



“To be, or not to be”: Shakespeare Against Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This essay hazards a new reading of the most famous passage in Western literature: “To be, or not to be” from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. With this line, Hamlet poses his personal struggle, a question of life and death, as a metaphysical problem, as a question of existence and nothingness. However, “To be, or not to be” is not what it seems to be. It seems to be a representation of tragic angst, yet a consideration of the context of the speech reveals that “To be, or not to be” is actually a satire of philosophy and Shakespeare’s representation of the theatricality of everyday life. In this essay, a close reading of the context and meaning of this passage leads into an attempt to formulate a Shakespearean image of philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Shakespeare; Hamlet; Renaissance; drama; soliloquy; philosophy; ontology; metaphysics; madness; acting

Crit. Cit.
Question/Problem

For a dramatic work, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* has made a remarkable splash in Western philosophy. As detailed in Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster’s *Stay, Illusion!: The Hamlet Doctrine* (2013) and Andrew Cutrofello’s *All for Nothing: Hamlet’s Negativity* (2014), the play has inspired reflection from major philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Derrida, and the play prompts philosophical introspection and conversation in us every time we read or see it. We are thus highly attuned to Hamlet’s place in philosophy, but what is the status of philosophy in Hamlet? That is the question of this essay.

The definition of philosophy here will be somewhat wiggly because the definition of philosophy in Shakespeare’s texts is vague and inconsistent. Sometimes it refers to metaphysical philosophy (about being-qua-being), sometimes to natural philosophy (what we now call science), sometimes to ethical philosophy (about virtuous action), and sometimes to any high-minded thought at all.¹ There are two instances of the word “philosophy” in *Hamlet* (1.5.169 and 2.2.368), both toying with the line between natural and metaphysical philosophy, but there are a great many more passages which sound vaguely philosophical, such as those containing the lines: “I know not ‘seems’” (1.2.76–86); “To thine own self be true” (1.3.58–81); “The dram of evil” (Appendix B); “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so” (2.2.251–52); “A king of infinite space” (2.2.256–57); “What a piece of work is a man” (2.2.305–10); “Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own” (3.2.202–04); “May one be pardoned and retain th’offence?” (3.3.36–72); “Use almost can change the stamp of nature” (Appendix G); “What is a man” (Appendix J.24–26); “We know what we are, but not what we may be” (4.5.42–43); “Alas, poor Yorick” (5.1.180–90); “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends” (5.2.8–11); “There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (5.2.165–68); and – of course – “To be, or not to be” (3.1.57–91), which is probably the most famous line in the most famous passage in the most famous play by the most famous artist in Western history.²

Crit. Cit.

This passage is so famous that the Shakespearean scholar Douglas Bruster recently wrote an entire book about just this one soliloquy, looking at its imagery, structure and meaning, but also at its “philosophical force” (31), its “philosophical insight” (31) and its “chilling philosophy” (102). Bruster concluded that the soliloquy is not about suicide, as many modern readers, such as John Dover Wilson, believe it to be (“a like expression of utter weariness is not to be found in the rest of human literature” [127]). On the contrary, Bruster argued (channelling Schlegel, Coleridge and Shelley³) the speech “mocks human achievement and ability” insofar as Hamlet is trying to be philosophical but Shakespeare was critiquing him for, in Bruster’s words, “thinking too much” (103). I do not want to wag my finger too harshly at Bruster because his book, published in the *Shakespeare Now* series, was written for a general audience, yet he did that audience a disservice when he presented Hamlet as a failed philosopher being mocked by Shakespeare. He did that audience an even greater disservice when, in an entire book about the “To be, or not to be” speech, he did not take seriously the dramatic context of the speech that, as Bruster knows, radically changes the meaning of its “chilling philosophy”.

Question / Problem 2

Consider when Hamlet cowers at the finality of death, of the afterlife, of “The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (3.1.81–82). This line is acutely problematic – as one of Shakespeare’s earliest editors, Lewis Theobald (8.165), first noted in 1733 – because Hamlet has recently seen his father’s ghost return from the grave. Has Hamlet “in a moment of deep despondency” forgotten about his father’s ghost and his final words, “Remember me” (1.5.91), after just two short months (this was Dover Wilson’s reading [74])? That is unlikely because Hamlet’s whole world has revolved around the ghost’s appearance for that entire time. Perhaps Hamlet is now convinced, as both he and Horatio have considered, that the spirit was not his father’s ghost after all but a “goblin” (1.4.21) or a “devil” (2.2.601). This solution is also unlikely, because the scene prior to “To be, or not to be” concludes with Hamlet stating that he does not know what the spirit was and that he is going to stage “The Mousetrap” to determine the truth of the spirit’s charge against his uncle (2.2.590–607). Maybe there is no contradiction here at all because King Hamlet’s spirit is returning from purgatory, which is only halfway to “the undiscovered country”, and travellers *can* come back from there (this was Theobald’s answer; his account of the theology involved was as water-tight as it was newly invented for this specific case). Maybe, technically speaking, King Hamlet didn’t return (only his *spirit* returned), so there is again no contradiction. Or maybe it wasn’t Hamlet but Shakespeare who forgot about King Hamlet’s ghost. Maybe, while in the throes of writing what would become the most famous passage in his most famous play, Shakespeare forgot about or, even more radically, just ignored the plot of *Hamlet* in order to write a poetic speech that could be plucked from the play and stand alone as a poignant philosophical statement on human suffering.

Or maybe Hamlet doesn’t mean what he says. This suggestion has the virtue of retaining the unity and coherence of *Hamlet*, even within the scene in question. For shortly after Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, he turns to Ophelia, who has been standing off to the side, and asks, “Are you honest?” (3.1.105), and then moments later, “Where’s your father?” (3.1.132). In this scene, Ophelia is indeed acting as her father’s agent: Polonius has sent her to see if Hamlet is really mad. As Hamlet’s questions to Ophelia indicate, he knows that she is working for Polonius and that he is being watched. “Are you honest?” No. “Where’s your father?” *Behind the curtain*. But *when* does Hamlet know that he is being watched? In most productions, Hamlet hears Claudius and Polonius shuffle or sneeze behind the curtain while he is speaking with Ophelia, then becomes suspicious, and then starts berating her. However, Shakespeare’s text does not require this reading. In fact, the quarto editions of *Hamlet* all place the stage direction “Enter Hamlet” before Claudius and Polonius hide, and there is no stage direction indicating that those two exit the scene. It was only in the later folio edition that there is an “Exeunt” for Claudius and Polonius followed by “Enter Hamlet”, the arrangement adopted by most modern editions. It is at least possible that Hamlet sees and is aware of Claudius,

Polonius and Ophelia. It is possible that Shakespeare intended for Hamlet to deliver his “To be, or not to be” speech knowing that he was being watched. If so, then “To be, or not to be” may not be the profoundly philosophical moment it has been taken to be by centuries of readers. It may be, instead, what someone says when he wants others to think he is crazy.

II

Crit. Ct. The idea that Hamlet knows he is being watched has been most forcefully illustrated by the Shakespearean scholar James Hirsh.⁴ He has argued on several occasions that “substantial, conspicuous, and varied pieces of evidence demonstrate that Shakespeare designed the ‘To be, or not to be’ speech to be perceived by experienced playgoers of his time as a feigned soliloquy” (“The ‘To be, or not to be’ Speech”, 34). Hirsh’s evidence – which is convincing – goes beyond a close reading of the scene and its context in *Hamlet* to include additional Shakespearean examples of feigned soliloquies (such as Edmund’s “O, these eclipses do portend these divisions” in *King Lear* [1.2.131–32]), overheard soliloquies (such as Juliet’s “O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?” in *Romeo and Juliet* [2.1.75]), and eavesdroppers being deceived and eavesdropped upon (such as Benedick in *Much Ado* and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*). Hirsh also points to two non-Shakespearean feigned soliloquies which allude specifically to “To be, or not to be”: La Fin’s in Chapman’s *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (3.1) and Orgilus’s in Ford’s *The Broken Heart* (1.3). And Hirsh narrates the historical shift from Renaissance drama, where soliloquies were understood as words spoken out loud by a character, to modern drama, which reconceived soliloquies as a character’s innermost thoughts only expressed in words for the benefit of the audience. At one point Hirsh exclaims, with exasperation, that seeing “To be, or not to be” as a glimpse into Hamlet’s mind because that is how it is usually played in modern performances is like believing that Ophelia was played by a woman in the Elizabethan theatre because that is how she is usually played today. And Hirsh dismantles, with palpable frustration, the argumentative gymnastics that editors (Harold Jenkins, Burton Raffel and Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor), critics (S.T. Coleridge, E.E. Stoll and Robert Speaight) and actors (Henry Irving) have proposed in an attempt to erase the problems presented by “To be, or not to be” and to salvage the sincerity and philosophical power of the soliloquy.

In the acknowledgments for his *To Be or Not To Be* book, Bruster wrote that he “benefitted” from Hirsh’s studies (105), but clearly Bruster was not convinced. Consider Bruster’s chapter titled “The Speech in Context”, which addresses the basis of Hirsh’s argument. “The presence of a perceived audience onstage would change our sense (as well as Hamlet’s) of the direction and function of his words”, Bruster wrote, before turning to wilful ignorance in a surprising way: “It may be permissible to think that the soliloquy has enough thought in and around it – prompts so much thinking and interpretation on its own – that we are allowed, with Hamlet, momentarily to forget that he may be overheard at his most intimate moment” (74–75). Impressionistic aesthetic judgement does not strike me as solid ground for selective forgetfulness.

Question / Problem 2 Our situation at present, therefore, is that Bruster’s philosophically oriented interpretation hastily dismisses the dramatic context of “To be, or not to be”, while Hirsh’s contextually oriented interpretation does not consider an important implication of that reading, specifically what it says about Shakespeare’s attitude toward the kind of philosophical introspection represented in the “To be, or not to be” speech. In an effort to mend this gap, this essay is a philosophically oriented reading of “To be, or not to be” which takes seriously the dramatic context of the speech. I ask why, if Hamlet knows he is being watched, Shakespeare would choose philosophy as the language Hamlet uses to feign madness. What was Shakespeare saying about philosophy?

III

Terms I address this question by attending to the differences between philosophy and drama. On the most basic level, philosophy is about *knowing* while drama is about *doing*: these words come from the

Greek σοφία, “wisdom”, and δρᾶν, “to do”. More specifically, the start of Hamlet’s soliloquy, “To be, or not to be”, invokes the form of philosophy called ontology, derived from the Greek ὄντο-, “being”. Ontology is, in Martin Heidegger’s definition, “that theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities” (*Being and Time* 32): the study of being-qua-being. Incidentally, the word *ontology* (or rather, *ontologia*) was coined by Shakespeare’s German contemporary Jacob Lorhard in 1606, just a few years after *Hamlet* was first staged. Lorhard used the term *ontology* interchangeably with the term *metaphysics*, and Shakespeare would have thought about the concerns of ontology in terms of Aristotelean metaphysics, the study of first and supreme causes and principles, supernatural and supersensible substance and structure, that which does not change, which remains true in all times in all places.⁵ Metaphysics was set off against both natural philosophy, with its theoretical attention to sublunary matters, and ethical philosophy, with its practical concern for virtuous action. With these distinctions in mind, we can note that what Critchley and Webster called Hamlet’s “ontological question” (11) is really an ethical question veiled in the language of ontology, as registered in Heidegger’s retort to Hamlet: “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 1). Thus, Hamlet’s soliloquy invokes both metaphysical philosophy (in its language of “being”) and ethical philosophy (in its concern with “action”).

Like ethics, drama is about action, but drama is also about acting. *Hamlet* draws much of its energy from the tension between the ethical action the protagonist wants to take and the theatrical acting he does instead. As James Calderwood emphasised in his reading of *Hamlet*, drama allows an actor “to be and not to be” a character; a play operates simultaneously as dramatic illusion and theatrical reality in ways quite foreign to the quest for the fundamental nature of reality in metaphysics. Thus, the basic dramatic phenomenon of acting has historically been a spur in the side of philosophy, going back to Plato, as Jonas Barish discussed in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*: “The key terms are those of order, stability, constancy, and integrity, as against a more existentialist emphasis that prizes growth, process, exploration, flexibility, variety and versatility of response. In one case we seem to have an ideal of stasis, in the other an ideal of movement” (117). Philosophy and drama are by no means antithetical, but the “ideal of stasis” in metaphysics and the “ideal of movement” in drama generate “fundamentally different types of endeavour” with different assumptions and motives, as Martin Puchner argued when unpacking “the anti-theatrical prejudice in philosophy and the anti-philosophical prejudice in theatre” (541).

Thesis
I want to suggest that Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy, and that he satirised metaphysics in Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” speech because he thought acting was more important than being. That is, Shakespeare valued human action and interaction, including the social roles we perform like actors playing characters on a stage, over abstract knowledge about existence generated through theoretical reasoning. Stated as such, this thesis is perhaps obvious but, if it can be shown to underwrite Shakespeare’s composition of Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” soliloquy, then the popularity of that passage seems to rest upon a fundamental misreading. While it seems to be a suffering man’s account of the battle between action and contemplation, and thus Shakespeare’s representation of tragic angst, a consideration of the dramatic context of the speech reveals that “To be, or not to be” is actually Shakespeare’s representation of the theatricality of everyday life. “To be, or not to be” is a clever deception the cleverness of which can be measured by how often it is taken as profound philosophy. If so, then a close reading of this passage might help us locate Shakespeare in the history of Western philosophy, as I attempt to do toward the end of this essay.

Shakes
 To be clear, I am not searching here for the philosophy “behind” Shakespeare’s plays.⁶ Nor am I looking at appropriations of Shakespeare in modern philosophy.⁷ Nor am I trying to use modern philosophy to read Shakespeare.⁸ These approaches are quite lively in Shakespeare studies at the moment, but I am instead interested in revisiting an older question asked by Sidney Lee in 1899 and by Rolf Soellner in 1962: *What was Shakespeare’s attitude toward philosophy?* At the same time, just as the Shakespeare described in this essay used philosophy to do drama, I am interested

“Savage and Deformed”: Stigma as Drama in *The Tempest*

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Text
Crit. Cit.
Question/Problem 2

The *dramatis personae* of *The Tempest* casts Caliban as “a savage and deformed slave.”¹ Since the mid-twentieth century, critics have scrutinized Caliban’s status as a “slave,” developing a riveting post-colonial reading of the play, but I want to address the pairing of “savage and deformed.”² If not Shakespeare’s own mixture of moral and corporeal abominations, “savage and deformed” is the first editorial comment on Caliban, the “and” here working as an “=”. Stigmatized as such, Caliban’s body never comes to us uninterpreted. It is always already laden with meaning. But what, if we try to strip away meaning from fact, does Caliban actually look like?

Question/Problem 1

The ambiguous and therefore amorphous nature of Caliban’s deformity has been a perennial problem in both dramaturgical and critical studies of *The Tempest* at least since George Steevens’s edition of the play (1793), acutely since Alden and Virginia Vaughan’s *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History* (1993), and enduringly in recent readings by Paul Franssen, Julia Lupton, and Mark Burnett.³ Of all the “deformed” images that actors, artists, and critics have assigned to Caliban, four stand out as the most popular: the devil, the monster, the humanoid, and the racial other. First, thanks to Prospero’s yarn of a “demi-devil” (5.1.272) or a “born devil” (4.1.188) that was “got by the devil himself” (1.2.319), early critics like John Dryden and Joseph Warton envisioned a demonic Caliban.⁴ In a second set of images, the reverberations of “monster” in *The Tempest* have led writers and artists to envision Caliban as one of three prodigies: an earth creature, a fish-like thing, or an animal-headed man. Prospero’s derisions, “earth” (1.2.313–14) and “mountain” (4.1.255), encouraged Romantic critics like Schlegel, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, as well as more recent writers like Franssen, to imagine the islander as some outgrowth of the ground.⁵ Elsewhere, Prospero calls Caliban “tortoise” (1.2.316) and “poisonous” (1.2.319), and Trinculo turns this reptilian aspect amphibian by repeatedly riffing on Caliban’s fishiness: “a man or a fish?” (2.2.24), “deboosh’d fish” (3.2.26), “half a fish and half a monster” (3.2.28–29). Critics such as John Draper, Barry Gaines, Michael Lofaro, and Michael Saenger have focused on these lines, giving their Calibans fins,

fangs, scales, tails, and webbed feet.⁶ Meanwhile, some of Trinculo's other offhanded remarks, as when he calls Caliban a "puppy-headed monster" (2.2.154–55) with "eyes . . . almost set in [his] head" (3.2.9), have led to more mammalian monsters. The third image of Caliban, that of the humanoid, seems to be based on his line about being turned into "apes / With foreheads villainous low" (4.1.248–49). Caliban can be the Cro-Magnon man nineteenth-century critics like Daniel Wilson called "the missing link" in their Darwinian gloss on the character, which was famously staged by Herbert Beerbohm Tree.⁷ Fourth and finally, Caliban's Patagonian god "Setebos" (1.2.373), Trinculo's reference to a "dead Indian" (2.2.33), Stephano's line about "savages and men of ind" (2.2.58), Prospero's description of a "thing of darkness" (5.1.275) that is "from Argier" (1.2.265), and Miranda's denigration of Caliban's "vile race" (1.2.358) have most recently resulted in a character that is finally human, yes, but still racially other. Inaugurating the post-colonial reading of *The Tempest*, the Caliban/Cannibal metathesis has resulted in an American Indian for critics like Sidney Lee, Leo Marx, and Leslie Fiedler, or the role has gone to an African actor like Dijimon Hounsou in Julie Taymore's film.⁸

Question/Problem If Caliban's deformity is usually seen as a sign of his "otherness," therefore, there is no consensus on the exact alterity embodied: is it a cultural, racial, biological, or existential otherness?⁹ However inflected, this reading actually reproduces what Shakespeare was satirizing in *The Tempest*. The costumes of demon, monster, humanoid, and racial other come from decontextualized attention on the epithets aimed at Caliban, the selective reader failing to see that these remarks characterize the interpretive errors of the Italians much more than they do the physical body of the islander. The images of Caliban based on these fanciful slanders therefore reveal a tendency some in Shakespeare's audience share with the Italian characters in the play: without careful attention to evidence, difference is exaggerated to make what is difficult to interpret into something radically strange, even unnatural and inhuman.

Terms
Thesis Thus, the significance of Caliban's body rests in the gap between what it is and what it is said to be. In other words, on top of *deformity*, a physical feature of Caliban's body, Shakespeare represented *stigma*, the social construction of the meaning of difference and deviance. As we would expect, Shakespeare's representation of stigma in *The Tempest* was deeply influenced by Montaigne's *Essays*, but Shakespeare did things with stigma that went beyond Montaigne: Shakespeare associated stigma with magic, and he associated magical thinking with trauma. Above all, Shakespeare associated stigma with drama, not only in the sense that he used the fraught social encounter of stigma to generate dramatic tension, but also in the sense that he dramatized the causes and effects of stigma. He staged meaning being made in a volatile exchange between stigmatizers and the stigmatized.

Shakespeare and criminology

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Abstract

This paper suggests that Shakespeare's plays offer an embryonic version of criminology, and that they remain a valuable resource for the field, both a theoretical and a pedagogical resource. On the one hand, for criminology scholars, Shakespeare can open up new avenues of theoretical consideration, for the criminal events depicted in his plays reflect complex philosophical debates about crime and justice, making interpretations of those events inherently theoretical; reading a passage from Shakespeare can be the first step in building a new theory of criminology. On the other hand, for criminology students, Shakespeare can initiate and sustain an intellectual transition that is fundamental to their professionalization, namely the transition from what I call a "simplistic" to a "skeptical" model of criminology. For this reason, I recommend that criminologists try what the Shakespearean scholar Julia Reinhard Lupton has called "thinking with Shakespeare." Thinking with Shakespeare is particularly valuable for criminologists because Shakespeare coded ancient philosophical ideas about crime and justice into the words and deeds of his characters: interpreting the drama takes us into the philosophy, and the philosophy provides us with the conceptual equipment for a better criminology.

Keywords

criminality, drama, dramaturgy, early-modern, humanities, interdisciplinary, literature, Renaissance, Shakespeare

Shortly after receiving my PhD in English, having written a dissertation on Shakespeare, I was hired to teach rhetoric and writing classes in—of all places—a Department of Criminal Justice. Writing had recently become a priority in the department, I was told, because employers in our area wanted their workers to be better writers. There were, I came to understand, two key reasons for this request. First, writing was probably not the sexy, sensational, highly televised aspect of the field that inspired students to pursue a career in criminal justice, but it would be a major part of their jobs, a skill set without which they would be simply unemployable, whether they saw themselves working out on the street, in an office, or on a campus. Second, given the always intricate nature of crime and justice, our cops, officers, agents, counselors, advocates, lawyers, and criminologists need to know how to interpret complex problems, and academic writing is, at its

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core, about the interpretation of issues so difficult that they elude the common sense of common men and women working with common knowledge.

During my first semester teaching criminal justice students, I heard them say some truly horrific things, things that, frankly, I did not want to hear from those we as a society were entrusting with the administration of justice: "You can usually tell if someone is a criminal by looking at him"; "Women are worse police officers than men because they aren't as strong"; "Revenge is perfect justice" (all of these are direct quotes). Where, I repeatedly found myself asking, did these brazen, inchoate, and—most importantly—factually incorrect statements come from? It occurred to me that my students and I had such drastically different views on crime and justice because—among other reasons¹—they were coming to our class armed with the popular assumptions, impulses, and ideas of twenty-first-century American culture, and I was coming from Shakespeare.

Shakespeare and criminology?

Having often seen strange transplants from far afield bring new and refreshing insights to a discipline, I decided to see what would happen if I took some time to consider the relationship between Shakespeare and criminology. This pairing may seem peculiar—what does a 400-year-old English playwright have to do with criminology as a contemporary academic discipline?—yet over the past century scholars, both Shakespeareans and criminologists, have created and sustained a multifaceted conversation on this very topic. In this conversation, there seem to be two dominant lines of thought. First, actors, directors, and critics—most famously Curt Toftelan, the subject of Hank Rogerson's documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2005), but also Laura Raidonis Bates (2003), Amy Scott-Douglass (2007), and Jonathan Shailor (2010)—have explored the value of Shakespeare as a tool for rehabilitating incarcerated criminals. Second, literary critics have made use of the insights and vocabulary of modern criminology in an attempt to understand the criminals in Shakespeare's plays, a discourse begun by August Goll (1909) and E. E. Stoll (1912) at the start of the twentieth century, and continued somewhat sporadically in the following decades, as in Charles Adler's (1936) case study of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. These critical foci—the one on prison theater, and the other on Shakespeare's characters—may be successful in their stated aims, but those aims seem to have obscured a more important line of thought, one that has yet to be explored except by Victoria Time. In *Shakespeare's Criminals: Criminology, Fiction, and Drama* (1999), Time argues, provocatively, that literary writers were doing criminology before there was such a thing as criminology, an academic discourse that only emerged in the nineteenth century. Foremost among these authors was William Shakespeare, the most consistent and deliberate artist of criminal behavior before the age of Arthur Conan Doyle. From this perspective, it is not just criminals who can benefit from studying Shakespeare, but also criminologists.

In this paper, I suggest that Shakespeare's plays offer an embryonic version of criminology; that Shakespeare was doing criminology in the early modern era before there was a name for that area of inquiry; that Shakespeare was a proto-criminologist whose contributions have not been registered in the history of the field; and that Shakespeare remains a valuable resource for the discipline of criminology, both a theoretical and a pedagogical resource. On the one hand, for criminology scholars, Shakespeare can open up new avenues of theoretical consideration, for the criminal events depicted in his plays reflect complex philosophical debates about crime and justice, making interpretations of those events inherently theoretical; reading a passage from Shakespeare

Question/
Problem 1

Crit. Cit

Question/
Problem 2

Thesis

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Is Hamlet a Sexist Text?

Overt Misogyny vs. Unconscious Bias

Crit. Cit
Text

As first argued by Juliet Dusinberre in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Shakespeare seems to have been attentive and opposed to the systematic mistreatment of women during his age yet, whenever I think about gender in Hamlet, something just feels wrong.¹ According to the Penguin edition, there are 3,834 lines in the play.² Only 325 of them are spoken by women, Ophelia (170 lines) and Gertrude (155 lines), the only two women in the play out of the more than 30 characters listed in the *dramatic personae*. Although roughly half of the human population is made up of women, they make up roughly 7 percent of the characters in *Hamlet* and speak roughly 8 percent of the lines in the play.

Question/ Problem,

This present absence of women has led modern writers like John Updike, Lisa Klein, and Alice Birch to reimagine the story of *Hamlet* from Gertrude's or Ophelia's perspective.³ It has led feminist critics to ask why the role of women is so diminished in the play. Is this evidence of sexism on Shakespeare's part?⁴ Of sexism in Shakespeare's society?⁵ And what do we do with the fact that the most celebrated play in the history of English literature systematically ignores half of humankind?⁶

Crit. Cit.

These were the questions Lisa Jardine posed at the start of her foundational feminist study *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (1983).⁷ Identifying "two main lines of approach to Shakespeare's drama within a feminist perspective" (1), Jardine mapped out, first, the view of a proto-feminist Shakespeare who "transcend[ed] the limits of his time and sex" (2); and second, the view of an "oppressively chauvinistic" early-

modern English society (3). Within this second approach, Jardine noted, “one may identify, as it were, an aggressive and a non-aggressive strand” (3). The aggressive strand “sees Shakespeare’s work as out-and-out sexist, and sets out to uncover his prejudices to the reader” (4), while the non-aggressive strand “takes it that Shakespeare did his best ... but that contemporary society’s limited understanding of women combined with his own male viewpoint have skewed the resulting picture” (3).

After rather fearlessly dissecting the discourse on Shakespeare and gender in these terms, Jardine flinched. She abandoned the question of Shakespeare’s attitude toward the feminine for a reason that is not, to me, very compelling. Seeking shelter behind one of the clichés of new criticism (famously formulated in Shakespeare studies when L.C. Knights asked “How many Children Hath Lady Macbeth?”⁸), Jardine wrote, “Whether the critic decides that Shakespeare’s plays contain inspired insights or warped fantasies of womanhood, the two schools seem to agree in their assumption that Shakespeare’s characters are susceptible of analysis as *people*” (6). It then becomes clear that Jardine’s resistance to seeing Shakespeare’s characters as people – something which I, like Michael Bristol, see as not only permissible and philosophically coherent but also the whole point⁹ – is bound up with a resistance to seeing Shakespeare as a person. Shifting from the truisms of new criticism to those of new historicism, she presented Shakespeare as a being without much agency who was formed by the powers that be, unthinkingly reflecting “the patriarchy’s unexpressed worry about the great social changes which characterize the period” (6). Here early-modern English society was just as conflicted about the feminine as Shakespeare, which may be true, but which does not satisfy our desire to know how he as a living, breathing, thinking artist represented women. To me, that remains the pressing and pertinent question even after we have acknowledged Shakespeare’s situatedness in society: How

Question/
Problem 2

did he represent women?

The position that Shakespeare was an unthinking conduit of Elizabethan misogyny is as unsatisfying as the position that *Hamlet* is a full-throated feminist manifesto. As Dusinberre would say, the “social conduit” reading takes away from Shakespeare an individual intellectual and artistic agency that is impossible to deny – he was clearly a thoughtful man and a deliberate playwright. As Jardine would point out, the “proto-feminist” reading, with its deliberately anachronistic language, takes away from Shakespeare the Elizabethan culture that clearly exerted a deep influence upon him – he was clearly a man of his time. Moreover, these efforts to identify Shakespeare as a friend or enemy to the modern feminist cause obscure the more complicated reality that he is probably both.

Yet such questions have not been pursued in recent feminist Shakespeare studies. In the twenty-first century, feminist Shakespeareans such as Ann Thompson, R.S. White, Cristiane Busato Smith, Sujata Iyengar, and Jess Carniel have turned – with good reason – to performance, adaptations, appropriations, and other modern receptions of *Hamlet*.¹⁰ That turn centers Ophelia, who is finally given space to shine as a character in modern refractions that speak back to Shakespeare, who is decentered in these readings. And feminist Shakespeare studies such as Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez’s *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies* (2016) and Valerie Traub’s *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment* (2016) have focused – with good reason – on overlapping identity categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, ability, age, and the intersectionalities among them.¹¹ That focus still emphasizes character over author, as in Tobin Seibers’s account of Ophelia’s gendered mental illness from the angle of Disability Studies, or Emily C. Bartels’s reading of gender and race in “Hamlet the Dane.”¹² Significantly, Traub’s account of Dusinberre, Jardine, and the first wave of feminist Shakespeare

studies ends without answers: “Fairly soon, however, such postures of defence and attack faded to the background.”¹³ Marianne Novy’s *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (2017) concurs: “It is now hard to find new scholarship debating whether Shakespeare was a feminist.”¹⁴ Did feminist Shakespeareans silently agree that Shakespeare was – or wasn’t – sexist, and move on? Have feminist Shakespeare scholars satisfactorily responded to the pressing question that students and fans of *Hamlet* persistently ask: is it a sexist play? Is this a question worthy of further debate—was Shakespeare, relative to his time and place, progressive on gender issues? Often our scholarship—far beyond feminist studies, far beyond Shakespeare studies—does a deep dive into history and theory (thank goodness: that’s what scholarship is designed to do) but then avoids the return to the big ethical and political questions that prompt our interest in literature in the first place.

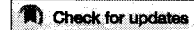
Identifications of someone or something as sexist can be uncomfortable. In literary studies, we are told to avoid an intentional fallacy that projects authorial intent backward from textual evidence. Yet in our daily lives we regularly identify sexism based on people’s words and actions. I shudder to image a world where we couldn’t identify sexism when we see it. Why treat Shakespeare any differently, especially in an era of #MeToo and #TimesUp where frank and open discussion of the pervasiveness of gendered inequality and violence has increased social power for women. That, as Dymphna C. Callaghan reminds us, is the goal: “That welfare remains the impetus of feminist critical analysis, and as such it behooves us to examine the gap between the apparent assimilation of feminism into the critical mainstream and the still secondary status of women in the world.”¹⁵

Attending to a comparable gap in Shakespeare’s text, this essay argues that *Hamlet* is not misogynistic in the sense that it promotes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In

fact, *Hamlet* critiques misogyny and patriarchy by configuring them with tragedy, yet the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women. In other words, *Hamlet* exhibits a structural sexism that is different from and more difficult to discern than the overt sexism of misogyny and patriarchy. *Hamlet* is therefore a powerful literary example of the way that, even when someone is trying to be ethically progressive on gender issues, unconscious bias can remain.

I.

Unconscious bias – the notion that we can harbor and practice prejudice and discrimination which we are unaware of, even if we purposefully and valiantly despise and resist bigotry – has emerged as a prominent concern in recent social scientific research, led by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald.¹⁶ This field of inquiry originates in the observation that much of human history involves claims that one tribe, one religion, one race, one nation, one gender, one sexual orientation, and so forth – in short, one identity – is better than another. Of course, *mine* is always better than *yours*: narcissism (love of the self) easily spills over into bigotry (hatred of the other). In highly developed nations such as the twenty-first-century United States, however, overt bigotry is declining because (in philosophical terms) we lack any sort of universal criteria by which we might evaluate the intrinsic worth of one identity over another, and (in more practical terms) prejudice and discrimination are now widely frowned upon if not railed against in public. Admittedly, the resurgence of openly racist, sexist, ableist, and classist rhetoric in the Trump era leaves us uncertain about future directions of this trend.¹⁷ In most quarters, however, explicitly bigoted groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Westborough Baptist Church are seen as fringe movements full of loonies. Thus, in the United States today,



'When evil deeds have their permissive pass': broken windows in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*

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ABSTRACT

This essay considers some questions of crime, criminal justice and criminology in William Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* (1604). In this early-modern English play, Shakespeare dramatized issues of criminology and criminal justice that Americans George Kelling and James Wilson theorized nearly four centuries later in their famous essay 'Broken Windows' (1982). While this observation allows us to consider the possibility that Shakespeare was doing something like criminology centuries before there was an organized academic discipline called 'criminology', a close reading of *Measure for Measure* also allows us to identify some of the faulty thinking in broken windows policing. Specifically, Shakespeare's play shows the abuses of power that can occur when individual law enforcement agents receive both a mandate to crack down on social disorder and the authority to decide for themselves what counts as disorder and how to fight it. Thus, while social scientific research and public opinion have recently called broken windows policing into question, this approach to crime control was already discredited by William Shakespeare more than 400 years ago.

KEYWORDS Shakespeare; crime; justice; criminal justice; policing; criminology; broken windows; social disorder; order maintenance; tragedy

Text

This essay has its origins in the observation that William Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* (1604) dramatizes theories of crime and justice that the American criminologists George Kelling and James Wilson recommended nearly four centuries later in their famous essay 'Broken Windows' (1982). Looking at these two texts next to each other, I wanted to know how Kelling and Wilson's theories might help us understand Shakespeare's play and, more importantly, how Shakespeare – a keen observer of individual and social behaviour – might help us understand the problems of crime and justice described by Kelling and Wilson. As I was asking these questions in 2014, the Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases erupted, each involving allegations of police racism and abuse of force, making 'broken windows' a topic of discussion on the nightly

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news. Could Shakespeare's centuries-old play help us understand this emergent social problem? Could a close reading of Shakespeare's play generate a testable social scientific proposition? Could a classic work of literature have policy implications for modern criminology and criminal justice? I ultimately answered *yes* to each of these questions, and the essay that follows puts *Measure for Measure* and 'Broken Windows' into conversation in an effort to describe the tragedy of a popular but imperfect public policy.

***Measure for Measure* and 'broken windows'**

In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, has let the laws of his city go unenforced for some 14 years, and the city has slid into a swamp of crime. As he explains:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave
That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch
Only to stick it in their children's sight
For terror, not to use, in time the rod
More mocked than feared becomes; so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
And liberty plucks justice by the nose,
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum. ...
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
For what I bid them do. For we bid this be done,
When evil deeds have their permissive pass
And not the punishment.¹

Not punishing crime promotes it, Shakespeare wrote, long before Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764) declared the modern theory of deterrence:

¹William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.19–39. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edn, ed S Greenblatt (WW Norton & Company, 2016) and will be noted parenthetically in the text. Written in or around the year 1604 Vincentio's speech recalls advice given from the new King of England, James I, to his son in *Basilikon Doron* (Robert Walde, 1599): 'For if otherwise ye kyth your clemencie at the first, the offences would soone come to suche heapes, and the contempt of you growe so great, that when ye would fall to punishe, the number of them to be punished would exceed the innocent; and ye would be troubled to resolute whome-at to begin: and against your nature would be compelled then to wracke manie, whome the chastisement of fewe in the beginning might haue preserued' (36–37). James attended a performance of *Measure for Measure* at court on 26 December 1604, and Shakespeare scholars have long thought the role of Vincentio was written with James in mind (see E Pope, 'The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*' (1949) 2 *Shakespeare Studies* 66–82; DL Stevenson, 'The Role of James I in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*' (1959) 26 *English Literary History* 188–208; JW Bennett, *Measure for Measure as Royal Entertainment* (Columbia University Press, 1966)), although this reading has also been mocked by R Levin as 'The King James Version of *Measure for Measure*' (1974) 3 *Clio* 129–63.

The purpose of punishment is not that of tormenting or afflicting any sentient creature, nor of undoing a crime already committed. ... The purpose, therefore, is nothing other than to prevent the offender from doing fresh harm to his fellows and to deter others from doing likewise. ... The swifter and closer to the crime a punishment is, the juster and more useful it will be. ... One of the most effective breaks on crime is not the harshness of its punishment, but the unerringness of punishment. This calls for vigilance in the magistrates.²

Beccaria is widely hailed as the father of modern criminology, but these parallel passages suggest that Shakespeare was doing something like criminology more than 150 years before Beccaria.³ In these passages, both Shakespeare and Beccaria emphasized the role of vigilance in justice, but where Beccaria noted that negligence can inhibit justice, Shakespeare went one step further to suggest that it actively promotes crime, 'For', as Vincentio says, 'we bid this be done, / When evil deeds have their permissive pass / And not the punishment.'

With lines like these, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* was a central text in the recent collection *Shakespeare and the Law* (2013), but it should be noted that Vincentio's Vienna does not have a problem of law.⁴ It has a problem of law enforcement. We need not only 'law and literature' readings of *Measure for Measure* – of which there are many⁵ – but also 'criminology and literature' readings because Shakespeare's Vienna is having a crisis of crime and criminal justice, not one of law and legislation. Specifically, the effect of criminal justice in Vienna has been the opposite of its intent: lenient law enforcement has contributed to an upsurge in crime. As noted by Victoria Time, the only scholar to bring *Measure for Measure* into conversation with modern criminology, this play is an early-modern example of the idea that city, culture,

²C Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments* [1764], trans R Davies and V Cox, ed R Bellamy (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 31, 48, 63.

³See JR Wilson, 'Shakespeare and Criminology' (2014) 10 *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 97–114.

⁴See *Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions*, ed B Cormack, M Nussbaum and R Strier (University of Chicago Press, 2013) esp essays by C Jordan, 'Interpreting Statute in *Measure for Measure*' (101–20), and D Bevington, 'Equity in *Measure for Measure*' (164–73).

⁵See, for example, MJ Wilson, 'A View of Justice in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*' (1993) 70 *Notre Dame Law Review* 695–726; J Levin, 'The Measure of Law and Equity: Tolerance in Shakespeare's Vienna' in BL Rockwood (ed), *Law and Literature Perspectives* (Peter Lang, 1996) 193–207; L Halper, 'Measure for Measure: Law, Prerogative, Subversion' (2001) 13 *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 221–64; P Penther, 'Measured Judgments: Histories, Pedagogies, and the Possibility of Equity' (2002) 14 *Law & Literature* 489–543; K Cunningham, 'Opening Doubts upon the Law: *Measure for Measure*' in R Dutton and JE Howard (eds) *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol 4 (Blackwell, 2003) 316–32; S Magedanz, 'Public Justice and Private Mercy in *Measure for Measure*' (2004) 44 *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 317–32; E Hanson, 'Measure for Measure and the Law of Nature' in K Cunningham and C Jordan (eds), *The Law in Shakespeare* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 249–65; A Majeske, 'Equity's Absence: The Extremity of Claudio's Prosecution and Barnardine's Pardon in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*' (2009) 21 *Law & Literature* 169–84; JV Orth, "'The golden metwand': The Measure of Justice in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*' (2010) 31 *Adelaide Law Review* 127–41; and P Raffield, 'The Congregation of the Mighty: The Juridical State and the Measure of Justice' in *Shakespeare's Imaginary Constitution: Late Elizabethan Politics and the Theatre of Law* (Hart Publishing, 2010) 182–217.

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community and situation – as much as mind and nature – can prompt and explain crime.⁶ It is clearly individuals who commit crimes, but individuals commit crimes in the context of social structures and situations that can encourage and facilitate criminal behaviour.

Since the mid-twentieth century, criminologists have explored this thesis in the name of an 'environmental criminology' or an 'ecological criminology' or the 'criminology of place'.⁷ Perhaps the most famous statement from this school of criminology is Kelling and Wilson's 'broken windows' theory, which was based on an experiment conducted by the social psychologist Philip Zimbardo. In 1969, Zimbardo observed that a car parked out on a street would remain undisturbed for a lengthy period but, if one window were broken and left unfixed, the unattended car would then invite vandals and robbers. In their groundbreaking article for *The Atlantic*, 'Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety' (1982), Kelling and Wilson built Zimbardo's observations on the psychology of vandalism into the idea that crime flourishes when disorderly behaviour goes unchecked:

Untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things and who probably consider themselves law-abiding. ... 'Untended' behavior also leads to the breakdown of community controls.⁸

Kelling and Wilson proceeded to argue that visible social disorder leads frightened citizens to withdraw from a community, loosening the mechanisms of informal social control, emboldening criminals and causing an increase in the frequency and severity of crime. From this perspective, there were too many 'broken windows' that went unrepaired in Shakespeare's Vienna, too much 'untended' behaviour, causing the community to spiral into chaos.

'Broken windows' is a theory of criminology – a theory of crime causation, what is sometimes called *criminogenesis*. It is a theory of criminology that seems perfectly accurate in its aetiology of crime, but Kelling and Wilson did not stop with criminology. They built the broken windows theory of criminology into a theory of policing, into an approach to crime control, an approach that also appears in *Measure for Measure*, but an approach with significant flaws and oversights that can be recognized and critiqued through a

⁶See V Time, 'Ecological Theory: Pompey, Froth' in *Shakespeare's Criminals: Criminology, Fiction, and Drama* (Greenwood Press, 1999) 75–79.

⁷See, for example, RE Park, EW Burgess and RD McKenzie, *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (University of Chicago Press, 1925); C Shaw and HD McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas* (University of Chicago Press, 1942); RV Clarke, "'Situational' Crime Prevention: Theory and Practice" (1980) 20 *British Journal of Criminology* 136–47; *Environmental Criminology*, ed PJ Brantingham and PL Brantingham (Waveland Press, 1990); and D Weisburd, E Groff and S-M Yang, *The Criminology of Place: Street Segments and Our Understanding of the Crime Problem* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, "Broken Windows: Police and Neighborhood Safety," *The Atlantic Monthly* 127 (1982), 31–32.

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thesis

close reading of Shakespeare's play. Specifically, Shakespeare's play shows the abuses of power that can occur when individual law enforcement agents receive both a mandate to crack down on social disorder and the authority to decide for themselves what counts as disorder and how to fight it. As such, a 'criminology and literature' reading of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* can both demonstrate and complicate our existing theories of criminology and criminal justice. On the one hand, we can see our theories in action in a memorable example; on the other, the play offers avenues to evaluate and improve those theories. For those who recognize the validity of broken windows as a criminological theory, yet remain uncomfortable with the liabilities of broken windows policing as an approach to crime control and prevention, I hope this essay provides room for reflection.

'Broken windows': from criminology to public policy

On the basis of their 'broken windows' theory of criminology, Kelling and Wilson argued that police departments should allocate resources for foot patrols and for officers to monitor and fix both the actual and the metaphorical 'broken windows' of a neighbourhood. By doing so, they argued, the police will do a markedly greater service for that community than that done by departments focused solely on investigating, arresting and punishing offenders who break the law. In their words, 'maintaining order' as opposed to 'fighting crime' ought to be the principal focus of law enforcement (33). But if the police are supposed to maintain order, how do they go about doing so? There are two answers to this question, the one that exists in Kelling and Wilson's theory, and the one that exists in reality when that theory is implemented as policy.

In their 'Broken Windows' essay, Kelling and Wilson argued that the best way to maintain order is to saturate a community with cops – get officers out of their patrol cars, put boots on the ground, and allow those officers to use their familiarity with a neighbourhood and their own best judgements to determine how to create partnerships in the community that reinforce the informal systems of crime control already in place. They reasoned that if broken windows cause nervous neighbours to shutter themselves inside, effectively opening up the streets for crime, then *Fixing Broken Windows* – which was the title of Kelling and Coles's 1996 book expounding this approach to crime control⁹ – will bring people and their informal mechanisms of social control back out. In this regard, 'broken windows policing' – as this theory of crime control has been dubbed – is highly performative: it is a

⁹See GL Kelling and CM Coles, *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in our Communities* (Simon and Schuster, 1996).

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Public Shakespeare:

The Bard in the 2016 American Presidential Elections

In a May 2, 2015 op-ed in the *New York Times*, Frank Bruni held up one of Hillary Clinton's chief campaign strategists, Joel Benenson, as an exemplar of the value of a good liberal arts education, specifically Shakespeare studies.¹ "I can personally attest to the value of Shakespeare in my current profession," said Benenson, who majored in Theatre at Queen's College. The knowledge and skills he gained studying *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he explained, were just as useful as those gained from statistics and political science. Bruni and Benenson's celebration of liberal arts education is a sub-type of what has recently become an identifiable genre: the Defense of the Humanities essay. Over the past 10 years – partly in response to increased funding for STEM fields, partly in response to bleeding student enrollments – scholars in the humanities and professors at liberal arts colleges have felt pressured to justify the very existence of this realm of academic work (I say "realm" because it is bigger than a "school," "field," or "discipline").² It is often public intellectuals who pen these defenses, but there emerged in the 2016 American presidential election season an identifiable and unprecedented "public Shakespeareanism" illustrating both the instrumental and the substantive value of academic Shakespeare studies in particular – that is, the value of both the skills acquired in the

Text

¹ Frank Bruni, "From 'Hamlet' to Hillary," *New York Times* (May 2, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/opinion/sunday/frank-bruni-from-hamlet-to-hillary.html>.

² See, for example, Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

study of Shakespeare and of the knowledge of what happens in Shakespeare's plays.

These public Shakespeareans were not simply exercising their rights as U.S. citizens to voice their political opinions (as a plumber might). Nor were they simply "crossing over" from their academic work to the public sphere (as a political scientist might). Instead, they were suggesting – and, I think, demonstrating – the political benefits of Shakespeare studies: it fosters skills of analytical and ethical reasoning while also equipping someone with a body of examples of politics gone wrong. In fact, Shakespeare scholars were uniquely positioned to comment upon the 2016 U.S. presidential election because the election exhibited the tone, characters, and structure of a Shakespearean tragedy: there was (1) a traditionally noble protagonist whose fatal mistake led to a surprising and disproportionately large catastrophe, and (2) an unceremonious, ignoble antagonist who provided comic relief but who also exploited (3) an economically stratified society filled with suffering, fear, anger, and resentment.

I. CITATIONAL OPPORTUNISM AND PUBLIC SHAKESPEAREANISM

Despite the apparent absurdity of citing a centuries-old English playwright who lived in an age of monarchy during discussions of a modern democratic election, Shakespeare has been roped into American presidential politics going back to at least the nineteenth century – sometimes in theatrical adaptations, sometimes in short argumentative essays, and sometimes in other media. For instance, allusions to Shakespeare appeared in 119 of the political cartoons that Thomas Nast published in *Harper's Weekly* between 1865 and 1884, many of them representing

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American presidential candidates.³ To mention just one, Nast drew Horatio Seymour, the 1868 Democratic nominee plagued by his handling of the New York Draft Riots in 1863, as a Lady Macbeth crying, with reference to the scandal, “Out, damned spot!”⁴ Indeed, *Macbeth* has been especially prominent in American politics. In the twentieth century, Barbara Garson’s play *MacBird!* (1967) used Shakespeare’s text to frame John F. Kennedy’s assassination and the transfer of power to Lyndon B. Johnson.⁵ In 1992, journalist Daniel Wattenberg dubbed the future first lady of the United States, Hillary Clinton, the “Lady Macbeth of Little Rock”: “The image of Mrs. Clinton that has crystallized in the public consciousness is, of course, that of Lady Macbeth: consuming ambition, inflexibility of purpose, domination of a pliable husband, and an unsettling lack of tender human feeling, along with the affluent feminist’s contempt for traditional female roles.”⁶ Also in 1992, Alan Woods’s *Macbush* wrote the presidency of George H.W. Bush onto Shakespeare’s play; in 2003, Michael Hettinger’s identically titled *Macbush* did the same for a hawkish President George W. Bush; in 2004, Harold Bloom followed suit with a parody in *Vanity Fair* titled “Macbush: The Tragicomical History of Dubya the Great, King of

³ See Harry Rusche, “Oh for a Muse of Fire: Thomas Nast and William Shakespeare,” in *Nast and Shakespeare* (2005), <http://staging.thomasnast.com/Activities/NastandShakespeare/NASdefault.asp>.

⁴ See Rusche, “Mockery of Politicians,” <http://staging.thomasnast.com/Activities/NastandShakespeare/HubPages/CommentaryPage.asp?Commentary=01RuscheEssay-06Mockery>.

⁵ See Barbara Garson, *MacBird!* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1966) and Tom Blackburn, “*Macbird!* and *Macbeth*: Topicality and Imitation in Barbara Garson’s Satirical Pastiche,” *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004): 137-44.

⁶ Daniel Wattenberg, “The Lady Macbeth of Little Rock,” *American Spectator* 25.8 (1992), 25. See Marjorie Garber, “*Macbeth*: The Necessity of Interpretation,” in *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2009): 86-107.

America and Subsequently Emperor of Oceania.”⁷ If those Shakespeareanizations of George W. Bush came from a Democratic angle, the Republican response was the suggestion that Bush was the American Henry V, as Mackubin Thomas Owens argued during the Iraq War: “As a youth [Prince Hal] is dissolute to say the least.... Upon his father’s death, he becomes a war leader of the first rank. President Bush’s youth was never as dissolute as Hal’s, but like the future Henry V, he became an effective war leader after 9/11.”⁸

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Looking at the Henry V / George W. analogy, the literary critics Scott Newstok and Harry Berger, Jr. coined the term “citational opportunism” to refer to tendentious political analogies to Shakespeare’s characters.⁹ They pointed out that the V / W analogy reflects quite poorly on George W. Bush if one actually does a close reading of Shakespeare’s character, starting with the “Redeeming time” soliloquy in *1 Henry IV* that inspired the analogy.¹⁰

Emphasizing that Hal is not (as usually assumed) “falsify[ing] men’s hopes” (1.2.186) with his

⁷ See Robert Anderson (wr.) and Alan Woods (dir.), *Macbush* (Columbus, OH: 1992); Michael Hettinger, *Macbush* (Oakland, CA: 2003); Harold Bloom, “Macbush: The Tragicomical History of Dubya the Great, King of America and Subsequently Emperor of Oceania,” *Vanity Fair* (April 2004): 286-89; and Todd Landon Barnes, “George W. Bush’s ‘Three Shakespeares’: *Macbeth*, *Macbush*, and the Theater of War,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26.3 (2008): 1-29.

⁸ See Mackubin Thomas Owens, “George W. Bush as Henry V,” *National Review* (Feb. 12, 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/209492/george-w-bush-henry-v>.

⁹ See Scott L. Newstok and Harry Berger, Jr, “Harrying after VV,” in *Shakespeare Yearbook* 18 [*Shakespeare After 9/11: How a Social Trauma Reshapes Interpretation*, ed. Matthew Biberman and Julia Reinhard Lupton] (2011): 141-52. This essay grew out of Newstok’s earlier essay, “Right Pitches Dubya as Henry V,” *AlterNet* (May 28, 2003), http://www.alternet.org/story/16025/right_pitches_dubya_as_henry_v. Newstok also organized a related roundtable discussion, “The Military Theatre: Drafting Shakespeare,” at the Shakespeare Association of America Annual Conference in Philadelphia (April 13, 2006), <http://cola.calpoly.edu/~smarx/Shakespeare/draftingshakespeare2006/index.htm>.

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, 1.2.172-92. All references to Shakespeare’s plays are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, third ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016).

current delinquency but instead will “falsify men’s hopes” with his promised reformation, Newstok and Berger saw Hal as a jerk: “Harry’s is a contentious, meanminded, and cynical speech even as it solicits moral self-justification.... Nothing in the remainder of the tetralogy changes this impression” (148). Specifically, Shakespeare’s Henry V wages war against France, not for the betterment of the English nation – which is what a good king would do – but because of his “dynastic guilt and bad conscience” (149). Thus, Newstok and Berger suggested that “this is an analogy ripe for Henrification of a negative rather than positive variety” (149): in this revised “Henrification” of George W. Bush, he waged war against Iraq, neither in a display of newfound heroism, nor for the betterment of America, but because of his “dynastic guilt and bad conscience” (Bush’s father, George H.W. Bush, deployed U.S. forces in the middle east during the Gulf War in 1991 but left the brutal dictator, Sadaam Hussein, in power). Newstok and Berger preferred “close reading,” which they said is “an antidote to citational opportunism” (145).

Not all allusions to Shakespeare in the popular press are instances of citational opportunism. Consider the Oct. 3, 2004 op-ed in the *New York Times*, “Friends, Americans, Countrymen...,” by Stephen Greenblatt, a scholar no one could accuse of not knowing his Shakespeare, or of being bad at close reading.¹¹ In his piece for the *Times*, however, Greenblatt chose to write about Shakespeare in a public newspaper, in an accessible way unencumbered by the conventions of academic writing, and explicitly in light of modern presidential politics. For Greenblatt, the recent presidential debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry (each candidate calibrating his response to the unpopular Iraq War) exhibited a surprising affinity to

¹¹ See Stephen Greenblatt, “Friends, Americans, Countrymen...,” *New York Times* (Oct. 3, 2004), <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/03/opinion/friends-americans-countrymen.html>.

the orations of Brutus and Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (each character adopting a different posture toward the death of Caesar). After qualifying the analogy ("Shakespeare lived in a monarchy, not a republic"), Greenblatt proceeded with a reading – close but also quick and clear – of Shakespeare's play, quoting evidence and analyzing it, as literary critics do. Greenblatt cited Brutus's love-hate relationship with Caesar – "As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him" (3.2.23-25) – to support his claim that "the honorable, principled Brutus ... lays out a complex and seemingly contradictory argument." In contrast, Antony "addresses not the listeners' heads but their gut feelings": Greenblatt quoted Antony saying his "heart is in the coffin there with Caesar" (3.2.104) and Antony's description of himself as "a plain blunt man" (3.2.216). Then, in a move that has come to characterize public Shakespeareanism, Greenblatt shifted from analyzing Shakespeare to analyzing modern politics by looking at it through the lens of the Shakespearean text. From Greenblatt's perspective, Bush was Antony and Kerry was Brutus in the recent presidential debate:

One man, the incumbent, insisted again and again on the need at all costs to avoid mixed messages. Everything for him was reduced to an apparently simple war-making strategy and a single enemy. The other man, the challenger, had a more complex account of the task. He expressed commitment to winning the war, but doubted its wisdom; he honored the sacrifice of our troops, but lamented our relative isolation from the rest of the world.

This is not citational opportunism. On the one hand, clearly Greenblatt can closely read Shakespearean texts as well as non-Shakespearean "texts" such as the 2004 presidential debate: this ability to analyze information closely and carefully is the instrumental value of literary studies touted by defenders of the humanities. On the other hand, Greenblatt also recognized and

made sense of a modern political situation based on its similarity to a scene he had studied over-and-over in one of Shakespeare's plays: this is the substantive value of Shakespeare studies and what separates a public Shakespearean like Greenblatt from the citational opportunist.

The practice of Shakespearean citational opportunism was actually satirized on national television four years later when Greenblatt appeared on *The Colbert Report* in October 2008.¹² On *The Colbert Report*, host Stephen Colbert mockingly adopted the persona of a blow-hard conservative political commentator modeled on Fox News's Bill O'Reilly. Back-stage before the show, Colbert would inform his guests that he would remain "in character" on the show and that his character would be "willfully ignorant of what we're going to talk about, so disabuse me of my ignorance."¹³ For example, in the segment leading up to his interview with Greenblatt, Colbert insisted, "Did you know that *Beverly Hills Chihuahua* is loosely based on *Troilus and Cressida*?" Colbert's acted idiocy often took the form of outrageously over-the-top conservative ideology, but on Greenblatt's episode it surfaced in the shape of Shakespearean citational opportunism. Referring to the 2008 presidential candidates, Colbert blustered that "Obama and McCain's stories are right out of Shakespeare." As if it were solid evidence for a strong analogy, Colbert emphasized the similar sounds of their names to insist that "*McCain* sounds a lot like *Macbeth*: a passionate man prized for his military heroism." Colbert then described Obama as an "egghead elitist who can't make up his mind. Clearly, Obama is Hamlet."¹⁴ When Greenblatt

¹² See "Stephen Greenblatt - Shakespearean Candidates," *The Colbert Report* (October 2, 2008), <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/nkfn9g/the-colbert-report-shakespearean-candidates---stephen-greenblatt>.

¹³ See "The Colbert Report: A Rare Behind-the-Scenes Look," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfiL2hpnmZ0>.

¹⁴ The Hamlet-Obama analogy was taken slightly more seriously by Ben Brantly, "Which Shakespeare Character is Obama?" *Big Think* (April 19, 2011),