she adored her promiscuity" (CC, 170) and will not allow herself to be stifled by his masculine possessiveness. As Raymond Olderman states, Mona "is a pure creature of love, and she loves all people uncritically, which . . . is the way Vonnegut most approves."<sup>25</sup>

During the holocaust caused by the contamination of the sea by ice-nine, Jonah forces his sexual intentions upon Mona, his Eve, in their bomb-shelter Eden. They are both disillusioned. As Peter J. Reed observes, "Burning lust does not last long in Vonnegut's wasteland."<sup>26</sup> Mona is

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<sup>24</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut," Esquire, LXXIV (September 1970), 203.

<sup>25</sup>Raymond M. Olderman, "Out of the Wasteland and into the Fire: Cataclysm or the Cosmic Cool," Beyond the Waste Land: The American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven: Yale, 1972), p. 202.

<sup>26</sup>Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1972), p. 137.

essentially lost to Jonah from this point on and ultimately commits a frosty suicide, leaving him to wonder whether she "represent[ed] the highest form of female spirituality? Or was she anesthetized, frigid--a cold fish, in fact, a dazed addict of the xylophone, the cult of beauty, and boko-maru?" (CC, 190). Looking back, Jonah finally accepts that there is only one way in which he can remember her: "So my instructions are clear, I suppose. I am to remember my Mona as having been sublime" (CC, 190).

Mona's symbolic function within the narrative seems to be to accentuate the false illusions so prevalent in Cat's Cradle; she is another of the harmless untruths, the mirages that supply hope to the many despairing human beings within the novel, and as such is an empty character although of great importance to the story. Mona is a satisfying ideal but she is not an authentic woman, just as The Books of Bokonon, though beloved by all readers, is admittedly "'shameless lies'" (CC, 16). Mona is to Jonah what ice-nine is to the mud-hating Marine general who requested its creation--a false illusion of "peace and plenty forever" (CC, 118).

Though essentially very different women, Mona Aamons Monzano is similar in several important respects to Montana Wildhack in the novel Slaughterhouse-Five. They both represent "Eves" to their respective "Adams" while cohabiting artificial paradises: Mona and Jonah in the bomb-proof

sanctuary and Montana and Billy Pilgrim in the showcase dome on the planet Tralfamadore. Like Mona, Montana is a sensually satisfying female to the protagonist, especially when compared with his previous mates. Mona's boko-maru is admitted to be the ultimate experience for Jonah; Billy's coupling with Montana is described in the narrative as "heavenly" (SF, 116) and Peter J. Reed aptly calls it an "erotic dream come true."<sup>27</sup> In contrast to Mona's inspiring musical talents, Montana's questionable contribution to the "fine" arts is several pornographic movies to her acting credits. Neither Mona nor Montana appears to be very intellectual upon examination of the discourses of each, and their major appeal is of a sexual/sensual nature.

Several things about Montana make her an interesting and significant character in Slaughterhouse-Five, although she is present in only several extremely brief scenes. Other than Billy, she is probably the most human of all the characters in the novel, which makes her a fitting mate for him in their cozy zoo cell-Eden. Her humanness is most readily revealed in the chameleon quality which she employs when adjusting to her environment, as all knowledgeable humans must do or else perish. Frustrated by life and familial problems--like her mate Billy--Montana resorted

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<sup>27</sup>Reed, p. 106.

to personally dehumanizing actions in a desperate effort to better her future existence: Billy married exclusively for money and connections; Montana exploited her own body for "fame and fortune." But this tainted side of her is never really presented to the reader; in fact, Billy even denies it when he is confronted with it in an "adult" bookstore. As far as he is concerned, Montana in her wilder days "could have been anybody" (SF, 177)--again her humanness and vulnerability are emphasized.

Montana's significance within the novel, however, lies in her representation of the continually sought-after phenomenon of the ideal female mate: beautiful, sexy, warm, vital, young, rather torrid, and vulnerable. She is all of these things, and as a mate, she supplies Billy with the only moments of contentment and happiness that he would ever know in a relationship. But she is simply not enough to keep him on Tralfaldore with her and their baby, and Billy spends his last days living alone on Earth. At the ends of both Slaughterhouse-Five and Cat's Cradle, the respective "Adams" are left without their "Eves," which perhaps suggests that the sexual bond which often ties man and woman together, as in these two examples, is not exceedingly adhesive in the midst of life's chaos.

Helga Noth Campbell, in the novel Mother Night, also has a deep sexual hold on the protagonist and supposed

autobiographer, her husband Howard W. Campbell, Jr. Living in Germany during World War II as newlyweds, they attempted to find some security, some stability through their relationship with each other, although it was more physical than spiritual. As Campbell writes in his memoirs, "the nation of two my Helga and I had--its territory, the territory we defended so jealously, didn't go much beyond the bounds of our great double bed" (MN, 33).

Like the previously mentioned soul-mates, Helga was beautiful and desirable; talented in the dramatic arts, she often appeared in stage plays that her gifted husband had written especially for her. Campbell writes that he also kept a diary of their erotic love life as a scheme "for keeping our sexual pleasure keen"; it was "a self-conscious experiment by a man and a woman to be endlessly fascinating to each other sexually" (MN, 97).

Despite this physical closeness, Helga was never to know of her husband's duplicity of selves during the war; the only aspects of himself that he shared with her were the sexual and literary ones. It was only after her disappearance while entertaining troops and subsequent presumed death that the lovers were finally emotionally and spiritually linked. Thoughts of Helga, as Campbell explains, helped carry him "through the war; it was an ability to let my emotions be stirred by only one thing--my

love for Helga" (MN, 36). Therefore, in death, Helga became a much larger and enveloping figure than she was in life and provided "a challenge to Campbell's romantic imagination"<sup>28</sup> and erotic memories in which he could self-pityingly immerse himself. Reminiscing, Campbell tells his readers that "uncritical love was what I needed--and my Helga was the angel who gave it to me" (MN, 33).

Helga, however, does not really exist as a tangible character within the plot of Mother Night--she has no speeches, and she never appears in any of the action. Yet her ghostly presence permeates Campbell's memoirs, and her significance in the story cannot be denied. Like Mona (CC), Helga provides a very important illusion for the protagonist to believe in; and in Mother Night, "illusion" is the key to almost all of the characters' personalities as well as the entire plot.

Perhaps if Helga had known more sides of Campbell's many-faceted personality her "uncritical love" might have been strained and twisted out of shape, which is exactly what happened to Sylvia Rosewater's love for her husband in the fifth novel, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. Like Helga, Sylvia was raised among the elite and in her youth

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<sup>28</sup> Jerome Klinkowitz, "Mother Night, Cat's Cradle, and the Crimes of Our Time," The Vonnegut Statement, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer (New York: Delta, 1973), p. 166.

met such great men as "Picasso, Schweitzer, Hemingway, Toscanini, Churchill, de Gaulle" (RW, 47); cultured and gifted, she played the harpsichord and spoke six languages. She is described by her father-in-law, Senator Lister Rosewater, as "'the most beautiful, intelligent, talented, affectionate wife imaginable'" (RW, 60).

Despite Sylvia's obvious love of and need for the refined life, she faithfully, willingly followed her husband Eliot to Rosewater, Indiana, in his crusade for the unloved people there. Although totally alien to her socialite breeding, Sylvia accepted—in order to please Eliot—such uncomfortable positions as President of the Ladies Auxiliary for the volunteer fire department, captain of the auxiliary's bowling team, and hostess to innumerable banquets given for "morons, perverts, starvelings, and the unemployed" (RW, 53). Because of her deep love for and loyalty to Eliot, Sylvia accepted their humiliating life in Rosewater County for five trying years, during which she attempted to support her millionaire husband in all of his rather unconventional philanthropic transactions. Sylvia, "the pale and delicate" woman (RW, 47), just did not have the inherent strength necessary to be Eliot's soul-mate, and she suffered a nervous breakdown in the attempt.

In her madness she burned down the firehouse (to which Eliot had a great affinity), and a doctor diagnosed

her illness as "'hysterical indifference to the troubles of those less fortunate than oneself'" (RW, 54). After being cured of this "'Samaritrophia'" (RW, 54) and then suffering another collapse, Sylvia was changed again:

. . . and the core of this third personality was a feeling of worthlessness, of shame at being revolted by the poor and by Eliot's personal hygiene, and a suicidal wish to ignore her revulsions, to get back to Rosewater, to very soon die in a good cause. (RW, 66)

At this point, she believes that "everything Eliot is doing is beautiful, but . . . cannot keep his pace."<sup>29</sup> To the dismay of the Senator, McAllister, and Mushari, and after all that has transpired, Sylvia unashamedly admits to them, "'I loved Eliot on sight in Paris--and I love him when I think of him now'" (RW, 79).

But Eliot's uncritical love for all people, coupled with his blatant neglect of Sylvia, causes her feelings of love and loyalty to shrivel and die, and she is personally destroyed by trying to be a soul-mate--the likes of which would be totally alien to her character and which she can obviously never be. Sylvia is used by Vonnegut to reveal the flaws in Eliot's thinking and in his crusade--in a way, her efforts to please him parallel his efforts to please the unloved people of Rosewater, and neither is ultimately successful.

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<sup>29</sup>Olderman, p. 205.



Emily Hoenikker, the wife of the father of the atom bomb in the fourth novel Cat's Cradle, is another female character who is completely destroyed--emotionally and physically--as she attempts to be a soul-mate to her own husband. Emily, an extremely musical person who "'could play every musical instrument there was'" (CC, 62), married scientist Felix Hoenikker because "'his mind was tuned to the biggest music there was, the music of the stars'" (CC, 64). Her attempt to be Felix's inspirational consort was never realized or even noticed by him, although several other male characters appreciated fully her physical and intellectual beauty. When questioned what his wife was like before her death, Hoenikker "'couldn't remember anything about her'," and once when she had cooked him a huge celebratory breakfast, he absentmindedly tipped her for her services (CC, 22). In speaking of Felix and his indifference toward Emily, one of her old suitors passionately claimed that "'the best-hearted, most beautiful woman in the world, his own wife, was dying for lack of love and understanding'" (CC, 63). She did, in fact, die of an injury she suffered when she wrecked Felix's car which he had unconcernedly abandoned in a traffic jam. Although she lived through the accident, she died later as a result of this injury when she delivered her third child; thus, Felix was indirectly responsible for the destruction of his would-be soul-mate.

Emily Hoenikker had spent her womanhood trying to please her husband, and he had given her indifference in return. Emily--the soul-mate who was appreciated by everyone who knew her excepting Felix--seems to emphasize the lack of humanity in her scientist-spouse, and in a small way, her death reflects his callous murder of the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the atomic bomb and ultimately the world population with ice-nine.

There are, however, in Vonnegut's novels, two soul-mates who are loved and appreciated by their husbands: Claire Minton (CC) and Eunice Rosewater (RW). Though sketched but briefly, they come across admirably to the reader. Both of these women are writers and are married to politicians. Claire Minton was formerly a professional indexer who financed her husband's schooling and once wrote a controversial letter about American patriotic snobbery to the New York Times, which caused her Horlick to be dismissed from his job immediately after its publication. He, however, believed that what she had written was true and, thus, tried to make the best of their situation; the Mintons, then, were very close until their simultaneous deaths.

Eunice Rosewater wrote a best seller (Ramba of Macedon), which was "an historical novel about a female gladiator", was a chess champion, and she and her husband the Senator (according to their son Eliot), "could laugh as though they

meant it" (RW, 22). She was lost to both husband and son fairly early in her life when she was drowned in a sailing accident.

Both Eunice and Claire were intelligent, articulate women, concerned about social problems, and they were both loved and appreciated by their husbands. These two women add a touch of normalcy to an otherwise peculiar group of female characters in their respective novels, and allow the reader and other characters to grasp hold of stability for a fleeting, but comforting, instant.

The last of the group of soul-mates and perhaps the most intriguing of all Vonnegut's female characters is Beatrice Rumfoord in the second novel, The Sirens of Titan. She is one of the few female characters in any of the novels who really undergoes a change in personality as the novel progresses. In fact, she is as much a heroine of the entire story as Malachi Constant is a hero. But when Beatrice is first seen in the narrative, she is as far from being a soul-mate as is imaginable. She is a bitter, cold, hard woman and her personality is reflected in her appearance and mannerisms. Like the all-white portrait of herself as a child, Beatrice as a woman appears always in spotless white, her unique beauty and haughty demeanor unmarred by life's ravages.

Beatrice is generally described in terms of iciness

and frigidity, and as is later revealed by her husband, in their marital relations she was indeed frigid and remained a virgin throughout their life together. As Rumfoord bitterly explained, "'as a younger woman, she felt so exquisitely bred as to do nothing and to allow nothing to be done to her for fear of contamination'" (ST, 261).

At the start of the narrative, Beatrice speaks to "almost no one" (ST, 12) and has allowed the grounds of the Rumfoord estate to fall into ruin, probably as an insult to her meticulous socialite-husband and to the world in general. Their marriage had been most unsatisfying for both of them, and one critic has suggested that perhaps Rumfoord purposely steered straight into the chronosynclastic infundibulum (a matter/time warp) in order "to escape his troubles."<sup>30</sup> As a result of this experience, Rumfoord can foresee the future--among other uncanny things--and he sadistically insists on informing Beatrice of the horrors that life has in store for her.

But it is Beatrice's very coldness and hardness which comprise her strength, and she determinedly proceeds to try in every conceivable way to disprove her spouse's predictions. Inevitably, she fails and is eventually raped while aboard a spaceship heading for Mars by her nearly

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<sup>30</sup>Hendin, pp. 83-84.

exact opposite--Malachi Constant, the richest man in the United States and one of the most despicable: "Beatrice is as cold, austere, and virginal as Malachi is sensual."<sup>31</sup> From this point on, Beatrice undergoes phenomenal suffering which includes unwanted pregnancy and subsequent motherhood resulting from Malachi's attack; repeated brain-washings on Mars; soldierhood and interplanetary warfare; a fight for survival in the jungles of the Amazon rain forest; rescue and then banishment by fellow Americans; and forced communal living with her attacker Malachi on a spaceship bound for exile on one of Saturn's moons, Titan.

But the once pure, unstained Beatrice has been more than touched by life, and her personality has been as altered as her appearance. In contrast to the cold alabaster figure that she once had been, Beatrice near the end of the narrative looks like "a gypsy queen" (ST, 288) with her gold front teeth, her copper-colored skin (caused by her diet in the rain forest), and the expression on her face which revealed "that she was being an awfully good sport" (ST, 231-32) about the suffering she had undergone.

When Beatrice, Malachi, and their son Chrono first

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<sup>31</sup>James M. Mellard, "The Modes of Vonnegut's Fiction: Or Player Piano Ousts Mechanical Bride and The Sirens of Titan Invade The Gutenberg Galaxy," The Vonnegut Statement, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer (New York: Delta, 1973), p. 198.

land on Titan, they spend much time resolving the tangle of emotions that each individually feels. In an affirmative action, Chrono finally chooses to join the noble Titanic blue-birds, though his deep affection for his mother continues even after her death. Malachi and Beatrice eventually fall in love when they realize "that a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved" (ST, 313). They spend approximately one year together as soul-mates, with Beatrice writing a book on the purpose of life and Malachi doing simple tasks and favors for her such as cleaning and raising food.

Just before she dies, Beatrice affirms her love for the now transformed Malachi when she humbly thanks him for using her because she realizes that "'the worst thing that could happen to anybody, . . . would be to not be used for anything by anybody'" (ST, 310). This relationship between Beatrice and Malachi at the close of The Sirens of Titan is the most positive of all the male/female relationships which exist in Vonnegut's novels, and Beatrice is a most remarkable soul-mate.

The soul-mates, indeed, are a very striking group and probably the most memorable of all Kurt Vonnegut's female characters. Their importance in the novels varies in each individual case, but overall they appear to represent the impossible dream: that is, life with angelic Eve in the Garden of Eden for an all-too-human but desiring Adam.

CHAPTER III  
THE MATRONLY COMPANION

Just as the "soul-mate" is an inspiration and incentive to those persons with whom she is spiritually linked, so is the matronly companion the diametric opposite. She is invariably a heavy woman, often obese, and is generally such a drab character that the critics have almost unanimously ignored her. Indeed, the other characters within the novels agree with the critics and ignore the matronly companion, too, regardless of how important a position she should hold in each of their fictional lives--be it mother, wife, daughter, or fellow human being in the midst of catastrophe. The matronly companion evidently possesses no real talents or skills and is a conversational boor. A female with this type of disposition has become a stock character on modern television, especially in the situation comedy programs. Such a stereotypical female figure in such non-conformist literature as Vonnegut's causes a questioning reader some distress: why did Vonnegut place these mundane women in the midst of such extraordinary circumstances as an ice-nine holocaust, the brink of revolution in a machine-controlled utopia, and in the immediate family of a bizarre, time-travelling optometrist? In every individual case, there is a definite and important

reason why each matronly companion is placed exactly where she is. Janice "Mom" Kroner,<sup>32</sup> Wanda Hagstrohm (PP), Hazel Crosby (CC), Barbara Pilgrim and her mother Valencia (SF) are all very minor female characters who can be categorized as matronly companions, and serve Vonnegut the author in small but significant ways.

If the novels are read chronologically, the first "mamma" figure to be encountered is Janice Kroner, or "Mom" as she wishes to be addressed by the young engineers and managers that are in constant attendance to her husband, the revered Dr. Kroner. Mrs. Kroner is the prototype of the Vonnegutian matronly companion and motherly spouse: "She was a fat repository of truisms, adages, and homolies" (PP, 107), according to the narrator, which is evident in the few snatches of her conversation that are presented to the reader.

The Kroners have obviously been married for quite some time which would account for their pervading parental image. "Mom," it would seem, wishes to be a mother to anyone who needs to be mothered and it appears that she perceives the insecure worlds of the struggling young executives and wants to provide them with some sense of stability, no

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<sup>32</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Player Piano (New York: Delta, 1952). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation PP.



matter how inappropriate or affected. She fails, however, and her undoing is the way in which she attempts to be a mother figure: she desires to be called "Mom," yet she conspicuously has no children of her own; her "helpful" advice consists only of worn clichés; and she responds to all situations in maddeningly predictable ways. She lacks spontaneity—"Mom's response was always the same" (PP, 108)--and in Player Piano's technological world she assumes the properties of just another mechanical device. The fact that Finnerty (the machine-hating rebel manager) does not like or trust her supports this theory even further. The hero's disillusionment with "Mom" as his surrogate mother occurs simultaneously with his disillusionment with the technological society which is his life. The unsteadiness which accompanies his disillusionment is highlighted by the Kroners' own stability.

Indeed, "stability" is not only the key to their life style, it is also the major element in their marital relationship--a rare attribute in any of Vonnegut's social institutions, especially in crumbling Ilium. Although one of the customs of their house exhibits seemingly separate lives for each of them (that of the men and women separating for their respective after-dinner chats), the Kroners seem to be as close as necessary to suit their needs: the mechanism of their marriage continues to run smoothly because its major

component parts are so dependable and predictable.

Janice "Mom" Kroner may well have been a model for Hazel Crosby in Vonnegut's later novel, Cat's Cradle. Like Mrs. Kroner, Hazel also wishes to be called "Mom," she has a substitute family consisting of all Hoosiers (people from the state of Indiana) instead of young technocrats, and she is apparently childless, too. The Crosbys do seem to have a fairly secure, though unexciting marriage, and each accepts the other in spite of individual peculiarities: e.g., Hazel's obsession with Hoosiers, and Lowe's belief that the people of Earth were put here solely "to build bicycles for him" (CC, 82). Neither Hazel nor Lowe considers the other's eccentric opinions odd in any way, or else they have each learned to accept their spouse's personal idiosyncrasies without question or comment. Hazel's attempts at vicarious motherhood--like "Mom" Kroner's--also fail because of their superficiality and predictability; she, too, becomes mechanical in her actions and speeches, and is described by the narrator in terms of a clock that "had just completed its cycle" (CC, 81).

Hazel's major function within the narrative seems to be to provide comic relief through the juxtaposition of her insignificant concerns with the horror of the destruction of the earth. The absurdity of her fanatical interest in Hoosiers--though Indiana no longer exists--and her construction

of an American flag--though all countries as such have been destroyed--reveal her need to establish something stable for people (and mostly herself) to lean on and have faith in. Hazel's "lies," though, lack the dynamic tension of Bokonon's and thus fail to satisfy man's need to respond meaningfully to his situation.

But man continues to search for answers, and Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of Vonnegut's long-awaited Dresden novel, Slaughterhouse-Five, does attempt futilely to establish some security and safety for himself by marrying a rich matronly companion by the name of Valencia Merble. Her father subsequently set Billy up in the optometrist business, and, thus, Billy had been duly "rewarded for marrying a girl nobody in his right mind would have married" (SF, 102-03), although he did realize that "he was going crazy when he heard himself proposing to her . . ." (SF, 93).

Valencia Merble Pilgrim has no physical appeal, she is described at one point by the narrator as being "as big as a house" (SF, 92-93), and is portrayed as continually munching candy which accents her obesity. Her conversation is equally unappealing as can be seen in her usual chatting topics: silver patterns, proposed diets, and monotonous niceties. To Billy, their marriage is "bearable" (SF, 104), and Valencia does have "a lively imagination" (SF, 102) when they are making love which seems to add to the whole experience

for him, although it is never even near "heavenly" as it is with Montana Wildhack. Valencia provided Billy with two children, Barbara and Robert, before losing her capacity for child-bearing, but these offspring are just as unsatisfying emotionally for Billy as their now-sterile mother is. Billy is certainly not an ideal father—with his constant time-travelling and obvious indifference—and it appears that as a parent Valencia also failed in light of the way their children turned out: Barbara is described as a "bitchy flibbertigibbet" (SF, 25) and Robert was quite a trouble-maker in high school. It should be noted that Robert did straighten out eventually, but only after he left home and joined the Green Berets where he had some strong guidance and support which were lacking in both his time-travelling father and bland mother.

The character of Valencia is serio-comic, and Vonnegut uses her to balance out Montana Wildhack's overt sexuality; each is an extreme in her own way. Valencia and Montana are as dissimilar as possible, from physical features to family background: Valencia's obesity is contrasted to the "fantastic architecture" of Montana's body (SF, 115); and Valencia's overly protective parents who are even willing to buy her a husband are the antithesis of Montana's lone alcoholic mother. This conscious juxtaposition of opposites as mates for the wandering Billy is used by Vonnegut to further enhance the

bizarre aspect of Billy's time travels as he lurches from one woman to the other and from one bed to another. Even Valencia's automobile accident--which results in her death--turns into an almost slapstick movie with Billy lying disinterestedly in the hospital, emotionally illustrating the Tralfalmadorian belief that people do not really die--they are actually still alive in all past moments which exist simultaneously with the present. One receives the impression that even if Billy did not accept this sustaining belief, he would not have cared about her death in any case--such is the mediocrity of their marriage. Valencia's own drabness serves as a highlighter to the deeply profound Tralfalmadorian ideas which her husband joyously embraces but will not share with her.

The Pilgrims' daughter Barbara evidently inherited many characteristics from her mother, and as a character she must be placed within the category of matronly companions beside her mother Valencia. Physically resembling her "mamma," Barbara's build is heavy "with legs like an Edwardian grand piano" (SF, 25), and as in her mother's case, she was apparently married for her family's wealth and connections. Just as Valencia somehow failed in her attempt at motherhood, so does the childless Barbara fail when she tries to mother Billy whom she believes to have become senile after his plane accident. As new matriarch of the family after her

mother's untimely death, Barbara attempts to dominate the all-knowing but uncaring Billy and "it was very exciting for her, taking his dignity away in the name of love" (SF, 114). Her rather sadistic attitude is in direct contrast to the uncritical love given by the soul-mates (e.g., Montana Wildhack) and it appears that Vonnegut created her for just that purpose: to bring into sharp relief the various types of "love" and their differing effects.

Probably the prime example of a matronly companion is Wanda Hagstrohm in Player Piano, although she has stiff competition from another female in the novel, the previously discussed prototype, "Mom" Kroner. In fact, the Hagstrohm family is selected by computer as the average family in Ilium, New York, which identifies Wanda as the average mother and housewife of the day. She, like all the matronly companions, is overweight, and her usefulness is decidedly in question. She does provide love and security for her husband and children, but physically she can do nothing for them.

In her entirely automated house, Wanda is left with absolutely nothing constructive to do, and she relishes the few mechanical breakdowns that occur because they allow her "'something to do'" (PP, 142) to pass away the empty days; she does not even have to adjust the dials on the appliances for they are all self-motivated.

Wanda, too, is conversationally dull and the majority of her speeches are lackluster, as she herself is. This is further emphasized by her husband's nickname for her: "Wan." As a woman she is so drab and uninteresting that—as in Valencia Pilgrim's case—her husband cherishes his extra-marital affair as the one bright spot in an otherwise gray existence. Unlike Valencia, however, who never found out about Billy's relationship with Montana, Wanda is totally aware of Edgar's infidelity and in a characteristically weak effort, she accepts the blame for the failure of their marriage because she is "'not exactly a girl any more'" and probably "'pretty dull'" (PP, 144).

Although Wanda symbolizes most of the women in the fictional, futuristic Ilium, in a splendidly colloquial speech aimed at her husband, she effectively voices the feelings of uselessness and frustration that all of the common people of Ilium are immersed in. In effect, her outburst sums up the whole novel's theme and establishes her significance as a character:

"It's me that's no good to anybody," said Wanda wearily. "Nobody needs me. You or even little old Delores [her daughter] could run the house and all, it's so easy. And now I'm too fat for anybody but the kids to love me. My mother got fat, and my grandmother got fat, and guess it's in the blood; but somebody needed them, they were still some good. But you don't need me . . ." (PP, 144)

The matronly companion, then, although always a humdrum, spiritless, dull figure, is nevertheless a very

important type of character in Kurt Vonnegut's novels. Aesthetically, she is never a well-developed character, yet the purpose she serves is to mirror or support by contradictory emphasis one of the author's themes and bring it into the necessary focus. One of the symbolic functions of this mundane character-type seems to be to point out to the reader—with whom Vonnegut is usually conversing—just how easy it is in this insane modern world to become dull, blasé, and useless. The matronly companion, then, epitomizes the dullness that man generally tries to overcome, but in which he is often hopelessly mired.



CHAPTER IV  
THE PECULIAR MOTHER

A second type of maternal figure is the peculiar mother. She is opposite the matronly companion in almost every characteristic except one: failure as a mother. Aside from this one similarity, they are quite different: the matronly companion is as mediocre as the peculiar mother is extraordinary; while the matronly companion has little or no effect on anyone, the peculiar mother leaves an indelible mark on those who know her, especially on her children who are generally sons.

Throughout his novelistic canon, Kurt Vonnegut seems to be grappling with the question of parents and particularly the role of the mother. This questioning becomes progressively more open with each novel. Indeed, in the later novels, the dominant father-figure diminishes, and the peculiar mother emerges as the most influential of all the parental figures.

In Vonnegut's first two novels, Player Piano and The Sirens of Titan, vivid maternal figures are almost nonexistent and are replaced instead by haunting paternal apparitions. Paul Proteus, the hero of Player Piano, is constantly reminded of his father's greatness and success as his superiors and

colleagues treat him only as "his father's son." Indeed, as the lie detector used in Paul's subsequent trial for treason reveals, he feels only "hate and resentment" for "one of the greatest true patriots in American history"—his father (PP, 274). No mention is ever made in the narrative of Paul's mother and her influence upon him; however, he does turn to "Mom" Kroner for some short-lived substitute mothering which indicates a desire or need for motherly love and/or security.

In the second novel, Noel Constant who is the hero's father is also a predominant figure in the narrative, while Mrs. Constant is only mentioned twice: first, when she realizes that she is pregnant by one of her regular paying customers (Noel); and later, during Malachi's drunken spree when he sobbingly offers "an oil well to any woman who'd come up to [him] and say real loud, so everybody could hear, 'I'm a whore just like your mother was'" (ST, 61). However, it is clearly the ghost of Noel Constant, the self-made millionaire, that permeates the story since the plot revolves around the fortune he made and how it influenced his son. There can be little doubt, though, that his mother's early "profession" deeply disturbed the hero.

But in the third novel, Mother Night, the reader is presented his first glimpse of a strangely influential maternal figure, Virginia Crocker Campbell, the mother of the narrator and supposed autobiographer, Howard W. Campbell,

Jr. As is the case with several of the soul-mates, Mrs. Campbell was musically inclined and "she played cello with the Schenectady Symphony Orchestra" (MN, 20); but unlike them, she never appears to have had a solid relationship with her mate since he was so involved in his job that "he had scant time and imagination left over for anything else" (MN, 19).

Housework, music, and motherhood were simply not enough to satisfy and sustain Virginia, and Campbell remembered her as being "morbid" and "drunk most of the time" (MN, 20), as they spent the lonely years of his childhood together. One of Mrs. Campbell's greatest desires was that Howard, her only child, learn to play the beloved cello as she had. But this wish was never to be fulfilled, since, as Campbell alleges, "I, like my father, am tone-deaf" (MN, 20). With an empty marriage, frustrated dreams, and a lonely existence, Virginia turned increasingly inward. In one climactic, weird incident which occurred in a darkened room, she frightened both herself and her young son by showing with a sodium flame what they would each look like when they were "dead." Years later, that horrifying episode was still clear in Campbell's mind: "From that moment on she hardly spoke to me--cut me dead, I'm sure, out of fear of doing or saying something even crazier" (MN, 20).

From the time he was ten years old, then, until he married, Howard W. Campbell, Jr. was without the benefit of normal, loving familial companionship. So with this short description of Campbell's disquieting early life and later lack of maternal love and guidance, Vonnegut sets the stage for the playwright-turned-spy that is Campbell: the man without a family, the man without a country, and with allegiances to no one but himself and his illusions.

The fourth novel, Cat's Cradle, is concerned with another lost mother and her replacement's effect on the children. Emily Hoenikker is this lost mother, and critic Josephine Hendin has stated that the "frozen sea" is the image for Emily, "for the mother that is dead,"<sup>33</sup> and cannot support life of any kind. "The mother dead before a child's life begins, the love lost at the beginning of time, runs through Vonnegut's work, spilling into his many images of destruction and coldness."<sup>34</sup>

Without their mother and with a scientist-father so distracted, the Hoenikker children were without a guiding influence until one of them, Angela (then in her sophomore year of high school), gradually emerged as "the real head of the family" (CC, 23). According to the youngest of the

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<sup>33</sup>Hendin, p. 84.

<sup>34</sup>Hendin, p. 84.

Hoenikkers, a midget named Newt, Angela "was a mother to Frank and me" (CC, 20); Newt also commented that his sister often claimed that she "had three children--me, Frank, and Father" (CC, 23), which she treated with no differentiation in age or familial status.

Therefore, at such an early age, Angela's social life was stifled and the remainder of her existence revolved around her motherly duties. Her one psychological outlet consisted of "playing weirdly authentic blues clarinet,"<sup>35</sup> although as Jonah observes after hearing her perform, "Such music from a woman could only be a case of schizophrenia or demonic possession" (CC, 150).

Even after her younger brothers had grown up, she persisted in treating them like children, even though she had "homely twin girls" of her own (CC, 98). Perhaps Angela's need to mother was an attempt to fill a void in her life created by marrying a man who clearly did not love her. Indeed, she is described by the narrator as "a woman to whom God had given virtually nothing with which to catch a man" (CC, 100); yet, she married a very handsome fellow, though she bought him with her share of her father's deadly invention, ice-nine. With a ruined young womanhood as a memory, an empty marriage saddling her, and not much

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<sup>35</sup>Klinkowitz, "Mother Night, Cat's Cradle, and the Crimes of Our Time," p. 171.

to look forward to, Angela immersed herself in alcohol, blues clarinet, and substitute motherhood until the very end of her discontented existence.

Angela's father Felix (whom she treated as just another of her childish charges) almost did not complete his invention of the doomsday weapon for the United States because of a sudden enchantment with turtles. Just as Angela took over and managed the motherless family, so did she indirectly become the "mother of the bomb" when she suggested a successful plan to get her father working on it once again. As Newt remarked in his letter to Jonah: "'Angela was one of the unsung heroines of the atom bomb'" (CC, 23). Therefore, Angela, the would-be mother and sustainer of life, became instead the patroness of death and destruction.

Even the instance of her death is as bizarre as her life, although Jonah sees "magnificence" in it (CC, 230):

She had picked up a clarinet in the ruins of Bolivar and had begun to play it at once, without concerning herself as to whether or not the mouthpiece might be contaminated with ice-nine. (CC, 230)

This magnificence that Jonah sees must be that of Angela's final effort to create some beauty amidst the chaos and wild destruction--her frozen body a lasting memorial to the love of music. However, it is rather pathetic that in such a time of crisis, she had no one person and nothing else to turn to for comfort save her clarinet. Angela's years

as a makeshift mother were fruitless and devoid of any real happiness for her (or her "children"), except when she was intoxicated by her own musical blues. Angela's one success in life was as an amateur musician, and not as an effective mother.

The peculiar maternal figure achieves even fuller development in Slaughterhouse-Five in the guise of Billy Pilgrim's mother. Although he describes her as an average woman--"She was a perfectly nice, standard issue, brown-haired, white woman with a high school education" (SF, 88)--her effect on him is bewildering and his memories of her later in his life are uncomfortable. Like many of Vonnegut's females, she played a musical instrument, an organ, and was a substitute organist for area churches. "She said she was going to join a church as soon as she decided which one was right. She never did decide" (SF, 33). Her indecision about religion seems justified, perhaps, but her fixation on a crucifix reduces her to just another cartoon figure in Billy's comic strip world. As the cynical narrator tells the reader, "Like so many Americans, she was trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops" (SF, 33).

Billy's other unpleasant recollections of his mother include that she was a dreadful "chain" smoker, and that once when they were visiting the Grand Canyon she unexpectedly

touched Billy which caused him to urinate involuntarily. During one of his time travels, Billy visits his mother much later when she is very, very old and in a nursing home. With all her strength, she struggles helplessly to ask her son the question that for her must be answered: "'How did I get so old?'" (SF, 38). Yet with all of his pain-numbing Tralfaldorian beliefs, Billy apparently does not answer her pleading question.

His feelings for his mother are strained and the narrator explains them:

She upset Billy simply by being his mother. She made him feel embarrassed and ungrateful and weak because she had gone to so much trouble to give him life, and to keep that life going, and Billy didn't really like life at all. (SF, 88)

He possibly also resented her more-than-ready approval of marriage to the repulsive Valencia solely because of the Merbles' wealth and powerful connections. Therefore, their mother-son relationship was an empty one, and another of Vonnegut's fictional children "grew up" without the benefit of real maternal understanding, guidance, and love.

Bunny Hoover, a homosexual character in Vonnegut's last novel, Breakfast of Champions,<sup>36</sup> is also a victim of maternal misguidance, as well as extreme mental cruelty.

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<sup>36</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Breakfast of Champions: Or, Goodbye Blue Monday (New York: Delta, 1973). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text and identified by the abbreviation BC.



His mother Celia is described by the narrator as "crazy as a bedbug" (BC, 181), and whenever Bunny came home from military school she would fill his mind with her morbid fears and unhappiness. According to the narrator, "She would hint that Dwayne [Bunny's father] was a monster. It wasn't true. It was all in her head" (BC, 180). Although Celia was an attractive woman, for some strange reason she could not stand to have her photograph taken. Eventually she committed suicide by eating Drāno, and she became "a small volcano, since she was composed of the same sorts of substances which commonly clogged drains" (BC, 65).

It is almost impossible, however, to further discuss Celia Hoover without also discussing the mother of the narrator. He compares both mothers for the reader:

Bunny's mother and my mother were different sorts of human beings, but they were both beautiful in exotic ways, and they both boiled over with chaotic talk about love and peace and wars and evil and desperation, of better days coming by and by, of worse days coming by and by. And both our mothers committed suicide. Bunny's mother ate Drāno. My mother ate sleeping pills, which wasn't nearly as horrible.

And Bunny's mother and my mother had one really bizarre symptom in common: neither one could stand to have her picture taken. They were usually fine in the daytime. They usually concealed their frenzies until late at night. But, if somebody aimed a camera at either one of them during the daytime, the mother who was aimed at would crash down on her knees and protect her head with her arms, as though somebody was about to club her to death. It was a scary and pitiful thing to see. (BC, 181)

The narrator, here, could very well be Vonnegut himself, since the details of his mother's suicide are identical

with the ones stated in a Vonnegut family history: "With her [Vonnegut's mother, Edith] other financial problems the prospect of losing her son in the impending holocaust made her cup of troubles overflow"; she died on May 14, 1944 and her death "was attributed to an inadvertant overdose of sleeping tablets taken possibly by mistake."<sup>37</sup> Edith Vonnegut was also described as an "extremely handsome"<sup>38</sup> woman, as is the narrator's mother. The obsession of the narrator with his mother's suicide is clearly evident, and as one reviewer asserts, "The Vonnegut who appears [as narrator of BC] is . . . troubled by schizophrenia and his mother . . . ."<sup>39</sup>

A chronological reading of Kurt Vonnegut's novels does reveal a growing obsession with the role of the mother in the family unit. This obsession culminates in Breakfast of Champions wherein Vonnegut dramatically illustrates how affected he is by his mother and her suicide. In the conclusion of the novel, the narrator sees his parents in a dream-like void--his father speaks to him, but his mother

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<sup>37</sup>"An Account of the Ancestry of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., by an Ancient Friend of His Family," Summary, I, No. 2 (1971), 115.

<sup>38</sup>"An Account of the Ancestry of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., by an Ancient Friend of His Family," p. 111.

<sup>39</sup>J. D. O'Hara, "Instantly Digestible," New Republic, CLXVIII (May 12, 1973), 26.

"stayed far, far away, because she had left [him] a legacy of suicide" (BC, 294), and the narrator is left crying. As the narrator/Vonnegut firmly states:

It seems to me that really truthful American novels would have the heroes and heroines alike looking for mothers instead [of fathers]. This needn't be embarrassing. It's simply true. A mother is much more useful. (BC, 268)

But a strange, eccentric mother is not useful and along with the matronly companion, this is the only kind of mother that exists in the Vonnegutian world--a failure--except only for a supernaturally transformed one such as Beatrice Rumfoord in The Sirens of Titan.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TEMPTRESS/TRAITRESS

Another female stereotype in literature is the temptress/traitress: a sexy, attractive, conscienceless, unscrupulous woman who will stop at nothing to achieve her goals. One of the classic examples is the Old Testament's Delilah, and just as the soul-mates are the inspirational Eves, so the temptress/traitresses are the unprincipled Delilahs. Kurt Vonnegut utilizes this stock character in five of his seven published novels, and though each individual character has unique qualities of her own, they are all similar to each other in several ways. These Delilahs are as follows: Resi Noth (MN), Zinka (CC), Anita Proteus (PP), Caroline Rosewater (RW), Patty Keene (BC); they are all attractive in some way, they all employ facades in their seductions, and they are all ultimately pitiable characters within their respective situations.

The most obvious of Vonnegut's femmes fatales would appear to be Resi Noth in Mother Night. As was mentioned earlier, Howard W. Campbell, Jr. was married as a young Nazi propagandist to a beautiful German actress, Helga Noth, who was later killed in the war. During his subsequent hermitage in Greenwich Village, Campbell exists solely

on memories of his beloved Helga and the hope that possibly she is still alive somewhere. Through a series of what Campbell assumes to be accidents, his cherished Helga is restored to him and she is "amazingly well-preserved for a woman of forty-five" (MN, 61). After their awkward reunion and brief exchange of stories, they lovingly, erotically spend their first night together, whereupon Campbell intensely avows that their love is as deep as it ever was. Immediately after this passionate declaration, "well-preserved" Helga discloses that she is in reality Helga's younger sister Resi and has been in love with him since she was a young girl. But having just been through an intimate night with her and knowing the reasoning underlying her deception, the lonely, bewildered Campbell accepts Resi as his lover once more.

Then Resi, Campbell, and his only friend, George Kraft, decide to leave the Village and establish a new, rewarding life for themselves elsewhere. In the process, however, Campbell discovers that Resi and Kraft are both Soviet spies, and that Resi's mission was to make him love her, much to his dismay. Later, when she is openly revealed as a Russian agent, Resi dramatically commits suicide as she claims that she has "'nothing to live for'" (MN, 173). In her dying breath she gasps, "'I will show you a woman who dies for love'" (MN, 173), as she throws

herself into Campbell's arms. Even with her death, however, Campbell cannot be certain if it was that of a rejected lover or that of an exposed spy; her true intentions were never to be known. Peter J. Reed has analyzed Resi's character and concluded:

She remains part stunned little girl, part ghost of Helga and we [the readers] are not sure where the loving younger sister leaves off and Soviet spy begins--perhaps this is how Campbell himself feels about her.<sup>40</sup>

Resi Noth is one of Vonnegut's more complex characters, and like her lover Campbell, she perhaps "served evil too openly and good too secretly" (MN, xii). Her facade was one of loving mistress, erotic lover, faithful companion. If her dying words are believed, then Resi in effect became what she pretended to be--and as the readers are warned in the introduction to Campbell's memoirs: "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (MN, v). The reader is to assume that this is the lesson that Campbell learned since it was he who was the great pretender. Indeed, the character of Resi parallels that of Campbell right down to their ultimate suicidal ends. Resi's importance in the novel, then, is to both problematize and mirror the protagonist, and in her honor the book is symbolically dedicated: "To Mata Hari" (MN, xvii).

Cat's Cradle, which followed Mother Night in publication,

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<sup>40</sup>Reed, pp. 107-08.

contains a female character, Zinka, who is similar to Resi Noth in several aspects. Zinka was a "Ukranian midget, a dancer with the Borzoi Dance Company" (CC, 26) who seduced and then betrayed Newton Hoenikker, also a midget and youngest son of the creator of the atomic bomb. Her facade was that of romantic lover and it was a convincing one, as Newt reveals to the protagonist Jonah: "'I may not ever have a marriage, but at least I've had a honeymoon'" (CC, 109).

There is some question, however, as to why Zinka really abandoned Newt and took his portion of the doomsday substance ice-nine with her to Russia. She had asked for political asylum in the United States soon after meeting young Hoenikker, suggesting either an elaborate scheme to ultimately dupe him or the possibility that she truly was romantically involved with him. During their "honeymoon," though, a reporter discovered that "Zinka was not, as she claimed, only twenty-three years old" and that she was actually forty-two (CC, 27). Several days later, she arrived at the Russian embassy prepared to return home, because "Americans were too materialistic" (CC, 26). Zinka did take the ice-nine with her, but this action could have been merely a rejected lover's revenge because Newt's feelings toward her were altered at the revelation of her true age and corresponding lies. But then, again, her sole mission might have been to steal the ice-nine and convey it

to her homeland. Newt would only comment that she broke his heart, but he never did elaborate on the reason--perhaps it was because she deceived him about her age, or perhaps it was because she seduced him in order to obtain his deadly ice. As with Resi, Zinka's true intentions are never known either to her lover within the story or to the reader.

The first of Vonnegut's femmes fatales was Anita Proteus in Player Piano, and although the reader does not know that she is truly one until almost the end of the novel, she is suspect from the very beginning of this anti-utopian tale. On the second page, the narrator reveals that Anita trapped her husband Paul into marriage as only a woman can-- by feigning pregnancy. As the story progresses her other deceits are exposed to the reader, such as her faked adoring attention in order to enlist "Mom" Kroner's patronage, and her affair with Shepherd which is brought out into the open only when she is certain that her new lover will be more successful than Paul.

Anita's only goal is to climb as high up the social staircase as possible, and sex provides her with a smooth, polished, but synthetic bannister. She uses sex to ensnare Paul originally and it continues throughout the story to be her only real hold on him: "She also had a sexual genius that gave Paul his one unqualified enthusiasm in life" (PP, 117). But when her husband is no longer socially prominent



(after his rejection of the machine-controlled bureaucracy and its smug managers), Anita applies her "sexual genius" to another budding technocrat, the ambitious Shepherd.

Intellectually, Anita is substandard as indicated by her vocation when she met Paul. She was a secretary, a menial position in Ilium. The only reason that Anita is a member of the elite social class--when the novel begins--is she married Paul, the son of a famous American technocrat/patriot. In actuality, she belongs in Homestead with all the other persons of mediocre intelligence who are without college educations; Anita is well aware of this fact and her "contempt" for those very Homesteaders is "laced with active hatred" (PP, 150) because of this knowledge. Her secret is possibly sensed by the other elites because they have not really befriended her, although she enjoys "the ritual attitudes of friendships" (PP, 15). Her one creative ability lies in interior decorating, which mirrors her own obsession with facades.

Anita exists in a highly technological society and becomes increasingly mechanical in her speeches and actions. At one point, one of the disgruntled engineers intimates that he could build a machine which could easily take her place in Paul's life: "'I'll design a machine that's everything you are, and does show respect'" (PP, 35).

By the end of the novel, Anita has become a wind-up

Mata Hari in contrast to an increasingly human Paul, who has even lost his enthusiastic interest in sex with her:

He was pleased to find a higher order of human need asserting itself, a need that made him think, if not feel, that he didn't give a damn if he never slept with her again. She seemed to sense this, too, and, for want of any proclivities to interest Paul save sex, her smile of welcome and forgiveness became a thin and chilling thing indeed. (PP, 267)

Therefore, the temptress/traitress moves on in search of more prestige and social power--the antithesis of the willfully dethroned hero, her husband, who rejects all that which she so desires.

Another of Kurt Vonnegut's would-be socialites who prostitute themselves for status and money is Caroline Rosewater in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. She is "a pretty, pinched, skinny, lost little woman" (RW, 128) who was a Phi Beta Kappa in college and married her husband Fred because she mistakenly believed that he was wealthy. However, in the novel, Fred ekes out a living by doggedly selling insurance, which is not that lucrative for him and causes Caroline to often become "mournful about being poor" (RW, 147). Out of desperation, she becomes involved with a rich Lesbian named Amanita Buntline, although the Lesbianism "wasn't particularly deep on Caroline's part. She was simply a female chameleon trying to get ahead in the world" (RW, 129).

In payment for her "companionship," Amanita gives Caroline clothes, little expensive gifts, and public friend-

ship with herself, an established socialite. Because of her husband's lack of money and prestige, Caroline is "brittle and cold" (RW, 129) to him and betrays both herself and him through her Lesbian relationship with Amanita. Caroline is also a rather poor mother figure with her almost daily alcoholism, and her only household talent is "making soap balls out of slivers" (RW, 162) which is not exactly inspiring. Like Anita Proteus (PP), who is always pretending to be what she is not and to feel what she does not, Caroline is an actress, but a poor one. Her imitations of the confident Amanita are "clumsy" (RW, 143), and as Amanita's daughter aptly observes, Caroline is just "no good" (RW, 125).

As a character within the story, Caroline holds the exact opposite philosophy toward wealth and social status of that held by the protagonist, millionaire philanthropist Eliot Rosewater. Wealth and social position are meaningless to Eliot, and this attitude is in direct contrast to the fact that Caroline--who is also a Rosewater--would do absolutely anything for either of the two, which would indicate that Caroline's inherent importance within the novel is to function as a foil to Eliot's unselfish philanthropy around which the plot revolves.

Like Caroline Rosewater, Patty Keene in Breakfast of Champions is also desperate for money. Her desire for capital is more admirable than Caroline's because she needs

it to pay her deceased father's hospital bills. However, her proposed method for obtaining the cash she needs is similar to Caroline's, since she is also willing to prostitute herself. Patty wants to discover whether her "brand-newness and prettiness and outgoing personality" are salable items to "a sweet, sort of sexy, middle-aged [rich] Pontiac dealer" (BC, 142). Although Patty is only seventeen, she has already been exposed to a great deal of "life" and has, furthermore, discovered the value of money in Midland City, U.S.A. Among other things, she had been raped once, and is working in a hamburger "joint" to pay off her family's debts. Dwayne Hoover, the Pontiac dealer, is "a magical person" to her because his fortune could solve most of her problems (BC, 136-37), just as wealthy Amanita and ambitious Shepherd can resolve the troubles of Caroline Rosewater (RW) and Anita Proteus (PP) respectively.

Patty Keene is an interesting character since she is the last of the Vonnegutian temptress/traitresses and is probably the most pitiably human. All of the Delilahs are paradoxically pitiful characters in their respective situations, however, and each is so for a different reason: Anita Proteus (PP) is to be pitied for her basic lack of intelligence which is unacceptable in highly developed Ilium; Resi Noth (MN) is caught up in her own deceitful ploy and sees no other recourse but to commit suicide; Caroline Rosewater's

(RW) life is frustrated and meaningless since her only motivation is unattainable wealth and social position; Zinka (CC) is ultimately left with nothing but patriotic blessings when she might have had a life of love and happiness with a fellow midget. But Patty Keene (BC), more than any of the other temptress/traitresses, represents hopelessness and the female's stock attempt to rise above it through prostitution—the world's oldest profession.

The temptress/traitress, although a stock literary character, is used deliberately by Kurt Vonnegut within his novels. In contrast to the male protagonists who are generally trying to grow spiritually, these femmes fatales want to grow only materially. In each individual example, the temptress/traitress's importance varies, but as a group, they add zest to the corps of Vonnegut's women who are bland and lifeless puppets for the male characters to toy with.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BIZARRE VIGNETTE

Throughout Vonnegut's novelistic canon, there appear grotesque sketches of women characterized by incongruous distortion, which are utilized by the author to point out quirks and frailties of human nature. These female characters appear in every Vonnegut novel and are never well-rounded, although their presences always have a direct bearing on the plots or an influence on those who are major characters. These lopsided females are usually seen only briefly, and they fit well into Vonnegut's style of writing: concise sentences, short chapters, and compact novels. This chapter will examine the bizarre feminine vignettes as they appear chronologically within Vonnegut's seven novels, justify their existence as literary characters, and explain their significance within each individual work.

The first bizarre feminine vignette appears on the second page of the first novel. It is of a certain Doctor Katharine Finch who is secretary to the protagonist of Player Piano, Doctor Paul Proteus. She is fairly intelligent as is indicated by her doctorate and by the fact that she is employed--unintelligent persons in the technological world of modern Ilium are not allowed to go to college or

work in any capacity besides the army or the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps (work crews). However intelligent Katharine may be, she does have one obvious flaw--she is blindingly in love with an insensitive engineer who is almost a machine himself. Eventually, in fact, he does invent a mechanical device which takes over his own job, and his every movement is as deliberate and automatic as a robot's. In contrast, Katharine is quite human and though businesslike at work, she blushes, cries frequently, and gets angry more often than any other woman in the novel. The fact that she adores the ridiculous Bud reduces her to a seemingly foolish girl, completely unlike any of the sophisticated, self-controlled women who people the managerial side of the river. In an effort to save their self-respect, Katharine and Bud do join the rebelling Ghost Shirt Society, but Proteus does not believe that his secretary is capable of deep personal involvement in the rebellion simply because her emotions are protected and "insulated by her adoration for Bud" (PP, 253).

Katharine Finch is almost the antithesis of Anita Proteus, and this fact appears to account at least partially for her significance as a character. Katharine is intellectual in contrast to the uneducated Anita; Katharine is extremely human and emotional, whereas Anita is coldly mechanical. More importantly, Katharine is loyal both to

her lover Bud and to her ex-employer Proteus, while Anita is loyal only to herself and her own personal goals. Doctor Katharine Finch is one of the few characters in Player Piano who remains human in an extremely dehumanizing society, and her vulnerability strongly emphasizes the metallic facades of most of the characters of Ilium's intelligentsia.

Another very minor female who appears in Player Piano is the "startlingly beautiful, dark-skinned brunette" (PP, 207) whom the visiting Shah of Bratpuhr wishes to seduce in order to satisfy his sexual curiosity about American women. With hardly any coaxing, she allows herself to be picked up by the Shah and then driven toward the inevitable hotel. The Shah's American guide perceives that the girl is "restless and unhappy, and utterly out of character" during the ride (PP, 208), although she determinedly tries to appear cheerful. Unable to contain herself finally, she begins to weep and reveals that she is married to a writer who is currently unemployed because he refused to abide by the government's rules concerning professional writing. Her husband also refused to do personally demeaning public relations work, and because of this, "his subsistence, his housing permit, his health and security package, everything" that they need in order to live was taken away (PP, 212). As his loving and loyal wife, therefore, she confesses that she is willing to prostitute herself to save the pride of



her husband whom she ironically describes as "'one of the few men on earth with a little self-respect left'" (PP, 212). But her husband's "integrity ends where his wife's prostitution begins,"<sup>41</sup> asserts Peter J. Reed, and it is ironic, indeed, that she is so overcome by love for him that she is willing to sacrifice her own self-respect in order to save his professional vanity. Her loving self-sacrifice again emphasizes Anita Proteus's total lack of concern for her husband Paul.

In the second novel, The Sirens of Titan, Vonnegut draws two grotesque, lopsided sketches of women, and the first is of the "ravishing, brassy blond" (ST, 53) that Malachi Constant marries during a fifty-six day drunken spree. She chews gum loudly, converses slangily in a "voice like a grackle" (ST, 54), and her overall appearance is that of a vulgar gold-digger. She despises Malachi for being (at that particular moment) unable to support her in the manner to which she is accustomed, and she sneeringly warns him of the possible consequences: "'You better go down to the office and find out what the hell is going on, on account of my boyfriend is a gangster, and he'll kill you if I tell him you aren't providing for me right'" (ST, 62).

This dame's one claim to being a member of humanity

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<sup>41</sup>Reed, p. 44.

is that she had an unhappy childhood, like Malachi's; however, she lived hers in humiliating poverty. This does not redeem her present crudity and later in the narrative, another character perceptively calls her a "'beast'" (ST, 92). Her symbolic function within the plotline of the novel seems to be to represent the vulgarity and repugnance of Malachi's affluent existence on Earth--even the numbing effects of alcohol could not disguise this woman's crassness. She epitomizes the total repulsiveness of Malachi's moral character since she is the woman whom he chose to marry and supposedly spend his life with.

Another female briefly and oddly sketched in The Sirens of Titan is the hero's mother, Florence Whitehill Constant, whose rather peculiar motherhood is discussed in Chapter IV; however, Florence's pre-maternal representation merits attention as a slightly bizarre vignette. The first clue to her early nature comes from her son during his aforementioned spree when he sobbingly bestows an oil well on each woman who would admit to being a whore exactly like his mother was. Indeed, before her unexpected pregnancy with Malachi, Florence was a chambermaid who spent one night out of every ten with Noel Constant "for a small flat fee" (ST, 75). She was not aware of Noel's wealth until she informed him of her "condition," whereupon they were married immediately.

Florence was then given a mansion, a million dollars, and told what to name the infant by Noel, who also asked her to continue to visit him every ten days--"but not to bring the baby" (ST, 81). Florence Whitehill Constant must have been in cultural shock--moving so rapidly from chambermaid to millionairess--though, strangely enough, she is never again mentioned in the narrative. But the reader is left with the impression that Malachi was deeply affected by the fact that his mother was a whore and can never totally forget it or his own loveless conception.

The third novel, Mother Night, also contains two rather strange female characters who--although shown briefly--leave vivid images in the reader's mind. The most striking of the two is Dr. Epstein's aged Jewish mother who spent her young womanhood in the Auschwitz concentration camp. She is "old--heavy, slow, deeply lined, sadly, bitterly watchful" (MN, 24), and when she first meets Howard W. Campbell, Jr. and recognizes his infamous name, she craftily attempts to trick him into revealing himself as a Nazi war criminal. Despite her son's continual entreaties to forget the concentration camp and its horrors, she simply cannot, and as she passionately explains to him, "'Every minute I can remember'" (MN, 194).

When Campbell comes to them near the end of the narrative and reveals himself as the hated Nazi propagandist,

Mrs. Epstein is pleased because she desires revenge and she comprehends the guilt that must envelop him. She understands all the evil that he accomplished with his radio broadcasts, and when the Zionists come to take him to Israel for trial, she ironically and meaningfully croons to him in German, "'Corpse-carriers to the guardhouse'"-- a chant she had heard every day while in the extermination camp awaiting death (MN, 196).

The second bizarre vignette in Mother Night is that of the wife of Campbell's best German friend, Heinz, who was admittedly loved less by her husband than his motorcycle. According to Campbell, Heinz's wife was somewhat less than likeable:

She was a nonstop talker, which made her hard to know, and her theme was always the same: successful people, people who saw opportunities and grasped them firmly, people who, unlike her husband, were important and rich. (MN, 87)

At various times throughout the war, Heinz sold "'her jewelry, her favorite furniture, even her meat ration one time--all for cigarettes'" (MN, 86); but when faced with losing his beloved motorcycle, Heinz gave up smoking immediately. Their relationship was not particularly loving. To Campbell, Heinz's wife had one redeeming quality: she made him personally "deaf to all success stories" (MN, 87), although ironically, he himself was one of those successes that she undoubtedly would have admired

the most.

In the fourth novel, Cat's Cradle, Kurt Vonnegut introduces the reader to a secretary named Francine Pefko, who will reappear again in Breakfast of Champions. When she is first encountered in the General Forge and Foundry by the protagonist who is seeking information on the creator of the atom bomb, Francine is "twenty, vacantly pretty, and healthy --a dull normal" (CC, 36). She is the epitome of the stereotyped, slow-witted, pretty secretary who types only what she is told to type and does not even slightly comprehend the gist of her boss's dictation.

Uncomfortable around her superiors, Francine degenerates into a total buffoon when Dr. Breed, the head of the Research Laboratory, attempts an unexpected, friendly conversation with her: "Her smile was glassy, and she was ransacking her mind for something to say, finding nothing in it but used Kleenex and costume jewelry" (CC, 37). In an hysterical statement which seems to be entirely acceptable (and ultimately true) in the middle of the think-factory which produced the atom bomb and the deadly ice-nine, Francine idiotically blurts out, "'You scientists think too much. You all think too much'" (CC, 37). These two utterances could be an appropriate epitaph for the earth's tombstone, since at the end of the novel the world has been literally frozen to death by the scientifically invented

ice-nine. The absurdity of the entire situation is compounded by the fact that obtuse Francine Pefko is the only person who isolates the problem and manages to bring it to the surface.

Cat's Cradle also contains two other female caricature sketches of any note. The first is that of the whore that Jonah meets in the Cape Cod Room in Ilium. Her name is Sandra, and though Jonah at first refuses her services, "she was bright enough to say that she wasn't really interested either" (CC, 28). Her function within the story-line is to provide Jonah with background information, which is actually community gossip, about the illustrious Hoenikker family. Because Sandra is a prostitute, and a drinking one at that, her information is not altogether reliable and should be regarded as such, although Jonah in accepting her sexual offers also accepts her word as fact.

The other quick sketch is of Dr. Breed's secretary, Miss Naomi Faust, who is "a merry, dessicated old lady" (CC, 40). Her name and attitude conjure up images of the fabled Dr. Faustus when she curiously exclaims at one point in the narrative, "'I'm indestructible. And even if I did fall, Christmas angels would catch me'" (CC, 40). This speech certainly echoes the conceited Faustus's beliefs, but unlike the doomed doctor, however, Miss Faust knows that the only absolute and redeeming truth is the fact that

"God is love" (CC, 53), and in that knowledge she has found her happiness and peace.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater contains more bizarre feminine vignettes than any of the preceding novels--five noteworthy ones to be exact. Two of these caricatures are of the unloved women who turn to the Rosewater Foundation for relief, and the other three are of residents of Pisquontuit and victims in one way or another of the Vonnegutian disease called affluence.

Diana Moon Glampers and Mary Moody are two women who turn to Eliot Rosewater for comfort, aid, and advice during his crusade in Rosewater County. The former is a "sixty-eight-year-old-virgin who, by almost anybody's standards, was too dumb to live," and indeed, "no one had ever loved her" because she "was ugly, stupid, and boring" (RW, 70). The latter is a suspected "arsonist, a convicted shoplifter, and a five-dollar whore" (RW, 172).

Both of these women represent some of the lowest and most despised types of human beings and by their very uselessness and baseness, they help expose Eliot's great compassion and ability to love simply because he does really care for them when apparently no one else can or will. To both of these women, Eliot represents a messiah figure. Mary Moody even insists that Eliot baptize her illegitimate infant twins, despite the fact that he is not even remotely connected

with any organized religious group. Similarly, when Eliot is leaving Rosewater for Indianapolis, Diana Moon Glampers arrives at the bus station sobbing, "'You're my church group! You're my everything! You're my government. You're my husband. You're my friends'" (RW, 197). This outburst possibly implies a nun/God-the-Father relationship, with Diana the celibate sister and Eliot the all-loving deity. In any case, Diana and Mary are important characters simply because they help certify Eliot's saintliness and humanity which are being questioned by several antagonists within the novel.

The youngest female character of any significance in Vonnegut's novels is thirteen-year old Lila Buntline who surfaces in the second half of Rosewater's story. She is "a tall creature, horse-faced, knobby" with "beautiful green eyes" and deeply sunburned skin (RW, 125). Lila is the daughter of wealthy but indifferent parents, and is an excellent sailor, among other things. Her appearance is rather ordinary, but her main preoccupation besides sailing is the peddling of pornography and fireworks to her schoolmates and yacht club chums, which is rather extraordinary for a girl her age. Since her family is quite wealthy, the reader suspects that her illicit business venture is more of a subconscious attempt to awaken her inattentive parents than it is to make a monetary profit as suggested by the narrator.



Lila is definitely a victim of the curse of affluence, as are her parents: her father, Stewart, whose life is one continual dreamless nap; her mother, Amanita, who is an alcoholic, domineering Lesbian.

Indeed, Amanita is another of the outlandish female caricatures who abound in the saga of Eliot Rosewater's crusade for humanity. According to Jerry H. Bryant, Amanita is "a lesbian [sic] who buys the attentions of and then dominates the town's pretty but penniless housewives."<sup>42</sup> In the novel, her principle victim is Caroline Rosewater and Amanita delights in reminding Caroline of just how ordinary and unprominent she really is. Raymond M. Olderman describes Amanita perceptively as "one of a small number of women in Vonnegut's work who destroy human dignity on a small scale."<sup>43</sup> Both Amanita and her daughter Lila represent personalities warped by prosperity, in contrast to Eliot Rosewater's which is just the opposite.

Amanita Buntline's superficiality and cruelty do not go unnoticed in Pisquontuit, however, since they are witnessed and passed on to others by the Buntlines' "young upstairs maid" (RW, 154), Selena Deal. Selena is an "intelligent, clean female orphan" (RW, 154), "a pretty girl who

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<sup>42</sup>Jerry H. Bryant, The Open Decision (New York: Free Press, 1970), p. 311.

<sup>43</sup>Olderman, p. 219.

played the piano beautifully and wanted to be a nurse" (RW, 155). Her true character, as well as Amanita's, is revealed in a very perceptive letter which she writes to the head of the orphanage bewailing her domestic position with the hypocritical, conceited Buntlines. Although Selena is seen only briefly in the narrative, her letter is printed in its entirety (RW, 155-58), and it may be that she "is used [by Vonnegut] to castigate further the way of life of the idle rich."<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, it is the minor character of Selena Deal, who introduces the "pearls before swine" theme which is the subtitle of the novel.

In contrast to God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater--which has numerous important though minor female caricatures--Slaughterhouse-Five is almost void of this particular character-type. There are three women mentioned ever so slightly: Maggie White, Lily Rumfoord, and Mary O'Hare, and the most significant of these is Mrs. O'Hare. To be sure, Maggie White does represent the stereotyped, vacuous, upper middle-class housewife: "She was a dull person, but a sensational invitation to make babies" (SF, 147); to make her appear even more ridiculous, Vonnegut has her actually believe every pronouncement in Kilgore Trout's outlandish

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<sup>44</sup>David Goldsmith, Kurt Vonnegut: Fantasist of Fire and Ice, Popular Writers Series, No. 2 (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972), p. 37.

cocktail conversation. But Maggie White is personally insignificant when compared to Billy Pilgrim's intense time travels with which she is juxtaposed in the narrative, as are all human beings within the novel. Lily Rumfoord, like Maggie, is "pretty" and intellectually unstimulating: Maggie's last reading venture was Ivanhoe and Lily dropped out of high school because "she didn't read well" (SF, 159), though both are married to successful and supposedly intelligent businessmen. These two characters' only value seems to lie in the fact that they are a part of the modern society in which Billy Pilgrim practices optometry--they are as transparent and meaningless as his everyday life is before his abduction by the Tralfalmadorians. These women epitomize the people that Billy would like to reach with his comforting Tralfalmadorian philosophies on the meaning of life and death.

The third and most important of the brief female sketches in Slaughterhouse-Five is that of Mary O'Hare, the person to whom the novel is dedicated. In the first chapter, the narrator (who appears to be Vonnegut himself) meets Mary while visiting one of his old war buddies to whom she is married. The narrator is interested in dredging up memories of the Dresden fire-bombing for a novel on which he is working. He immediately likes and respects Mary because her profession is that of a "trained nurse, which is a lovely

thing for a woman to be" (SF, 8), and from the beginning of his visit with the O'Hares, he senses that Mary is upset either by his visit or somehow by his presence in her home.

Mary's anger gradually becomes more apparent and is manifested in her restlessness and abruptness. Finally, she confronts the narrator with a furious accusation about his intended war novel:

You'll pretend you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played by Frank Sinatra or John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have a lot more of them. And they'll be fought by babies just like the babies upstairs. (SF, 13)

This indignant speech by Mary O'Hare apparently touched and affected the narrator, who subsequently understood her anger and frustration: "It was war that made her angry. She didn't want her babies or anybody else's babies killed in wars. And she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies" (SF, 13). Thus, the narrator/Vonnegut promised Mary that he would indeed deglamorize the war and call his novel aptly enough, The Children's Crusade; he fulfilled both of these promises, and dedicated the novel to Mary since she was the one person who so correctly diagnosed the war for him. As the narrator contentedly tells the reader, "She was my friend after that" (SF, 13).

Breakfast of Champions, which followed Vonnegut's rather unconventional war novel, contains numerous bizarre feminine vignettes which collectively contribute to the

nightmarish atmosphere of this novel.

The first to be encountered is Lottie Davis who is the black housekeeper for Pontiac dealer Dwayne Hoover. Lottie "was descended from slaves," as are many of the minor characters in the book, and she and Dwayne "didn't talk much, even though they liked each other a lot" (BC, 17). This comment highlights one of the major problems within the novel: the characters simply do not communicate with each other.

Two other female characters who appear only briefly are Mrs. Vernon Garr and Gloria Browning. The former is the wife of an employee of Dwayne Hoover, and she is a "schizophrenic" who "believed that Vernon [her husband] was trying to turn her brains into plutonium" (BC, 42). The latter is a twenty-five year old victim of a fouled abortion who admits that she "'doesn't have enough nerve to commit suicide'" (BC, 149), even though she was forced to have an hysterectomy and wishes she were dead. Both of these female characters--although presented only slightly--nicely parallel the protagonist's wife, Celia, who was also paranoid around her husband and did finally have the courage to take her own life.

Another strangely one-sided female caricature appears in the guise of Grace Le Sabre, the cigar-smoking, sex-obsessed wife of another of Hoover's employees. In response

to her husband's traumatic experience with his crazy employer, Grace speaks contemptibly of the Hoovers' sex life in comparison with their own overwhelmingly active one. "'We're the only white people in Midland City with any kind of sex life'" (BC, 163), claims Grace to her husband in defense of their life style, and at her suggestion they leave Midland City at once for the Hawaiian Islands and what they believe to be sexual freedom. It is interesting that Grace is the dominant figure in their marriage and is correspondingly unfeminine in both her speeches and actions. She and her husband have switched sexual roles, as revealed by her cigar-smoking and his fetish for dressing up in women's clothes. The Le Sabres do have a "happy" marriage, but it is warped according to societal standards, and Grace adds another odd dimension to the picture of the modern female presented in the story.

As with several other Vonnegut characters, Bonnie McMahon in Breakfast of Champions is totally motivated by a desire for money; however, she is willing to work for a legitimate wage. She is a waitress in a Ramada Inn bar and "she had a policy of never showing her anger about anything there in the cocktail lounge" because most of her income consists of customer-given tips (BC, 211). Bonnie's life is centered around two shallow goals: "She meant to recoup all the money her husband had lost in the car wash in

Shepherdstown, and she ached to have steel-belted radial tires for the front wheels of her automobile" (BC, 211). The character of Bonnie McMahon seems to symbolize the obsession that many Americans have with material wealth and the ensuing indifference that results toward relationships and spiritual or emotional happiness.

Much of Breakfast of Champions revolves around the participants in the Midland City Arts Festival, one of whom is a female Gothic novelist named Beatrice Keedsler who is originally from Midland City. This midwestern metropolis is considered by several characters in the story to be "the asshole of the universe" and it is indicative of Miss Keedsler's lack of profundity when she admits that she "'was petrified about coming home after all these years'" (BC, 196). The narrator/Vonnegut discloses that he has "no respect whatever" for her literary efforts because she tried "to make people believe that life had leading characters, minor characters, significant details, that it had lessons to be learned, tests to be passed, and a beginning, a middle, and an end" (BC, 209). Through this criticism of her work, Vonnegut is able to pinpoint his personal attitudes toward "good" literature and petty authors, and in the end of the narrative, Miss Keedsler is slugged (rather symbolically) in the jaw by Dwayne Hoover on his rampage against all robots.

However, the most prominent of the minor female

characters in Breakfast of Champions is Hoover's mistress, Francine Pefko, who is a secretary like her namesake in Cat's Cradle. Francine is described as "a war widow with lips like sofa pillows and bright red hair" (BC, 112), and is desired by her lover because she has a "beautiful body" (BC, 152). She is a typical Vonnegutian mistress--beautiful but excruciatingly shallow. She is a capable businesswoman, is loyal, and "always rooting for her man" (BC, 150). But when it comes to really understanding another human being--i.e., Dwayne in his mental anguish--Francine is an utter failure. She is not, as Dwayne ultimately believes her to be, a gold-digger; she is simply an inane woman who can see only the superficial aspects of those around her, and in Dwayne's case, she understands only his sexual and business needs.

Francine Pefko represents the antithesis of the female liberationist in her attitudes toward herself and men in general. She feels sympathy for all men because "they take such chances, they work so hard" (BC, 154), and in a moment of her deepest reflection she says thoughtfully, "I guess God made women so men could relax and be treated like little babies from time to time" (BC, 154). This very shallowness proves to the sickened Dwayne that Francine is, indeed, a robot and he proceeds to break three of her ribs and her jaw during his maniacal spree. To



Dwayne and Vonnegut, Francine represents the mindless acceptance of mundane, everyday life that permeates not only Midland City society, but the current American one as well.

These bizarre feminine vignettes are typical of Kurt Vonnegut's style of writing and in fact characterize it. They are brief, vivid sketches of women which comment on the human condition in general with extraordinary insight, usually concentrating on common quirks and frailties of human nature. The vignettes serve Vonnegut the author as disguised or undisguised comments on more important characters within each narrative, as well as on the problems, philosophies, and hopes of the all-important protagonists. The bizarre vignette is a unique type of literary character and is used by Kurt Vonnegut to great advantage in all seven of his novels.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FEMALE: HER CHARACTER, STATUS, AND SIGNIFICANCE IN VONNEGUT'S NOVELS

By observing the five general types of female characters that people Kurt Vonnegut's novels, it is possible to assimilate a fairly well-rounded picture of his overall attitude toward women and their various roles in modern society. But in addition to the female characters themselves, there are many random comments on the "fair sex" dispersed throughout the novels. When these are added to the five conspicuous characterizations, they effectively combine to complete a Vonnegutian collage of the contemporary female. These rather telling "comments" may be found in the form of a specific situation, relationship, or narratorial remark.

As a satirist, Vonnegut is aware of our culture's use of the female body as a great selling device. Campbell tells the reader in Mother Night that he once discovered an account of the execution of his father-in-law while thumbing through a pulpy magazine which obviously used pornographic pictures of women to sell itself rather than relying on its journalistic prowess. Ironically, the one article Campbell reads is "very well done" (MN, 32) and decidedly unporno-

graphic, although its clearly suggestive title of "Hangwomen for the Hangmen of Berlin" is aimed at alluring readers with unliterary motives.

This same idea is stressed further whenever Kilgore Trout's fiction is mentioned. The narrator always remarks on the irrelevant-to-the-text pornographic book covers that are used to sell Trout's books and the fact that these books can, therefore, only be located in "adult" bookstores. The naked women that adorn the dust jackets are apparently the only selling point that the comparatively unknown Trout works possess.

In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, a tabloid newspaper called The American Investigator utilizes the same marketing technique: a sensational front-page story with the screaming headline, "I WANT A MAN WHO CAN GIVE ME A GENIUS BABY!" (RW, 115), complete with a suggestive photo of a sensual young girl. Even the mystical sirens of Titan, from the novel of the same name, are used to sell Malachi Constant's sterility-causing cigarettes.

Vonnegut's satire also reaches the way women are taught by society to see themselves. Because Kilgore Trout is considered by most critics to be an alter ego of his creator, it is fairly revealing to examine the women that Vonnegut has had Trout create. The readers are informed in Breakfast of Champions that Trout's stories "usually

didn't even have women in them" (BC, 20)--an intriguing comment in itself--and those females that are mentioned are generally interested only in sex. In Trout's Venus on the Half Shell,<sup>45</sup> which is excerpted in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, a space wanderer is nobly searching for the meaning of life and is confidently told by a beautiful, exotic alien queen that "the answer" lies in her arms. This unprofound, self-centered explanation is, of course, not the one that he is "'primarily looking for'," although he will certainly accept her tempting sexual offers (RW, 134). In another of Trout's novels, The Son of Jimmy Valentine, the hero "was so good at touching women the way they wanted to be touched, that tens of thousands of them became his willing slaves" (BC, 151); they eventually elected him to the presidency of the United States, although his obvious appeal was not political. In these two examples, Trout's women are overly absorbed in sex, which is probably a satirical comment on the current sexual revolution in America and the importance placed on it by some female liberationists.

The third discussion of a Trout female characterization occurs in Breakfast of Champions. According to the narrator, there is only one "female leading character in

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<sup>45</sup>This is not to be confused with the recently published novel Venus on the Half Shell by Kilgore Trout. This particular book was penned by Philip Jose Farmer under Trout's pseudonym, and published by Dell in New York.

any novel or story by Kilgore Trout," and she was a rabbit with genius intellect (BC, 232). Because she was different from the rest of the bunnies, she decided to have an operation in order to become normal, but was killed beforehand. Her human murderers never ate her, however, "because of her unusually large head" which they assumed to be a symptom of disease (BC, 232). This characterization can be interpreted on two levels. On the surface, it could be satirizing the current popularity of Playboy Magazine and Playboy Enterprises which have both capitalized on the nude female body and use the Playboy bunny as their official and well-known insignia. But on another level, the satire suggests that many American women do not wish to be intelligent or distinguishable from each other. This notion is developed further in the following excerpt from Breakfast of Champions:

Patty Keene was stupid on purpose, which was the case with most women in Midland City. 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.

So, in the interests of survival, they trained themselves to be agreeing machines instead of thinking machines. All their minds had to do was discover what other people were thinking, and then they thought that, too. (BC, 136)

The "people" mentioned in the second paragraph of the above quotation obviously refers to the male population, which is presented as the intelligentsia. Along these same lines is a quick sketch of a "winded, defeated-looking fat woman"

whose "expression implied that she would go crazy on the spot if anybody did any more thinking" (CC, 37). Indeed, the majority of Vonnegut's fictional women are unintellectual--purposely or otherwise--excepting only several of the idyllic soul-mates who are discussed in Chapter II.

An analysis of Vonnegut's females must include a survey of wives and marriage, and, of course, many comments on them may be found within the novels. Some specific marriages have already been discussed in earlier chapters; however, there are many random general remarks and certain specific instances which add depth to Vonnegut's picture of the modern female and her most controversial role in society, that of the wife. In a personal interview, Vonnegut had this to say about the institution of marriage:

So many mating customs that my generation followed--and continues to follow--have to do with property rather than love. They're very old schemes for insuring the union of money rather than humans. We talk about love but our marriage laws have more to do with property.<sup>46</sup>

This view of the author's is manifested in most of the fictional marriages that he presents for reader scrutiny.

In Player Piano, Dr. Paul Proteus sees marriage as "the notion of man and wife as one flesh--a physical monstrosity, pathetic, curious, and helpless Siamese twins" (PP, 53). In the same novel, the rebel manager, Finnerty,

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<sup>46</sup>Unger, p. 16.

believes marriage to be one way of slyly elevating oneself in society (PP, 81), and he describes the women he knew in Washington as "'the dull wives feeding on the power and glory of their husbands'" (PP, 75).

In the second novel, there are also various unhappy marriages, such as those of Winston and Beatrice Rumfoord (they were "third cousins and detested each other" [ST, 27]), and Noel and Florence Constant, who purposely saw each other only once every ten days. Mother Night exhibits several similar unions, such as that of Campbell's parents (see Chapter III), and the engulfing marital problems revealed by Campbell's would-be executioner, Bernard B. O'Hare, in his drunken verbal meanderings: "There wasn't anything I couldn't be" . . . "And then I got married--" he said, "and the wife started having kids right away . . . and the wife kept having kids" (MN, 188).

Likewise, Cat's Cradle is a veritable wasteland for matrimony. The narrator has been divorced twice and is never to find or know a happy marital union. The marriage between Dr. and Mrs. Felix Hoenikker is a legal one only, and is complete with community rumors of wifely infidelity. Even the poor guy who runs Jack's Hobby Shop has lost his wife, and, as is discovered later in the narrative, she had been unfaithful to him for many years with one of their student clerks. God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Slaughterhouse-Five

both present their share of marital failures, and Breakfast of Champions is packed with the remnants of broken marriages. In the latter, it is disclosed that Kilgore Trout is a veteran of three divorces, all precipitated by his "pessimism" (BC, 31), and there is also a married rapist at work on the single-female population of Midland City. Of course, the central marital failure is that of the protagonist, which ended in his wife's suicide.

Just as marriage is a target for Vonnegut's satire, so are love and sex. The author himself has stated that "'If somebody says "I love you" to me, I feel as though I had a pistol pointed at my head'."<sup>47</sup> This also happens to be Dwayne Hoover's attitude in Breakfast of Champions, and he warns his mistress to never talk to him of love for it reminds him of his wife's self-destruction (BC, 152). At the other end of the string of novels, Paul and Anita Proteus are continually piping mechanical "I love you's" to each other which are completely devoid of passion or emotion and, therefore, ironic since the Proteus's only real tie to each other is passion.

There is also the curious situation of Howard Campbell's marriage to the beautiful Helga, which he calls "a nation of two" and was supposed to "show how a pair of lovers

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<sup>47</sup>Hendin, p. 33.



in a world gone mad could survive by being loyal only to a nation composed of themselves" (MN, 27). But Vonnegut has stated that it is "'a terrible strain on two people alone, pretending to be a society',"<sup>48</sup> so even if Helga had not been killed in the war, their great sexual bond might have cracked under the strain placed upon it. As Gerald Weales has aptly observed, "Love--Caritas or Eros --is not much consolation in any of the novels."<sup>49</sup> The emotions which are important in Vonnegut's world seem to be those of uncritical love and kindness--both of which are seldom exhibited by Vonnegut's female characters.

One thing that is displayed by his fictional women is competency in the working world, although most of the jobs they hold are menial and often degrading. There are many capable secretaries: Katharine Finch (PP); Francine Pefko (CC and BC); Naomi Faust, the "icy" receptionist, the Girl Pool, and the Mail Girls who all work in the General Forge and Foundry (CC). Spinster school teachers are found in two novels: Irene Fenstermaker (ST) and Dwayne Hoover's real mother (BC). Lowly waitresses scheme for more cash: Patty Keene and Bonnie McMahon (BC). Prostitutes sell their wares on busy Vonnegutian streets: the

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<sup>48</sup>Unger, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup>Weales, p. 53.

writer's wife (PP); Florence Whitehill Constant (ST); Mary Moody (RM); Sandra (CC). There are also assorted actresses and writers, but generally Vonnegut's females do not participate in the business world as such. But the narrator in Slaughterhouse-Five encountered some real competitors during his early days as a journalist: "The very toughest reporters and writers were women who had taken over the jobs of men who'd gone to war" (SF, 8); he remembers them as "beastly girls" (SF, 8) who were, in his opinion, too calloused and indifferent to the suffering of human beings all around them.

The portrait of the modern woman that Kurt Vonnegut has collectively constructed is not a very pleasant or complimentary one and it is somewhat surprising that his works are as popular as they are in this age of female enlightenment and self-pride. His female characters are generally flat stereotypes, and Vonnegut admittedly did not put much conscious effort into their characterizations, yet they have undeniably strong and secure positions within his novelistic framework. There is not a single novel in Vonnegut's canon whose plot could fittingly survive without its female characters and the disagreeable image of the contemporary woman that permeates the males' philosophies. These two feminine elements are the mortar which secures the individual bricks of plot and male characters. Critic

Josephine Hendin establishes a valid point when she states that "Vonnegut is a culture hero because he celebrates male vulnerability."<sup>50</sup> This observation is true, indeed, and it is also true that women are absolutely necessary in just such a situation to take advantage of and complement that very masculine vulnerability. Although Vonnegut's portrait of the female appears superficially to be hurriedly painted, and with apparently not much preparation or forethought put into it by the artist, it nevertheless is significant simply because it provides such contrast and corresponding depth to the remainder of the paintings—be they of male characters or plots—in Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s novelistic museum.

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<sup>50</sup>Hendin, p. 36.

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