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Saturday Evening Post

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Absurdities in a Manufactured Reality: Vonnegut's Short Story Illustrations in the *Saturday Evening Post*

Jarrod Waetjen

"Take a trip with Norman Rockwell back to the America you remember."

- Advertisement for a collection of Rockwell's illustrations in the summer 1972 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post* (55)

"Oh, Jesus, they got as much as we did."

- Vonnegut's response when asked whether or not the illustrators of his short stories were "good" (Reed On Art 37)

It is common for critics who address the short stories of Kurt Vonnegut to begin their articles by pointing out that very few critics address the short stories of Kurt Vonnegut. Further patterns emerge. For instance, it is almost a prerequisite to quote Vonnegut's introduction to *Welcome to the Monkey House*, the most notable collection of his short stories. If critics do not directly quote it, as is the case in Peter J. Reed's introduction to his book-length treatment of Vonnegut's short stories, they point out that it is often quoted, specifically the passage where Vonnegut claims, "The contents of this book are samples of work I sold in order to finance the writing of the novels. Here one finds the fruit of Free Enterprise" (x). The final step in introducing an article on Vonnegut's short fiction is to dismiss the aforementioned quote as Vonnegut-esque self-deprecation and go on to valorize the work, to argue that they contain the same elements and tropes found in his novels, and to demonstrate that they are the earlier opuses of a budding genius. Although this paper, like all the others, begins by referencing Vonnegut's attitude towards his short stories, the purpose is not to undercut it. Rather, his assertion that these short stories are an economic enterprise should be respected and further analyzed, not in order to diminish the "timeless" artistic significance of the texts, but rather to recognize the value of stories crafted for a specific population in a single moment in time. The aforementioned quote is not the only evidence of Vonnegut's attitude towards his earlier work: Vonnegut also wrote, "I didn't think I would amount to a hill of beans. All I wanted to do was support my family" (Bagombo 1). Given that the amount of money Vonnegut brought in for each publication in the *Post* was more than three months worth of paychecks he earned working for General Electric, it is safe to assume that his motivation was, at least in part, financial. While critics may struggle to rescue these earlier works from the dustbin that is "slick fiction," there is no denying that these stories are inherently different than the novels they preceded and served an entirely different purpose—they are, as Vonnegut explained, "the work [he] sold to finance the writing of the novels."

Knowing Vonnegut's attitude, it may be less productive to "rescue" them than to analyze the works as the socioeconomic products Vonnegut claims them to be, and recognize them as a result of a different type of mastery, one that engages, but does

not challenge, a mass audience. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, as relocating Vonnegut's short stories is a rather difficult task. To begin, the author has been battling the high/low distinction his entire career. His earlier novels, brought to the market as paperbacks, were hampered by their "science fiction" label. Vonnegut addresses this in one of his most often quoted statements, "I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled 'Science Fiction' . . . and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics mistake the drawer for a urinal." Moreover, studying his work as a product of masscult introduces methodological problems, i.e., if these works are to be treated and lauded as stories for the masses, why should his be favored over those of any other author of slick fiction? Furthermore, even within the collection of a single author's short stories, it is impossible to recognize any broad generalizations or overarching themes. Vonnegut didn't write a single type of story, attempt to address any one audience, or necessarily write his short stories with a clear literary goal in mind. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, "Vonnegut's short stories" are not solely Vonnegut's short stories. As I will argue later in this article, in order for authors to publish their works, they were required to write stories that appealed to the journal's demographic and, once the manuscript was finished, they had little to no control over editorial decisions, accompanying illustrations or the overall aesthetic of the final product. Indeed, Vonnegut's manuscript is only the first step in what ultimately is a collaborative production of a literary commodity.

For these reasons, this paper is in no way an attempt to solve the discrepancies between Vonnegut's stories and his novels, nor is it an effort to resituate the debates regarding the recognition Vonnegut's stories deserve. Rather, in analyzing a few of his stories, all printed in the same publication—in this case, the *Saturday Evening Post*—there is an opportunity to explore the work that these stories do contextually and interrogate them as commodities. Thus, rather than engaging in this discussion through a rigorous textual analysis, one that assumes a level of control that Vonnegut did not maintain over his stories and one that could only be mired in canonical debates, it may be more useful to address the works as they exist in the *Post*, or more specifically, the way that Vonnegut's stories interact with their accompanying illustrations.

I. More than a Pretty Picture: The Function of the Illustration

An analysis like the one I propose has yet to be produced probably because the majority of Vonnegut's readers have never encountered his short stories in their original publications. The entire collection of Vonnegut's short works is held in two anthologies: *Welcome to the Monkey House* (published in 1950, this is the more widely recognized of the two as it holds a majority of the most frequently anthologized stories) and *Bagombo Snuff Box* (published in 1999, it contains the "leftovers").^[1] Though every story in these two collections first appeared, complete with often elaborate illustrations, in either slick magazines (*Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Collier's*) or pulp magazines (*Galaxy*, *IF*), not one of

these images was reproduced in the anthologies. This becomes more apparent when juxtaposed against the illustrations found in Vonnegut's novels, as every reprint of every edition is complete with the original images the author created for his text. While the economic reasons behind the omission of the magazine illustrations is apparent—the difficulties of garnering the right to publish them and the practicality of reproducing them in a small, novel-sized paperback—the omission suggests that they are non-essential. If this is true, if these illustrations are expendable, what purpose did they serve at the moment of publication?

Many argue that illustration serves to enhance a given text by artfully representing a scene. In his article, "Illustration as Fine Art," Otto Ege argues that "in any illustration the 'what' is obviously more important than the 'how.' The ability to interpret the text and thereby enrich or increase the perceptibility of the reader is more important than technical skill of the exploitation of some metaphysical theory of what art should be or the manipulation of current 'isms'" (4). In his book, *Image and Text*, Edward Hodnett supports Ege's position:

For better or worse, the illustrator takes the drifting images evoked by the written word and translates a few of them into finite graphic images with their own evocations. . . . All too often the illustrator is woefully inadequate in relation to the text assigned to him, intellectually and imaginatively as well as technically, and his efforts are then impertinences. (7)

The image—a (sometimes) pretty picture to enhance the viewer's experience—is supplemental and easily separable from its text. While in many cases this may be true, W.J.T. Mitchell provides an alternative theory in his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*:

The boundary line between texts and images, pictures and paragraphs, is drawn by a history of practical differences in the use of symbolic marks, not a metaphysical divide. And the differences that give rise to meaning within a symbol system are similarly dictated by use; we need to ask of a medium, not what "message" it dictates by virtue of its essential character, but what sort of functional features it employs in a particular context. (69)

According to Mitchell's assertion, in the context of the *Post*, the word and image combine to create a specific message, to serve a unique purpose. To separate the image from the text is not the simple omission of an interpretive drawing; rather, it is an alteration of the entire message. Thus, an illustrated story in the *Post* is very different from one printed in *Welcome to the Monkey House*. Mitchell's theory is vital in furthering this discussion, for the illustrations that accompany Vonnegut's stories, at least the ones on the pages of the *Post*, fail to meet the interpretive expectations of Ege or Hodnett. The illustrations do not serve to graphically represent a scene from the work, something Peter Reed failed to notice in his treatment of the illustrations.

Reed describes Vonnegut's stories in *Collier's* magazine: "They were illustrated by some of the preeminent glossy-magazine illustrators of the time, typically with one large representation of a scene from a story across the opening two pages, above or below the title with a short teaser to elicit interest in the story" (29). Ironically, Reed does not notice that the one example he provides of a "representation of a scene" fails to represent a scene. Reed writes, "For 'Report on the Barnhouse Effect,' the illustration by Glen Fleischman fills the entire page. . . . It depicts a man with his hands raised thoughtfully to his mouth and a frown of concentration, surrounded in both the foreground and background by images of aircraft plunging in flames and blazing warships" (29). While this may be a visual representation of the story as a whole, Vonnegut describes no single scene like this. Indeed, there is a man who destroys military targets with his mind, yet there is no description of how he does it, or what he looks like while in the process. While relegating the images to the sole role of "illustration," and arguing that the "short teaser" serves to elicit interest in the story, Reed fails to realize, or at least to assert, that the word/text combination of the image and title elicits an immediate response, well before the viewer ever reads the short story. This concept was not lost on Vonnegut himself.

While describing the joy he found in the *Saturday Evening Post* as a youth, Vonnegut claims, "[I would] leaf through the magazine with my fingertips, so my eyes can shop for a story with a stimulating title and illustration. . . . While I shop for a story, my eyes also see ads for automobiles and cigarettes and hand lotion and so on" (Bagombo 4). Herein lies the purpose of the *Post* illustrations. The purpose of these images is not, as Ege or Hodnett would have it, to simply visually interpret a moment in the story, but rather, with the help of a beguiling title, to sell the short story as well as the rest of the magazine that features it. Though that may seem like an elementary assertion, the images and text that make up the stories in the *Post* are part of a specific marketing strategy, one designed to gain and keep the reader's attention by disrupting the conservative image the *Post* toiled to create.

II. Upsetting the Middle Class: Strategic Marketing for Vonnegut's Short Stories

In their book, *Marketing to the Mind*, Richard Maddock and Richard Fulton point to one of the greatest challenges faced by advertisers, a challenge that was as true in the 1940s as it was when, in 1996, they claimed, "The average family unit has access to 36 television channels and receives over 2.1 magazines in the home each month. This causes visual clutter. To make the marketing message unique and memorable, it must stand out from the noise" (73). To combat the clutter, the advertisers present a strategy that involves the employment of "absurdities," visuals that depart slightly from ordinary reality, designed to enhance audience recall. So, as Maddock and Fulton argue, when the Energizer Bunny interrupts what is otherwise a banal commercial, when an animal speaks to express its satisfaction with its pet food, or when a pickup truck is dropped off the side of a bridge, it does so to disrupt the clutter of ubiquitous advertising in order to be more memorable.

However, in order to be effective advertising, as opposed to just a strange moment, the image must adhere to two rules:

1. An absurdity is a slight departure from reality, with the emphasis on slight. This means that the message cannot be totally or almost totally obscured in a surrealistic, abstract production that obscures reality
2. An absurdity must be product related from a rational or logical point of view. (74)

In order to translate a memorable image into a practical marketing ploy, the absurd image must be resolved by a rational sales pitch. The absurdity serves to upset the norm, and the product resolves this incongruity. This strategy is hardly a new development. Ellen Thomson, in her study of American advertising theory from 1900 to 1920, explains that scientists such as Wilhelm Wundt have theorized such “Laws of Association” since the turn of the century (40-50 years before Vonnegut published his first short story in the *Post*). According to Thomson, Wundt argues that an advertiser can create a need, then “display the name of the article with the need it satisfies” (259).

Jim Aitchison carries this theory into print media, though instead of “absurdity,” he uses the term “bent.” He argues that for a word/text combo print advertisement to be effective, either the image or text needs to be “bent,” while the other is “straight”: “If the idea of the ad is being carried by the headline, it means the headline will contain a twist, a trick, a turn, a shock factor; it will be *bent*. Therefore, the accompanying visual must play a subservient or *straight* role. And vice versa” (187). It is this very strategy, the “bent” or “absurd,” that the text and image combinations in Vonnegut’s short stories employ. Unlike the anthologized stories, the stories in the *Post* work as advertising vehicles designed to shine through the clutter by creating (through the image and title) and resolving (through the story) absurdities. Looking at them in this way opens up opportunities for interpretation previously unavailable to the critics who would evaluate the works chiefly on their literary merit. Treating the text and image as an organic whole, or a literary advertisement, allows a semiological reading to better analyze the contextual work that both do. In fact, in his article “Rhetoric of the Image,” an analysis of print advertisement for Panzani Italian food, Roland Barthes contends that the advertising image is prime for such a reading, as the messages are overt:

In advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum readings: the advertising image is *frank*, or at least emphatic. (33-4)

It may be argued that illustrations are different than printed images advertising Italian food; yet, they contain similar elements. There is a carefully constructed image (one that is designed to both garner attention and disseminate a message through a conscious choice of form, composition and color); a brief caption (the title of the story serves to reinforce the image's message); and a product (whether it be a short story or noodles, both forms exist so as to illicit interest in their merchandise). Moreover, treating these illustrated stories as an advertisement generates a unique reading, one unavailable to critics who address the text alone. But before we are able to engage in such a reading—one that would ask how the absurd illustrated images upset the consistent tone of the *Post* so as to draw the attention of its readers—it is important to appropriately define this tone.

David Papke, in his article, "Lawyer Fiction in the *Saturday Evening Post*," quotes the begrudging admission of the 1937 New York Times that, "[The *Post*] probably had more influence on the cultural life of America than any other periodical" (207). Not only did the *Post* champion a patriotic, conservative middle-class America, it helped manufacture it. While the original producer, Cyrus Curtis, began the *Post* as a male equivalent to his other publication, *The Ladies Home Journal*, soon thereafter, Curtis broadened its appeal to include the entire middle-class family, a segment of the population to which the Curtises themselves belonged (Damon 7). By 1910, its circulation moved well beyond one million and stood as the preeminent representation of white America. As Maureen Honey writes, "With its Norman Rockwell covers and Benjamin Franklin masthead, the *Post* stood for middle-class, individualistic, family ethics and was the most successful periodical of its type during the early decades of this century (673). A wide readership and profound status meant that the *Post* was soon able to dictate, rather than represent middle-class standards. Perhaps the most frequently cited example was its incredible influence in altering gender roles during WWII, as the *Post* had a large hand in mobilizing the female work force. Besides producing countless propagandist images, Rosie the Riveter being the most famous^[2], it also produced romantic stories featuring women working in what were traditionally male jobs.

With its incredible power and unblemished image, the *Post* was careful to guard this reputation, and as a result, the journal was very selective about the stories it would publish. Though Vonnegut is known for his dystopian themes and fantastic tales, the *Post* did not publish a single one of his science fiction stories, opting instead for his narratives about high school bands, summer romances and investment bankers. The *Post*'s unwillingness to publish stories outside of its cultivated reputation was not reserved for Vonnegut alone. Even when F. Scott Fitzgerald was at the height of his popularity, the *Post* would still only publish stories that adhered to its philosophy. As Robert Roulston writes, "No matter how much his reputation burgeoned, the *Post* would reject his fiction if it became too negative, too iconoclastic, too difficult, or too at variance with traditional morality" (151).

While the stories may have adhered to this strict ideological code, the illustrations chosen to accompany Vonnegut's manuscripts, in an attempt to shine through the clutter of wholesome images, deviate ever so slightly from the journal's ethos. These images serve as absurdities, distressing the ideal that readers have come to expect from the *Post*. After the disrupting image and the story's title capture the audience's attention, Vonnegut's stories resolve the conflict, returning the reader back to the utopian middle class. In order to illustrate this point, the rest of this article will be dedicated to analyzing six out of the eleven stories^[3] Vonnegut published in the *Post*: "Custom-Made Bride," "The Boy Who Hated Girls," "The No-Talent Kid," "The Kid Nobody Could Handle," "Runaways," and "This Son of Mine"

III. Squashing Rebellion: The *Post* and the Misbehaving Child

From its inception, the image of the industrious young boy has been tied to the mythos of the *Post*. In fact, in 1899, when the periodical was in danger of financial ruin, the journal's saving strategy was the use of "post boys," young boys who would sell and deliver the magazine door to door. Jan Cohn writes, "In less than a year, the scheme for selling the magazine through boys had succeeded so well that their share of the sales now exceeded the entire circulation for July 1898. By 1900 the circulation of the *Post* had soared to 193,544. At 13,947 copies a week, the Post boys' sales represented 7.2 percent of an issues circulation. They had become a fixed asset in the distribution system of *The Saturday Evening Post*" (189). As the *Post* developed, Cohn continues, images and advertisements of industrious post boys became a mainstay on the pages of the journal. Moreover, since the *Post* had always lauded the exploits of industry, whether by featuring financial successes, tips for accumulating wealth (as in its series entitled "How I made my first \$1000") or admonishing those who made money by less than ethical means,^[4] the icon of the hard-working paperboy fit perfectly within the manufactured image of the journal. This ideal was further developed as the *Post* featured illustrations of young, strong, athletic, assiduous, white males throughout its pages. To find evidence of this, a reader need go no further than any collection of Rockwell's *Post* illustrations^[5]. For example, in Christopher Finch's *Norman Rockwell's America*, the chapter entitled "Growing Up in America" displays illustrations depicting young boys studying ("Schoolboy Gazing out of the Window," "Cramming" and "The Scholar"), demonstrating athletic prowess ("leapfrog" and "Home from Camp"), and wooing young ladies ("Young Love" and "Love Letter"). Indeed, the pages of this anthology, as well as those of the *Post*, are filled with images and stories of young, successful boys. For instance, the March 1975 issue featured an article about the all-star hockey player, Gordie Howe and his sons (also professional hockey players), and a letter to the editor from a man who credits his professional success as an engineer to his days working as a post boy.

Perhaps this is why Amos Sewell's illustration, found on page 26 of this same issue, of a dejected boy standing beside a large bass drum as his concerned band teacher tries to console him is so visually jarring. Not only has the child, via the story's title,

been labeled untalented, but he is also puny, shunted to the side, and overwhelmed by the large drum and teacher. In the *mélange* of the *Post's* images of "boyhood," this image of an insignificant failure serves as the aforementioned advertising "absurdity."

With the reader sufficiently disturbed, the story provides reconciliation. In this case, the child, Plummer, wants to be a member of the school's marching band, for he is infatuated with the prestige and letterman's sweater that goes with it. Although he is a hopelessly bad musician, he continues to harangue his band teacher, George Helmholtz, into allowing him to become a member. He is finally successful when he purchases (with the money he earned as a paper boy) a monstrous bass drum (one that is coveted by all the marching bands in the county) and offers it to Helmholtz in exchange for allowing him to pull it in the band—and thus he earns the prestige of the band sweater. While the image portrays a failed ambition, the story provides an account of a young boy who, through ingenuity and a paper route, meets his objective. This is the first of many absurd images that allure the reader through images of failure, which are then rectified by the comforting story.

Another example of such an image can be found in the September 24, 1955 issue alongside Vonnegut's story "The Kid Nobody Could Handle." Illustrated by Harvey Kilder, the picture depicts a young boy in a leather jacket jubilantly upsetting papers in the school office he is vandalizing. Again, when juxtaposed with the boys illustrated by Rockwell, this image and title serve as an absurdity, one that is resolved by the accompanying short story. Helmholtz (once again a band teacher) meets a young ruffian named Jim, a hopeless case who was shifted from family to family. Helmholtz makes every effort to save the boy but to no avail. When all seems lost, Helmholtz gives Jim his most prized possession, a trumpet once owned by John Phillip Sousa and encourages him to "make the world more beautiful than when we came into it" through music and by "loving himself." Once again, the absurd image of the destructive boy is resolved through the promise of productive work.

Perhaps the most interesting case study that illustrates the effects of these text/image arrangements can be found in the April 15, 1961 edition. Vonnegut's story, "Runaways," features an illustration by Peter Sterrine, which depicts two teenagers holding hands in a police station as a state trooper and detective loom over them. Even if we were to ignore the subtle racist message of having the dark features of the young boy represent the "lower class" and the light skinned, redheaded lady as the "upper," this image nonetheless depicts two youths flouting authority. The upsetting visual of teenagers pinned against a wall by hulking authority figures is addressed and righted in the text. Vonnegut provides a story describing the daughter of the Governor of Indiana, Annie Southard, and her ex-reform school, lower class boyfriend who are caught by the police on their way to Chicago where they were going to elope. After safely being returned to their homes, they slip out and make another attempt to escape to Chicago while listening to rock

lyrics that chastise adults for not understanding “true love.” It is only when the parents of the two runaways call off the manhunt and broadcast their blessings for the couple over the radio that the two realize that they were more interested in rebelling than they were in each other and sheepishly return home, thus signaling the end of their romance and reconciliation of social order and class divide constructed by the *Post*. The two teenagers in the illustration, who are subjected to the gaze of an armed authority, come to realize, through the writing of Vonnegut, that their poor decisions are a result of their own immaturity—an appropriate lesson for the pages of the *Post*. In his article, “Why They Read Vonnegut,” Jerome Klinkowitz makes a similar argument. “In *Runaways* . . . [Vonnegut] pictured a teenage couple who at length find themselves “not too young to be in love,” but in fact “Just too young for everything else that goes with love.” The story gently mocks youthful rebellion, counseling that there are some responsibilities that kids, for a while, should simply not have to bear” (28).

Compare Sterrine’s illustration to Rockwell’s vision of a runaway illustrated on the cover of the September 20, 1958 edition of the *Post*. A young boy sits on a stool at his neighborhood soda shop with his “hobo pack” beneath him. The soda jerk and police officer stare at him with gracious smiles as he looks guiltily up at the latter. In Rockwell’s image, the runaway is clearly safe; his poor decision is made clear to him in a humorous way. Sterrine’s illustration of the runaways, by contrast, features no benevolent smiles, and serves only to upset the *Post*’s idyllic image of family.

Unruly children are not the only source of absurd imagery, as illustrators of Vonnegut’s stories further undermine the nuclear family through attacks on heteronormative values. Ironically, many of the accompanying stories don’t even address (even to resolve) these issues. In many ways, the illustrations cease to visually represent the stories at all, but instead present gratuitously upsetting imagery. Such is the case in the Summer 1972 edition of the *Post*, in which Bob Myers illustrates Vonnegut’s “Custom-Made Bride”. The illustration features a wife dressed in tightly fitting, zebra print, low-cut garments who finds herself the object of two different male gazes (the title suggests that she is manufactured, thus reinforcing her status as object). Her husband sits cross-legged, appreciating the pinup-esque pose struck by his wife, while the second man’s face appears, seemingly nestled in the crook of the woman’s neck, menacingly leering at another man’s wife. The image seems to depict a story of two men competing for the interest of a woman of questionable character. Yet, in the story, no such competition takes place. Vonnegut describes a wealthy designer who squanders his earnings on clothing and parties for his wife; through all the extravagance, however, he never communicates with her. When he is broke, and in need of a financial planner (the second gentleman in the picture), the husband realizes that he needs to spend less time spoiling his wife, and more time getting to know her. In an attempt to draw the interest of the reader, a story that reinforces the value of a “healthy” relationship is illustrated by a somewhat irrelevant depiction of a competing lover. This attempt to upset the idyllic family does not stop

at suggestions of infidelity, for, in other stories, the illustrations attempt to challenge heterosexuality itself.

IV. Pink Capes and Square Rods: Homosexuality as an Absurdity

In his article, "Norman Rockwell and the Fashioning of American Masculinity," Eric Segal writes, "In May 1916 the *Saturday Evening Post* featured for the first time an illustration by Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). This cover image, "Boy with Baby Carriage", inaugurated a forty-seven-year relationship that fused "The *Post*" and "Rockwell" together as catchwords for the culture of white, heterosexual, middle-class America" (633). Rockwell's first image for the *Post* was of two boys in baseball jerseys mocking another boy, who is clearly overdressed and pushing a baby carriage. According to Segal, this is not the only time Rockwell would present images mocking alternative images of sexuality, as the recurring figures of the "fop" and the "sissy" were degraded in order to reinforce heterosexual ideals.

In this environment, where "the culture of white, heterosexual, middle-class America" was set as the ideal, queer images, no matter how subtle, function as extremely effective absurdities. For instance, the August 18, 1956 edition of the *Post* features Vonnegut's "This Son of Mine...", a story about a son, Ben, who disappoints his father, Merle, by refusing to take over the family manufacturing plant in order to become an actor. However, the reader learns that Ben's resistance to taking over the factory was nothing more than a fear of the responsibilities of adulthood. His wish to become an actor was only a convenient excuse. Father and son reconcile, and the family tradition is maintained.

While this story addresses a troubled family, Larry Kritcher's illustration presents the non-sequitur of a troubled sexuality. The father is holding a square peg and square hole (rampant both with sexual metaphor and clichés of normality) while giving a troubled glance over his left shoulder at his son who holds an effeminately coy-looking expression. Between the two is a small dab of pink (an unusual color for a chair backing). The image of an older man holding a phallic representation of heterosexuality giving a troubled look at his son (who is separated from the father by pink cloth) interrupts the hetero-normative tone of the *Post*. A reader who is drawn by this absurdity is reconciled by Vonnegut's story of a youth's fear of responsibility, a common and therefore more comfortably masculine problem of "healthy heterosexual" teens.

It could be argued that the reading of this image is far too interpretive, and the small blotch of pink was overanalyzed. While this is a fair assertion, Hughes's illustration in the March 31, 1956 edition provides further evidence of absurdity through queer imagery. A boy sulks in a band room resplendent in his pink cape while a girl stares at him longingly in a shirt of the same color. All of this is printed beside a short story with the title/caption (written in purple letters) "The Boy Who Hated Girls." The story is about a trumpet player named Burt who sees his band leader as a father figure

and acts out when he is sent to another teacher for private lessons. The young woman in the picture is, in the story proper, merely the concerned girlfriend who, by the end of the story, becomes the concerned fiancé. In the image, however, Burt's sexuality is very much in question—a device used to disrupt the usual heterosexual message of the *Post*. Once this garners the reader's attention, Vonnegut's story, as it is done in each of the previous five examples, reestablishes the manufactured mainstream values found on every other page of the journal.

The introduction of these illustrations in order to evaluate the image and text as a single entity allows readings and interpretations that have not been addressed by critics. In much the same way that film critics moved away from *auteur* theory when they recognized that a director played one role of many in the production of a film, perhaps it is time to recognize that more than one author's imagination factored into the production of Vonnegut's stories, for the word/text combination that constitutes the finished piece is a product of multiple creators, produced for an audience in a specific historical context. I will be the first to admit that Mattock and Fulton's theory of absurdity does not apply to all of Vonnegut's short works (let alone the entire collection of writings produced in the 80-year history of the *Post*); yet, the theory does illuminate the illustration-text dynamic in particular Vonnegut stories and publications. While the usefulness of the theory of absurdity might be exhausted, the analysis of word/text documents and the theorization of illustrations requires further contemplation.

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[1] There is a third anthology, *Canary in a Cat House*, which was published before the other two. It suffered from an extremely short run and failed to sell many copies. Though it is a much sought after collector's item now, it contains no unique stories that cannot be found in the two anthologies I have mentioned.

[2] See Melissa Dabakis's "Gender Labor: Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter and the discourses of Wartime Womanhood."

[3] There was actually a twelfth story purchased by the post, "The Hyannis Port Story," but it was never published due to JFK's assassination. It was pulled because it referenced, in a favorable way, the former president. The editors felt that it would be in poor taste to publish the work.

[4] Coen writes, "The magazine shared progressivist scorn for men whose money was tainted with corruption and for crooked dealing in general" (186).

[5] Rockwell is a useful figure not only because he is synonymous with Post illustrations, but also because Vonnegut himself references him in the introduction of *Bagombo*: "Illustrators during the golden age of American magazine fiction used to get as much money as the authors whose stories they illustrated. They were often as famous as, or even more famous than, the authors. Norman Rockwell was their Michelangelo" (4).