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Expos 20: Why Shakespeare?

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“Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark”  
(But Not What You Think)

In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, when Marcellus famously proclaims “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.4.90), there would seem to be an obvious answer as to what that rotten thing is: King Claudius has murdered his predecessor and brother, King Hamlet. Upon closer examination, however, this interpretation is problematic. For one thing, at this point in the play the Ghost has only just appeared, and neither the audience nor Marcellus has any reason to think the king was murdered. For another, Marcellus’ line responds to a question by Horatio about what Prince Hamlet is going to do next. A reader new to *Hamlet* might, if asked Marcellus’ meaning, say Denmark’s problem is that Norwegian invaders are looming on the horizon while the heir to the throne is wandering the castle deranged and quite possibly violent.

Under the first interpretation, Claudius has polluted Denmark, and Shakespeare is arguing the uncontested point that killing one’s brother for power is wrong. In this paper, however, I argue that the primary source of pollution in Denmark is not Claudius’ crime but Prince Hamlet himself. Death and decay seeps out from Hamlet’s mind, in both his actions and his speech, until the court itself comes tumbling down. Hamlet is what is rotten in the state of Denmark. Were this a “morality play,” in which the good are rewarded and the bad punished, it would be a rather unnecessary denunciation of fratricide. Instead, however, *Hamlet* is a tragedy, a generic classification we understand better by contrast with the morality play.

Hamlet destroys an otherwise flourishing Denmark. Consider what Shakespeare has

shown us of him at the point when Marcellus delivers his famous line. This is a man who has previously considered suicide (1.2.129-34), and who announces again here that he doesn’t value his own life (1.4.65), even though his claim to the throne seems secure. Hamlet demonstrates a worrying fixation on the Ghost, repeating his desire to follow it four times and taking a frantic tone in conversation with his friends. He refuses the advice of his friends not to follow it and instead threatens to kill them when they try to stop him (1.4.84-85), after which Horatio and Marcellus agree that Hamlet seems mad and is not currently fit to command:

HORATIO: He waxes desperate with imagination.  
MARCELLUS: Let’s follow; ’tis not fit thus to obey him.  
HORATIO: Have after. To what issue will this come?  
MARCELLUS: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. (1.4.87-90)

Which is more plausible, that Marcellus prophetically sensed the spiritual pollution caused by King Hamlet’s murder and therefore replied to Horatio with a complete *non sequitur*, or that Marcellus answered Horatio’s question with the reasonable point that Prince Hamlet may be a danger to the state?

Furthermore, Marcellus is *correct* to see Hamlet as a danger to the state. After the Ghost’s appearance, Horatio compares Denmark’s current state to that of Rome before the murder of Caesar (1.4.87-89). His parallel has nothing to do with hidden past crimes, but with a death to come. Just as Brutus killed Caesar (and Shakespeare had just written *Julius Caesar*, so he certainly knew what he was implying here), so Hamlet will kill Claudius.

Imagine the events of *Hamlet* without Hamlet’s perspective. Claudius rules capably, diplomatically preventing the invasion of Denmark. Suddenly, inexplicably, Prince Hamlet goes mad. Concerned, Claudius and Gertrude try to find out the source of his madness in order to help him, but discover only that Hamlet is dangerous as well. Claudius plans to exile Hamlet for his own good (3.1.185-89). Before that, however, Polonius volunteers to try one last time to help

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Expos 20

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*Hamlet and the New Misogyny*

Shakespeare's Hamlet has a perplexing relationship with women. Sometimes he is sappily enamored with his feminine counterparts; at others, he berates them in a wild and cruel rage, exclaiming in one of the most famous lines of the play, "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.121), to a hurt and confused Ophelia. He sighs, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (1.2.146) at one moment, yet he laments the loss of Ophelia, stating that he would "be buried quick with her" (5.1.269) at another. These complicated conversations peak immediately after Hamlet's murder of Polonius, where, in what is by far the longest tirade against a woman in the play, Hamlet chides Gertrude's supposed loss of virtue while commanding her to rid herself of any vice (3.4.41-94).

The unavoidable conclusion: Hamlet is misogynistic, a term the Oxford English Dictionary defines as a "dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women." To a certain extent, this is true, for Hamlet does display deep-seated chauvinistic intolerances. Yet a close analysis reveals that the accepted definition of misogyny does not extend to all of Hamlet's actions and beliefs. Shakespeare's inclusion of Hamlet's irrational and self-contradicting tendencies when speaking to women challenges the typical definition of misogyny, construing it instead into one that seeks simultaneously to defend and, through this defense, to impugn women's behavior. Misogyny in this work therefore implies not an inherent hatred of women but, instead, a desire to control conduct that fosters what society typically considers to be

misogyny. If we accept this premise, we see Hamlet in a different light, now as a prince frustrated by the "corrupt" tendencies of the female gender, who uses misogynistic tactics to push his concept of morality and virtue on those present.

Religion plays a fundamental role in *Hamlet*, and nearly every character in the play succumbs to its tenants. Even from the outset, King Claudius uses the words of religious authority to console Hamlet, stating: "It [Hamlet's grief] shows a will most incorrect to heaven...Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven, / A fault against the dead, a fault to nature" (1.2.95-102). Hamlet employs this same terminology to great effect in his tirade against Gertrude. He decries Gertrude's marriage to Claudius: "Heaven's face does glow, / O'er this solidity and compound mass, / With heated visage, as against the doom, / Is thought-sick at the act" (3.4.45-50). Hamlet uses this religious fervor to compare Gertrude's former marriage to Old Hamlet, recalling the Greek pantheon as he calls his father Hyperion, Jove, Mars, and Mercury (3.4.56-58). Through this comparison, Hamlet not only echoes the religious undertones present throughout play, but also presents himself as someone who actively and aggressively throws his beliefs on others. If there are those who do not agree with said belief, Hamlet ominously calls upon Judgment Day to warn of their inherent sin (3.4.70). Religion at its core is a series of moral precepts to be followed, and from this conception of morality, one can create a definition of virtue. Hamlet adheres well to this concept of religious morality. When debating whether or not to kill Claudius, Hamlet resolves, "[Am I] to take him in the purging of his soul, / When he is fit and season'd for his passage?" (3.4.88-90), deciding that it would be better to kill Claudius when he is less virtuous.

Hamlet's definition of virtue relies primarily on the assumption of no sin both before and after marriage. By creating this definition of virtue, it makes sense therefore to see why Hamlet

## I Am Become President: The Rhetorical Choreography of Johnson's Nuclear Propaganda

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Compared to the garish pageantry that normally characterizes presidential campaign advertisements, the minimalist approach of President Lyndon Johnson's "Girl with Ice Cream Cone" commercial stands out. The attack ad, which aired in 1964, deploys an apocalyptic brand of reductionism to mobilize the public against electoral challenger Barry Goldwater. For sixty seconds, the viewer observes a single sequence of a young girl blithely consuming an ice cream cone while a disembodied female speaker delivers a single narrative about the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The dire consequences of nuclear testing serve as a single justification for a Johnson ballot. The simplicity of the advertisement leaves little room for misinterpretation by the audience. Unless the viewer is oblivious to the existential stakes of nuclear catastrophe, he or she has no choice, by the logic of the commercial, but to elect Johnson. Within this conceptual framework, each presidential candidate, Johnson or Goldwater, is respectively exalted as the sole solution to, or sole catalyst of, nuclear Armageddon. Underpinning this advertisement, then, is the notion that democracy is a participatory system that enables citizens in ideological agreement to coalesce strategically. The ensuing micro-political coalition, who champions a cause such as nuclear test bans, then strives to elect a representative, a savior figure, to enact macro-political action.

Clearly, the apocalyptic content of the commercial is ripe ground in itself for criticism and deconstruction. By hyperbolizing the threat of nuclear extinction, the commercial creates a state of existential dread and agitation that compels citizens to supplant their own political will with a supposed collective will, the immediate objective of which is to elect Johnson. This façade of an egalitarian "we," unified behind a presidential candidate, confers the appearance of a democracy upon a system governed by, and arguably for, the elite. However, although one could extrapolate a problematic model of democratic governance from these observations, it would be remiss to foreground the commercial's content at the expense of the structure and presentation of its content. What distinguishes "Girl with Ice Cream Cone" from its counterparts is not its condemnation of Goldwater's nuclear platform per se, but rather its method of condemnation. In particular, the commercial's use of an unorthodox hierarchy of narrator, child, and audience serves to insulate its truth claims from scrutiny. Neither narrator nor girl acknowledges the audience during their pseudo-conversational exchange. The word "vote" is not uttered until the final seconds of the commercial. Instead, the nuclear rhetoric of the advertisement is repackaged as dialogue, stripped of electoral context, and depoliticized through visual and auditory diversion. Through this method of veiled information delivery, the commercial's structure renders the viewer a passive consumer and thereby espouses a coercive vision of democracy that does not encourage, but rather stifles, meaningful political participation.

The image of the girl impassively licking an ice cream cone, which occupies the screen for fifty-three seconds of the one-minute commercial, provides immediate evidence of the commercial's reductive dynamics. She, the embodiment of naiveté and vulnerability, does not once speak, much less react to the alarmist narrative of the speaker. As she laps up the top of her cone, flecks of ice cream accumulate steadily around the corners of her mouth. Her line of sight never falls upon the audience but rather alternates between the ice cream and someplace off-screen, implying that she is unaware of the camera filming her. This endearing performance of childish vacuity, despite its apolitical veneer, indirectly prescribes a set of political actions for the audience. The viewer is implicitly informed that, if he or she is to safeguard this idealized representation of youth and innocence from an apocalyptic fate, he or she must form a strategic coalition against nuclear testing. Thus, as the sole "plot" of the commercial, the child is deployed to urge the audience to coalesce in support of Johnson. In this case, political coercion does not rely on macabre scenes of destruction and mushroom clouds, but rather the calculated pairing of doomsday rhetoric with the symbolism of future generations.

Moreover, the narrator introduces another enemy besides nuclear detonation through the script and her intonation. Her voice remains high-pitched and sing-song until she delivers the words "Goldwater" and "die." When enunciating these two words, her pitch falls considerably and develops an ominous timbre. Through this process of vocally coupling Goldwater with the concepts of death and nuclear destruction, the coalition that Johnson has just forged becomes oriented against Goldwater. The commercial's narrative progression, which takes the form of a pessimistic bell curve, amplifies the audience's negative impression of Goldwater. The narrator cautions,

Do you know what people used to do? They used to explode atomic bombs in the air... Do you know what people finally did? They got together and signed a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and then the radioactive poison started to go away. But now, there's a man who wants to be President of the United States, and he doesn't like this treaty... He even voted against it. He wants to go on testing more bombs. His name is Barry Goldwater, and if he's elected, they might start testing all over again. (Johnson)

By first presenting the troubling history of atomic testing, then alluding to a diplomatic solution, and finally returning to a grim counterfactual of a regression back to testing, the commercial reminds the audience of their obligation to coalesce in opposition to Goldwater. Thus, the coercive form of democracy proposed by the commercial incorporates a contradictory element of populism that urges collective action against ill-willed elites. It suggests that, although government exists in service of the public good, the act of voting should not be discounted as an instrumental method of ensuring this fundamental duty of democratic institutions. In short, though the government must and will protect its constituency, its constituency must also mobilize within governmental structures in order to protect itself.

Further analysis of the advertisement's rhetorical tactics exposes the role of gender as a mobilization strategy. The femininity of the narrator's voice frames the conversation within a maternal context that finds its basis in hackneyed female archetypes. The dialogue is couched in the sort of simpering oversimplification that one might expect of

## Understanding Animals to Understand Ourselves

**A**T BEST, WE TEND TO VIEW THE FIELD OF ANIMAL PSYCHOLOGY AS a combination of hypotheses that can never be adequately tested; at worst, we end up viewing the field as a pseudo-science. Animal psychology, or the study of behavior in non-human animals, sits at the juncture of scientific experimentation, psychological inference and, perhaps most troubling, pure imagination. Because we cannot ask other animals what their experience is like, we must instead use our own imaginative skills to look at the animal mind to gain a better understanding of it. The use of this kind of imagination in a scientific field understandably invokes skepticism. However, it is this aspect of animal psychology that potentially allows us to see through the eyes of other animals, making the imagination the most important tool in the field. If we can imagine seeing through the eyes of other animals, we can begin to see more of ourselves. That is, the field of animal psychology has the potential to

uncover more about our own mind by giving us a glimpse of our brain's evolutionary past and cognitive individuality. At stake within the field of animal psychology, then, is the definition of intelligence and the identification of emotions in ways that we can appreciate without mistakenly projecting human versions of intelligence and emotions on animals. As we search to define another animal's level of intelligence, we run the risk of imposing our own understanding of intelligence on them.

Taking up this challenge, Alexandra Horowitz's book *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* seeks to help us better understand the field. As she takes us into the mind of our canine companions, she tries to keep human bias out of her tests and conclusions. In itself, it is a laudable goal, but as we discover it is also nearly impossible to achieve. For instance, she writes "the first things to forget are anthropomorphisms" (14); and yet, as we will see, she uses anthropomorphisms to draw her conclusions. We might turn such inconsistencies against her, arguing that animal psychology is laden with an impossible mission. Yet, as I argue in this paper, these problems ultimately help us gain a better understanding of the challenges of animal psychology itself. In other words, there is something greater to these inconsistencies: by reading *Inside of a Dog*, we come to understand what is at the heart of the problem. In short, the problem Horowitz encounters – and indeed, the problem nearly any animal psychologist encounters – is based squarely on the tests and testing standards we use when we test for animal intelligence. A careful reading of *Inside of a Dog* shows us that we do not yet know where to draw the line between testing for animal intelligence and putting animals on a human standard of

## The Futility of Touch

Caillebotte's *Man at his Bath*

THE SUBJECT OF GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE'S *MAN AT HIS BATH*,<sup>1</sup> a nude man at his toilette, presents us with an intriguing proposition: we are invited to look at a man at a moment of physical intimacy, yet his back is turned to us in a way that keeps us distant from him. It might be easy, in other words, to assume we are catching a full glimpse of a man in a vulnerable and even eroticized moment: he is nude and we are interrupting his privacy. Indeed, Caillebotte's painterly emphasis on the man's body tempts us to see *Man at his Bath* as voyeuristically erotic, and perhaps indicative of an unsettling power imbalance between a painter and his subject. Admittedly, the painting is, to varying degrees, all of these things. But it would be simplistic to assume that Caillebotte merely intends to furnish his own or his audience's pleasure. Caillebotte's 1884 impressionistic painting instead delineates the limits of physical intimacy: the subject's very sexualization surprisingly alienates us from seeing him and

thus from having a real sense of knowing him. That is, the painting is erotic to demonstrate the limits of eroticism; it is voyeuristic to emphasize what cannot be spied upon; it is imbalanced to indicate that we cannot wrest intimacy even from a man caught in the nude in a private space. The initial interpretation of the painting points us toward a more considered reading: that erotic knowledge itself is not sufficient; that the artist cannot know the bather by apprehending his body; that eventually art becomes a barrier to full knowledge of the subject. The erotic and aesthetic distancing implicit in *Man at His Bath*, in other words, helps us question painting as a medium for intimacy. By portraying the bather as sensual but inaccessible, Caillebotte has composed a sexualized painting that inherently limits intimacy.

To say that our knowledge of Caillebotte's subject is inherently limited is not to argue that our initial glance at the painting is necessarily wrong. *Man at his Bath* is fundamentally about access: the kind of access Caillebotte and we as viewers have to the bather certainly seems intimate. The painting's premise forces us into a stranger's personal moment even as it suggests that the artist and the subject are not themselves strangers to one another. Caillebotte constructs this assumed familiarity through the painting's title and setting. The room is, noticeably, a bathroom, a private location that suggests a site of confidence, a place that is consummately interior. This setting suggests that the painting's subject is consummately interior as well, and that seeing such a scene invites us to see the man as he really is. He is nude, caught at what could be argued is a frozen eternity: the daily rite of the bath situates the scene

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Is Hamlet a Sexist Text?

Overt Misogyny vs. Unconscious Bias

According to the Penguin edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there are 3,834 lines in the play. 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. In other words, 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. Why is the role of women so diminished in *Hamlet*? Is this evidence of sexism on Shakespeare's part? Of sexism in Shakespeare's society? And what do we do with the fact that the most celebrated play in the history of English literature systematically ignores half of humankind?

As illustrated in this essay, *Hamlet* is not misogynistic in the sense that it promotes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In fact, *Hamlet* powerfully 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, unconscious bias can remain.

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. This field of

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“It started like a guilty thing”:

The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics

King Hamlet is a tyrant and King Claudius a traitor but, because Shakespeare asked us to experience the events in *Hamlet* from the perspective of the young Prince Hamlet, we are much more inclined to detect and detest King Claudius’s political failings than King Hamlet’s. If so, then Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, so often seen as the birth of modern psychology, might also tell us a little bit about the beginnings of modern politics as well.

Let’s start over. Let’s read *Hamlet* as if we’ve never read it before. It begins with a king who has died. A figure looking like the dead king has appeared to some soldiers sent to guard the castle of Elsinore – they don’t know why, nor do we in the audience. This figure was armored up, suggesting something of a warrior king, and this intimation of a warrior king is immediately confirmed by a man named Horatio, the only one around who has any idea what’s going on:

Such was the very armour he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated;  
So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,  
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.  
‘Tis strange. (1.1.60-64)

There really is something “strange” about Horatio’s story. A technical term of combat, “parle” means peaceful negotiations between the opposing sides of a conflict. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this line from *Hamlet* for its definition: “A debate or conference; discussion; negotiation; *spec.* a meeting between enemies or opposing parties to discuss the terms of an

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Tragic Excess in *Hamlet*

“Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar,” the aging Polonius counsels his son Laertes in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1.3.60). Polonius proceeds with several additional “precepts” (1.3.57) which similarly promote the Aristotelian ideal of the golden mean, a cultural commonplace of the early-modern age which valorized the perfect middle ground between two extremes:

Beware

Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,

Bear’t that the opposed may beware of thee....

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,

But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy. (1.3.64-70)

Polonius goes on (and on), but the principle is clear. *Don’t be too hot, but don’t be too cold. Don’t be too hard, but don’t be too soft. Don’t be too fast, but don’t be too slow.* In each of these formulations, there is no substantive ethical good other than moderation. Virtue is thus fundamentally relational, determined by the extent to which one is able to find the balance between two extremes which, as extremes, are definitionally unethical.

More generally in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare paralleled the situations of Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras (the father of each is killed, and each then seeks revenge) to promote the virtue of moderation: Hamlet moves too slowly, Laertes too swiftly – and they both die at the end of the play – but Fortinbras represents a golden mean which marries the slowness of Hamlet with the swiftness of Laertes. As argued in this essay, Shakespeare endorsed the virtue of balance by allowing Fortinbras to be one of the very few survivors of the play. In other words, excess is tragic in *Hamlet*.

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Ophelia's Songs:

Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in *Hamlet*

Did Ophelia go to the water, or did the water come to her? That is the question asked in a scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* usually played for laughs – the clownish, malapropistic gravediggers debating what is and is not suicide: "Here lies the water – good. Here stands the man – good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life" (5.1.15-20). What's at stake for the gravediggers is the legitimacy of Ophelia's funeral. Since Christian doctrine prohibited suicide, someone killing herself was not allowed a Christian burial. What's at stake for us in the audience is the understanding of a concept that is central to the play *Hamlet*: moral agency. To what extent are we as individuals responsible for the things we do, and to what extent does circumstance determine our actions? Did Hamlet go to death, or did death come to Hamlet? Did Denmark go to its downfall, or did downfall come to Denmark? Are catastrophes in tragedies the result of the conscious choices of characters, or do catastrophes come about "will he, nill he" with a turn of Fortune's wheel?

I think Shakespeare answered the question of Ophelia's moral agency in an unexpected way: through the imagery of music in *Hamlet*, including the songs she sings just before her death. The centrality of music in Ophelia's story might even explain why Shakespeare named her Ophelia, invoking Orpheus, the legendary Greek musician.

Usually, Ophelia's songs are seen either as the symbol of her madness, or as the symbol

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### Trump as Satan

In 2016, Washington Republicans made a deal with the devil. Like Dr. Faustus, they sold their souls for power and prominence. They now stifle their consciences, never speak ill of President Trump, and hug him closely, fearing the wrath of his base. The same Lindsey Graham who in 2016 wrote, ‘If we nominate Trump, we will get destroyed ... and we will deserve it,’ recently said, ‘To every Republican, if you don’t stand behind this President, we’re not going to stand behind you.’ Meanwhile, Trump skulks in the White House, mired in ‘the swamp.’ In this, he calls to mind another literary devil.

At the moment, Donald Trump is Satan as imagined by John Milton in the first epic simile of the finest epic poem in the English language, *Paradise Lost*. Milton introduced Satan awash in a swamp of his own, speaking with his buddy Beelzebub. Milton introduced Satan awash in a swamp of his own, ‘prone on the Flood’, having fallen from heaven to hell. As massive as ‘that Sea-beast Leviathan,’ Satan hulks so big from the sea that the pilot of ‘some small night-founder’d skiff’ might mistake him for an island, and seek to pass the night in safety ‘with fixed anchor in his scaly rind.’ It’s an old Norwegian seafarer’s fable. When the beast wakes, it dives into the depths of the ocean. The anchored skiff is dragged along. The sailor is pulled to his watery grave. Similarly, Republicans who have anchored their boat to Trump, thinking he’s an island providing protection from the sea, risk being dragged down to their demise when, like a whale startled from sleep, he goes plunging.

Trump as Satan: you might think it’s absurdly over-the-top, or want to celebrate it as a (literally) epic takedown, but this is not a political statement hurling invective. It’s an analytical

statement describing what is happening – what will happen – and why, aided by the Miltonic intervention. Great literature helps us understand the world. Both politicians and literary critics do their jobs best when they’re willing to use literature to think about life.

First published in London in 1667, *Paradise Lost* is a Christian humanist epic about the war in Heaven and the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden. Though he’s the ‘author of evil,’ Satan is shockingly an attractive character. He charms us with his energy. When God the Father anoints his Son king over the other angels, Satan, ‘Great in power’, doesn’t think it’s fair. The system was rigged. Milton – one of the fathers of modern liberalism, active in the Puritan rebellion against the royal absolutism of Charles I – lent Satan his own freedom-loving, tyrant-hating language, the outraged angel mounting a rebellion ‘to cast off this Yoke.’ A powerful orator, but loose with the truth, Satan secures a base of support, ‘and with lyes drew after him the third part of Heav’ns Host.’ This third of the angels back Satan to the bitter end, no matter what.

Satan’s opponents see his rhetoric as ‘calumnious art of counterfeited truth’ and ‘argument blasphemous, false and proud.’ The first Never Satan-er to stand up is an angel named Abdiel, earning God’s admiration:

Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought  
The better fight, who single hast maintaind  
Against revolted multitudes the Cause  
Of Truth.

War in Heaven erupts, angel against angel, the apostate against the faithful. After three days, God sends the Son to end it. The mere sight of the Son’s flaming chariot thundering toward them turns the apostate on their heels. They sprint away in retreat. The gates of Heaven open for them:

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“To thine own self be true”:

#### What Shakespeare Says About Sending Our Kids Off to College

Every fall, millions of parents send millions of children off to college for the first time, and those parents must find something ceremonious to say. What do we say to the sons and daughters we’ve been able to mold, mentor, guide, and indeed save (often from themselves) as they step out of our control and into a world that – quite frankly – they don’t understand, couldn’t possibly understand?

William Shakespeare actually wrote a scene about this event. It comes in his most famous play, *Hamlet*, and it gives us one of his most quoted lines: “To thine own self be true” (1.3.77). This line has inspired countless [valedictorian addresses](#) and blog posts. Films such as *The Last Days of Disco* and *Clueless* have riffed on it. People [tattoo](#) it on their bodies. A friend of mine went to a school that had its students sign every letter with their name and “To thine own self be true,” even though none of them knew where the line was from or what it meant.

Indeed, what does “To thine own self be true” actually mean? *Be yourself? Don’t change who you are? Follow your own convictions? Don’t lie to yourself?* Determining the meaning of this line – and thus Shakespeare’s advice for young men and women on their way to college – depends to some extent upon the meaning of “self,” the meaning of “true,” and perhaps even the meaning of “meaning.”

Grammatically speaking, the word *self* usually appears as part of a reflexive pronoun (“myself,” “yourself”), but it has also emerged as a noun (“the self”) because it does useful psychological work. What is “the self”? What is it that you are true to when you are “true to yourself”? When we talk about “the self,” we are usually referring to who a person *really* is, to an internal condition or reality, a reality which can sometimes remain hidden behind the exterior

or visible aspects of a person. “The self” is a term that – like *soul*, *mind*, *spirit*, and *nature* – refers to someone’s essence, to what someone essentially, actually, really is as opposed to what someone only appears to be.

Like *self*, the word *true* has several senses. A person can be true, as in faithful, in contrast to being disloyal. Or a person can be true, as in honest, in contrast to being deceitful. And something can be true as opposed to being false; a thing can be actual and real, not imaginary or only apparent. As such, we can ask, one should be true to oneself as opposed to being what? “Disloyal” to oneself? “Dishonest” to oneself? “False” to oneself?

There is also the pragmatic question: *How does one go about being true to oneself?* And the ethical question: *Should one be true to oneself?* But I want to remain with the semantic question that is both more basic and more difficult: *What does “To thine own self be true” mean?*

To answer this question, we must consider the meta-question, *What is the meaning of “meaning”?* What do we mean when we ask, *What is the meaning of “To thine own self be true”?* Meaning usually relates to the significance or sense of something, and meaning is often understood as intent. Thus, our question, *What is the meaning of “To thine own self be true”?*, can be restated as, *What was Shakespeare’s intent when he wrote, “To thine own self be true”?* What was he trying to accomplish? What were his goals? What did he hope to communicate? What did he want us to understand when we heard “To thine own self be true”?

I would like to suggest that, if we understand meaning as intent, then “To thine own self be true” means, paradoxically, that “the self” does not exist. Or, more accurately, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* implies that “the self” only exists as a rhetorical, philosophical, and psychological construct that we use to make sense of our experiences and actions in the world, not as anything real. If so, then this passage may offer us a new way of thinking about Shakespeare as more than a playwright, as a moral philosopher as well, one who did his ethics in drama.

“It started like a guilty thing”: The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics  
*Beginning of the Body*

Let's start over. Let's read *Hamlet* as if we've never read it before. It begins with a king who has died. A figure looking like the dead king has appeared to some soldiers sent to guard the castle of Elsinore – they don't know why, nor do we in the audience. This figure was armored up, suggesting something of a warrior king, and this intimation of a warrior king is immediately confirmed by a man named Horatio, the only one around who has any idea what's going on:

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When he the ambitious Norway combated;

So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,

He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.

'Tis strange. (1.1.60-64)

There really is something “strange” about Horatio's story. A technical term of combat, “parle” means peaceful negotiations between the opposing sides of a conflict. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this line from *Hamlet* for its definition: “A debate or conference; discussion; negotiation; *spec.* a meeting between enemies or opposing parties to discuss the terms of an armistice.” But the former king, if Horatio can be taken at his word, once slaughtered a slew of Polacks while in parlay. This is not the only possible reading of this line. Perhaps Horatio is trying to be metaphorical or glib – and there is some editorial dispute over the phrase “sledded Polacks” – but the most straightforward reading of the first substantive bit of information we get about King Hamlet is that he was a warrior king who did not respect the laws of war.

This image of a somewhat scandalous King Hamlet is amplified as Horatio proceeds to explain why Denmark is on high alert:

Our last king,

Whose image even but now appear'd to us,

In his very first scene, Hamlet is overtly ontological, concerned with what he *is*, not what he *seems* to be. “I know not seems,” he says to his mother after she asks why his father’s death “seems” so “particular” with him:

‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forc’d breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,  
For they are actions that a man might play,  
But I have that within which passes show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.75-86)

This is a Hamlet who cannot act; or, rather, this is a Hamlet who acts exactly as he is. His semblance and his essence are exactly the same, he says, except that his internal state, “that within,” is even more real, even more in existence than his considerable display or “show” of mourning. For this Hamlet, “action” is “play,” Shakespeare using the language of drama here to distinguish Hamlet from an actor who *pretends* and to characterize Hamlet as a man who *is*, as a man who has “within” him something real and true – something more real and more true than the performance of grief, which is denigrated as “the trappings and the suits of woe.” This Hamlet is not acting sad; he *is* sad. He is concerned with truth, with what “can denote [him] truly,” with that which *is* in contrast to that which *appears*. He is, in a word, an ontologist.

If Hamlet begins as a man concerned with truth, essence, and reality, he becomes – after the visit from his father’s ghost – an actor who alters his behavior to make others think he is something different than what he actually is. For starters, Prince Hamlet experiences the ghost’s revelation that Claudius killed King Hamlet as a breakdown of appearances: he immediately turns to his “tables” to register the fact that people can *be* different than they *seem*, “that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (1.5.107-08). Parrying his uncle’s ability to deceive with false appearances, Hamlet vows to make others think he *is* mad when really he is only *acting* mad: “I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on,” he says to his friends Horatio and Marcellus (1.5.172-73). Hamlet’s suggestion that he can put on madness, like a coat, signals a shift in his concerns from the real to the apparent, from *being* to *seeming*. In this moment, therefore, he changes from an ontologist concerned with essences to an actor concerned with appearances. He even outlines the formal acting gestures he plans to employ – encumbering his arms, shaking his head, pronouncing doubtful phrases (1.5.175-79) – to signify his madness.

Is Hamlet a Sexist Text? Overt Misogyny vs. Unconscious Bias  
*From the Middle of the Body (End of Body Section 1 and All of Body Section 2)*

The most obvious example of this unconscious, unintentional bias against Gertrude surfaces when Hamlet directly accuses her of killing her husband. In her bedchamber, after Gertrude laments Hamlet's accidental killing of Polonius, Hamlet says it is "almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (3.4.28-29). Has Hamlet broken with reality when he says these lines? Does he actually believe his mother had a hand in his father's murder? Is Hamlet testing her to see if – *Mousetrap*-like – she proclaims her malefactions when confronted? Or, as I think more likely to be the case, has Hamlet's distress and anger over his mother's hasty remarriage been transformed – in the panic of the murder of Polonius – into an accusation that registers more symbolically than literally. When Hamlet says to Gertrude, *You killed my father*, what he means is that her remarriage to his uncle has offended Hamlet as much as if she had killed her husband herself.

If King and Prince Hamlet exhibit an unconscious ethical bias against women, the play *Hamlet* exhibits an unconscious structural bias – and this is where we can start to reasonably attribute the sexism we see in some of Shakespeare's characters to the author himself (in contrast to their misogyny and patriarchalism which I do not believe we can attribute to Shakespeare). Like the sexism of the modern corporation, the sexism of *Hamlet* stems from the under-representation of women. Qualitatively speaking, Shakespeare did not represent the women in *Hamlet* with the same verve as the men. Quantitatively speaking, there just aren't very many women around, and they don't say much when they are. Claudius has 552 lines in the play, Gertrude (the analogous female character) only 157. Horatio has 294 lines, Ophelia (the analogous female character) only 173. Looking at substantive speeches is even more telling: Claudius has 47 of his 102 speeches that run for three or more lines (46 percent), Gertrude only 16 of her 69 speeches (23 percent). Indeed, when Gertrude does speak, it is often for one-line affirmations of things male characters have already said: "Ay, amen" (2.2.39), "It may be, very

like" (2.2.152), "So he does indeed" (2.2.161). As for Ophelia, her one-liners are so peppered with "my lord" (which she says more than half the times she speaks: 30 out of 58 speeches) that they are often only half-liners.

In fact, *Hamlet* fails the Bechdal test. An invention of the modern pop culture critic and feminist Allison Bechdal, the Bechdal test provides a three-pronged measure for gender inequality in literature and film: for any given text, are there (1) at least two women who (2) talk to each other (3) about something other than a man. The number of famous works, especially films, which fail this test is astounding. The *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogies both fail, which is surprising because, even though powerful women are present in each – Princess Leah in *Star Wars* and Galadriel in *Lord of the Rings* – it becomes clear upon closer inspection that these characters remain subordinate in the central plot. Likewise, Shakespeare attended to neither the inner-life of Ophelia and Gertrude nor their lived experiences in the world beyond their relationships to the men who are the central concern of the text (whether fathers, husbands, or sons). The question isn't whether men or women are better, more ethical beings in *Hamlet*, but which are more developed as characters. In other words, Shakespeare's sexism manifested in a specifically literary way.

*Hamlet* is not a sexist text because, in his first soliloquy, Hamlet characterizes Gertrude as "a beast that wants discourse of reason" (1.2.150). *Hamlet* is sexist because men have 19 major soliloquies and monologues, while women have two. It is not a sexist text because Laertes chides Ophelia to be chaste (1.3.5-43) while, as she points out, he goes off to enjoy the sexual licentiousness that is college in France (1.3.44-50). It is sexist because her part in this conversation involves seven lines, two metaphors, and two similes, while his involves 39 lines, 13 metaphors, 3 similes, and a thread of logical deduction that exploits the resources of formal rhetorical argumentation. In terms of language and literary forms which are interesting and

King Hamlet – also a royal – dies off-stage. Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern – all nobles – die off-stage, but Laertes – also a noble – dies on-stage. Looking at manner of death, King Hamlet and Gertrude were poisoned; Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern were stabbed (or encountered some other violent death); Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet were each stabbed and poisoned; and Ophelia stands alone in suicide. There were no patterns in the relationship of the deceased to the killer, or in the gender or class of the killer. There were no correlations between the deliberateness of the deaths and any other category.

The one thing that stuck out to me most clearly was that three of the characters with a double *hamartia* – Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet – also had doubled manners of death, both stabbed and poisoned. In these three cases, it seems reasonable to conclude that Shakespeare connected more severe crimes (ambition, revenge) with stabbing, and less severe sins (deceit) with poison. There are certainly conceptual parallels between the violent, external, public, political crimes of ambition and revenge and a violent, external, public, political death by stabbing. The same is true for the secret, hidden, internal, private, moral crime of deceit and the way poison kills from the inside out. The pattern connecting deceit and poison holds with Gertrude, but not with Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern (who were deceitful yet violently killed). At the same time, those three characters – Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern – each die off-stage, which, like poisoning, is a less visceral and visible death than stabbing on-stage. Similarly, Ophelia is deceitful and dies off-stage. King Hamlet also dies off-stage, which feels like a fittingly far-removed death in light of his personal rather than political *hamartia* of pride.

At this point, I developed a hypothesis about the relationship between the severity of a character's *hamartia* and "spectacularity" of his or her death. The term *spectacle* also comes

from Aristotle's *Poetics*. It refers to the visuals in a work of drama, the things we see on stage. Significantly, drama is the only kind of literature – not prose, not verse – that includes spectacle. And spectacle is only present when plays are performed in the theater, not when read in a book. The "spectacularity" of a moment is the extent to which it exploits the visual medium of theater. A death occurring on-stage has a higher spectacularity than one off-stage. A stabbing with lots of blood and guts has a higher spectacularity than a poisoning.

To test my hypothesis, I created a system for scoring the spectacularity of a death and the severity of a *hamartia*. First I scored the place of death according to its visibility: +1 for off-stage and +2 for on-stage. Then I scored the manner of death according to its brutality: +1 for suicide, +2 for poisoning, +3 for stabbing or any other weaponed assault. Then I combined the scores for visibility and brutality to generate a score for the spectacularity of a character's death. Next I scored each character's *hamartia* according to its severity: +1 for pride, +2 for incest, +3 for deceit, +4 for revenge, and +5 for ambition. The results of this analysis appear in Table 2 and are charted in Figure 1.

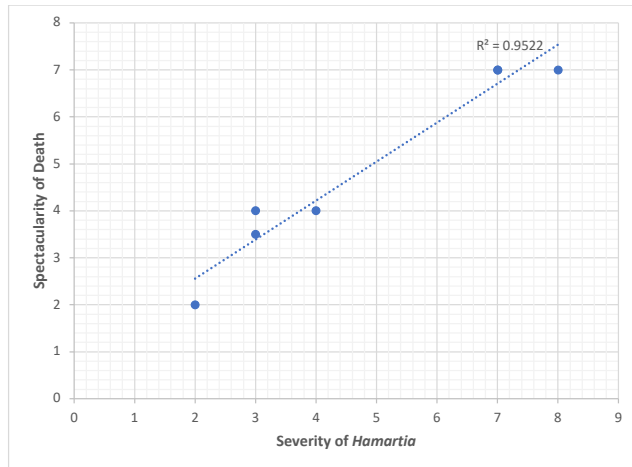
**Table 2: Severity of *Hamartia* and Spectacularity of Death in *Hamlet***

Character	Severity of <i>Hamartia</i>	Spectacularity of Death
King Hamlet	1	2
Polonius	3	3.5
Ophelia	2	2
Gertrude	4	4
Laertes	7	7
Claudius	8	7
Hamlet	7	7
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern	3	4

As Figure 1 shows, there is a linearity between the severity of one's *hamartia* and the spectacularity of one's death in *Hamlet*. Mathematically speaking, there is a strong linear correlation coefficient. This constant, denoted as "r", describes how perfectly two sets of data can be modeled with a linear relationship. Completely random data would yield r=0. The closer

the value of  $r$  to 1, the better the linear model can describe the system. The relationship between severity of *hamartia* and spectacularity of death in *Hamlet* yields an  $r$  value of 0.9522, a very strong correlation.

**Figure 1: Severity of *Hamartia* and Spectacularity of Death in *Hamlet***



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This analysis revealed that the spectacularity of a character's death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is proportionate to the severity of his or her *hamartia*. The greater a character's faults or errors are, the more visceral his or her death will be. What this means is that Shakespeare found a specifically dramatic way to symbolize character at the intersection between plot and spectacle. Beyond simply confirming that character is destiny in Shakespearean

tragedy, this analysis suggests, more specifically, that *hamartia* is catastrophe. Here, instead of Aristotle's emphasis on the difference between the severity of the *hamartia* and that of the catastrophe, Shakespeare created a similarity between the severity of the *hamartia* and the spectacularity of the catastrophe. This argument suggests that, when Shakespeare asked himself the very practical artistic question of how he should write a character's death, he looked back upon the way he wrote that character's life. Or, perhaps even more plausibly, when Shakespeare knew how a character was going to die, he allowed it to inform the way he wrote out the character's life and actions.

While this phenomenon has been shown to govern *Hamlet*, it would require further examination to see if the dissemination of tragic necessity and the spectacularity of death hold in other Shakespearean tragedies. Does it explain Romeo poisoning himself and Juliet stabbing herself? Julius Caesar stabbed 23 times? Cinna the Poet torn apart by a mob? The murder of the Macduffs? Cordelia hanged off-stage? Antigonus exiting pursued by a bear? What is the spectrality of Chiron and Demetrius baked into a pie, Othello smothering Desdemona with a pillow, or Cleopatra bitten by a snake?

candidate for the source of pollution, who deals in diplomacy and even refuses to carry out Hamlet's execution in Denmark.

The reason why Hamlet's relationship to the pollution of Denmark is unclear, and by extension why it is so easy to see Marcellus' comment as a reference to the murder of King Hamlet alone, is simple: Hamlet is the main character. We see the play from his perspective. When images of decay swirl around Hamlet's brain, we imagine that he is simply observing the corrupt court of Denmark. When people begin to die around him, we imagine that something is killing the Danes, not that Hamlet himself is causing their deaths. Unlike a morality play, which allows its audience to disassociate themselves from wrongdoing by circumscribing it within "bad" characters, Shakespeare writes *Hamlet* as a window into Hamlet's mind, a mind that is slowly warped as Hamlet loses himself in death. The rottenness that plagues Denmark is not observed by Hamlet, but caused by his own sickness.

Although it turns out that Hamlet is the primary source of corruption in Denmark, however, he is also correct. Claudius *did* murder the king. By creating this tension between Hamlet's knowledge of the truth and the trouble he causes, Shakespeare moves the play beyond the reach of easy moral judgment. In a morality play, wrongdoing would pollute the state, and rooting it out would purify it. In *Hamlet*, however, wrong has been done, but it is the *discovery* of the wrongdoing that pollutes the state. In other words, Hamlet does exactly what the protagonist of a morality play is supposed to do by discovering the crime. Yet this discovery is precisely what leads to pollution and the fall of Denmark, because Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* as a tragedy, not a morality play.

Unlike the aforementioned morality play, which carefully separates the good and the bad, in a tragedy a sympathetic protagonist inadvertently causes spiritual pollution and catastrophe.

Shakespeare represents reality more than he moralizes: instead of telling us what to do about evil, he shows us what happens when we seek it out. The tragedy of *Hamlet* is that by searching for pollution, Hamlet became a source of pollution. Rottenness in Denmark and in tragedy is not a signpost pointing out evil to be tracked down; it is accidental, unintended, and ultimately catastrophic. Hamlet suspects briefly that the spirit claiming to be his father "may be the devil" leading him into evil (2.2.627-28). He was right. Hamlet found nothing but death and madness by following the Ghost. Unfortunately for Denmark, he brought them back to court with him.

statements are therefore not meant purely to criticize, but are a loving, if ill-mannered, way to protect them from themselves. He loves them so much that he must criticize them to ensure their virtue is unspoiled.

Traditionalists would argue that misogyny in its inherent form arises as a result of ingrained and deep-seated prejudices against women. Love in any format is not included in this definition, as it is contrary to this belief, for it would not make sense through this reasoning to suppose that one would have the capacity to love while still engaging in aggressive and cruel behavior. However, an expanded definition of what it means to be misogynistic, and the roots of this misogyny, can be seen through a new critical reading of *Hamlet*. Prince Hamlet's consistent policing behavior is misogynistic, yes, but this misogyny stems from love. The paternalistic tendencies Hamlet displays are not hateful inherently, but manifest themselves in that way due to a misguided need to control women's virtue.

We can therefore postulate a new definition of misogyny using *Hamlet* as one that not only seeks to subjugate women through misguided critiques, but also seeks to repress women based on a fundamental need to love, and therefore control. We find that the reading of *Hamlet* presented above, and Shakespeare's portrayal of Hamlet himself, give us two distinct types of misogyny: "villainous" misogyny, wherein an inherent hatred of women provides the drive to subjugate, and "heroic" misogyny, where doubt as to a woman's strength leads to patronizing behavior coming from a need to "save" the woman from herself. These two definitions now expand and redefine what it means to be misogynistic – the term now not only applies to instances of pure hatred, but applies to Hamlet's actions as well.

Yet while Hamlet's interactions are interesting within the confines of the play, the implications Shakespeare presents us with regarding systems of societal oppression are all the

more intriguing. Beyond the text, one finds that recent events that society would normally not consider to be misogynistic in nature, do, in fact, adhere to that principle. When the Taliban imposes draconian restrictions on the fundamental rights of women, they adhere to the "villainous misogynistic principle". Yet when male politicians remark on certain rights women can or cannot obtain, they invoke the "heroic misogynistic principle," more often than not stating that they must protect a woman's virtue, based on their assumptions on morality and what it means to be a "proper" member of society. While the latter, "heroic" misogyny could be considered by some to be "less harmful" than the former, the point still remains: misogyny exists in varied forms, and there is no hierarchy of misogyny that would make some tendencies less misogynistic than others, for any misguided belief is the same – a misguided belief. Perhaps this is the meaning behind Shakespeare's inclusion of Hamlet's interactions; to provide the modern reader with a new way of analyzing our world's gender norms.

questions that could be easily overlooked if we are merely looking to criticize Horowitz's contradictions. They are, however, some of the most important moments in her book as they provide us with a deeper understanding of the inherent struggles the field of animal psychology faces.

For some readers, Horowitz's framework for dog intelligence potentially becomes more confusing as she cites a study designed to test a dog's response to a human emergency. We might read her use of this study and the failure of her conclusions to come up with definitive answers as other examples of the contradictory nature of her book, but again, this is not from any true failing of her own. Instead, it is another reflection of the nature of animal psychology itself. The test Horowitz cites is designed to test the "dog hero" theory. This theory holds that a very high form of dog intelligence might be measured by a dog's ability to respond to a human emergency simply by reading our body language and other social cues. In this test, a dog owner acted out a particular emergency situation to test the dog's response. Yet again, the test proved to be a failure for the dog, at least on the surface. Few, if any, dogs responded to their owner's plight. But Horowitz reconciles the results of the experiment, saying that dogs have to be "*taught* to understand emergency situations" (240). If this is the case, what of the less-socialized dogs that did not pass the "human interaction" standard of intelligence in the Piaget test? Where does their form of intelligence fall on the canine intellect scale? Yet another problem with animal psychology is reconciling the different experience levels each individual animal has. For animals that have less contact with humans, and whose intelligence levels would not be based on recognizing human social cues, this task would seem to be much simpler; but by

Horowitz's definition of dog intelligence that makes reading social cues a central feature of that intelligence, this is not the case. Thus, yet again, Horowitz uncovers many more questions about the feasibility of defining a dog's range of intelligence than she is able to give answers. As it turns out, this ability to uncover the core questions of animal psychology may well be the most important contributions her book makes.

**A**s Horowitz helps us journey into the mind of a dog, she unwittingly takes us on a tour of some of the greater problems of animal psychology. Skeptics would argue that her conclusions about dog intelligence contradict her stated goals, that she is basing her conclusions on unsound assumptions. This may well be true. However, with a closer reading, her seemingly inconclusive and unfounded claims do not necessarily point to a problem with her analysis but to a problem with the concept of animal psychology. As we search for a deeper understanding of the beings around us, we have to question our methods and challenge our assumptions. This may cause some people to question the feasibility of defining animal intelligence, and even the viability of animal psychology as a whole. However, this field has much to offer in helping us understand ourselves. We, too, are animals, and perhaps knowing more about the minds of other creatures will help to illuminate the questions we have about our own psyche.

### **Work Cited**

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Horowitz, Alexandra. *Inside Of A Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 2012. Print.

an exchange between schoolteacher and child. The repetition of the interrogative phrase "do you know" is reminiscent of factual, instructive videos that seek to educate, rather than persuade, the viewer. The narrator even makes several allusions to the girl's health and welfare, as though validating the goodness of her motives: "Now children should have lots of vitamin A and calcium, but they shouldn't have any strontium-90 or cesium-137" (Johnson). The gendered implication of this dialogue is that the speaker is a female caregiver or educator whose authentic concern for the wellbeing of the girl and demonstrated virtue transcend electoral partisanship. In this way, the narrator's female identity distances the delivery of the script from its underlying political agenda. Furthermore, the girl seems to have been carefully selected for her role as the image of futurity. By designating the poster child of potential nuclear winter as a hapless girl no older than six or seven, Caucasian and wide-eyed,

Nonetheless, what separates "Girl with Ice Cream Cone" from other political campaign advertisements is its structural departure from conventional narrative frameworks. The marketing *pièce de résistance* of the commercial is the way in which it choreographs interactions among its triad of participants: the girl, the narrator, and the audience. The audience interacts with the girl only by viewing her consumption of an ice cream cone; both are the soundless recipients of information. This interaction is mediated by the narrator's one-way dialogue, which, due to its coddling tone, is presumably intended for the girl. Yet, the narration is projected from nowhere, a voice without corporeal confirmation. The speaker's authority is thereby amplified by her physical indeterminacy – she is not a fallible individual, but rather an objective figure enshrouded by ambiguity and impersonality. Despite her physical absence, she is the locus of content. She narrates the apocalyptic counterfactual of nuclear winter, the product of a Goldwater victory, while simultaneously interspersing her narrative with direct references to the child. For instance, after listing a few radioactive isotopes and before explaining the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, she notes, "These things come from atomic bombs, and they're radioactive. They can make you die" (Johnson). The speaker thus exists in the strange limbo between maternal anxiety and machinelike detachment. The viewer becomes both a witness to and an indirect recipient of the narration. The girl, on the other hand, becomes the embodiment, or simulacrum, of the audience. Though she appears to be the addressee of the narrator's dialogue, the girl is in actuality a projection of the audience and thereby the medium through which the audience is coddled and manipulated. This hierarchy of speakers and listeners further elevates the narrator into a position of informational authority.

One effect of this rhetorical interplay is to downplay the intrusive "sales pitch" quality typical of political commercials. Instead of imploring the audience directly, the narrator obscures this self-serving intention by speaking to, and thus through, the girl. The girl becomes a prop that enables the narrator to declaim from a position of superiority without estranging the audience through blatant condescension. In this process of information transmission, the viewer is excluded from direct participatory roles. Bereft of a mechanism to critically engage the dialogue between narrator and child, he or she is rendered into a mere spectator and passive consumer of the nuclear narrative. Furthermore, since the content of the commercial is directed toward the child but ultimately intended for the audience, the submissive position of the child is grafted onto

the viewer. The audience's role is relegated to that of spectatorship, an act with little to no propensity for substantive engagement with the content at hand. This pseudo-participatory position is particularly consistent with the voter's position in the nuclear policy realm; as a spectator of elite decision-making regarding "the bomb," he or she is incapable of direct intervention.

The broader repercussion of this rhetorical positioning is its infringement upon the political sovereignty of the voter. This is not to suggest that the commercial opposes the notion of popular sovereignty; rather, by instructing the audience to "vote for Johnson," it encourages the enactment of political agency through electoral channels. And yet, though it does not materially exclude citizens from formal mechanisms of political engagement, the commercial endeavors to dilute the political efficacy of the citizen. The disembodiment of the narrator, the depoliticization of the narrative, and the conflation of audience and child fundamentally alter the nature of the commercial's reception. Moreover, the synthesis of technical jargon and simpering condescension further distance the audience from the dialogue. Once the presentation of political information is obscured by such rhetorical veneers, it becomes difficult for viewers to extract political insight from the advertisement, much less contest its truth claims. How does one effectively rebut the claim, for instance, that a child's intake of high dosages of "strontium-90 or cesium-137" may cause death? Thus, the narrative structure of "Girl with Ice Cream Cone" not only omits large swathes of Goldwater's substantive agenda, but also coerces the viewer into acknowledging its assertions as facts. This form of governance enables opportunistic political bodies to manipulate their constituencies through coercive strategies. And, when the subject matter is as weighty and exigent as the prevention of nuclear apocalypse, such rhetorical mediation functionally removes the "deliberative" aspect of deliberative democracy. By rendering the audience subservient to the disembodied narrator and thus an indirect, obedient consumer of information, the advertisement promotes a vision of democracy in which the informational passivity of the voter coexists uneasily with his or her purported agency to enact political change.

In examining such tensions, one must note that any proposed vision of governance is not comprised exclusively of its political program. Such programs are inevitably presented through rhetorical and audiovisual frames that are saturated with ideological baggage in their own right. For this reason, there exists analytical value in the act of separating the substance of political advocacy from its method of presentation. Improving one's cognizance of the complex frames through which seemingly simplistic political narratives are delivered is a prerequisite to being not only a vigilant citizen, but also a vigilant critic of the inferred roles that citizens are often pressed to occupy. Furthermore, the method of reorienting our critical gaze from the content of political acts to their rhetorical, audiovisual frames should be adopted beyond the narrow scope of the "Girl with Ice Cream Cone" commercial. This critical method may engender a heightened awareness of how political programs forwarded through commercials, speeches, or other forms of presentations attempt to situate the audience in the broader economy of symbolic exchange between a ruling body and its subjects. Once the variables of presentation and viewership are emphasized in political criticism, we might have better means of engaging and subverting the process of rhetorical coercion

slight rosy flush. The dark crease between the buttocks is the highly sexualized center; visually speaking, we are perfectly positioned to enter the man from behind. Yet to sexually appropriate the bather, to heed the erotic reading here, would be to remain emotionally without; in Caillebotte's painting, any suggestion of sex preempts a vision of the bather's face. It would rob the bather's most indicative signifier of himself. His face, once again, always remains private. At best, any presumed intimacy between the viewer and the bather is incomplete.

**A**t this point it is pertinent to call attention to Caillebotte's painterly touch in a way that brings this discussion of intimacy and knowledge to a larger sphere of suggestion. Ultimately, the element of Caillebotte's painting that most distances us from the bather is painting itself: facture, the quality of paint on canvas. Indeed, the aesthetic experience of Caillebotte's painting, as well as the impression of intimacy it initially gives, derives from the artist's soft touch: we see the marks of the paintbrush as light reflects from the gleaming oil paint. We see a sensuously fresh painting, one that trains the eye on the bather's skin as a kind of reflective surface, an aesthetic vision of the body that situates the figure in patches of darkness and light. In this sense, the kind of sensuously fresh painting employed by Impressionists such as Caillebotte potentially reduces the human figure to a set of formal elements: lightness and darkness formally composed. In other words, even beyond the alienation of erotic voyeurism, which distances viewers from the internality of the bather, viewers must also contend with the alienation of artistry. To look at art is itself voyeuristic.

We thus stand at a double distance when confronting *Man at His Bath*: the sexual and the representational, the aesthetic and the erotic, may seem to invite us to know the bather, but they ultimately alienate us. The dual alienation points to broader issues in the relationship between sexuality, artistry and intimacy. But by undertaking a formal analysis of the painted bather, can we understand him on a level any deeper than if we had sexualized him? The answer Caillebotte seems to offer is no. In painting a highly sexualized portrait that ignores the bather's individuality in favor of eroticism, Caillebotte presents knowledge defined by its limits, drawing attention to the falseness of that knowledge. The painting's sensuality and suggestion of physical familiarity is, in fact, a red herring, a false claim of intimacy. To access him is impossible: whether through erotic appropriation or formal analysis, we cannot know the man at his bath.

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## Endnote

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Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848-1894). *Man at His Bath*, 1884. Oil on canvas; 144.8 x 114.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 2011.231.