MASCULINITIES IN PLAYER PIANO

Hegemonic Masculinity as a Totalitarian State
Introduction

*Player Piano*, published in 1952, primarily deals with the theme of men, or masculinities, made redundant by technological advance. This theme has in more recent years been highlighted by, for instance, Men's Liberation groups. The machinery introduced in the Industrial Revolution has, in Vonnegut's future, been refined to the point that manpower has been replaced with mechpower, where those deemed unfit for “academic” studies either must serve twenty-five years in the military or working with the "Reeks and Wrecks", the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps. This structure is enforced and maintained by a totalitarian state. However, Vonnegut’s state is slightly different from the popular image of ‘Big Brother’, i.e. an impersonal, near-omniscient and inhuman government. It is highly human, meaning that Vonnegut examines the men behind the machinery on a more personal level, thus making possible an examination of their motives and ideas. To quote O’Donnell and Sharpe,

> The Post-Fordist thesis is that the new technology has made a more flexible and efficient organisation of production possible. Post-Fordist production involves a separation of the labour force into a ‘core’ of highly skilled employees and a ‘periphery’ of generally less skilled, part-time, temporary, contract or trainee employees.¹

Vonnegut envisions a plutocratic America where the aforementioned periphery has been made obsolete, where a corporate oligarchy supersedes the presidency in authority. An example of this structure is the absent father of the main character Paul Proteus, George Proteus, who was before his death the National Industrial, Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs and Resources Director, a position which might have been below the presidency at that time², but the scales have tilted towards total domination by those who fuel the economy, i.e. the corporations. The ‘unenlightened’ Shah, spiritual leader of Bratpuhr who is visiting America to learn about the great American society, shakes his head and calls it “communism” (21), which it is, with the exception that there is no Communist Party. In its place is the oligarchy of the corporations which the government allows to prevent inefficiency.

I argue that the hegemonic masculinity, or the masculinity of the patriarchy, provides

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both motivation and justification for the men who are constructing the totalitarian state of *Player Piano*. I will furthermore look at the effects, on both society and the individual, of a hegemonic masculinity.

The Hegemonic Masculinities in *Player Piano*

Most of the men in the novel feel that their sense of masculinity has been stripped away. The economical system, along with the war, are both the underlying reasons for constructing a totalitarian state and for the crisis of masculinity.

Paul Proteus, who is “the most important, brilliant man in Ilium” (1) feels the same way. Despite being one of the finest ivory tower doctors, he desires a life where there is meaning. To bring a sense of importance and meaning to his life, he tries to break away from the hegemonic masculinity, i.e. the hierarchically and socially dominant form of masculinity. Thus he represents a dissenting masculinity, a form not accepted or desired by the hegemonic masculinity.

In their work, O’Donnell and Sharpe examine a reconstruction of masculinities that has been going on for a long time, noting that “there has been a shift in what was regarded more as ‘men’s work’, from heavy industry towards high-tech occupations, and occupational ‘masculinity’ has been reconstructed accordingly to embrace these kinds of career paths”.3 As Vonnegut said of his first novel; “this was in 1949 and the guys who were working [with machinery] were foreseeing all sorts of machines being run by little boxes. *Player Piano* was my response to the implications of having everything run by little boxes and punched cards”.4 In other words, the hegemonic masculinity has changed the criteria for what is masculine, from emphasis on the body to emphasis on the brain.

Just as “masculinity and femininity…have meaning in relation to each other”5, Vonnegut, and the characters in the novel, also contrast the hegemonic masculinity with the saboteur, an abstract personality with no clear characteristics, other than being non-masculine, which is also unacceptable. “The saboteur wasn’t a wrecker of machines but an image every man prided himself on being unlike” (234). The saboteur identity represents a direct attack, not just upon the state, but also and more importantly, upon the hegemonic masculinity. It is interesting to parallel this attitude towards the saboteur to the attitude towards homosexual

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3 Uncertain Masculinities: youth, ethnicity and class in contemporary Britain. 151.
men found in homophobic types of masculinity where heterosexuality is mandatory. The Ilium Works and the Eastern Division go to great lengths to construct a uniform personality, i.e. a uniform masculinity, since women are barred from Vonnegut’s corporate world. This absence of women will be discussed later.

There is no question that there is a hegemonic masculinity dominating the Ilium Works, and consequently something of an ‘Ilium-spirit’. Higgins and Haritos-Fatouros notes that “within a range of masculinities shaped by race, class and organizational and state structures, a hierarchy of masculinities of develops, with hegemonic masculinity subordinating all the others to itself,” which reflects the structure of Player Piano. The hegemonic masculinity encouraged within the company is one based on admiration of the company, the nation, technology and industry. In the words of Connell, “the rationality of the organization is guaranteed by formal authority and tight social control”. He also, commenting on the rationalisation of modern high-tech society, proposes to “explore crisis tendencies around rationality by focusing on men working in such settings, who have a claim to expertise but who lack the social authority given by…corporate power”. In Player Piano, Vonnegut provides the ideal settings to study such a crisis of masculinity.

Paul Proteus is one of the few, within the system, who has not at heart embraced this hegemonic masculinity and he is watching everybody else enjoy the new times and their new social roles. He is very dismissive of the hegemonic masculinity and does not approve of it. Trapped in a system that requires a hard-working man (within technological advance), Paul cares very little for his job and frequently, but silently, vents his despair and loneliness in small bursts of anger. His anger comes from his frustration, which in turn comes from him being the sole representative of an obsolete type of masculinity, which in its turn causes his depression. Paul has become a stranger in a strange land.

Although the hegemonic masculinity, or the Ilium-spirit, covers much of an identity construct, it leaves a few facets to the individual. There are a few, if ultimately undesirable, acceptable personality ‘flaws’, exemplified by Baer, hierarchically above Paul but utterly incompetent socially. Another flawed personality is Berringer, a “wealthy, extroverted, dull boy” who was given his position without the otherwise necessary years and labour, because of his father’s accomplishments. Although neither of these exemplifies desired

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8 Connell argues that Winter and Robert’s strategy is overgeneralized, applicable only to specific settings. *Masculinities, 2nd Edition.* 165.
characteristics, the hegemonic, i.e. hierarchically superior, masculinity both permits such variations, being “well-recognized and secure subaltern positions”, and ensures that all types can work together within the industrial economic system.

Ed Finnerty, Paul’s only ‘real’ friend, as in friendship not defined by hierarchy or workplace relation, was promoted to the National Industrial Planning Board, the second most prestigious position in society. But he resigns and travels back to Ilium to visit Paul, which marks the initial conflict. Having been to Washington, Finnerty found it to be even worse than Ilium and calls his former co-workers “stupid, arrogant, self-congratulatory, unimaginative, humorless men. And the women – the dull wives feeding on the power and glory of their husbands” (86). Finnerty’s finding Washington worse than Ilium can be attributed to the fact that, that high up hierarchically, there can be no questioning of the absolute right of the patriarchal structure. Unable to accept this, he quits, despite the offered raise.

How much worse Washington is the reader does not know, and has to take Finnerty’s word for it. As stated earlier, Paul’s colleagues could also be described in so many words. A possible explanation is that Finnerty has been away from Ilium for so long that he sees it through the opaque rear-view mirror of memory. Paul offers another explanation; that when Finnerty and Paul graduated from college there was no “…assurance of superiority, this sense of rightness about the hierarchy topped by managers and engineers” (6) that is now implanted in the young doctors-to-be and the Ilium that Finnerty left behind has changed, or, as the managers and engineers would say, been made more efficient.

Those who wholeheartedly believe in this superiority, the hierarchical elite, are the aristocrats (or the patriarchy) of Vonnegut’s America. They consider themselves the most productive citizens of the nation and as a consequence their superiority should be reflected in their income as well as their social status, which their oligarchic stranglehold on the national economy cements. Kroner, a friend of Paul’s father, Paul’s superior, and the Eastern Division’s demagogue, has no problem in justifying this disproportionate reward, saying that “[it is] strength and faith and determination. Our job is to open new doors at the head of the procession of civilization. That’s what the engineer, the manager does. There is no higher calling” (128). Also, the managers and engineers are the aristocrats of corporate America in both the political sense and the social sense, i.e. the aristocratic environment in which they surround themselves and their code of conduct. Finnerty’s criticism of the elite being self-congratulatory seems spot on.

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9 *Masculinities, 2nd Edition*. 139.
The dinner parties, Country Clubs and the strict code of conduct and thoughts expressed in public are all very much reminiscent of the popular image of how the privileged act in public. Though they disappear from the plot after Paul’s visit to the Meadows, for the obvious reason that Paul has then becomes a traitor, they constitute a large portion of the first half of the novel.

A good episode to use as example of their upper class mannerisms is the Country Club (51-60) where Finnerty, more intoxicated than usual, “ruins the whole evening” (60) by not siding with machinery. While somebody hierarchically lower than Finnerty possibly would be thrown out and permanently excluded, if not immediately arrested for talking like a saboteur, Finnerty is a high-ranking member of the N.I.P.D. and thus is hierarchically higher than all present and quite free to speak his mind.

Finnerty commits his worst act of nonconformity and faux pas when Fred Berringer challenges Paul to meet ‘Checker Charley’, the checker machine that cannot make a mistake. Finnerty bets money on the game, betting on Paul to beat the machine, which he is alone in doing. Seizing the opportunity to humiliate Finnerty, Berringer, who does not even know whether Checker Charley has tape memory or not, accepts the wager. Because neither he or his nameless co-conspirators are engineers, or mechanics, they cannot know that the machine has a loose connection, which sets it on fire after a few minutes.

The machine burns, and Paul wins. Finnerty insists, once again unsupported, that “Paul looks after his own circuits; let Charley do the same” (60) while the general feeling is that “something beautiful had died” (59). Finnerty, in pure Schadenfreude, remarks “sic simper tyrannis” (60). Berringer blames Finnerty, suspecting him of having tampered with the machine. But Baer, who also checked the machine, exonerates him. Why Baer does not notice the loose connection himself, and why nobody asks him if he did, remains a mystery. Somehow, Berringer’s complacent inaptitude or the faulty wiring is not the source of this tragedy, but Finnerty who, as if putting a hex on the machine by betting against it, caused it to fry and die.

The passage is a good indication of their relation to their beloved machines. As Vonnegut would later write in Timequake; "the human brain is capable, in cahoots with the more sensitive parts of the body, such as the ding-dong, of hating life while pretending to love it"\textsuperscript{10}, and it is perfectly applicable to the good doctors of Ilium as well.

There are signs of a covert aspiration in their behaviour; to be as machine-like as

possible, and for other humans to be machine-like, in a sense misanthropic. It is expressed by many people throughout the novel, but the two most notable is Paul, regarding Baer, who he thinks is “the most just, reasonable, and candid person he’d ever known – remarkably machine-like” (195) and Finnerty when he half-jokingly tells Anita that he will “design a machine that’s everything you are, and does show respect” (40). Everybody wants to be like the machines, like the super masculine ‘sturdy oaks’ they are, or at least believed to be.

This aspiration manifests itself in their relation to their wives, who are little more than accessories, a required social appendix to keep up appearances. The women of the upper class, the wives of the managers and engineers, are as Finnerty says, “feeding on the power and glory of their husbands” (86). While some might consider them victims of a hegemonic masculinity and a patriarchal society as a whole, there are other possible readings. I would argue that they are more assimilated than they are subordinated. They are subordinated to their men socially, in respect to power and position to express their concerns but, while being indisputably victims of economic violence, the average man (and woman) is, as Anita says, “perfectly well-fed” (176), i.e. the women do not need to participate in order to survive. They do, however, play the game and remain subordinated and accept their lot because of their desire for a high social status. That acceptance is in turn an affirmation of the hegemonic masculinity, of which aspirations, ‘get up and go’ and the desire for upward social mobility is very important. The women, desiring power and glory, choose to reinforce the ideals of the dominant masculinity. They have, in fact, both incorporated, and been incorporated by, the hegemonic masculinity, accepted as a subaltern complement to the hegemonic masculinity.

Another feature of hegemonic masculinity is the Ilium contempt for the Homesteaders, the men and women and Reeks and Wrecks living on the other side of river. Though the Ilium attitude has “an affectionate and amused undertone, the same sort of sentiment felt by most for creatures of the woods and fields” (174), it is nonetheless contempt. Their sense of superiority will not permit an active hatred; their solution is to maintain a condescending attitude is their solution, which be analysed as a parallel to the extremes of patriarchal attitude towards woman. Anita, Paul’s wife, is the exception to this rule. She has no problem in hating the Homesteaders, but her attitude will be examined later.

Continuing to dissect the masculinities within the system, the ‘brass’, a military term which, like so much else in Vonnegut’s post-war America, has remained since the war, are always right. Their superiority stems from their rank. And because the divine right of machines, they wholly deserve their rank.

Baer, in a characteristic disregard of social manners, backchannels Paul’s “There goes
the merit system…” with “Yep – there it goes…Zip zip, out the window.” (195). They are referring to Paul Berringer being invited to the Meadows, an island dedicated to “an orgy of morale building” (39). Because it would “break his father’s heart” (194) if Berringer were not invited, in spite of his obvious arrogance, inaptitude and stupidity, Berringer can safely ignore the rules by which everybody else has to play. This is a good example of how conforming to norm, and knowing the right people, can still make up for inaptitude.

This ‘merit system’ fails on several other instances, such as when Fred Garth’s son, sentenced by the machines to Reeks and Wrecks but, in his father’s words, “didn’t miss [his GCT] by much, and the Appeal Board made a special ruling” (192). Having an Appeal Board at all is of course contradictory to the idea that machines are better than men at working and thinking. Then again, appealing is pointless unless you are have friends in high places.

In fact, the entire organisational structure, founded on the calculating machinery but fouled by social machinery, has little of a merit system. It remains, as it has been before, a matter of knowing the right people. Bud Calhoun, the petroleum manager below Paul, is a talented designer, but his skills are of little value, despite him being a better designer than those assigned to such tasks, when “the machines says no” (74). Since Bud does not know anybody hierarchically high enough to vouch for him, he is barred from design jobs.

These exceptions aside, which in themselves serve as examples of another facet of the hegemonic corporate identity, the identity of the individual is determined by hierarchical rank. The idea is to create men that are “foursquare, desperate to please…an anthropomorphic image of the corporate personality” (129). Within the system, the reward for loyalty, meaning accepting being herded by heredity, and productivity, is the Ilium type of masculinity. As Connell points out\(^\text{11}\), surrendering the original masculinity construct is the condition, rather than the disadvantage, of having the privileges of the ruling class, that is, by conforming to hegemonic masculinity, other masculinities are made undesirable and the reward for conforming is that masculinity \textit{an sich}.

During Paul’s visit to the Meadows, the huge prestigious social gathering meant to infuse ‘team spirit’ into the mangers of the Eastern Division, under which the Ilium Works are subordinated, Vonnegut further illuminates the motivation and propaganda and consequently the shaping of the corporate masculinity.

Baer and Kroner, following the ‘Manual’, i.e. \textit{the} pamphlet on the proper code of conduct, are “forever suggesting that teams be formed and games be played as a method for

\(^{11}\textit{Masculinities, 2nd Edition.} \text{246-249.}\)
building morale in the Eastern Division’s family” (46). Kimmel notes\textsuperscript{12} that this method is has become popular in contemporary high-tech corporations, but Vonnegut possibly predated him on this observation. This method for building a proper masculinity, or ‘real men’, whatever currently defined as such by the type holding power, was already popular more than fifty years earlier.

The biggest ”proud symbol of the Meadows” (201) is the oak, the inanimate symbol of men as ‘sturdy oaks’\textsuperscript{13}. The reverence and humility before the oak is both amusing and disturbing. Symbolically, the oak represents two things; the corporate equivalent to the Rock of Ages and a phallic symbol of power and domination. Thus, when Garth, disappointed as his son fails his GCT a second time, hacks away at the tree and is later apprehended, he is treated by the authorities as the criminal of the century. Despite his crime being nothing more than, as he jokingly describes his act, “attempted treeslaughter” (307), the action represents both the destruction of that which was supposed to stand tall and proud throughout the ages as well as a violent emasculation. It is the fear of castration, the loss of power and control of the patriarchal society. Garth’s action is also a threat against the vision that most notably Kroner expresses, that “nothing of value changed; that what was once true is always true; that truths were few and simple; and that a man needed no knowledge beyond these truths to deal wisely and justly with any problem whatsoever” (124). According to Garth, not only are they clueless but “the men at the head of the procession of civilization…are ten-year-olds at heart” (279), and his act of treeslaughtering brings to surface a doubt in these few and simple truths, that perhaps the leaders truly have no idea what they are doing.

Paul, too, thinks that the way the brass deals with problems is childish and simplistic. He thinks that “it was a beautifully simple picture these procession leaders had. It was as though a navigator, in order to free his mind of worries, had erased all the reefs from his maps” (221). But they are not alone in their monomaniacal right to be right.

Alternative Masculinities

The Homesteaders are proud and uneducated. Even though the Ilium men think them inferior, they do not think that the Ilium men are superior. The basis for the Homesteader contempt of the managers and engineers is not a perceived inferiority, but more formless and stems rather


from desperation and hopelessness. Contrasted with the Ilium masculinity, the difference is
the lack of power, which makes the Homesteader masculinity more universal without being in
control of anything. They do, however, have a homogenous masculinity, but without any
power.

Isolated incidents, as Halyard, the man who is accompanying the Shah of Bratpuhr and
whose job is to answer any questions that the Shah may have, repeatedly calls it, do occur.
One such ‘incident’ is the man from Reeks and Wrecks who spits in Halyard’s face in reply to
his impatience. The desire to humiliate sometimes prevails over the desire for economic
stability, which the elite is well aware of and therefore rarely moves around the average man.

It would also be appropriate to take notice of the lack of interaction between the two
types. As aforementioned, the river is rarely crossed to mingle with ‘the others’. Reverend
Lasher, who is one of the leaders of the revolution, is almost disappointed to find men on the
other side discontent with the corporate masculinity. He says that “it’s much more convenient
to think of the opposition as a nice homogenous, dead-wrong mass” (89), something he
perhaps otherwise would have done. The Ilium brass sees the ‘average man’ as just that. In
their eyes, the Homesteaders have no individual personalities, but taken together represents
the inferior majority, constituting a single subordinated masculinity.

Almost twenty-five years after *Player Piano* was published, Vonnegut stated that
“chemicals make us furious when we are treated as things rather than persons”\(^\text{14}\), which is
what the Homesteaders are treated as. Everything they own is impersonal, average and
machine-made. To paraphrase Vonnegut, the Homesteaders are objects for which other
objects are made, so that the object may not be a subject. Naturally, a word used in both
relevant senses, this is not enough for the Homesteaders, because they are people rather than
objects.

Vonnegut allows the reader to observe the results of the totalitarian technocracy,
through the eyes of the Shah of Bratpuhr. He and his guide Halyard visit Edgar Hagstrohm, an
R&R employee, to see how wonderful life is in America. Edgar’s life, however, is
heartbreakingly miserable. Both he and his wife agree that it is nobody’s fault, but they still
have nothing but household of loathing and deceit to go with their brand new, fully furnished
pre-fabricated house. Their marriage is even more tragic than Paul and Anita’s, and when the
Shah, as the spiritual leader he is, encourages them to “live”, he unwittingly emphasises that
the Hagstrohms does not have much of a life and will never have one either. Edgar knows

what is wrong with him, and explains to his wife that; “I’m no good to anybody, not in this world. Nothing but a Reek and Wreck, and that’s all my kids’ll be, and guy’s got to have kicks or he doesn’t want to live – and the only kicks left a dumb bastard like me are the bad ones. I’m no good, Wan, no good!” (167) to which his wife replies that she is “no good to anybody…Nobody needs me…And now I’m too fat for anybody but the kids to love me” (167). The last time Hagstrohm is mentioned, he is wanted by police for having wrecked his house with a blowtorch and appeared naked outside his mistress’ house and “demanded that she come to the woods with him” (263). He then disappears completely.

The Hagstrohms are depicted by Vonnegut to show the miserable lives of a typical family. Though Paul and the Hagstrohms never meet, Paul thinks that all Homesteaders lead such lives, which is an assumption very close to mathematical perfection on his behalf, as Edgar Hagstrohm is “statistically average in every respect save for the number of his initials” (161) according to the personnel machines.

In essence, both the average man and woman, or as the Shah persists in calling them, ‘slaves’, suffer under the technocratic patriarchal rule. Anita, being a representative of the Ilium identity, illustrates Paul’s point when she asks “what else could we possibly give the people that they haven’t got?” (184) to which Paul replies “You said, what else could we give them, as if everything in the world were ours to give or withhold.” (184). But, in the world they live in, where corporate control is ubiquitous, everything is theirs to give. The media (26), art (242), infrastructure (160) and the economy are all directly controlled by the industry. The coercive institutions are also controlled, even if indirectly so. Everything (material) that is to give is indeed theirs, but Paul is referring to whether this is right or not. In other words; whether patriarchal dominance is right or wrong.

The distress of the men can be somewhat applied to the Homesteader women as well, their job as housewives has been made redundant by the brilliant machinery from the Ilium Works. Consequently, Hagstrohm’s wife feels that as she is ‘too fat’ and having no intellectual value, she is worthless in her own eyes. The Ilium-attitude towards the average man, of them being helpless forest critters, is internalised by the average man and woman. The plight of the men resembles that of the women, granted if in ‘separate spheres’ and having different prerequisites, the average women having little else than their physical beauty to depend on, and the Ilium women little but conforming to their social function.

However, this is an essay on hegemonic masculinity and therefore the topic of women will only be explored in relation to that. A deeper examination of women in Vonnegut’s America would require more female characters, at least a number that approaches the number
of men. But *Player Piano* is a book about (male) managers and (male) engineers and Vonnegut primarily examines, on the individual level, the oppression of men and, with the exception of Anita, not the women. Their situation will be briefly discussed later.

As stated before, the average man’s sense of being stripped of their masculinity derives from the reduction of meaningful work to drudgery and droning, which in turn results in their hopelessness and loss of self-respect. This happens, according to Paul, because “the First Industrial Revolution…devalued musclework” (52). However, he is unable to pinpoint exactly what the Second Industrial Revolution, which the men at Ilium have nearly completed, has devalued. The answer is; masculinity. Finnerty remarks that “dope addiction, alcoholism, and suicide went up proportionately” (54). Although the connection between the two cannot be proved, and there would not be an interest, or permission, to examine it anyway, Finnerty thinks that “if there’s the slightest connection, it’s worth thinking about.” (54), something he is alone in thinking.

Traditional masculinity, deriving from the body and the use of the same, i.e. labour and preferably hard labour or ‘men’s work’, has been lost to the machines. Bigley, the barber who gives the Shah a haircut, is a good example of someone possessing a redundant type of masculinity who still does well, even though his profession is also soon made redundant. He talks to the Shah, who does not speak English, thus delivering a monologue on the state of the nation. He is proud of the work he does, the sense of importance it gives him. He thinks that “it takes more time and skill to cut hair’n to do what the doctors do” (204), who do little else than looking after the machines.

Bigley discusses at length the reshaping of masculinities and has a very clear opinion on what has happened, and is going to happen. In his mind, “[the] machines separated the men from the boys” (205) and “took all the good jobs, where a man could be true to hisself and false to nobody else” (207). To Bigley, it is clear that the men around the country have been deprived of their source of self-respect, i.e. their jobs, and the extension of that; the need to be needed. “It is still…an important part of male identity to have a job”\(^\text{15}\). Just as the managers and engineers of Ilium have their masculinities defined by their job, the Reeks and Wrecks have their masculinities defined by their lack of a life worth living.

Bigley finds it comforting that he does not have any children with his wife because there would not be anything “for them but the Army or the Reeks and Wrecks“ (208), because the profession of barber is soon to be automated. He firmly believes that had he been a father, his

\(^{15}\) *Uncertain Masculinities: youth, ethnicity and class in contemporary Britain.* 149.
children would gladly have the same profession as their father, another indication of Bigley’s view of himself as a strong patriarch.

Having a conventional type of masculinity, Bigley is keen on war as a way of asserting and displaying masculinity. He views the battlefield as an arena for displaying a pure masculinity, where brute force, or traditional violent masculinity, is the one thing that can save your life. He says that “you’re king over there – king to everybody, and especially to yourself” (206). Kimmel argues that masculinity is “constantly in need of validation, of demonstration, of proof”\(^{16}\). Consequently, the ‘average man’ feels so non-masculine (which is a better term to use in this context than feminised), because there is a catch 22 involved (the masculinity that the men seek to assert does not approve of their asserting it); the hegemonic masculinity deprives them of any chance of asserting their masculinity, firstly by replacing them with machines and secondly by defining “men’s work” as academic studies, from which the average man is barred. So the possibility of demonstrating masculinity is war, and even the chance of having your “head separated from your shoulders” (205) would be worth it, if it also presents the opportunity to showcase ‘genuine’ manliness.

Vonnegut ends the long monologue by a final comment. When Bigley is finished, the final verdict on his work, the source of pride and self-respect, is that it is “nothing a turban won’t cover” (208). For all his pride in his work, the self-respect it gives him, the sense of being needed and wanted, the job is not done satisfactorily. At least not as good as it could be.

**Finnerty, Lasher, Paul**

I have now established the masculinity, and the society, which Paul is trying to escape and reshape. But into what is he changing his masculinity? As far as rebellion goes, Paul is a ‘late bloomer’. At the age of thirty-five, he decides to take on a new masculinity. But where does this ambition and this desire come from, and which masculinities has Paul encountered that he would aspire to incorporate?

The Homesteader identity is a good example of a different masculinity. But Paul is clearly ambivalent in regard to the Homesteaders, unlike Finnerty, who completely and unreservedly wants to become one of them and declares that “those dumb bastards…they’re my kind of people” (142). Paul does not share his best friend’s enthusiasm for the Homesteaders, possibly because he agrees that they are ‘dumb bastards’, without Finnerty’s

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\(^{16}\) *The History of Men, Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*, 45.
acceptance of them.

He also takes an interest in old novels, in particular those in which “the hero lived vigorously and out-of-doors…Woodsmen, sailors, cattlemen” (137); in other words an old-fashioned ‘working class’ masculinity. He acts on this desire and buys a country cottage outside the city and acquaints himself with the caretaker Haycox. Their relationship, however, will be examined later.

There are three main characters that provide a great deal of information, namely Finnerty, Lasher and Haycox. Firstly, Finnerty, who perhaps exercises the most influence over Paul, needs to be examined. While Paul was still ‘merely’ depressed, contemplating consulting psychiatrists to cure his unhappiness, Finnerty had already begun his rebellion. His “way of life wasn’t as irrational as it seemed; that it was, in fact, a studied and elaborate insult to the managers and engineers of Ilium, and to their immaculate wives” (33). Paul fails to understand why Finnerty does what he is doing. The only thing Paul knows about Finnerty’s childhood is that he is, in Kroner’s words, “a mutant, born of poor and stupid parents” (35). Having grown up under conditions that most likely produced a masculinity that is incompatible with the Ilium way of life, exemplified by his sexual conquests and socially destructive behaviour, he never adjusted to the hegemonic Ilium masculinity, nor did he surrender his earlier masculinity. Because of this, Paul is drawn to him, yet another example of early discontent with his participation in enforcing the social and economic system. Not surprisingly, Finnerty acts as both catalyst and guiding star to Paul, leading the way to a different tomorrow and, more importantly, a new masculinity.

Paul’s ambivalence towards Finnerty is interesting, and best seen as a struggle to establish his new masculinity or, to quote Connell, “to oppose patriarchy and try to exit from the worlds of hegemonic and complicit masculinity”17. I will try to illustrate Paul’s ambivalence by using two conflicting quotations from the writer, the first being when “[Finnerty] laid his hand on Paul’s shoulder, and Paul fought a reflex that suddenly made him want to get as far away as possible” (84), compared to Paul’s expectation “that Finnerty would be able to give him something – what he didn’t know – to assuage the nameless, aching need that had been nagging him” (48). The tug-of-war between what he is and what he wants to be begins anew from the second that Finnerty comes back to Ilium.

Finnerty, on the other hand, is quite busy himself, trying to find his own identity. “It’s the loneliness, the not belonging anywhere” (86) that drives him towards the Homesteader

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masculinity. He is fairly early on in the novel a wanted enemy of the state and labelled saboteur, acting as an icebreaker and clearing the path for Paul, and is in that sense very important, but ultimately he is most important as a friend. As Morse points out, “Vonnegut believes loneliness in the United States occurs primarily because Americans lack relatives and friends.” Because those who leave Ilium, whether resigning or being fired, are under police surveillance, Paul realises that he must follow Finnerty to have an identity at all.

It would be foolish to assume that because Finnerty and Paul are opposed to the dominance of the corporate world, or the patriarchy, they would be ‘pro-feminist’. In recent times, exemplified in Connell by the Men’s Liberation movement, there has been criticism against such a point of view. It was perceived as too masculine by (some) feminists and, by the hegemonic masculinity, too feminine to be masculine. Nevertheless, this is the position of the revolutionaries of Ilium as well. They are in the business of reclaiming masculinity, to restore it to its pure state and former glory. Finnerty blurs out, uncontested, that America needs to “get back to basic values, basic virtues... Men doing men’s work, women doing women’s work. People doing people’s thinking” (299). They have no ambitions, as Paul while heavily intoxicated yells, to “meet in the middle of bridge” (105); they serve mainly, looking at the revolution as a whole, as useful allies to Lasher, who has a more egalitarian point of view, though not by much. Lasher says he is not a revolutionary, but more interested in “saving people’s souls” (334) than he is in gender politics, and his views on gender come mainly from the holy scripture. Paul long remains sceptical towards Lasher, unlike Finnerty who takes a liking to him at once.

Lasher is a cynical, intellectual priest and anthropologist within the Reeks and Wrecks. He is concerned with the loss of faith in his congregation; the church-goers are disillusioned and miserable, with no real interest in anything, let alone God. Lasher is the one who talks Finnerty into joining the revolutionary Ghost Shirt Society, giving Finnerty a place to belong, possibly even serving a paternal or maternal function. He believes that when the American society was restructured to put machines and industry first, the “old values don’t apply anymore. People have no choice but to become second-rate machines themselves” (290). Lasher, too, is in the business of reclaiming masculinity, though in the guise of repopulating his congregation. But first and foremost, he is important in relation to Finnerty. So what do they believe constitutes the masculinity that has been made obsolete by machines?

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The man who properly, through empirical experience, introduces Paul to the world of old-fashioned farming life, and consequently old-fashioned ‘working class’ masculinity, is Haycox, the caretaker of the farm house. It is hardly an understatement to call Haycox a simple man, and Paul is initially much impressed by his ‘no-nonsense’ type of masculinity. When Doctor Pond, the Doctor of Realty who is selling the cottage to Paul, tries to convey the importance of academic merit to Haycox, he explains, as if to a child, that Paul is a Doctor of Science because “he knows how to keep machines healthy” (154). Haycox replies shortly that Paul is a mechanic, not a doctor, and neither is Doctor Pond. Pond defends himself, saying that his thesis “was the third longest…eight hundred and ninety-six pages”, which Haycox, most unimpressed calls him a real-estate salesman and gives himself the title of “Doctor of cowshit, pigshit and chickenshit” (155). When contested about his job, he threatens to throw Pond “clean over the barn” (156). This is one of the best examples of pre-revolution conflict between the two types of masculinities in Player Piano. The Reek and Wreck, Haycox, is aggressive, violent and inferior, being a traditional ‘working class masculinity’ while Pond represents a hegemonic masculinity that is certain of its dominance; passive, condescending and superior.

As it later turns out, the violent and forceful masculinity represented by Haycox was not what Paul wanted, it merely served as a symbol of what he aspired to be. And, while he is waiting to join the Homesteaders, “the charming little cottage he’d taken as a symbol for the good life of a farmer was…irrelevant… [and] he hadn’t gone back” (259). It could be argued that the cottage is irrelevant because he is off to bigger and better things, i.e. the coming revolution, but it would be worth noting the possibility that he feels that the simple type of life and thus masculinity has been tainted and that the cottage, too, would soon be usurped by the corporate America. Lastly, as if the realisation has not struck him, and Vonnegut does not elaborate on this, it is in fact contradictory to his earlier statement, that “complete idleness…was as amoral as what he was quitting” (147). It could be said that Paul has realised that you incorporate, not immerse yourself in, facets of masculinities. So what is Paul’s foundation, what masculinity was he brought up with, and how has he reacted?

The prison that Paul feels he is in can be examined in relation to his father. Paul's father George, the just-below-president, casts his shadow over Paul's life and Paul is still when the novel begins expected to follow in his footsteps. Finnerty later becomes a substitute for the father that Paul wished he had, or the masculinity that he wishes that his father had. However,

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20 Masculinities, 2nd Edition. 35.
the lack of a strong paternal image does not give the full picture that is needed to analyse
Paul’s masculinity and reason for changing himself.

There is not enough information to solidly back an Oedipal motivation. The subject is
brought up when the prosecutor accuses him of a childish paternal hate as incitement for his
saboteuring ways and Paul partly agrees. The one time it is discussed, Paul talks about “the
unpleasant business between me and my father” (317), but that sentence is the only one, aside
from “the guy was hardly ever home” (83), that mentions this and elaborates nothing.

Perhaps more interesting is the fact that Paul’s mother is not mentioned a single time, in
any way, directly or indirectly. This complete absence is interesting, but it also means that a
reason for it is elusive. Whether it means that she died, was absent, or a blind spot of
Vonnegut’s can never be ascertained. What is does remind one of is that the phenomena of a
non-present woman is recurring in Paul’s marriage. His near indifference and annoyance with
Anita, who at times seems to be of little more use to him than someone that accompanies him
to dinner parties, can possibly substantiate absence, but it comes uncomfortably close to a
circular reasoning to serve as an argument in analysing Paul.

Ilium women: Paul and Anita

As stated earlier, the women in Player Piano are at best bleak, both to the men and the writer.
Whether or not this is the zeitgeist of the 1950’s shining through the pages and ages is
difficult to say, but regardless of the case, the women of Ilium are not pleasant, if even
deserving of sympathy. The problem with the women is the same as the problem with the
men, i.e. the homogenised, fixed identity which leaves little to appeal to as far as conventional
morals go. This applies to the Ilium women alone, and the Homesteader women that are
featured are quite different from those north of the river.

Vonnegut gives precious few examples, but one is the woman who accompanies the
Shah in the limousine. The Shah is looking for carnal pleasure and a young woman is willing
to supply it, in order to support herself and her husband, who is a writer. He had his novel
rejected by the National Council of Arts and Letters because it featured, aside from being
substandard in its exceeding maximum length and had too high readability quotient, an anti-
machine theme. A shocked Halyard says that her husband should see a psychiatrist, as they
can take “hopeless cases and turn them into grade A citizens” (244). Her husband refuses
because he “watched his brother find peace of mind through psychiatry. That’s why he won’t
have anything to do with it” (244). Her husband was then ordered into public-relations duty,
which he also refused. Thus, his “his housing permit, his health and security package, everything, was revoked.” (245). Amazed and startled, Halyard asks if her husband would “rather see his wife a… [prostitute] than go into public relations?” to which the woman replies, “I’m proud to say…that he is one of the few men on earth with a little self-respect left” (245). Both she and her husband value the ‘self-respect’ of not conforming to norm, i.e. personal integrity far more than economic stability, health, and possibly their lives. The desire for integrity, which is important in relation to Paul, is obviously important to them. Furthermore, it could be said that the woman and her husband share an inferior masculinity, demonstrated and asserted when her husband refuse to go into public relations. Their concept of ‘self-respect’ is reminiscent of Paul, and his desire to live like the heroes in his novels. The woman’s story moves the Shah so much that he gives her a ruby ring and sends her on her way. Aside from offering concrete evidence of the fascist nature of the ruling industry and being a moving story, this serves as evidence of how aggressive and unforgiving the destruction of dissenting masculinities is.

Anita will be examined in her relation to Paul, which leaves Katherine Finch. Katherine is atypical in, firstly, that Vonnegut does not place her at any social gatherings and, secondly, she is a person, rather than a indication of status, and expected to behave as such. She is a Homesteader, but for the grace of her obsolete job as a secretary, a job she keeps because of yet another anachronism, idiosyncratically maintained in a time where machines are, most of the time, more efficient than people. As her Georgia sweetheart Bud Calhoun in a fit of engineering ecstasy points out, it would not be hard to replace her (77). But perhaps the most important factor is that she joins the Ghost Shirt Society alongside Paul and the others, thus surrendering her Ilium identity. She is in many respects very much like Anita, but without ambitions of status and power.

Studying Paul’s relation to his wife becomes the equivalent to a case study, where the effect of the hegemonic masculinity is clearly present at a personal level. Even if Paul rejects the corporate masculinity, this rejection, too, causes distress.

Paul’s inner workings are made clear in his nightmares. Half-asleep, he sees “the quasi nightmare…of man and wife as one flesh – a physical monstrosity, pathetic, curious, and helpless Siamese twins” (61). As far as establishing a working relationship goes, Paul is a failure. Though his relationship to his never-mentioned mother, with whom he must have spent most of his young life if his father was so absent, could be analysed as paramount in his failing marriage, it cannot be proven. More importantly, Vonnegut focuses on the conflict between the two persons and their relationship.
There is never a direct suggestion, nor does Paul wonder, as to why he is married to this woman. One possible explanation is that he married her for her heritage. This necessitates that even that far back in time, Paul had a desire to be what he considers a ‘real man’, which is quite possible. But the primary reason, found in the text (159)\textsuperscript{21}, is that she announced, incorrectly, that she was pregnant with his child.

Vonnegut does not offer much information on the beginning of their relationship, though he hints (2) that it is more of a carnal than an amorous one at first. It is of very little value to speculate on the specifics that led up to the turning point in their relationship. But sex has its biological function. Or so Paul thought. Anita ‘gets pregnant’ and thus ‘catches her man’. It may sound harsh, if not misogynistic, to claim that she ‘gets pregnant’ to catch and keep a man, but when it comes to Anita, there is no doubt that it most certainly is so, since she is lying about being pregnant.

Anita is one of the most despicable women throughout Vonnegut’s novels and the depth of the character makes for an interesting analysis of her, and therefore her relationship with Paul. There are two possible immediate conclusions, the first being that she is a downright power-hungry hypocrite and the second that she is subjectively seen though Paul’s eyes, ignoring his abuse of her. Neither is entirely convincing, though the former is better supported than the latter. The first ignores the depth of her character and the second the structure of the novel itself, where Vonnegut as narrator is free to express that view, were it true.

In contrast to Paul, who outwardly seems like a rock of ages, or a sturdy oak, Anita is very insecure and frightened. She is, as she is painfully aware of, constantly reminded of her inferior position within the marriage. Paul long remains blissfully ignorant of this tension, which often causes the friction and rows between the two.

Anita, according to Paul, enjoys helping him prepare for conversations with e.g. Kroner. It is “the game she never got tired of - one that took every bit of Paul’s patience to play. She was forever casting herself as a person of influence and making Paul play dialogues with her” (78). Even though Paul is not interested in playing the game, his willingness to play it anyway, even if reluctantly and absentmindedly, is an indication of his subconscious knowledge that Anita needs attention, affirmation and a sense of importance, something she forever will lack when he constantly, according to her, “go[es] around the house showing off your great big I.Q.” (249). Paul, when contemplating on what grounds Anita will divorce him, acknowledges that “extreme mental cruelty…was close enough to the truth” (259). He is

\textsuperscript{21} There are numerous references to this. See also 2 and 177.
aware of his shortcomings, but rarely of hers.

Can her behaviour, of which Paul is so tired, be attributed to the overcompensation insecurity brings? Anita feels alone and inadequate compared to Paul, and she has an affair with Shepherd, the second-in-command at the Ilium Works, who is also a viciously ambitious and opportunist man. She explains her love for Shepherd that he “needs me, respects me, believes in the things I believe in” (250). So what are the beliefs that Paul and Anita do not share? That question leads to the possibility of Anita as a power-hungry hypocrite.

There are plenty of examples, but perhaps the most astonishing is her immediate willingness to take back Paul when he is exonerated of saboteur charges. When she learns that Paul is being offered the job of manager of engineering, en par hierarchically with Kroner, she is willing to take him back and having nothing more to do with Shepherd. This in spite of the thorough thrashing she gave him when they last met, announcing her intention to divorce her heartless, cruel and uncaring husband and marry Shepherd instead. All her grounds for divorcing Paul, the extreme mental cruelty, is no longer an issue to her, dwarfed by the prestige of being the wife of the manager of engineering of the entire Eastern Division. Anita, being sick at heart throughout the marriage, is apparently quite willing to continue being so, if the price is right. However, her response might be nothing but a charade to ensure Paul’s cooperation in the investigation. Though that is not probable, it is possible, and therefore there is nothing definite in her action, but it remains a good indication.

For his part, Paul is from time to time certain that she does not love him at all but can “only suspect that her feelings were shallow – and perhaps that suspicion was part of what he was beginning to think of as his sickness.” (17). Vonnegut, as narrative voice, offers further evidence and states that Anita was “utterly satisfied, not so much by Paul as by the social orgasm of, after years of the system’s love play, being offered Pittsburgh” (135), which is another example of the triumph of her love of power over the power of love.

Vonnegut as the writer is much harder on Anita than Paul, but then again, he is also more blunt and truthful, as when Anita asks Paul if he thinks that she can be bought, Vonnegut adds that “her expression was softening, answering her own question.” (178). This could be read as Anita is simply shallow and greedy, but it is more rewarding to examine her willingness to be bought in relation to her gender role. Anita is unable to find any satisfaction in her ‘self’, which was her former identity, crumbling under pressure to conform into the hegemonic corporate role. Thus she finds pleasure in the corporate gender role, and in it alone. The result of this is her fierce determination to embody the behaviour deemed appropriate for a woman in her position, married to the most powerful man in Ilium. And
consequently, that which she loves in Paul is his position and the masculinity that is supposed
to accompany it, which, if Paul had embraced the corporate masculinity, would have affirmed
her as well.

When Paul married her, Anita did her best to rid herself of her embarrassing past, and
successfully so. This is something that Paul fails to see. Thus, by asking her to go back to a
simple country life, he also demands that she will throw away all that she has done all these
years, in fact, the foundation of their marriage. And Paul is expecting her to do what she sees
as complete idiocy and madness, if not a direct attack against her identity, demonstrates if not
Paul’s blindness, then his naivety.

The corporate identity is very important to Anita, because it is only through being a
perfect example of an Ilium-wife she can be appreciated. She has no other qualities, except
her artistic merits, which extends to interior decorating with their kitchen as her Magnum
Opum. But even if she had been gifted artistically, it would do her little good, since “no
machines has ever been built that can recognise that quality” (178), and she would be left with
nothing in any case.

This is important in light of her attitude towards Finnerty. His idiosyncratic and
inappropriate behaviour opens the door for Anita to assert herself, to give herself some sense
of importance since no other is willing to give it to her. That Finnerty is hierarchically
superior to her is irrelevant and Anita seizes the opportunity to prove herself compliant and
assimilated, which to her, just as for the men, is rewarded by the identity in itself.

Vonnegut, in a sense clairvoyant of the complications of women’s role as collaborators
in a patriarchal society, lets Anita assume the characteristics of corporate masculinity, of
which she would have been fully integrated, had she not fallen victim of the sharp social
demarcation of her being a woman. That she lacks justification for her position as oppressor
and being of the ‘wrong gender’ is not an obstacle; she revels in the superiority and power of
the patriarchy, just like the men do. Since she cannot have the position herself, she aspires to
vicariously exercise power and influence.

Bearing in mind that “[our conception of] men’s violence is broad and includes not only
physical and sexual violence, its threat, or both, but also emotional abuse, economic violence,
and institutional violence”\textsuperscript{22}, the defunct relationship is worth seeing from a perspective of
violence. Vonnegut might be hard on Anita, speaking where socially accepted behaviour
prevents Paul from doing so, but there are times when “the delicate mechanism that kept him

\textsuperscript{22} Masculinities and Violence. 4: 56. Websdale, Neil and Chesney-Lind, Meda. Doing Violence to Women:
Research Synthesis on the Victimization of Women.
from hurting her stripped its gears” (177) and Paul lashes out against her, against what he feels is complacency and injustice.

It is, however, hard to judge Paul, as he is truthful, at least through his eyes. He makes his most cruel and poisonous attack on Anita when they are arguing in Homestead, which “hurts her the most…[and] make her hate him the most” (177). Again, albeit cruel and insensitive, it is truthful. After Anita has devalued the spiritual worth of the common man, Paul savagely reminds her that she would be one of them, and of the same value she just attributed to them, unless he had married her, which he would not have done, had she not lied about her pregnancy. Crying and hurt, she defends herself, saying that she must have had something that these people did not have. Paul’s reply is oligomenorrhea. A delayed menstrual period, in a sense a physical defect, is in Paul’s eyes all that differentiates Anita from any other Homesteader. Ignoring the power-hungry side of her, which Paul is not completely aware at that time, it is spot on. As stated before, the problem morally with his cruel and malicious attack is that it is true. Though Paul later says that it is her artistic talent that makes her better than other Homesteader, this is a lie posing as an apology.

This particular argument serves well as an example of the deep conflict and resentment inherent in their marriage. Everything they have to criticise their better half for is true. Anita is no better than any Homesteader; she has no title, in fact no ever-so important academic credits at all. And Paul is, just as Anita says, distant and at least occasionally cruel. For example, having been in Homestead drinking, Paul comes home late and Anita suspects that he has had an affair. Paul lies, quite cruelly, and says that he did sleep with a woman he met there, but Anita is tired “of the conversation, apparently, and she looked restively at the television screen” (114). She is taking it quite well, but then Paul adds another lie, that “Shepherd saw me coming downstairs with her” (114) and she is immediately very concerned. Her husband having an affair matters very little in comparison to having a witness to it, something that can affect his, and through him her, social status. Paul is very aware of this and deliberately adds Shepherd to hurt her the most.

Another marital crime that Paul commits, mentioned earlier, is unknowingly flaunting his I.Q., which Anita feels makes her nothing but a stupid housewife. Again, though the phrasing might be revised for reasons of consideration, it is in essence true. But for Paul, “she was what fate had given him to love” (136) and is also “all that he had” (136). Love does strange things to a human brain, and Paul fails to recognise, if not rejecting the idea altogether, possibly blinded by sex and the constant automatic ‘I love you’, that he is not loved back, and probably never has been.
Their roles as respective representatives of conflicting identities, and their roles in respect to the hegemonic Ilium masculinity, may be crucial for understanding their marriage, but the resentment and anger cannot be explained by that alone. The violence the two inflict upon another, which is the physical manifestation of their two main conflicts, of class and gender, is not caused by this alone. It has, in fact, a longer history than that.

The foundation of their marriage, marked by their wedding anniversary, is founded on Anita’s lie. As Vonnegut remarks, “it was the date on which Anita had announced to Paul that he was with child…and on which he had responded by offering her his name” (159), though Paul now thinks it insignificant, is one of the first deceptions and acts of violence within their relationship. “[Paul] had married her after she had declared that she was certainly pregnant” (2) and has accepted her because “he knew her too well for her conceits to be offensive most of the time” (136). On the other hand, the slightest mention or reference to her announcing her pregnancy pains Anita so much that she ignores their anniversary.

Paul, being uninterested and distant, is blissfully ignorant of her affair, though he should have been suspecting something. On several occasions, Anita expresses trust in and defends Shepherd from Paul, who does not think much of Shepherd. Her defence of Shepherd is a reversal of her attitude in the beginning of the novel, where Anita is furious about Paul's refusing to have Shepherd fired for spreading ‘lies’ and she is, at the time, loathing the man even more than Paul does. But as their affair begins and continues, Anita begins to voice her belief that Shepherd is the voice of reason, know-how and sanity. There are many situations that would have seemed strange to a husband who was interested in his wife. In a society where the use of first names are very much prohibited unless you are married, Anita’s using Shepherd’s full name (112) is an hint to their affair, but Paul thinks nothing of it. Furthermore, as the session on the Meadows draws closer Anita is constantly quoting Shepherd on what to do and how to behave (171)23, but Paul, having already decided to quit, is nothing but annoyed with her constant interfering with his daydreaming.

Since Paul is not, if using the notion of masculinity defined by lack of femininity, masculine enough for Anita, she seeks her desired man elsewhere and finds it in Shepherd, who, according to Anita, has “a lot of get up and go” (172). Paul replies that Shepherd makes him want to “lie down and die” (172), which is his reaction to the Ilium Works as well, but those things are the most important things in the world to Anita.

There is another man involved in shaping Anita’s perception of what a real man should

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23 For other instances of Anita quoting Shepherd, see 101, 170 et.al.
be and think; Paul’s father. Knowing very little about him does not stop her from fantasising about what he would have been like and Paul, were it up to Anita to decide, would have had Shepherd’s type of masculinity. She says that “when you see him [Shepherd] at just the right angle, he’s the spitting image of your father” (64), which to her means a man with a lot of ‘get up and go’, with goals and ambitions, complemented by a competitive and aggressive disposition; that is the man of Anita’s dreams. And she expects Paul to become very much like his father. She eventually grows weary of waiting for him to reconstruct his masculinity and decides to find the identity that she desires elsewhere, finding it in Shepherd.

Anita’s love for Paul is at best superficial, conditional to her expectations on his conforming to the hegemonic masculinity. Thus, it would be easy to assume that Paul’s love for her is genuine. Ignoring the hollow gestures and false reassurance of affection, their parting on the Meadows shows them both at their best sides, and the love is changed into the more honest “I like you” (250). But Paul makes the same mistake as Anita; he loves his image of what she could be, rather than what she is.

Initially, the marriage would objectively seem like a good idea. Paul seeks a link to a masculinity that is different from the corporate, hegemonic masculinity and would find a ‘simple’ woman who would feel comfortable with a less aggressive and competitive masculinity. Anita, on her part, wanted the hegemonic masculinity and the power inherent in it.

It is Paul’s failure to embody the masculinity that Anita expects of him that ultimately drives them apart. In connection with this, it would perhaps be proper to remark that does has certain qualities normally connected with male dominance over women. His idea of “teaching her to be a farmer’s wife” (156) is an indication of his view that he, as a man, has a right to be right and dominate both on a personal plane as well as on the construction of her identity.

The possibility that she had submitted to his power would also negate the discontinuation of their marriage. In an ironic turning point, Anita, being more dominant and powerful, has the power to divorce Paul. This power, which she is granted by Paul’s non-dominating masculinity, paves the way for her ascent to power, continuing to vicariously enjoy a high hierarchical position, married to Shepherd.

In the end, this simple, unbridgeable difference of gender roles and expectations upon their partner is the key to understanding their failing marriage. Lastly, there is not enough information to say whether Anita is simply opportunistic or following her heart when she cheats on Paul, though both, or even a combination of the two, are possible interpretations. It should also be noted that Shepherd might not be as interested in Anita herself as his interest in
having conquered the wife of his ‘enemy’. The fate of their relationship would have made for a good epilogue.

**Conclusion**

Vonnegut outlines the effects of a hegemonic masculinity in a ‘post-capitalistic’ society. The state is constructed by and structured around the hegemonic masculinity, shaping the lives of all whom live in the society, whether the results are considered good or bad. Being the single most important player in the economy, the state is given the right to decide what is right, a right granted by the plutocratic society it creates.

As the globalisation process and the development of a global economy are continuing, the novel serves as example of the hegemonic masculinity that may or may not accompany it. Should the corporate identity be hegemonic, it could also be a ‘hegemonic femininity’; the power-structure itself is indifferent to gender. *Player Piano* is therefore an excellent ‘case study’ and a glimpse of the society, and the gender politics, of another point in history.
References: