

Enacting the Man: Masculinist Performativity in Anglo-American Politics and Drama

By

Joshua Kelly

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2023

Date of final oral examination: April 3, 2023

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Mike Vanden Heuvel, Professor, Integrated Liberal Studies & Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies
Michael Peterson, Professor, Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies
Aili Tripp, Professor, Gender and Women's Studies
James McMaster, Assistant Professor, Gender and Women's Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	<i>ii</i>
ABSTRACT.....	<i>iii</i>
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE.....	25
CHAPTER TWO.....	67
CHAPTER THREE.....	117
CONCLUSION.....	157
APPENDIX A.....	170
WORKS CITED.....	176

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Randy Bolton.

“Do the work.”

I would like to thank all of my teachers who inspired and mentored me in the theatre and in my progress toward a Ph.D: to Scott Logsdon for his treasured friendship and artistic vision; to Joe Legate for his leadership, generosity, and endlessly supportive spirit; to Rich Haptonstall for his partnership and instruction in so many works of art, and his familial guidance; to Jere Hodgins for teaching me to be a good director, his appreciation of my talent and trust in my abilities; to Dr. Jay Ball for his comradeship and for his tutelage in the rigors of proper scholarship and the exposure to paradigms and philosophies which would become integral to my life; to Dr. Matthieu Chapman for his gentle remonstrances, unwavering demand for excellence, and championing of my work in the professional sphere; and to Dr. Randy Bolton, who was a friend, defender, and teacher in a time and place others refused to be—to him particularly I owe a debt of love that, since his passing, I’ll have to bear for the rest of my life. This would have been a very large letter to post, my dear friend, but it was forthcoming. I’m so, so sorry you aren’t here to find it waiting in your mailbox.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee for taking on a dissertation so challenging in its scope and interdisciplinarity. Particularly I would like to thank my adviser Dr. Mike Vanden Heuvel for his guidance, and for giving me the encouragement and freedom necessary to finish in an agreeable time. I would also like to thank the Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies Ph.D program for providing me with the dissertator fellowship that gave me the practical support to finish this work Thanks also to Dr. Aparna Dharwadkar for seeing my directing ability

to be as worthy of support as my scholarship, and asking me to direct a play of such importance to her and her husband.

I would like to give a special thanks to the scholars and writers who contributed to this dissertation by making their own work available or discussing their projects with me. Special thanks to Dr. Joshua M. Roose, who provided me with digital copies of his book before its publication. Thanks as well to *Kingmaker* playwrights Robert Khan and Tom Salinsky, whose interview forms a component of my dramatic analysis in Chapter Three, and for providing me with a text of their play. I would also like to thank fellow scholar Thomas Worth for his discussions on masculinity in politics and the fruitful exchange of our disciplines.

Particular thanks go to my colleagues in the ITS program, especially my good friends Steffen Silvis, Ashley Bellet, Holly Berkowitz and her husband Cameron Schnell, who were the source of myriad good times, good drinks, and good advice over the five years of my coursework and research. I wouldn't have made it through the trials of doctoral study without them—and the last part of the journey after their departure to new adventures was the hardest. Special thanks go as well to my first friends in Madison, Savannah Gentry and Andrew Demayo, who are among the dearest people I met during my Ph.D study. I would also like to thank my good friend and scholar Dr. Andy Wall for his encouragement and the most ridiculous road trip in American history, during which many of the ideas herein were discussed.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation demonstrates that masculinist performativity has been a central component in Anglo-American politics in recent years, and that such centrality is recognizable in dramatizations of recent U.S. presidents and U.K. prime ministers. I demonstrate the ways in which such performativity in these cultures has been informed by intersectional subjectivities of whiteness, heterosexuality, capital interest and working class labor, but that the embodiment of these traits and the crises which beset this ideology became extreme and conscious performances in the administrations of Donald J. Trump and Boris Johnson. Through an analysis of their performativity and the ways in which those criteria are reflected in dramatizations of both figures, this dissertation shows that performances of masculinity played a dominant role in U.S./U.K. politics during these administrations and that such a performative force is archived in dramatizations of both men, characterizing their persons, policy, and the “special relationship.”

While performances of hegemonic masculinity have been analyzed in both the Oval Office and 10 Downing Street before, few holders of the office have had such a conscious embodiment of masculinity, using it as a political tool. Nor has that performativity been such a necessary referent in performance media; because of which, those (re)performances are thus reintegrated back into the public consciousness, reifying hegemonic performances of masculinity in culture. Inasmuch, the interdisciplinary focus of this dissertation reveals crucial intersections in political science, theatre studies, performance philosophy, and gender studies as they concern masculinist performativity. It further demonstrates how performance studies and dramatic criticism have legitimate analytic and archival potential in political studies, as dramatization of these figures is unreadable without embodiment of the masculinist ethos. Finally, as the United States and the United Kingdom are leaders in global policy whose domestic issues have likewise

global consequences, understanding the nature of masculinist performances between these offices is of grave import: numerous countries under recent and similar performative leadership have resulted in nationalist, extremist, anti-democratic, and far-Right cultural and political shifts (as seen in France, Germany, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Italy, and Brazil). The phenomena that are embodied in hegemonic masculinity are integral to the leaders who mobilize these regressive demographics, and therefore imperative to discuss.

INTRODUCTION

I vividly remember standing on an American diplomat's private lawn in Aspen, Colorado in early August of 1990, watching Margaret Thatcher and George Bush respond to the news that Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait...[Bush] spoke with complacency and understatement. When it came time for Mrs. Thatcher to seize the microphone, however, the entire tone of things underwent a dramatic change. She spoke of aggression and invoked defiance. I always believed the story that has since been confirmed officially—that she instructed Bush in private that “this is no time to go wobbly.” Be that as it may, on the following day the President himself was reaching for Churchillian language and saying that the Iraqi occupation “would not stand.” (Hitchens xvi)

On November 10, 2021, *Fox News* host Tucker Carlson invited Missouri Senator Josh Hawley to discuss “the deep trouble” facing men in America. When asked why he felt the need to defend masculinity, Hawley responded:

It's in crisis, men are in crisis, Tucker, as you pointed out. I mean, listen, we've got at least sixteen million men in this country who are out of the labor force—they're not just unemployed. They're not even trying to work. And I'm talking about able-bodied men, prime-age men. We have an epidemic of fatherlessness in this country...And it's time that we say to young men in particular: “We need you. We need you to be responsible. We need you to get a job. And you can make this country a better place by being who you were meant to be.”

Carlson, who “couldn't imagine why anyone would be anything but grateful to hear that,” looked on while banner headlines scrolled beneath his face: WHY AMERICA SHOULD EMBRACE MASCULINITY and MASCULINITY IS NOW SEEN AS “TOXIC” AND MEN ARE WITHERING AS A RESULT. They attributed the cause of this deep trouble to an American Left that “doesn't believe in gender,” and finds the idea of “independent men who would actually go to work and be

responsible and contribute to their families and contribute to society...scary” (“Sen. Hawley...” 2021).

The dog-whistles in this segment are just low enough for outsiders to hear: to Carlson and Hawley, the attacks came from feminists, queers, and those relying on social programs to survive (with all their economic and racial implications). “Masculinity” must logically be defined, by this harried definition, as the ideal opposite to its oppressors. Without explicitly saying so, Hawley and Carlson undoubtedly present the premise that “masculinity” as such is straight, white, and working or bourgeois class; that what is being attacked is an identity as much as an idea. In less than four minutes, Carlson and Hawley create a perfectly compressed performance of the crises of masculinism.

This dissertation provides an analysis of performances of masculinism which have informed administrations of the United States and the United Kingdom, the “special relationship” in Anglo-American politics, and how such performances are reflected in their respective nations’ dramas. While occupants of the Oval Office and 10 Downing Street (both men and women) have always enjoyed and communicated through a dialectic of masculinity, the recent administration of Donald Trump provided a radical shift of that ethos and reinforced the ways in which masculinist crises impacted American policy. In the case of Boris Johnson, crises of masculinity and their performances were somewhat different but wholly related to this ethos—much like our two countries themselves.¹ Although such performativity is, on a theoretical level, somewhat esoteric, public reception and appreciation of these performances are keen enough that they become necessary *(re)performances* in depictions of these two figures.

¹ To be clear, modes of hegemonic masculinist performance have pervaded both of these political arenas for some time, but the discursive, conscious nature of Trump and Johnson’s performances (and their intentional use as political tools) is both informed by and transformative of earlier masculinist performances.

Such dramatizations reify those crises, and continue to shape performances of masculinity, the society which embodies them, and document the anxieties which are the taxonomizing criteria of such identities.²

The thrust of this dissertation tackles a number of questions: what has been the nature and effect of masculinist performativity on Anglo-American culture in the last few decades? How has masculinist performativity changed in the Oval Office and 10 Downing Street in recent administrations? How is that performativity reflected and reperformed in contemporary drama — and does that drama *reinforce* the original performances and political characters (that is to say, can we use our understanding of this performativity to predict or understand policy decisions as successfully as we might with more conventional political methodologies)? Lastly, what are some of the implications of these continued hegemonic (re)performances, especially their effects in shaping the political identities which they represent?

My immediate recognition of this phenomenon in the presidential sphere occurred as I watched the Republican primary debates on March 3, 2016, when Trump responded to Florida Senator Marco Rubio’s personal jab that “his hands are the size of someone who is [five feet, two inches tall]. And you know what they say about men with small hands.” On live television, Trump declared: “And, he referred to my hands—if they’re small, something else must be small. I guarantee you, there’s no problem. I guarantee” (*Washington Post* 2016). After a moment of shock, I was faced with the inescapable reality that two candidates for the Presidency of the United States of America had stood in front of an audience of 16.9 million people and

² For the purposes of brevity (and to avoid overusing the term “performance” when it occupies such a specific place in this work) I shall be using “dramatizations” to refer to dramatic works specifically, but may *also* include non-theatrical performances (such as Alec Baldwin’s depiction of Trump on *Saturday Night Live*) and non-textual references to the character (such as the Public Theatre’s visual allusion to Trump in the titular character of *Julius Caesar* (2017).

unabashedly claimed that penis size is a (dis)qualifying factor to hold office. Naturally, I was not the only one to notice this, and journalistic comment (alongside scholarly interest) of this phenomenon has only grown over the years. It wasn't long before these performances were being recognized in Anglo-American relations, as the commentary of Michael Goodwin of *The New York Post* was replete with (what I recognized to be) more dog-whistles signaling masculinist ethos when he compared Johnson to Trump:

It took a revolution because the leaders of both of Britain's major political parties united in opposition to change, with the pooh-bahs and grandees trying to scare voters into sticking with the status quo. Naturally, the establishment media lectured the rubes on what was good for them...To be clear, Trump and Johnson are not sainted men of unquestioned virtue. Rather, they are leaders speaking on behalf of millions upon millions of middle- and working-class people...It's a thing of beauty to see such undaunted courage on both sides of the Atlantic. Count that bond as part of the special relationship. (Goodwin 2016)

Interest in this kind of work has been pervasive, as is demonstrated by the 28 October, 2020 NPR article, "Trump Has Weaponized Masculinity As President. Here's Why It Matters." Pointing toward the hypermasculine language Trump employed after his treatment for COVID-19, Danielle Kurtzleben writes that there "are areas beyond public health that reflect Trump's focus on masculinity — areas where it may influence policy" (Kurtzleben 2020). *The Guardian* reported in the same month that "Masculinity is a force in the US election," and that "In the president's view — and the view of many of his followers — there is one way to be a man: you dominate, you hurt people, you use any means necessary to assert yourself as the top dog in the pack" (Filipovic 2020). During the Biden/Trump debates, *The New York Times* asked whether or

not masculinity found its American duality in the two candidates, deciding that “the presidential election has become, among other things, a referendum on masculinity” (Bennett 2020). No less a scholar on the subject than Jared Sexton wrote in 2016 that Trump would fail on several major responsibilities as President precisely because of his masculinist performativity: “Disturbing trends show that men, especially the white men who make up a majority of Trump’s base, are suffering for their posturing” (Sexton 2016).

It is fair to say that the awareness of masculinist performativity in politics is at an all time high, but what most commentators are missing are a theoretical history of this phenomenon, the conceptualization of such masculinity in precise, observable terms, and the connection of the masculinist ethos to well-established theories in performativity. For scholars of drama and performance theory, dramatic texts and performances provide insightful case studies as to how such performativity is recognized and read by the public; how such an ephemeral quality of political leaders (and the demographics they represent) are preserved as artifacts.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship does much to explore gendered relationships in current politics but little to analyze either drama’s capacity to document masculinist politics or to analyze the “special relationship” between the President and Prime Minister through masculinist performativity. Meredith Conroy attempts to “fill two gaps in the political science scholarship on topics of gender, politics, media, and leadership” in *Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency* (2015) but does not provide a groundwork for performances of masculinity and relies on quantitative political science, focusing mostly on how the media creates gender bias against certain candidates. Laura Sjoberg, in her chapter on Feminism in *The Oxford Handbook of*

Political Leadership (2014) does give some account of the fact that the “association of ‘good’ leadership with traits associated with masculinity means that the *definition of what it is to be a good leader* overlaps significantly with what it means *to be a good man*” but focuses primarily on expectations of women in leadership roles (74). Strikingly, one of the most incisive analyses of political leadership through the lens of masculinist performativity comes from Valerie Sperling in *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (2015), which explores why “activists on both sides of the Kremlin (pro- and anti-regime) have chosen to wield concepts of femininity, masculinity, and homophobia (heteronormativity) as tools in their political organizing efforts” (2). *Much* could be made of Sperling’s analysis in Putin’s relationship to Donald Trump, but the book does not explore a masculinist relationship with the American president except for a telling comparison to recent U.S. examples of the same phenomenon:

On the figurative level, in 2004, US presidential candidate John Kerry was teased by Republicans for his high-end road bike, which paled against George W. Bush’s “more manly Trek mountain bike.” Eight years later the Internet buzzed over an indirect physical competition between the bare-chested photos of Barack Obama and a workout photo shoot in *Time* magazine featuring Republican vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan, with commentators arguing over which man had the “better” body (in 2008, similar discussions had occurred when racy photos of Obama and Putin were released). After George W. Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” speech in May 2003, which was made aboard a US aircraft carrier and prematurely proclaimed an end to major military operations in Iraq, women reportedly made calls to G. Gordon Liddy’s talk show to exclaim about “what a stud” the president was. Bush had worn a flight suit with a parachute harness, the

straps of which caused a “noticeable bulge in the president’s crotch”; debate ensued as to whether or not the president’s handlers had engaged in “sock stuffing” to gain whatever symbolic masculine advantage could be conferred in that fashion. (21)

Some analysis of masculinist performativity in relationship to the President is found in Justin S. Vaughn and Stacy Michaelson’s “It’s a Man’s World: Masculinity in Pop Culture Portrayals of the President” in *Woman and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics* (2012). While many of the other essays of the book focus on the femininity either desired or missing from presidential politics, this essay focuses *specifically* on how presidential masculinist (re)performances can be found in popular consumption, that “popular cultural depictions of the presidency, including those that provide fictional depictions of the institution, provide an ongoing gendering of the office that continues to serve an informal yet unbreached barrier between women and presidential leadership” (Chapter 7). In the works analyzed in this dissertation, such depictions are either overt criticisms of the character’s masculinist performativity or rely on dramatizing that ethos in order to make the character readable. Regardless, Vaughn and Michaelson fundamentally understand the power that (re)performances of such masculinity can have, that it “both reflects contemporary political reality and shapes public understanding and expectations about politics” (Chapter 7). Naturally, their analysis does not include Trump or extend across the Atlantic to any prime minister.

Similarly, while Jeff Smith devotes an entire chapter section of *The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fictions on the Page, on the Stage, Onscreen, and Online* (2009) to performances of masculinity, the analyses in question are only of fictional

presidents as self-realized characters and such performances' relationship to the counterculture of the '60s. However, his introductory remarks give us some context:

Looking to presidents for traditionally masculine virtues has a long history. It gave us Teddy Roosevelt with his big stick and, long before that, an Andrew Jackson whose "virulent hypermasculinity" helped him push his cerebral predecessor aside. The Kennedy image of the early 1960s was assembled from old materials: sports, seamanship, wartime exploits, "profiles in courage," and even a suggestion of knights in shining armor (conveniently supplied via the popular musical *Camelot*). It's intriguing that when the administrator of NASA went to brief the new president on the space program's need for more money — far from pledging to put Americans on the moon, Kennedy at first resisted funding Project Apollo — the talking points he spoke from warned against leaving the program "emasculated." Similar language figured in later debates over Vietnam and even the Great Society. (182)

On the note of Kennedy, Robert D. Dean's essay "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," comes closest to the kind of work I am doing both in terms of masculinist performativity and policy-making. In it, Dean demonstrates the connections between crises of masculinity in the American public, the masculinist ethos of the president, and the very specific impetus this caused in him to create programs such as the Green Berets, the Peace Corps, and the Presidential Council of Physical Fitness. Dean's thesis that "a more complete history of politics and policy demands considerations of gender as a factor in policy reasoning" informs the very logic of this dissertation (30).

Furthermore, Georgia Duerst-Lahti inextricably connects these offices of power with masculine performance, as she writes that “presidential campaigns have always been about what kind of man should hold an office predicated on masculinity” (“Seeing...” 733). Referring to R.W. Connell, she concludes that the 2000 election campaigns “evoked the two major modes of U.S. masculinity, dominance masculinity and technical expertise masculinity” (733). These previous concepts and various identifiers of masculine performativity in political ideology are best comprised in her “masculinism” (the term I will primarily use), which has “incentive to mask its hegemonic dominance in the discourse and practices of universal individuals and meritorious standards” and which “has been capable of setting the terms of normal, just, and proper arrangements for social and political power” (“Gender Ideology” 165). However, as a political scientist, her primary objectives are not to analyze how such performativity is based in a series of stylized acts but how it correlates with various political ideologies, namely: enlightened left liberalism, liberal masculinism, neo-fraternalism, new paternalism, traditional paternalism, and new patriarchy. Therefore, understanding Duerst-Lahti’s intersections is extremely useful in correlating a *kind* of masculinist performativity with a *kind* of politics (as suggested earlier by Greig) but does not provide us a *de facto* series of acts by which masculinity is performed in Anglo-American politics and recognizable in drama. She is also more concerned with identifying masculinism’s political inverse, femininity.

As for prime ministers, a less-expansive corpus of scholarship exists connecting Downing Street to gendered performance. cursory examples in scholarly works include James Martin’s *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction* (2013), which remarks that “Even as women participate in democratic politics in ever greater numbers...the nature of public speech and communication continues to be defined to a great extent as masculine...The well-known example

of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher deliberately deepening her voice in order to sound more like a ‘statesman’ underscores this point well” (Chapter 9). Indeed, the masculinity of Thatcher dominates artistic and scholarly interest, as is suggested by Yves Golder in “From Parodies of the Iron Lady to Margaret Thatcher’s Political Image” (2020), and by numerous depictions of her in recent dramas as a drag role. Sara Martin writes that “the ‘symbolic wound’ Thatcherism left in ‘the contemporary imagination’...has inspired a veritable avalanche of studies considering how gender conditioned her leadership. Formally or informally, many have concluded that ‘she seemed to be not so much a “real woman”, but much more of a “male type” ’” (Chapter 7).

Paul Ward devotes a chapter section to “Masculinity, Britishness, and Empire in the late nineteenth century” in *Britishness Since 1870* (2004), whose matrix for British masculinity at that time included “moral earnestness and religiosity to athleticism and patriotism” (38). He does not examine how the office of the prime minister was affected by such hegemonic masculinity. Ben Griffin surveys some post-war performativity in one prime minister when he writes:

Harold Wilson, for example, attacked the 14th Earl of Home’s credentials to lead the country by asking ‘How can the scion of an effete establishment appreciate and understand the scientific revolution?’...Wilson underlined this distinction in his own gender performances, choosing to smoke a pipe and drink beer in public, when his private preferences were for brandy and cigars, making a point of drawing attention to his preference for tinned rather than smoked salmon; similarly, public interest in his Gannex raincoat only makes sense as a subtle

deviation from upper-class sartorial codes...[T]he overwhelming status advantage attached to ‘gentlemanly’ forms of masculinity had diminished. (419)³

Griffin concludes: “To be taken seriously as political leaders, men had to look, stand, dress and behave in ways that conformed to sets of gender norms” which was problematic as those norms were valued differently by class and political bent, and “Only Wilson managed to straddle this gulf with any success by himself” (422-423). Unfortunately, his review of gender performances among prime ministers doesn’t go further than Wilson.

The only reference to the masculinity of the prime minister in *British Cultural Identities* (2002) explains that “The culture of Westminster is often likened to a boys’ public school...Heckling, jeering, and the routine exchange of insults are so much part of the daily proceedings that prime minister Tony Blair, who has sought actively to promote women within the Cabinet, has repeatedly discussed the possibility of a ban on name-calling” (Garrett 117). Anna Hickey-Moody’s Introduction to *Deleuze and Masculinity* (2019), although she does not go into performances of the prime minister specifically, does triangulate Anglo-American masculinity and even provides a matrix: “as I write, the international political landscape is populated by figures of masculinity such as Donald Trump, Scott Morrison, Boris Johnson, and Nigel Farage. The spectrum of global political performativity is clearly heterosexual, conservative, middle class, materially white, and male...The four men cited above most likely believe that their (hetero)sexuality is indeed a ‘natural’ performance of their gender” (32). Again, these are the referents of hegemonic masculinity which are the most persistent and which form the recurring basis of the masculinism analyzed in this work.

³ This very sentiment was performed almost verbatim as a very compelling monologue in an episode of the Netflix original series *The Crown*, with Jason Watkins starring as Harold Wilson.

One of the most recent major works concerning this phenomenon is Joshua M. Roose's *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity, and the Populist Epoch* (2021), in which the tactics of Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage to appeal specifically to white working-class males in the United Kingdom are analyzed thoroughly. As well, Jayson Harsin equates the "herd mentality" of Boris Johnson's COVID-19 response with the "same toxic White masculinist selfishness" of those pro-Trump protestors in the USA who stormed State houses demanding an end to lockdown in his conclusion that "a conjuncturely specific form of toxic, especially white, masculinity is key to understanding the virus's entwinement with contemporary post-truth of 'emo-truth' politics" (Harsin 2020).

None of this is to say that public or journalistic interest in Boris Johnson's masculinity has been missing. Much as in the United States vis-à-vis Trump, a number of recent news articles have pinpointed masculinist performativity as a force on Johnson's policy. In October 2019, the *Independent* published "How leaders like Boris Johnson took toxic masculinity in politics to terrifying new heights," claiming that his statements "amplify the competitive alpha dominance and the social expectation on men to assert as much aggression as possible" (Walsh 2019). A year earlier, *The Guardian* diagnosed the Brexit movement in which Johnson (next to Nigel Farage) was the largest cheerleader as "lost in toxic masculinity" (Bennett 2018). The same publication only in September, 2020 (in comparison to the same bare-chested equestrianism of Putin mentioned earlier) described Johnson as "in a muddle equating parenting with femininity and strength with masculinity" while he was photographed doing push-ups on the floor of his office in 10 Downing Street, claiming he had failed his "virility test" (Williams 2020).

Methodology

Understanding the relationship between masculinist performativity and national politics is not entirely a new pursuit—nor is an analysis of the way in which such performances are reflected in drama. Such analysis is predominantly conducted through political philosophy, gender studies, performance studies, or dramaturgy, though there do exist very few successful amalgamations of interdisciplinarity which provide inspiration for my framework. The most seminal of these is David Savran's *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (1992), in which Savran formulated an entire “post-war” ethos of masculinity and gave close-readings of Miller and Williams to demonstrate that masculinity's reflection in canonical drama. To illustrate the connection between the performative and political sphere, Savran begins with an anecdote that is useful to repeat, here:

When the American National Exhibition opened in Moscow with great fanfare during the summer of 1959, then Vice President Richard Nixon journeyed to the Soviet capital to open the show...The civility of the occasion, however, was sabotaged by a day-long heated debate between Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev over nuclear weapons, foreign military bases, the free exchange of ideas, and the merits of American capitalism, home appliances, and jazz...[They] took up positions prescribed for them by a narrative of conquest and imperial domination that long antedated their heated words. Despite their preoccupation with the world stage, the most revealing part of their exchange had little to do with affairs of state. (Savran 1-3)

That exchange was published verbatim in *The New York Times*:

KHRUSHCHEV: I defend the real policy, which is to assure peace. How can peace be assured when we are surrounded by military bases?

NIXON: We can talk about that later. Let's drink to talking—as long as we are talking we are not fighting.

KHRUSHCHEV: [Indicating a waitress] Let's drink to the ladies.

NIXON: We can all drink to the ladies. (3)

This, says Savran, is the only point of agreement in their entire dialogue, a “point of strategic agreement that transcends the Cold War: the politics of masculinity” (Savran 4). Two superpowers of utter ideological opposition had found mutual truth expressed in a “universal attitude that produces women as objects of male desire” (4). Despite a global cataclysm which resituated the East and West hemispheres to either side of the Iron Curtain, “the antagonism between capitalism and communism is displaced and reconfigured as an opposition between man and woman, producer of discourse and silent accessory, ogling subject and object of the gaze” (4).

“We can all drink to the ladies,” accomplished far more than the Geneva Convention ever could, coupling the two Cold Warriors under the aegis of “all,” of a “universal” desiring subject—belligerent, inflamed, masculine, and heterosexual—who, in his unspeakable arrogance, carves up the world and then threatens to annihilate it. (Savran 4)

These are adjectives that codify the paradigm of masculinist performance which have been found over numerous theoretical works and disciplines, and even in psychological study (Pappas 2019). From our point of departure with Savran, little has been done in the field of theatre/performance studies to structure masculinist performativity as a politically explicative or predictive tool —

though many studies in gender theory, history, and political science used quantitative methodologies to explore this phenomenon. As well, Savran doesn't provide an analysis of presidential (re)performances specifically or of masculinist performances in American leadership past his post-war era. Savran's anecdote is an extremely useful depiction of masculinist performance and its effect on policy: this dissertation will compile such instances among a number of administrations to show a genealogy of performance of which Savran only examines a fraction. Furthermore, Savran's use of political performances was intended only to introduce the phenomenon vis-à-vis the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams: I will be tackling these masculinist performances first as political events which are (re)performed in dramatizations and subsequently reified on the world stage, continuing the cycle of reflection between this specific identity and its performativity.

This is why this dissertation centers performance theory as the starting principle of such analysis but also uses dramatic analysis as a proof of fact. As contemporary drama and pop culture are active and useful measurements of political forces, I demonstrate how dramatic criticism and dramaturgy archive these particular (re)performances in that their characters are reliant on an audience's reading of their masculinist performativity. As much as polling data and political statistics are tools in understanding how certain political identities are represented through party leadership, so too are the ways by which performative/performance studies understand and enact characters in drama. The use of masculinist performative tropes in dramatizations of public figures both affirms the object's position within that political identity and reifies those connected ideologies: in this case, reperforming crises of masculinity and thus documenting them simultaneously. This also demonstrates that theatre, performance studies, dramaturgy, and performance philosophy are not only useful when used as intersectional tools,

but *critical* to be used as interdisciplinary tools. Doing so can both create a more active political understanding and have immense potential for dramatizing the political in theatrical praxis and study.

Beyond Savran, the major thinkers who will help to codify working conceptions of hegemonic masculinity will be R.W. Connell, whose book *Masculinities* (2005) is the touchstone of the subject, and Judith Butler's conceptualization of performativity and (re)performance. Butler (1990) convincingly establishes gender as a signification which is inscribed on one by various markers, either physical or "a stylized repetition of acts," which acquire recognizable meaning by that very inscription (179). When grouped together, such acts create a potential ethos of gendered performance, criteria which can be distinguished over time and between cultures. Further to this, gendered performances constitute effective changes in social relations to gender—it substantiates that which it signifies in the ever-occurring (re)performance of itself, thus constituting performativity. R.W. Connell argues that multiple masculinities exist within a given society and that "hegemonic masculinity" allows for the greatest exercise of power within patriarchal societies while other masculinities are subordinated by their performative closeness to femininity, queerness, or skin color (Connell 1995). It will be the work of this dissertation to demonstrate the ways in which those multiple identifiers, gender significations, and (re)performances have occurred and reified/documentated masculinist performativity in politics and drama. Such a task necessarily hinges on accepting the fluidity of masculinist performativity while appreciating what seem to be its constant or recurring themes, as Karl Kippola writes in *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865* (2012):

[It] is impossible to talk of one American masculine model...On the most basic

level, the parameters of masculinity, as a cultural invention, are established by characteristics and behaviors that are identified as manly (and just as importantly defined as unmanly, animalistic, or effeminate). In his performance of gender, a man “assumes” a role, to borrow from Judith Butler — meaning a role both taken on and taken for granted... To further complicate historical inquiry, an exemplar of manhood differs from the “multiplicity of masculinities” that are actually performed, which creates a constant double vision of male identity... (Koppola 2)

Underlying and connected to the work of these thinkers is Luce Irigaray who describes the masculine ethos’s homosocial behavior of exchanging and commodifying women. What Savran calls “the primary mode of desire” in Miller’s work (illuminating the masculine ethos in *After the Fall* and others), he draws on Luce Irigaray to define such a mode as:

...the system of exchange under patriarchy that always refers to “the production of women, signs, and commodities...back to men.” It is a social monopoly in which “wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men.” (Savran 35)

As such, Irigaray provides a central tenet of masculine performance in that heteronormative relations rely on hom(m)osexuality: “the regime...situates women as the medium of men’s alliances with one another, as the buried support and energetic reserves of the body politic” (Zakin 2011). Such commodification and exchange of women is integral not only to Savran’s example (Nixon and Khrushchev), but in some way incorporated in all other masculinities discussed in this dissertation, and will be fundamental in constructing my own. Hom(m)osexual and homosocial relations appear frequently in the public and private interactions of presidents and prime ministers and are particularly noticeable in the personae of Boris Johnson and Donald

Trump. Of course, while Irigaray writes extensively about the ways in which such masculine ethos is a central aspect of political ideology, she does not analyze the specific performances or (re)performances of American presidents or British prime ministers. Valences of gender which distance the subject from the hegemonically masculine are imposed on Otherizations of race and class, which is also fundamental to masculinist performativity. The ways in which this occurs and theories that deconstruct this ideology are explained in the first section of Chapter One.

Chapter Overview

While there are numerous studies, books, and articles which concern themselves with masculinity in the Anglo-American sphere, few if any of them specifically focus on the homosocial relationship shared between the president and prime minister's cultures, the interactions of their offices and policies, or both countries' dramatic reflection of the stylized repetition of acts which comprise it. Such an analysis is crucial for both American and British politics as, without it, a central piece of political *modus operandi* is being understudied. Exploring this connection is also crucial to global politics: the United States and Great Britain are leaders in global policy, but as multiple governments and parties have become more immersed in this form of masculinist performativity we likewise see that "narratives of masculinity in crises, widespread in many societies, constitute a discursive opportunity for the far-right" to take political power — opportunities which have been taken advantage of by nationalist movements throughout Europe and South America (Greig 5). The U.S. and U.K. are no exceptions to this far-Right opportunism via masculinism, as this dissertation will show.

The first chapter of this dissertation will place the Anglo-American masculine ethos in theoretical context and give historical examples of the special relationship's masculinist

embodiments since World War II. None of these administrations will be analyzed in comprehensive detail but as illustrative moments from various presidential-P.M. relationships to demonstrate the recurring masculinist performativity of those relationships. While such Anglo-American relationships were forged and executed, scholarship in gender studies kept pace (or focused on these relationships post hoc) and provided multiple frameworks for identifying the masculinist crises which were prevalent in both societies. A theoretical overview of the most seminal and necessary theses in gender performativity will underscore that history, including those of Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, David Savran, Micheal Kimmel, and especially R.W. Connell. I ultimately adopt Connell's contention that these leaders represent the dominant "hegemonic masculinity" in their respective societies (2005, 23). I further use her seminal work in theories of masculinism to structure my theoretical arguments, including theories of multiple masculinities and hierarchies, masculinity's relationship to race and economic forces, and the masculinist performances such hegemony engenders. I will also continually chart the evolution of masculinist performativity, its crises, and its political representations as they are all depicted in notable drama of the time.

Chapter Two will be devoted to analyzing the major moments of the Trump presidential campaign and presidency using the configuration of masculinism developed from the historical and theoretical overview provided in Chapter One and arguing those moments' relevance as performative events. Such moments are too numerous to concisely list here, but will include several of Trump's arguments during the primary and general election debates; his performance, character, and delivery of major oratories; his relationship with foreign dictators and the nature of his appreciation or contention with them; his demographic appeal in the 2016 election and enduring relationship with working-class white men; his rhetoric concerning women; his

relationship with certain figures on a demonstrably masculinist basis (such as Kanye West); his private sexual history and scandals, and others. I will then analyze notable performances of his character in recent productions, including by the Public Theatre in their 2017 production of *Julius Caesar*; Alec Baldwin's performance of Trump in various *Saturday Night Live* sketches; the recent Showtime miniseries *The Comey Rule* starring Brendan Gleeson as Donald Trump, and others. While the seminal drama of Trump (the *Frost/Nixon* of the Trump *idée fixe*, if you will) has not yet been written, it is certain that whatever touchstone play is inspired by this administration will feature Trump's relationship with masculinity as a central performative component.

Chapter Three will provide the same insight and analysis of Boris Johnson. Though identical expectations of masculinist performativity do not necessarily exist in the United Kingdom's leadership as they do for the United States, Chapter One will demonstrate that the historical reciprocation of these values is clear, and that occupants of the offices perform their relationship as part of that genealogy, and their similarity is inescapable. Since Johnson's political career has much more longevity than Trump's, it will be necessary to focus on those times which best exemplify his operation with our matrix of the masculinist performativities during his tenure as a journalist, a Member of Parliament, and Mayor of London, and those moments since his premiership in which his connection with Donald Trump evinces this ethos (this occurs most notably during his premiership during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Partygate scandals). On the other hand, original drama featuring Boris Johnson as a central character has been more commonly produced in the United Kingdom than playtexts featuring Trump in America. These include Robert Khan and Tom Salinsky's *Kingmaker* (2014); the Sky

Atlantic drama *This England* starring Kenneth Branagh as Johnson, and his numerous appearances as a puppet in the late-night sketch comedy *Spitting Image*.

The Conclusion will present the specific points of masculinist connection between Trump and Johnson since Johnson's inauguration as prime minister on 24 July, 2019 and in the character of the Anglo-American "special relationship" between them. Drawing on our previously established definitions of masculinist performativity and supported by recent scholarship in political science, gender studies, and performance theory, I will conclude that a) previous paradigms of gender performativity have been formative to both figures and their policies, and that b) public reception, understanding, and (re)performances of masculinism are documented in these dramas, making them archival artifacts in the masculinist genealogy of both cultures. These dramas only contain readable characters by virtue of their masculinist dramaturgy, and their capacity to embody such performativity make them unique historical and political touchstones. Although such performances arise from a history of hegemonic behavior, these figures are also discursively different, self-aware, and more concerned with embodied the crises of masculinity than their predecessors in either country, which contributes to their special relationship. Due to the short amount of overlap in Trump and Johnson's time in office, this will be a shorter chapter and will leave room for a section in which the implications of such a relationship and its connection to the larger scope of masculinist performativity in world politics will be articulated.

Conclusion

Performances of masculinity are at the core of Trump's administration and his presidential legacy, which is evidenced at the very least by the fact that every major tell-all and investigative

work published in the last four years have been unable to avoid at least some peripheral commentary on Trump's masculine image, including: Mary Trump's *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man* (2020), Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House* (2018), Stormy Daniels's *Full Disclosure* (2018), both Bob Woodward's *Fear* (2018) and *Rage* (2020), and Michael Cohen's *Disloyal: A Memoir* (2020). The most exhaustive and publicized book on Trump, *Confidence Man*, has only been released in October 2022, by Pulitzer Prize-winner Maggie Haberman, and has been used in particular for this dissertation, because Haberman has understood most clearly how integral masculinist performance has been to Trump's pre- and post-Presidential image, and how conscious he was of this factor in his commercial and political image. The quotes used from her biography in this work frequently illustrate the ways in which Trump's cognizance of his masculinist performance were as readable as the performance itself.

The same is true in a number of interviews given by former colleagues of Boris Johnson, though the tell-all of his premiership has not yet been published. Apart from the fact that salacious or insulting details have commercial interest, it is worth stopping to ask ourselves why so much material focuses on these specific facets of each man's character. The answer is that these performances are conscious, reflexive, integral to the public and private persona of both men, and thus a factor in their policy. To criticize this portion of their affect is to make legitimate criticisms of their political efficacy (similar to the case Sperling makes re: homophobic depictions of Putin). This will be analyzed in several forms of artistic media and particularly in their dramatization throughout this dissertation. Inclusion of this performativity is, for the same reasons, necessary in the act of dramatizing these specific figures: it is a facet of their personal

and political characters without which an audience will indelibly feel that something key is missing, and why so many pieces of drama (both serious and comedic) contain it.

Since definitively losing the election in November 2020, Trump has made the impact and perils of an Oval Office guided by masculinist performativity all the clearer. His initial defiance of the will of the American people transformed quickly into personal belligerence, legal contest, a hijacking of the transition process, the arguable act of election tampering (his call pressuring Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to “find” enough votes to flip the State in his favor) and culminated in his incitement of literal insurrection on January 6, 2021. Splitting collective faith in the democratic process roughly in half, Trump has set events in motion which are arguably catalysts for civil wars. Numerous political commentators have diagnosed Trump’s post-election fracas as the most damaging part of his presidency for this reason. My contention is that these actions are the *coups de grace* of his masculinist performativity, a willful rejection of any event that connotes becoming a loser and an employment of strategies (from obstinance to outright threats) which characterize such an ethos in its most exaggerated forms. If some opinions concerning the lasting rifts those final days of Trump’s term will cause are correct, then there is an imperative to understand their motivations and their consequences as thoroughly as possible. This dissertation will help define a destructive happening that waits in the American political establishment like a bomb, ready to destroy the system that perpetuated itself in a grand Hegelian fashion.

While there is much to be said about both of these figures after January 6, 2021, and Johnson’s resignation from office, this dissertation only leads us to these dates. As both figures no longer retain the office which embodies the hegemonic paradigm (as per Connell) after this time, their administrative capacity to reflect masculinist performativity and respond to the crises

of masculinity are effectively ended at these points, even though they both continue to inform the performativity sphere as public figures. These final days of their tenures and some observations of how their political memories contribute to ongoing masculinist cultures in the Anglosphere are discussed in the Conclusion.

In our world, a world in which patriarchy is the contested norm, performances of masculinity (and the masculinist tactics used to keep such identities in social dominance) are central to virtually all aspects of public and private life. Understanding masculinist performativity can help one decode the dynamics at play in police brutality, LGBTQ+ legislation, gun debates, family trauma, women's rights—everything from film criticism to the threat of nuclear war. While the ideological veil of masculinism is criticized and rebelled against, its dominating presence and overt influence are indisputable, highlighting a critical need for analyzing precisely how it manifests itself in every realm of human interaction. The fact that such masculinism sits at a nexus of social forces as class, gender, and race merely underscores both the necessity of its study and its interdisciplinary relevance.

As such, the fields of gender studies, political and performance philosophy, and theatre studies have a unique convergence point in presidential/prime minister performances and the dramas in which those figures appear. By utilizing this interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation will not only illustrate the feasibility of such interdisciplinary study, but reassert the potential that performance theory can have on political understanding and vice versa — that an understanding of political performance is as useful as a thorough understanding of political science.

CHAPTER ONE

MASCULINIST PERFORMATIVITY AND CRISIS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN POLITICS
AND DRAMA

A genealogy of masculinist performativity

It is necessary to begin by creating a genealogy of masculinist performativity: an amalgamation, both conceptually and chronologically, of theories of masculine/ist performance, comprising criteria by which such performances can be identified. It can also show us how identities which meet those criteria can be understood or “read” as performances that are reified in political ideology and (re)performed in drama. This is useful for several reasons, and two of them (the establishment of an identity’s history and recent ways in which that history has manifested) are described in Michael Peterson’s *Straight White Male: Performance Art Monologues* (1997):

The emphasis on the performativity of identity has the advantage of encouraging the historicization of identity. The value of this is clear when we look at the performance of straight white class-privileged manhood in the contemporary scene. Several years ago, when I first began looking at them, such performances seemed related to desperate responses to the erosion of identity privilege, which seemed to be happening culturally despite the social conservatism of the Reagan-Bush years. More recently, the retrenchment of identity privilege as indicated by anti-immigrant, antigay, and anti-affirmative action developments suggest that some reactionary performances of straight white male identity have been more powerful than their frequently “wacko” extremism might have suggested. (10)

The following twenty years would show just how much more power such “wacko” extremism would become. What Peterson diagnoses as “the retrenchment of identity privilege” in reactionary performances of straight white male identity are, in fact, recurring criteria in the genealogy: socially conservative performances which ingratiate themselves into a political identity—often crossing lines of party and class. Tracing a genealogy of such performative identities demonstrates how masculinism becomes repetitive, pervasive, and hegemonic. There are, I feel, intellectual and moral pitfalls to this, which Peterson also illustrates in his conclusion:

...straight white men are more likely than most to inhabit their supposed identities with a boring steadiness, an arrogant nonchalance...But this is, in a way, simply a restatement of a theme so recurrent it threatens to become numbing: here is the center, see how central it is, notice how we orbit around it. The trap here is that the critic must report this legendary centrality in order to make clear the power investing in these men and their representations. However, this always risks reinforcing the hegemony it purports to analyze...White straight male power really does exist first and foremost in the realm of (particular) representations, and if we must never forget that this representational regime is of course backed up by very real force, it is perhaps just as accurate to suggest that this force is in fact supported only through the exercise of representation. (188)

My objective in this work is to identify a dominant mode of masculinist performativity in the Oval Office and 10 Downing Street and locate it within a history of hegemonic performativity (for indeed these figures help to constitute hegemonic identities), but to avoid reifying such performances as de facto masculinity against which all other performances find subaltern solidity. Yet, despite Peterson’s acknowledgement that “in the daily lives of many people in our

society...male white bourgeois straights are far from central elements,” the fact remains that the subjects of these offices and of their “special relationship” *does* find, historically and presently, hegemonic masculinism as its central, repeated identity (even in the cases of the two women who have held the post of prime minister and the one Black man who has been president, as that is the ethos with which they had to contend in order to embody the offices). In order to do the necessary work, we take Sally Robinson’s point that “[m]asculinity and whiteness retain their power as signifiers and as social practices because they are opaque to analysis, the argument goes; one cannot question, let alone dismantle, what remains hidden from view” (1). We must risk reinforcing the hegemony of a thing to point out that it is, in fact, hegemonic, and that the emperor is naked albeit confirming he *is* the emperor: to not allow it to remain normative by virtue of its invisibility. And the repeated performance of that identity, to draw one last time from Peterson, is largely because such male white bourgeois straightness occupies “the position least affected by economic or transcultural challenges to established identity” (188). One reason for that resilience is because “the culture surrounding these performances...is imbricated in State and institutional power” (Hickey-Moody 4).

However, reinforcing the hegemonic centrality of masculine performativity can be avoided by accepting R. W. Connell’s contention that an “ideal masculinity” will exist at any given point in a society, meaning that it is subject to change. In our own time, the progressive pushback against what is called “toxic masculinity” is increasingly popular and demonstrates that such signifiers are fluid.⁴ A focus on the present form of a dominant masculine performance is crucial for Connell, as hegemonic masculinity must be “defined as the configuration of gender

⁴ “The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity, let alone the most comfortable. Indeed, many men live in a state of some tension with, or distance from, the hegemonic masculinity of their culture or community...The dominance of hegemonic masculinity over other forms may be quiet and implicit, but may also be vehement and violent, as in the case of homophobic violence” (Connell 2000, 10)

practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy” (77). This phrase—the answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy—is recurrent in my framework as the masculinist performances I will be critiquing are fundamentally reactionary and the response to perceived “crises of masculinity” in various spheres. I follow Demetriou’s argument that multiple models of masculinity combine to create a hegemonic bloc, which, in the words of Christine Guionnet, “en s’adaptant aux évolutions sociales, participent invariablement à la reproduction d’un ordre social patriarcal. Au sein d’un groupe donné à un moment précis, le modèle culturel de la masculinité hégémonique s’impose à tous les individus mâles, y compris à ceux qui le contestent et le vivent mal”⁵ (Dulong 13). My genealogy shall show that the problems assailing the “legitimacy of the patriarchy” have been, by and large, informed by the same social forces from the post-war to the new millennium periods. They have also defined the special relationship, which demonstrates a conscious shift in masculinist performance in recent years—what Joshua M. Roose defines as populist “hyper-masculinity” (2020)—as in the special relationship between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump.

And so: what are the characteristics of masculinist performativity, a hegemonic brand of masculine performance which claims the title of normative and demands embodiment in Anglo-American society’s highest offices? What informed these wide-reaching social performances and when did it begin? The criteria have existed in several decades of study of masculinist performativity and have exploded into political visibility: 1) racial and class anxiety, 2) heteronormativity and homosociality, 3) aggression, superiority, and dominance, 4) antifeminism and misogyny. Michael S. Kimmel provides an overview:

⁵ “... by adapting to social changes, participate inescapably in the reproduction of patriarchal social order. Within a certain group at a certain time, the cultural model of hegemonic masculinity is imposed on all individual males, including those who resist it or see it as evil.” Translation, mine.

The turn of the century was a time of dramatic change, in which the traditional foundations of gender identity—control over one's labor, ownership of the products of that labor, geographic and social mobility, domestic dominion over women and children—were eroding. Rapid industrialization, which brought changes in the scale and process of production; the closing of the frontier; challenges by women to the separation of spheres; new waves of swarthy immigrants and black migrants to the cities, and the emergence of a visible gay male subculture in the northern cities—all threatened hegemonic masculinity's sense of empowerment...Everywhere, cultural critics observed masculinity to be in crisis. (1993, 32)

Such crises engender performances of masculinism as a response to the decentralizing of the working-class, white, straight male subject. Explained in part and simply by Blais and Dupuis-Déri: “Masculinism asserts that since men are in crisis and suffering because of women in general and feminists in particular, the solution to their problems involves curbing the influence of feminism and revalorising masculinity” (2012, 22). However, this definition does not account for the intersectional anxieties that also inform these crises—of race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender.⁶ This is the case for Joshua Roose, whose definition “works on a spectrum, with contested versions of what constitutes the ideal man and the root causes of their ‘crisis’,” which, like “toxic masculinity,” describes “socially constructed aspects of masculinity, including sexism and violence, that can be harmful to both men and women...yet it does little to shape public

⁶ “Crisis is [...] a condition of masculinity itself. Masculine gender identity is never stable; its terms are continually being redefined and re-negotiated, the gender performance continually being re-staged. Certain themes and tropes inevitably reappear with regularity, but each era experiences itself in different ways.” Michael Mangan, “Shakespeare’s First Action Heroes: Critical Masculinities in Culture, both Popular and Unpopular,” quoted from Walsh (2010), 9.

policy” (99). I would push back on Roose’s final contention and point out that when such masculinist performances by elected officials, as one example, are “a reaction to feminist efforts to address women’s needs and to advance freedom and equality for women”—what Dupuis-Déri calls “state antifeminism”—then such constructs do *much* to shape public policy (2016, 22).

There is a discursive influence upon public policy when certain political movements begin to claim these signifiers for themselves both as depictions of character and particularly as planks in their platform (i.e. when Trump supporters adopted “deplorables” as a badge of political unity).

If the study of masculinity begins in understanding “the social constructions of what it is to be a man,” then it follows that the study of masculinist performance begins in understanding how those crises are created and which identities they threaten (Kimmell and Bridges, 2011).

This is, of course, not to suggest that such crises are logically valid or that the victimization they engender is historically true, as scholars like Pamela Robertson contest that these crises and the performances they create are hysterics designed to reaffirm an identity’s political power. Since World War II in the Anglo-American sphere, this occurred in working-class men through a changing historical relationship between whiteness, maleness, and labor, given an increasing number of women and migrant workers and a reduction of manual-labor jobs, from post-war economies to the neoliberalism of the late century.

Hegemonic working-class masculinities grounded in roles represented as ‘heroic, with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skills and bodily toughness’... have been undermined. In the context of neoliberalism and the ‘new economy’, they have been subordinated to masculinities equipped with the requisite cultural capital and bodily dispositions to achieve in a world

where manual labour is less valued, particularly in the absence of the valorisation of the 'working-class man' by blue-collar unions. (Roose 83)

Indeed, this post-war masculinist performance is (re)performed most perfectly in Willy Loman's declaration that "A man who can't handle tools is not a man" (Miller 30). Masculinist demographics which feel this alienation naturally respond to public figures who speak directly to their perceived sense of victimhood. In instances where the perceived threat is the sexual liberation of women or the destabilization of racial privilege or loss of self-support through manual labor (such as with coal mining jobs in both the U.K. and the U.S.), public figures who take on those crises as their own and target them in policy serve to bridge the gap between ideological and political masculinism, and to reify that demographic's subjectivity by embodying it on a national stage. Robinson describes the trajectory of this victimization:

In the late 1960s, in the wake of the civil rights movement, and with the rise of women's liberation, gay liberation, and the increasing visibility of ethnic and racial diversity on the American scene, white men began to be decentered. Some accounts of this general shift take economic changes into account ...That this class is assumed to be normatively white perhaps goes without saying; but the degree to which the crisis is afflicting the white middle class is also, and most forcefully, a crisis in masculinity, has become clear in recent years, with the vociferous cries of men who are contesting the claim that *they* are the villains in American culture. White men have, thus, been marked, *not* as individuals but as a *class*, a category that, like other marked categories, complicates the separation between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. (3)

This places white, male subjectivity as its own form of identity politics alongside the supposed rise of other forms identity politics in the '60s, with its population realizing unconsciously perhaps that, in the words of Peggy Phelan, “performance plunges into visibility,” and such visibility was therefore required to maintain social viability and dominance, although this is paradoxically the identity always implied by *the silent majority* (148). The gendered language of Richard Hofstafer’s “pseudo-conservative” of 1954 thus becomes a broadly applicable descriptor of this kind of political identity over the ensuing decades, one who “believes himself to be a living in a world in which he is spied upon, plotted against, betrayed, and very likely destined for total ruin” (45). Sandy Peterson, in considering Hofstadter’s analysis in her dissertation on the performance of conservatism, agrees that “Fundamentally, it comes from a need to assert a particular kind of identity...by status politics, rather than or in addition to interest politics” — which she maintains is simply a dog-whistle for long-term interest politics, though neither she nor Hofstadter explore in detail the ways in which performances of white masculinity are substantive to this identity (105).

Scholarly debate also exists as to whether or not the dramatization and performance of these crises are the perpetuating causes of said crises (as in the masochism and remasculinization of David Savran) or whether “the recourse to victimization attempts to *solve* that crises” (Robinson 197). But what differentiating theories have in common is the foci of victimized white masculinity’s fear in women and people of color, which incorporate through performative valences queer and educated communities (such as the effeminate and effete). These crises were reclaimed, redoubled, and reperformed by white male working classes and business classes throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, each time reframing the supposed victims as definable players in theatres of identity politics.

The idea that dominant masculinity is “in crisis” is evidenced in widely divergent discursive registers, from scholarly histories of American masculinity to popular news magazine coverage of the Lorena and John Bobbitt incident. From the late sixties to the present, dominant masculinity appears to have suffered one crisis after another, from the urgent complaints of the “silent majority” following the 1968 presidential election, to the men’s liberationists call for rethinking masculinity in the wake of the women’s movement in the 1970s, to the battles over the cultural authority of “dead white males” in academia, to the rise of a new men’s movement in the late 1980s. (Robinson 5)

These crises, their subsequent catalysts of a political identity, and that identity’s public pushback against its perceived oppressors all fall under the heading of protest masculinity that R.W. Connell identifies as performances of classist anxiety, or as Hickey-Moody describes it, “a term often used to explain working class men’s anger at their place in the world” (14). This performance of masculinism has been even the subject of one scientific experiment at Cornell University across four lab studies, which tested whether “individuals tend to react to feedback that threatens valued identities with overcompensation, enacting attitudes and behaviors associated with the identity to a more extreme extent than they would have in the absence of threats” (Willer 982).

Women showed no effects when told they were masculine; however, men given feedback suggesting they were feminine expressed more support for war, homophobic attitudes, and interest in purchasing an SUV. Study 2 found that threatened men expressed greater support for, and desire to advance in, dominance hierarchies. Study 3 showed in a large-scale survey on a diverse

sample that men who reported that social changes threatened the status of men also reported more homophobic and prodominance attitudes, support for war, and belief in male superiority... Together, these results support the masculine overcompensation thesis, [and] how it can shape political and cultural attitudes (980).

Protest masculinity in the U.K. and U.S. is part of a genealogy of privilege which began to be destabilized in the post-colonial era, before which economic, racial, and sexual supremacy were the birthright of middle- and upper-class white males as part of their colonial heritage — one which the Great Depression and later the culture wars of the '60s challenged irrevocably during the lifetimes of many who had lived to see colonial masculinity's apex. "For men of the affluent classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in British and American imperial centres, to be the globe's economic masters meant to be its sexual masters, with access to women of other classes, other colours, and other nations being part of the reward for those who conquered them" (Burstyn 83). It is also the gendered inheritance of the nation as an entity, as "the masculine model of an idealized male United States, which replaced the pre-Civil War model of state-based American identity, provided the organizing framework for American foreign policy at the beginning of the twentieth century, and continues to do so to this day" (Brinck-Johnson 8).

A white subjectivity fractured by the abolition of slavery and post-colonialism; a working class subjectivity destabilized by a post-war infusion of woman's labor, racial integration, and civil rights into the work force and in daily life; a subjectivity which considers itself a normative representative of a new world super-power and the codification of that national identity as dominant and male — all of these forces in the early and mid-twentieth century would coalesce

into the reactionary masculinist performativities after World War II. Naturally these crises can be seen as identifying factors in all three of Connell's distinguishing of gender structures: power relations, production relations, and cathexis (2005, 74).

Such crisis tendencies will always implicate masculinities, though not necessarily by disrupting them. Crisis tendencies may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity. Michael Kimmel has pointed to this dynamic in turn-of-the-century United States society, where fear of the women's suffrage movement played into the cult of the outdoorsman. Klaus Theweleit in *Male Fantasies* traced the more savage process that produced the sexual politics of fascism in the aftermath of the suffrage movement and German defeat in the Great War. More recently, Women's Liberation and defeat in Vietnam have stirred new cults of true masculinity in the United States, from violent 'adventure' movies such as the *Rambo* series, to the expansion of the gun cult and what William Gibson in a frightening recent study has called 'paramilitary culture'.
(84)

Hegemonic condensations of race and gender and orientation have definitive influence even in subaltern performances of race, gender, and orientation, as pointed out by Dr. Vershawn Ashanti-Young, who writes in his memoirs about the *nigga*- and *faggot*-genders which are extensions of white masculinist separations between Black working-class men and educated Black queers.⁷ Sometimes, the conflation between femininity, homosexuality, race, and labor was

⁷ "What my brother finds enviable about me is to him not only a function of our gender difference but also a function of our perceived class difference. Really, the two are inextricably linked. My (nigga) gender insufficiency is offset, though not entirely, by what he sees as the leisure, comfort, and ease of white-collar work, especially that of a university intellectual. There are certain privileges he sees in my being a faggot, privileges he covets for himself. This allows him to give me tacit approval. He believes I'm at least milking my gender for all it's worth, but the benefits I reap aren't appealing enough to get him to barter what he believes I've had to trade—not just the

distanced from hegemonic white masculinity through wider social forces, such as when “American society emasculated Asian American men to perform “women’s work” (e.g., launderers, cooks) and prohibiting marriage with whites” in the 1940s (Lu 347). Other times, these Otherizations were specific tactics of powerful institutions, such as when the FBI investigated and exposed “gay and lesbian activists in the Black freedom struggle...to discredit and sow division within and among civil rights and Black Power groups” (Leighton 151). Masculinist ideology also Otherized society, according to Jane Ward, through a series of heteronormative institutional practices which served to reify its normative context in scientific discourse:

[H]eterosexuality, for most of the twentieth century, referred not simply to opposite-sex attraction, but to a medical, legal, cultural, and religious ideal—to an aspiration for procreation-focused, male-initiated, malecentered, male-controlled, nonadulterous (at least on women’s part), private, and static sexuality. White Christian European and American male physicians, sexologists, and psychologists shaped heterosexuality in their own image, constructing a sexual ideal in which indigenous people, people of African descent, Jews, and women were already problematic figures. As queer historian Julian Carter has argued, it was precisely this fusing of discourses of whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality in the twentieth century that formed the concept of the “normal” American, a subjectivity most readily embodied by white men. (59)

The recognition of this kind of normativity and the electoral bloc that it represents are inescapable concerns for politicians in national campaigns; senators, parliamentarians, presidents

correct gender identification but a proper racial one. For him what it costs to increase my class status is just not worth what’s gained.” (59)

and prime ministers are in constant dialogue with this working class, white masculinist subjectivity (creating a basis of criticism against neoliberal politics by progressive thinkers). The establishment of this identity as hegemonic occurs when “there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual” (Connell 77). And while such hegemony may always be challenged and its underlying cultural ideals can be shifted, the continued performance of these identities (and policies enacted in response to their crises) by elected leaders have reified performative ideologies and given them greater solidity, becoming a “producer of history” (81). By 1958, when Arthur Schlesinger published “The Crisis of American Masculinity” in *Esquire* magazine, institutional power had definitively taken up the correspondence.

By the time Schlesinger wrote “The Crisis of American Masculinity” in 1958, Cold War liberals were beginning to regroup in the wake of Stevenson’s two crushing defeats...Schlesinger’s references to the “boring,” “banal,” national politics of recent years were clearly allusions to Eisenhower and Nixon’s tired, spirit-crushing influence on the nation; his call for American men to reject the status quo in favor of a “definite and hard-hitting” political life gave the crisis in masculinity a political outlet...In the able hands of such men as Schlesinger, Mailer, and Alsop, John F. Kennedy became not just the incarnation of the virile “vital center” liberal whose template Schlesinger had created ten years earlier, but the antidote to the nation’s crisis in masculinity. (Cuordileone 543-544)

The same reflexive identity was constructed and reified by similar events in the United Kingdom over the same time period: a genealogy of masculinist performativity which culminates ultimately in the passing of Brexit and the premiership of Boris Johnson. From the post-war

period onward, masculinist performativity's nexus in whiteness, anti-intellectualism, and physical prowess is succinctly captured in Salman Rushdie's reflections of his school days: "At an English boarding school in the early 1960s...there were three bad mistakes you could make, but if you made only two of the three you could be forgiven. The mistakes were to be foreign; to be clever; and to be bad at games" (Rushdie 26). This mentality could be seen as a prevalent force in English culture and politics much later. According to Roose, white working-class anxieties in places like Birmingham on the subjects of a migrant workforce, multicultural populations, the collapse of some manufacturing industries, and the presence of white nationalism all contributed to establishing a Tory and UKIP party which actively sought to address those concerns, and is represented by men who embody that identity such as Nigel Farage.

Despite his privileged roots and youth, Farage deliberately adopts a disposition more likely to endear him to working-class voters and, in particular, British working-class masculinity...Farage is known for holding numerous press conferences in pubs, and he is often pictured with a beer or cigarette in his hand. He openly admits to having been to lap-dancing clubs and derides as politically correct those who would decry such behaviour...[It] is arguable that the public speeches, media commentary, and other public communications of Nigel Farage were aimed at males, and the primary emotion that they emphasised was anger regarding the current state of the United Kingdom. (118-120)

Farage is one in a line of U.K. politicians who have reified the masculinist ideology and its "sense of loss and resultant anger, anxiety, and alienation [which] manifest in ugly and very often hyper-masculine ways" (136). M.R.M. Ward, in his sociological study of industrial

masculinities and the influence of an educated class in the South Wales Valleys, charts a similar history, wherein “the development of a ‘crisis’ discourse overtakes issues of poverty, racism, and structural inequalities” (6).

The restructuring of the economy and the de-industrialization process that has occurred during the last 40 years has altered traditional transitions from school to work across the global north. These economic changes have been accompanied by a set of common held assumptions that men are the new disadvantaged, and that there is a ‘crisis’ in contemporary forms of masculinity. This supposed ‘crisis’ is evidenced in political rhetoric, public policy, high levels of educational underachievement, violence and suicide rates, mental health problems, absent fathers and a lack of male role models. (149)

Ward’s conclusion that “what is always present is the heritage of an industrial and cultural legacy which shapes the acceptable forms of manhood” is repeated throughout Britain at large (157). Although such crises were amplified and shifted in Britain during the 1990s, the first of these reactionary performative identities (resulting in the British “New Lad”) was brought about by white, working class male angst over advances in feminism, the gay movement, and post-Fordist economic upheaval (Hunt 56). Indeed, this period is covered much less extensively than masculine performativities in British culture of the nineteenth century and earlier, but the same themes of crisis continue from the post-colonial to the post-WWII context. By the end of 1946, British labor shortage had reached over one million, for which women and immigrants were the ideal replacement categories, without inheriting the cultural capital that comes with possessing the identity of white male laborers (Wilson 89). The emergence of white working class

masculinism in Britain, as in the United States, also came with its subordination of other forms of masculinity, reifying its hierarchical status by valences of whiteness and heterosexuality.

Heterosexual masculinity emerged alongside (and was frequently defined in opposition to) other emerging categories of masculinity, particularly queer masculinity. Homosexuality was developed and defined as a social category in the campaigns for legal reform (such as in the 1957 Wolfenden Report) and in the human sciences' focus on it as a 'social problem' to be studied and solved, and had become the focus of national scandal and police arrests in the post-war years (where queerness was framed as at worst, a sign of national weakness and decay, and, at best, an affliction). At the same time, migrant masculinities were perceived to have a growing presence in British society. Their otherness was perceived as a threat – resulting in outbreaks of violence from the 1950s onward and increasingly strict immigration legislation after an initial period of openness – and they were expected to engage in the thankless task of assimilation. The presence of black migrants in Britain...was used as a means of securing the imagined community of the nation, while also giving rise to a 'recharged' definition of whiteness, with white masculinity becoming activity, control and refusal in the face of black presence (and white women as victims and prey to black men). Both migrant and queer masculinities were means of defining what white heterosexual masculinity was not. (Salter 11)

Perhaps most important to note for this dissertation: these anxieties were framed for theatrical as well as public performance. The emergence of the Angry Young Men were one of several cadres in the arts by which the collective masculinist voice found representation even among

individuals who were arguably urban and white-collar, such as John Osborne. The words and actions of Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and the homosocial masculinist hierarchies of queer performance in *A Patriot for Me* (1965) are texts which utilize the masculinist crises to dramatic effect (Kelly 2016).⁸ Predictably, Osborne and similar figures would fall out from their alliances with the New Left as their public dialogues became more concerned with the displacement of men and the destabilization of their identity as that of the nation, heralding the rise of far-right nationalist politics out of the collective crises of masculinity. Andrew Wylie is one of the few scholars that charts out a broad survey of major plays that depict these crises in the post-war era:

In *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill simultaneously illustrates and critiques reactionary essentialism...Churchill's *Top Girls*, meanwhile, explores the pros and cons of attempting to better the lot of women within the existing framework...Sarah Daniels' *Neaptide*...exposes the oppressive aspects of masculine behaviour through the actions of her male characters, but does not envisage the possibility of men being possessed of redeeming features...Fearfulness about any discussion of gender is, colourably, the principal underlying feature of the laddishness of Patrick Marber's *Dealer's Choice*, in which braggadocio and male bonding serve as substitutes for real communication

⁸ Andrew Wylie does make the interesting observation that: "It is worth noting that in gender terms the masculine defence of the status quo began before the feminine assault on it. In taking Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as a significant misogynistic expression of threatened masculinity, there is a danger of putting the cart before the horse. As I discuss in Chapter 2, some plays by women staged in the early 1950s met with a degree of popular success. Given the relatively small number of these, however, the question remains why Osborne should react defensively against a threat which had not yet emerged. Indeed, why should feminism in Britain take so long to find a voice?" (Wylie 13). I might respond to Wylie by restating the fact that such crises are often based on perceived more than actual threats, and the mere concept of "feminine assault" is enough to trigger them, even if they are not political realities (such as the fear of guns being taken away in the United States). Osborne, a reactionary *par excellence*, could certainly have written *Look Back in Anger* out of such anxiety.

among the male characters or as positive contact between them and women. John Osborne's *The End of Me Old Cigar* contains a recognition that feminism had come into being, and presents a male fantasy about the subversion of its aims, in what can be seen as an endorsement of pro-patriarchal reassessment of gender relations. An edgy nervous acceptance of change is central to Pinter's *The Homecoming*, in which ambiguity and veiled threats serve as an exposé of the shortcomings of competitive masculine relationships... (17)

Other more canonical dramas throughout the twentieth century would continue to trumpet the crisis of masculinity and demonstrate that its anxiety was the result of increasingly visible subaltern identities in the public and labor spheres.⁹ These include the works of David Mamet and his *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983) and Sam Shepard's *True West* (1980), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). In Britain, the successors to the Angry Young Men carried the torch of these crises, such as in Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) (Walsh 2010, 5). Performances of crises of masculinity were not only written, criticized, or reperformed by white male dramatists identifying with working class struggle, as Nicola Abram condemns W.E.B. DuBois's study of *Pyeyucca* (1984) for its focusing "on a disempowered masculine subject" (63). Abram also references the Black Mime Theatre Women's Troop's performing of *Drowning* (1991) as containing:

...a study in hypermasculinity: the three performers sit astride the chairs, legs akimbo, laughing heartily, mumbling incomprehensibly, drinking competitively,

⁹ The embodiment of masculinist performativity required to write and perform these characters is not unique to drama. Because other forms of pop culture (such as television sketches) both utilize and require such embodiments equally in order to make their dramatizations readable, I will be drawing on such examples outside of the theatre (but still within the disciplines of performance) in order to demonstrate the essential element of masculinist performativity in creating these characters and conflicts.

and leering at (imagined) women. Since the stage space is otherwise empty, they skilfully imply the objects of this salacious gaze through synchronised gestures and by orientating their bodies in particular ways. In this mimed scene, ‘woman’ is produced by the male gaze and for male pleasure. She is made object: that which is to be seen but cannot see. But viewers are encouraged to recognise this as a contingent state rather than a natural reality, since the performers are themselves only performing masculinity. (149)

And so, hegemonic masculinity was performed onstage through the second half of the twentieth century, both by artists who identified with its crises and those who sought to destabilize its claim to centrality and normativity.¹⁰ Consequently, this created space for politicians to perform masculinity as part of their public, private, and political characters, both inspired by and informing these dramatizations as they entered cultural consciousness. What Roose sees as hyper-masculine demagogues in his case studies of selected leaders are also the performative children of these crises of masculinity: “men” who have simply utilized their masculinist identities as political tools, as much as politicians who recognized the potential for mobilizing this demographic and acted accordingly.

Between the reactionary outrage of the ‘60s and ‘70s and our current epoch of masculinist politics, however, came a period in both countries characterized by a new neoliberal

¹⁰ And not, of course, just onstage. One of the more barefaced expressions of masculinist crisis and its amalgamation of race, class, and gender as the enemy appears in Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968), as a soldier faces a revolutionary mob:

Standing against them, the demonstrators were not only sons of the middle class of course, but sons who had departed the middle class, they were rebels and radicals and young revolutionaries; yet they were unbloodied, they felt secretly weak, they did not know if they were the simple equal, man for man, of these soldiers, and so when this vanguard confronted soldiers now, and were able to stare them in the eye, they were, in effect, saying silently: “I will steal your clan, and your brawn, and the very animal of your charm because I am morally right and you are wrong and the balance of existence is such that the meat of your life is now attached to my spirit, I am stealing your balls!” (288)

paradigm and policy, which contributes to our genealogy, and in which lies “embedded masculinity politics” (Connell 2010, 33).

Its treasured figure, “the entrepreneur,” is traditionally coded masculine. Its assault on the welfare state redistributes income from women to men and imposes more unpaid work on women as carers for the young, the old, and the sick. Its attack on “political correctness” and its rollback of affirmative action specifically undermine the gains of feminism. In such ways, neoliberalism from the 1980s on offered middle-class men an indirect but effective solution to the delegitimation of patriarchy and the threat of real gender equality. (Note that this concerns neoliberalism in general, not just the specific agenda of anti-feminist, anti-gay neoconservatism.) (33)

Despite neoliberalism’s claim to view individuals as free-market agents regardless of gender or race, masculinist ideology and identity still find traction in so-called “wedge” politics, dog-whistles which define immigrant labor forces, social justice initiatives, and indigenous politics as being incompatible with commodification (34). “In fact, certain types of privileges are necessary in order to constitute oneself as autonomous and productive. Most realms welcoming neoliberal forms of risk are dominated by privileged men, thus actively contributing to the reshaping of contemporary forms of masculine domination” (Côté-Boucher 43). Neoliberalism, then, provided for the “reconstruction of bourgeois masculinity” which was in contest after the counter-cultural ‘60s and ‘70s (Connell 2007, 255). In these ways, neoliberal politics was an implicit response to the crises of masculinity by those invested in its identity on both the Left and the Right, a

precursor to the *explicit* response in the form of the masculinist political parties and representatives that would follow.¹¹

Neoliberalism also gives exceptional political power to a class of men distinct from yet performatively connected to the white, working class, heterosexual man: entrepreneurs. Through masculinist neoliberalism, these two identities would find ideological and performative common ground. According to Connell, this is in part because of the role sport plays as a necessary touchstone of the working class man and the metaphor sport provides for capital success (256).¹² Primarily, however, neoliberalism's implicit allying of men through sites of sport, sexual conquests, and men's arenas in which cultures of masculinism thrive are, "through the market agenda...defended or restored, without an explicit masculinity politics" (263). These sites and cultures, though differentiated by class accessibility (that is to say, the difference between elite gentlemen's clubs and rural strip clubs, for example), are identical sites of masculinist performativity and generate shared performances across class divides. Neoliberalism also served to foster *differences* in both cultures which nonetheless provided fodder for crises of masculinism, such as the instantiation of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, which resulted in Thatcherite fears that such communitarian services were contrary to the British people's desire "to do a proper job at work" and that "human dignity and self-respect are undermined when men and women are condemned to idleness" (Ballantyne 1980).

¹¹ This is not to say that explicit political performances of masculinism didn't exist. "[The 1970s and 1980s] saw the rise of distinctly anti-feminist 'men's rights' groups, and also saw Western feminism's focus on male violence and shift towards separatist strategies" (Connell 2007, 250). These backlashes of the time, however, were "more powerful culturally than politically. It has not mobilized men as a sex class for political warfare, defending a collective interest." (253).

¹² Maggie Haberman's book notes the way in which sports provided a hypermasculinist model for Trump in the form of New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, "whose habit of theatrical firings mesmerized fans and made him as much a focal point of press attention as the team's on-field doings... Trump found a display of hypermasculinity he often emulated during the fragile era when the AIDS virus terrified the country in the 1980s" (9).

That this class (and its anxieties) was identified through masculinist images was a fact reinforced in various media, one of which Susan Faludi analyzes:

ARE MEN REALLY THAT BAD? was how *Time* magazine sniffily defined the central question in a 1994 cover story, memorably illustrated by a man sporting a business suit, a wedding ring, and a pig's snout for a face. While the image indicated a swinish wallowing in dominance, it left unexamined the American man's more common experience of fear at losing the job that requires the business suit, the family for whom he wears the ring, any context in which to embed his life. (13)

This reveals an interesting point about masculine identity as it concerns alienation. For Marx, workers become alienated from their identities and their products through industrialization and capital structure. What the crises of masculinity in the post-war period reveal about men, however, is that the loss of work leads to an absence of identity *primarily through the loss of the masculine image*. Men saw themselves first as “men,” defined by specific kinds of work, and emasculated through threats to that work and their displacement in it, regardless of whether it was white-collar or blue. The ability to claim “success” and the homosocial capital that comes with it, being lost, was an abnegation (or robbery) of masculinity, a parallel between the emasculation of working-class masculinity and what I call the “e-masculation” of business and tech labor in the electronic and Internet age. In a bizarre reaction to the typical process of dehumanization through lost or exploited labor, the reaction suggests that these men see themselves ipso facto as *men* before they see themselves as *human*.

This was the case even while neoliberalism reinforced white working class masculinism through altering the shape of the labor market. Despite neoliberalism's promise of self-

fashioning, “work trajectories are still driven along class lines where conditions of necessity and the demands of material exigency, that is, the pressure to earn money exerted by classed life conditions, effectively ‘foreclose’ the potential for choice and the possibility of reflexivity among the working class” (Simpson 87). The erosion of industries on which working class white men had placed their identities was being precipitated by growth in technological and service sectors, areas which working class masculinity derided, creating a disparity between whiteness and subordinate, unvalorous, and Otherized labor (101). Further to this destabilization of labor comes the crises of identity traits associated with it, namely race and gender, which create room for renewed performances of protest masculinity despite a market ethos which rhetorically allows for the greatest possible mobility, success, and dominance of the individual. By the mid-’90s, groups like the Promise Keepers—ultra-right organizations which spoke to men whose “occupational and civic betrayal had been compounded by a powerful sense of domestic betrayal”—drew over a million men per year to their events (Faludi 228). Neoliberalism did not assuage the identity crisis of working class white heterosexual men who found themselves forced to participate in a changing technological and service workforce. Such a shift required them to redefine their masculinity in relations to subordinate social status—namely femininity, homosexuality, and BIPOC communities, thus perpetuating these crises at the same time as it reinforced masculinist performativity across class lines.

Neoliberal influence on masculinist performativity in both the United States and the United Kingdom was similar (and beyond, as the export of masculinist performativity is the result of both nations’ status in the global free market). Working class masculinity began to incorporate financial and market-based rhetoric in stakes of identity, “that ‘hard work’ must now be coupled with innovation and entrepreneurialism” (Gahman 252). Being a man becomes

synonymous in working class American idioms with the conservative sloganeering of “having a ‘bootstraps’ mentality, ‘not freeloading,’ ‘not taking handouts’...” (252). At the same time, working class masculinities were neoliberalized through new relationships between social and financial dominance and supremacy. In industries wherein the previously contentious race- and gender-demarcated markets of manual and rural labor find new competition against neoliberal markets, “neoliberal policies and practices are refashioning masculinity in ways that further entrench the material and symbolic dividends afforded to (normative) men over other social groups (e.g. women, migrant labour, racialized workers, queer folks, transgender people, and disabled people) through the continued propagation of the idea that ‘men’ are more equipped to, and must, be individualistic, hard-working, and self-reliant” (259).

Throughout the ‘90s, these neoliberal crises of masculinity and their performances were again the recurring subjects of both popular and countercultural theatre. “Neil Lyndon’s *No More Sex War* (1992) and David Thomas’s *Not Guilty* (1993) are key examples of men claiming victim status and blaming feminism for the oh-so-much-harder-lives men have compared to women,” Elaine Aston writes (3). Taking her cue from Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992), Aston goes on:

One of Faludi’s key findings is that in response to these ‘betrayals’, men prefer to see themselves as ‘battered by feminism than shaped by the larger culture.’ As masculinity in crisis, the boys in trouble, comes to dominate the decade, the unwillingness to lay the blame anywhere other than at feminism’s door accounts for the anti- (sometimes virulently anti-) feminist feel to the decade. A culture of feminist blame, however, does not resolve, rather deepens masculinity in crisis...

(3)

Indeed, during the '90s, some of the most notorious plays in British drama speak to this positioning of the disaffected male voice, including the Royal Court's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996)¹³ — which “was greeted by many as theatre's answer to *Trainspotting*” — the plays of Antony Nielson, Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Things* (1993), Nick Grosso's *Peaches* (1994), Patrick Marber's *Dealer's Choice* (1995), and Simon Block's *Not a Game for the Boys* (1995), which all, as David Edgar says, “address masculinity and its discontents” (5).¹⁴ In response to this, Aston posits the works of Sarah Daniels, Phyllis Nagy, Caryl Churchill, Judy Upton, Rebecca Prichard, Winsome Pinnock, and Sarah Kane as collectively feminist theatre playwrights of the '90s whose various works characterize this masculinity in crisis. In addition, a number of radical collective and explicitly countercultural groups who also staged these crises, and which had been thriving into the late '80s and '90s, began to lose funding around this time: these include the lesbian theatre company Siren, Monstrous Regiment, and Gay Sweatshop. Clean Break survived, alongside Scarlet Theatre and Foursight Theatre, as well as the only 1970s women's new playwriting company to stay alive, The Sphinx Theatre Company (13).

But Aston's picture of the staged crisis of masculinity in theatre of the '90s as being a backlash primarily against feminism is incomplete (though she does examine some plays very briefly in her last chapter which consider those crises as being centered in shifts of economy,

¹³ “As Aleks Sierz reflects of 1990s' British theatre, Ravenhill's work shares an interest in the impact of a collapse of authority: ‘Young people have been abandoned. However funky and uninhibited, they are dazed, confused and boiling over. With all adults corrupt, there is little to relieve pain and the tedium except shopping and fucking.’ As with Sierz's reading of the play, there is certainly a lack of authority in *Shopping and Fucking*. But this absence of Law, as suggested by Gross's earlier remark on homosexuality, is pathologized in and perpetuated by the representation of homosexual masculinity. In the play, self-destructive behaviour is bound up with homosexuality and the struggle for masculine identifications: the desire for the interdiction of paternal Law in order to rectify the disruptive homosexual subject, stem pollution, and restore social order” (Walsh 97).

¹⁴ Aston also provides examples of the same in British film, including *Trainspotting* (1996), which “gave expression to a 1990s generation of Thatcher's children: disaffected young men who, in the absence of any purpose—political, social or otherwise—locate directionless lives in an urban world of designer drug-taking” (4). *The Full Monty* (1997) also shows “masculine disaffection in a community of ex-steel workers from Sheffield...[T]he men take up stripping: their only means of survival is in the objectified ornamental role, traditionally reserved for women” (5). Her list also includes Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1997) and Kevin Elyot's *My Night With Reg* (1997).

sexuality, gender, and race).¹⁵ As Kathryn Ann Whittaker writes in her 2009 doctoral thesis, “Comparable critiques of the discourse point to a lack of attention given to identity axes other than that of gender” (30). Understanding post-war crises of masculinity as being catalyzed by working-class, white male insecurities regarding their place in the home, the work force, and in political and artistic representation provides for this intersectionality. While this genealogy of hegemonic masculinist performance evinces a reduction of non-idealized masculinity to various forms of femininity and so makes this conflation understandable, it is erroneous to suggest that masculinist performativity and crises by this time had become defined only by feminist threats to centrality. Whittaker, as one example, attempts to analyze plays in and around this time for which “portrayals of ‘race’ are constructed to reify or undercut hegemonic masculinities dependence on its retaining a fixed, ‘natural’ appearance. Thus...representations of class, sexuality, and national identity will come to bear upon the readings herein” (244).

In Whittaker’s work, those plays which acknowledge the intersectional catalysts of crises of masculinity (and thus situate the hegemonic male as working/middle-class, straight, and white) are Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1992), Alan Bennett’s *The History Boys* (2004), Roy Williams’s *Clubland* (2001), and David Henry Hwang’s *Bondage* (1992). Some plays also attempt to illustrate that a distance from masculinist centrality was a real force in modern, urban life: Michael Pearce makes the claim that Roy Williams’s *Lift Off* (1999) shows a “proximity to whiteness is no longer prized...In *Lift Off* Tone attempts to emulate the ‘ideal’ of black masculinity which Mal embodies” (119). Williams’s work, according to Pearce, was profoundly shaped by “social-realist depictions of British working-class youth set in urban environments,

¹⁵ “In *Break of Day* it is not that the women are represented as simply doing ‘better’ than the men and at their expense, but that political, social and economic change conditions lives, employment prospects or job satisfaction, for which feminism alone cannot be held responsible, but for which it is frequently used as a scapegoat.” (166)

written in a youth vernacular and their exploration of masculinity” found in Nigel Williams’s *Class Enemy* (1978) and Barrie Keefe’s trilogy *Barbarians* (1977) (114).

By the early-to-mid 2000s, masculinist crises were *de rigueur* in notable dramatic texts. Cormac O’Brien argues that Caryl Churchill’s *The Bonefire* (2006) reveals “a male subject subsuming and then performing aspects of masculine practice that he observes in the public world around him. Furthermore, the idealized manhood that such performances aspire to is heavily reliant on virtually received notions regarding what constitutes authentic manhood in the male subject’s immediate socio-economic, political, and cultural schema” (411). Grant Williams opens his 2013 dissertation with a quote from *August: Osage County* (2007) and by stating the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama’s famous monologue contains a key theme: “the diminishment of the American man.”

...there was something sad in his voice—or no, not sad, he always sounded sad—something more hopeless than that. As if it had already happened. As if whatever was disappearing had already disappeared. As if it was too late. As if it was already over. And no one saw it go. This country, this experiment, America, this hubris: what a lament, if no one saw it go. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Dissipation is actually much worse than cataclysm. (1)

A half-century of dramatic survey for Williams becomes a history of “emasculated, hollow men,” and the study of *August: Osage Country* reveals “that the problems that beset America and masculine identity are not singly the result of modern times, but reflective of a nation’s identity built on anxiety and restlessness...American identity itself—founded squarely within a conception of hegemonic masculinity—might have always fit within ideas of crisis with fears of usurpation or replacement by an other” (28). Naturally, I contend with Williams that this

reflexivity is *particularly* American, but his realization that one of the most lauded plays of the new millennium was informed by a masculinist ethos that had *come to personify the nation* is extremely insightful, and the timing is crucial. It is around this time that masculinist performativity becomes a rejuvenated radical force in Anglo-American politics due to a host of new “threats” to that subjectivity, including: the election of Barack Obama, increased conflict on the issues of immigration, post-9/11 jingoism, continued decline in manufacturing and blue-collar jobs, breakthroughs in progressive political agendas empowering women, BIPOC, and queer communities, among others. This force would build in critical mass until the watershed year of 2016, culminating in the passing of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. Tracy Letts’s acceptance of the Pulitzer was one of many dramatic Tiresiases warning us of what was to come: after sixty years, the hegemonic male had not been destabilized, wouldn’t be decentered from representation onstage and in public office, and would continue striving to inform and be embodied in both, in its most overt form in decades.

That this evolving subject of drama was responding to a growing awareness of the cultural force of masculinism in both countries is most vividly marked by the 2020 production of Roy Williams and Clint Dyer’s *Death of England*, a one-man play of intense, nearly-schizoid masculinist energy performed by Rafe Spall at the Dorfman Theatre. The play is an untethered monologue of a character fueled by cocaine and beer, lamenting how the death of his racist, conservative father during a World Cup match is, in fact, a metonymic funeral for the country. Spall’s exhausting, violent performance is itself a testament to masculinist projections, explosive and insecure, misogynistic and jingoistic, riddled with sex and machismo, but crippled ultimately by the agonizing conflation of his relationship with both his father and his Englishness. Williams and Dyer’s play unambiguously asserts the premise that to be a man and to be English are

inextricably identical performances: the examination of this political psychology results in a text that can only (and most aptly) be described as a true state-of-the-nation play.

And so, the genealogy of masculinist performance in the United States and the United Kingdom has been established by theorists and documented in performance texts and drama. Theatre history and theory have served as both an archival force and a modus of (re)performance for the complicated phenomenon of gendered political performance—and, as all collective performances eventually do, has reified those ideas in the society they reflect. What remains is to chart the extent to which U.S. presidents and U.K. prime ministers have been exemplars of that ethos, how they were characterized in drama, and to what extent both had manifested in the personae of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson—the newest, most important demagogues of masculinist performativity in Anglo-American culture. To do so, I will give a brief overview of how that shared performance began in political memory, and some notable examples of masculinist (re)performances of presidents and prime ministers in drama, leading up to our case studies of Johnson and Trump.

Presidents and Prime Ministers: Masculinist Performativity and Drama

“Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States” (America’s National Churchill Museum, par. 13). So said Winston Churchill in his address at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946. While this was not the first time he had used the phrase “special relationship” to describe the ties that bound the United States and the United Kingdom, it would be the address which would cause it to become attributed to him

thereafter. “The special relationship” became a post-war conceit, strengthened by the fact that leaders of both countries had only met in person one time before Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George in Paris, 1918). “The special relationship” would be referred to repeatedly by prime ministers and presidents over the next several decades, alluding to a cohesion of military strength, foreign objectives, and economic policy, and would become the most concise rhetorical touchstone of twentieth century U.S./U.K. partnerships. That relationship would change subtly in definition, tone, and effect over the next seventy-five years, but would always be outwardly based on these cohesions. And it would be the foundation from which prime ministers Theresa May and Boris Johnson would attempt to create “a new special relationship” with President Donald Trump (Stewart & Smith, 2017). The special relationship was even invoked in the early months of President Biden’s administration, when he and Prime Minister Boris Johnson aimed “to build on the World War II agreement that laid the foundation for the allies’ ‘special relationship.’” (Sanger 2021).

But these fraternal associations did not only encapsulate the world of global politics: they were, on another level, indicative of the previously formed alliance between individual heads of government, men who had to develop interpersonal relationships as testaments of national collaboration. As such, every relationship begins with the individuals’ relative positioning within politics of masculinity, and is informed by their performances of it. “The special relationship,” through this kind of embodiment, takes on an historical identity, one in which new executors of the relationship inherit performative legacies. We can see that from its Churchillian inauguration, however, *fraternal* loses its high-brow imagery and takes on the tone of the frat house: “locker room talk” with political power. The markers of that masculinist performativity is often archived

and reified in performative texts, which in turn contribute to our historical understanding of the figures, the nations they represented, and the masculinist societies which produced them.

Of course, as men, an “effective alliance required meeting psychological and social challenges along with military, political, and economic ones. [Churchill and Roosevelt] each had to convince the other...that he was trustworthy, capable, and vigorous; that he commanded enough courage, perseverance and toughness to defeat a frightening enemy” (Costigliola 99). The performance of these traits between the world stage and private stage are the stuff of legend, now: particularly in Churchill’s “padding around nude before other men” during his visit to the White House in 1941-1942 (151). According to Frank Costigliola:

Evidence suggests more than one meeting with Churchill nude or nearly so....Churchill, holding a drink in one hand and a cigar in the other, paced around his bedroom, naked because of the stuffiness from the central heating. When FDR knocked, Thompson opened the door at his boss’s request. As Roosevelt turned away, Churchill, looking “innocently down at his dramatic nudity,” said, ““Come on in, Franklin. We’re quite alone.”” Then “Churchill posed briefly and ludicrously before the President,” said he had nothing to hide, and “tossed a Turkish towel over a shoulder.” They talked for an hour, with Churchill pacing about though not covering himself further. Odd as it may have been, such nudity fostered a sense of intimacy and trust as they discussed intelligence secrets and atomic research. This combination of high politics and homoerotic frisson fed the “excitement” that prompted Moran to double Churchill’s usual dose of barbiturate sleeping pills. (152)

It is during this visit, writes Curtis Roosevelt, grandson of Franklin Delano, “that the friendship of FDR and Churchill was cemented” (175). He describes a collegial atmosphere in which “they smoked and drank, and bantered...Quite aside from the alcohol, my grandmother reported that “Pa” and the prime minister seemed “to charm each other” and that she hadn’t seen “father” so relaxed in another person’s company in a long while” (177-178). Eleanor would later describe the naval discussions carried on in the Map Room as “two little boys enjoying themselves in the bathtub with their toy boats,” a remark which Curtis Roosevelt says “accurately record[s] the atmosphere” (180).

Fostering a homosocial bond abroad in order to counteract the global threat of German fascism is one thing. Churchill’s bid to play into masculinist politics back at home continued well into the Fifties. It is no coincidence that the Tory, aristocratic Churchill would later vociferously appeal to white working-class anxiety, as revealed by uncovered cabinet documents in 2007.

On 3 February 1954, under the agenda item ‘Coloured Workers’, Churchill is quoted, with abbreviations, by Cabinet Secretary Sir Norman Brook as saying: ‘Problems wh. will arise if many coloured people settle here. Are we to saddle ourselves with colour problems in UK? Attracted by Welfare State. Public opinion in UK won't tolerate it once it gets beyond certain limits.’ (Smith 2007)

What might have been considered an blatant (that is to say, demographically unmotivated) racism on the part of Churchill is quickly complicated by his followup that the ““Ques. is wtr it is politically wise to allow public feeling to develop a little more before taking action”” (Smith 2007). The post-war influx of migrant workers from the West Indies had triggered reactionary

outcry from Britain's working-class white males, compelling Churchill to suggest to his Cabinet that "Keep England White" would be "a good slogan" in 1954 (Addison 233).

Roosevelt was equally invested in defining and leading the masculinist body politic in his own time and ways: for him, the New Deal was a chance to reshape the American working man in a nationally beneficial image (though not one divested from working-class labor). It was working-class labor which, he said in a speech delivered to the Commonwealth in San Francisco in 1932, imposed peace on upper-class barons, in "developing a pioneer country," and quoted Jefferson in that "the great mass of our population is of laborers, our rich who cannot live without labor..." He continues by declaring the purpose of Government—and therefore the very intention of the American state—is to give to every man "an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work" (The American Presidency Project). The instantiation of this "little man," still performed at an intersection of class and race and gender, displaces a "Hooverian national emphasis on the self-made, rugged individualist" which "no longer requires the aggressive accumulation of material possessions" but "seeks balance between innate skills, gifts, and talents..." (Ireland 57). It was this ideal of the hard-working male body which would become immortalized in famous New Deal murals (like those of Allen Thomas), after the emasculation of the Great Depression (Kimmel 1996).¹⁶

While President Roosevelt insisted on preserving not only 'the bodies of the unemployed' but also their moral strength and integrity 'from destitution', it might be argued, therefore, that preserving the bodies of the victims of the Depression became part and parcel of the very same effort made by the New Deal

¹⁶ Susan Faludi also mentions: "As an artist with the Public Works of Art Project, a prototype for the WPA, wrote to President Roosevelt, this was an era when American art finally "took on a virility," because of this "golden opportunity to do our best work for our fellow countrymen."" (20)

Administration to preserve their manhood, which Roosevelt beautifully defined as ‘their self-respect, their self-reliance, and courage and determination’ (Armengol 62).

The masculinist performativity which imbued the special relationship is precisely what infuses the dramatization of LBJ in Robert Schenkkan’s 2012 play, *All The Way*, played most notably by Brian Cranston and later Brian Cox. For example, Schenkkan inserts Johnson’s infamous phone call with his tailor in the middle of a conversation with Hubert Humphrey, pausing to say into the phone: “Not too tight in the bunghole, there, Manny. And gimme some extra room in the pockets there for my stuff, my knife and my keys, and leave me some slack for my nutsack” (27). In another scene, he exercises homosocial capital with Martin Luther King, explaining that:

LBJ ... Lobbyin’ is just like propositioning women, you know?

MLK hesitates. Is this a coded reference to his own philandering?

MLK I’m not sure I understand.

LBJ I knew this fella once, a real ladies man, got more pussy than you ever saw, and I said to him, “What’s your secret?” And he said he’d go into a bar and ask each woman if she wanted to go out. “Boy, you musta got slapped a lot,” I said. “Oh, hell, yeah,” he says, “but I also got me a lot of yeses.” We only need eight yeses to get it out of Judge Smith’s committee.

A moment.

MLK Alright.

LBJ Alright. (46)

Schenkkan’s LBJ dissuades J Edgar Hoover from pursuing charges against MLK for adultery, rationalizing that “Whatever a man gets up to in his privacy is his own business” (52). In his

denunciation of Governor Sanders's lack of support, LBJ firmly equates morality, Christian faith, courage, and masculinity as being of one action:

LBJ . . . No! You listen to me. You need to make up your mind once and for all, just what kinda Christian you are. Are you a once a week fella, or do you hold the Word in your heart? What kind of politician are you? You just out for yourself, or do you wanta make a better life for all the people of Georgia? And what kind of Man are you? You got the balls to do what you know is right, or do you just slink away? (104)

Similarly, Nixon's rise to political prominence, characterized by his moniker "the forgotten man," was dependent on "a masculine ideology that emphasized independence, hard work, and a resistance to government handouts" (Robertson 22). Likely the most seminal dramatic representation of Richard Nixon comes in Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon*, which in 2006 had a West End run before moving to Broadway, and was adapted in 2008 for a feature film directed by Ron Howard with the original starring actors (Michael Sheen and Frank Langella). Indeed, this play gets slightly more analysis in this chapter than other dramatizations of presidential figures for being so canonical, and because the conflict itself is a dramaturgical exemplar of masculinist performativity.

In the text, Nixon does not get to the bottom of the first page before flirting with the ladies attempting to do his makeup before an interview: "They say blondes photograph better than brunettes? Or is it the other way round? I forget" (17). In a moment that firmly establishes Nixon's legacy as being one of hegemonic masculinity being toppled by the Other, however, Brennan eerily revives the old anti-masculinist mob facing Norman Mailer's soldier (noted earlier), as he describes Nixon's resignation.

Brennan Now, I'm a military man, but I don't mind telling you, watching from inside the helicopter, I wept at the moment. And wept for a good deal of the journey back to California. While 30,000 feet below us liberal America cheered. And gloated! The trendies. The hippies. The draft-dodgers and dilettantes. They had got rid of Richard Nixon. Their bogeyman. And who did they get in his place? Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. (23)

Nixon himself confesses that "What makes life mean something is a purpose. A goal. The battle. The struggle. Even if you don't win it" (27). A struggle is precisely what Nixon seems to relish about his interview with Frost, anticipating there will be "no holds barred" (42). After the pre-interview, Brennan and Nixon have sized up their enemy as unworthy of the man's battle, being both English and wearing Italian (i.e. laceless) shoes, which Nixon agrees are "quite effeminate" (43). For Frost, much of the building conflict of the play is in shedding that subaltern masculinity and rising to the masculinist struggle, "Because this is war, isn't it? Gloves off...It's ballsy, it's confrontational" (58).

Among Nixon's political ruminations is the struggle between the televised image and the reality of its subject, but he frames it in tellingly masculinist terms: "They should tell anyone entering politics, 'Forget intellect, conviction, or powers of argument, don't come near Capitol Hill unless you have a full head of hair, you don't perspire, and you don't need to shave twice a day" (65). This is just before he suggests that someone in Frost's "ah...field" can "get away" with wearing his effeminate shoes, thirty seconds before the first interview is to air, effectively throwing Frost off of his game. This is, incidentally, a conflict Frost faces outside of the Nixon interviews as well, as his second life of talk-show hosting and producing frivolous movies cause

his colleagues to judge him less as a hard-hitting journalist and more as a glamorous B-list celebrity.

Brennan, once the first interview begins, takes up another compelling metaphor, in which he compares Frost's first question and Nixon's answer to a boxing match. Metaphors of sport being, as Connell remarked, nexes for disparate class relationships in masculinist politics, Morgan is once again demonstrating that the entire struggle of *Frost/Nixon* is, essentially, a masculinist power play which documents both the character and the administration of Nixon.

Brennan In boxing, there's always that moment – you see it in challengers' faces – the instant they feel the power of the champ's first jab. A sickening moment – when they realise all the pep talks – and the hype – and the months of psyching themselves up has been delusional all along. I saw it in Frost's face. In his eyes. If he hadn't known the calibre of the man he was up against before the interviews started – he knew it halfway through that first answer. (67)

Nixon takes up the same strategy again, asserting masculine superiority by asking Frost “Did you do any fornicating?” five seconds before the second interview is to begin (75). Frost, finally catching up to the actual game being played, begins the interview by blaming Nixon for Vietnam, which puts Nixon on his back foot though he recovers. Nixon never relents on emasculating Frost, calling him later on a Friday night and feigning surprise that “A handsome young fellow...An eligible bachelor” is alone and working (86). Once it is suggested that Frost is preparing for the Watergate section of the interview (Nixon's weakest subject), however, Nixon changes tack, offering Frost some homosocial bonding in one of the most noted speeches in the play:

Nixon ... No matter how many awards – or how many coloumn inches are written about you – or how high the elected office is for me – it still isn't enough, am I right? We still feel like the little man? The loser they told us we were? A hundred times. The smart-asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born...And isn't that why we work so hard now? Why we fight for every inch? Scrambling our way up, in undignified fashion, whatever hillock or mountain it is, why we never tire, why we find energy or motivation when any sensible person would lie down, or relax...We were headed, both of us, for the dirt. The place the snobs always told us we'd end up. Face in the dust. Humiliated all the more for having tried so pitifully hard. Well, to hell with that. We're not going to let that happen. Either of us. We're going to show those bums, and make them choke on our continued success. Our continued headlines. Our continued awards, power and glory. We're going to make those motherfuckers choke. Am I right?

Frost You are. Except only one of us can win. And I shall be your fiercest adversary. I shall come at you with everything I've got. (87)

Nixon's tactic works. Rather as if he had suggested to Frost (as he had done with Khrushchev, historically) that they both drink to the ladies, Frost immediately takes the challenge at face value and rises to meet the battle, canceling his evening plans with Caroline to prepare instead. It is a battle he wins decisively when he gets Nixon to admit that he broke the law, prompting the most famous line of the play: "I'm saying that when the President does it, that means it's not illegal" (96). After this loss, in the final scene of the play, Frost wishes Nixon goodbye by gifting him a pair of Gucci loafers.

The dramatized relationship between Richard Nixon and David Frost is reperformed and paralleled decades later between George W. Bush and Tony Blair, at a time when strong leadership and masculinist ideals were in demand as the Anglosphere reeled from 9/11 anxiety.

As Benjamin Moser writes:

Iraq had no connection to the September 11 attacks, and so a connection had to be pitched—as a consumer item. Asked why the administration waited until September 2002 to press its case, Bush’s chief of staff candidly admitted: “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.”

This language sustained the frenzy September 11 unleashed. George W. Bush, who dodged service in Vietnam, was marketed as martial, macho, the only barrier between America and Armageddon. (Moser 670)

The special relationship between George W. Bush and Tony Blair is captured in all its masculinist dynamic in David Hare’s *Stuff Happens*, which premiered at the National Theatre London in September 2004. In the play, Bush begins meetings with the National Security Council with prayer, ridicules his mother for being a bad cook, and dismisses Blair’s well-thought arguments during their first meeting by commenting only on their eloquence. By Act Two, the primary conflict between the governments (whether to move forward with a unilateral invasion of Iraq or wait for a UN Resolution that Blair would like passed first) becomes characterized either as a course of honest, strong, righteous dominance or an effeminate, European, cowardly path towards justice.

Rumsfeld ... We don’t need lectures from Europe on how to hold our knives and forks. (*Rumself turns back to Powell.*) ... Because what they really hate, what’s really bugging them, is not the way we do things. It’s that we’re the only people in

the world that can do them. It's not our manner, it's our power. And all they want, all anyone wants, is to put a brake on that power. (Hare 102-103)

Hare carefully suggests that the American nation itself—not unlike its threat from anti-masculine forces abroad during the Cold War—is feeling its masculinist surety being shaken by Otherized forces. When reminded that Blair isn't one of the French or the Germans, Dick Cheney responds:

Cheney I don't trust him. New Labour. What the hell does that mean? We don't call ourselves New Republicans.

Rumsfeld We're not a friggin' girl band. (103)

Cheney then begins to characterize Blair's—and England's—contribution to the invasion as being more of a burden than a help: “If you want to go into battle with a preacher sitting on the top of the tank, that's fine by me. But bear in mind, preacher's one more to carry” (104).

Ultimately, this is a position the dramatized Bush adopts as, in every scene in which he meets with Blair, the dynamic is of Blair frantically trying to offer reasonable courses of action while Bush offers nothing, demurs, and stonewalls his eloquent ally. Even when confronted with the U.S.'s betrayal of Anglo-American diplomacy (Donald Rumsfeld's public comment that the U.S. did not need the British for a successful coalition force), Bush refuses to apologize, and leaves Blair to face the political consequences alone. What pervades at the end of this drama is not only the haunting memory of the unspeakable destruction wreaked on innocent Iraqi civilians as a consequence of these events (brought to centerstage by a concluding monologue from a nameless Iraqi Exile on the final page), but the feeling that two protagonists were in fact embodied nations coming to an end of their friendship—a relationship trampled by dogged certainty and a need to exercise power irrespective of sense.

Major reviews for this production rarely comment on masculine politics specifically, but several attempts to explain the disparity between the impassive Bush and the frenetic Blair demonstrate, with the understanding of masculinist performativity detailed above, that these elements are being received by reviewers (if not consciously interpreted by them as such). For *The Guardian*, Neal Ascherson writes:

The Olivier shook with mocking laughter as Blair (played almost too cruelly by Nicholas Farrell) stumbled about the world begging for moral reassurance from President Bush. Anxiety gives way to panic as he realises how crude the American approach is, and how thin the evidence that Saddam is a global threat. Tantrum flares when Rumsfeld offers to 'help' him by keeping British troops out of action. Finally, as war is replaced by chaos, he sinks into bruised self-righteousness: 'I wasn't sure what I'd be apologising for. And besides, the moment has gone.' (Ascherson 2004)

Peter Marks, writing a review for a later production in 2008 in *The Washington Post*, acutely notices:

Yet something in the way Foucheux [playing Bush] fixes his gaze and carries his body—evoking that almost comical sense of manly resolve the president attempts to project—captures Bush uncannily... portrayed as preternaturally affable, even in the act of stabbing in the back an ally whom Hare paints as hopelessly gullible, in the courtly, might-minded Blair... (Marks 2008)

These introductory examples demonstrate several things: that performances of masculinity have been coded into dramatizations of presidents and prime ministers in major works of drama through the twentieth century; that their characters are representative of the masculinist ethos

which embody both countries and their culture's relationship to one another through masculine and homosocial lenses; that such (re)performances are immutable when writing or acting these characters in the course of production; and that social and political phenomena—in this case, American and British masculinisms—are usefully archived and reified in the dramatic texts. Plays and dramatizations introduce or amplify to the public the ways in which masculinist performativity was central to the political identities of these men, and preserve for future readers and productions the integral force such performativity had on their supporting demographics, their respective cultures, and their political memories.

In the following chapters, I demonstrate how this performativity was central—even definitive—to the political careers of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. Their public personas became so inextricably defined by masculinist performativity that any depiction of them in drama or popular culture almost *demands* a (re)performance of their masculinism in order for such a depiction to be readable by its audience. As the resulting analyses of these (re)performances show, masculinism becomes as central to the characterization of both men as it is to their policy and political character. To write them into drama and play them in production is to (re)perform the cycle of hegemonic masculinism.

CHAPTER TWO

MASCULINISM IN THE POLITICS AND DRAMA OF DONALD TRUMP

Donald Trump: Masculinist Performativity on the Road to the Oval Office

There is a sense in which using Donald Trump as a case study for masculinist performativity is an exercise in the obvious. Trump's proud display of traits like those explored in Chapter One were the subject of daily headlines and have been since the Republican Party primaries in 2015. What is less obvious are the ways in which these behaviors are the next performances in a long genealogy of masculinist performativity, how they are inseparable from the political and performative memory of Trump, and how they are recorded and (re)performed in drama. Furthermore, masculinism so self-conscious as to become a dominant political philosophy is a relatively new phenomenon, even if we have been aware of hegemonic masculinism's influence on American politics for some time. Donald Trump presents what is arguably the most active case study of *self-aware* masculinist performativity being used as a navigational tool for Oval Office policy, and led an administration more devoted to combating masculinist crises than ever before.

While the scope of my analysis will focus mainly on the apex of Trump's political career (stopping well before his bid for a 2024 reelection to the presidency), there are elements of his personal life and business dealings which provide insight to his masculinist performativity between 2015 and 2020 which will be referenced throughout in order to provide greater context. Focusing on Trump during his time as a political figure is crucial because it is in this chronology that a) such performativity was essential in shaping executive policy in the United States, and b) it was during this time that dramatizations of Trump were more numerous, popular, and provided

the greatest dramatic embodiment of that masculinist performativity. While this chapter will not cover events in Trump's political timeline after the January 6th, 2020 insurrection on the U.S. Capitol, it will be clear that this performativity is seminal and ongoing in Trump's later performances on the political stage, and will no doubt inform future dramatizations of him as he continues to be in the public consciousness.

Trump's embodiment of masculinism and his public performance of it began long before he desired to become a political figure. During the years of his cultivated playboy image of the early '70s, Maggie Haberman writes, he attempted to escape the more domestic strictures of his upbringing by moving to the Upper East Side of Manhattan and establishing himself as a presence at elite nightclubs.

The goal for Trump was to make an impression. He often appeared with conventionally beautiful women on his arm, trophies that would raise his profile. "He really wasn't the playboy he made himself appear to be. That was part of the act," Rudolph Giuliani, then a politically active New York lawyer, said decades later. (30)

It is this cultivation of a masculinist image which makes Trump an important case study in hegemonic performativity: as much as he was conditioned by and embodied the hegemonic prescriptions of masculinity in our time, he also was conscious of its political and social power, and eventually sought to weaponize it in gaining (and trying to keep) the highest office in the free world.

When Trump announced his candidacy for the Presidency on June 16, 2015, from Trump Tower in New York, a *prima facie* interpretation of his speech suggested it was about restoring America to its place of primacy in the world. Being repeatedly "beat" by China in trade deals,

Japan in car exports, and Mexico on border issues undermined “our gross domestic product—a sign of strength, right?” (*Time* 2015). In the plan to rectify this and other problems, Trump continued: “Now, our country needs—our country needs a truly great leader, and we need a truly great leader now. We need a leader that wrote *The Art of the Deal*.” In oratorical terms, Trump had by this point established the problem and introduced the solution (though attempting to fit his speeches into any established main-point speaking structure is difficult). The next major sections are personal anecdotes of his business success—all of which are centered on monetary gain. In order to amplify these points, the stressed imagery is unabashedly placed on size and athleticism: “The biggest bank in the world is in China...[i]t’s like take the New England Patriots and Tom Brady and have them play your high school football team...”. Personal stories are replaced by an extended list of hypothetical anecdotes in which he describes how he would deal with major problems of the world via aggressive phone calls. “The head of Ford” would “beg for a little while” not to be taxed for internationally manufactured goods. He juxtaposes his total wealth of “\$8,737,540,000” against the “losers...that are selling this country down the drain.” Finally, he lays out his plan to “build a great wall,” that “nobody will be tougher on ISIS than Donald Trump,” that “he will find the right guy...to take our military and make it work” (presumably a woman is incapable) and that he will “Rebuild the country’s infrastructure” which “Nobody can do like me.” (*Time* 2015).

What seems on my part like an exercise in picking low-hanging fruit is actually a clarification of Trump’s announcement outline and ideology. In attempting to identify his main points, what is revealed is the first presentation of the future Trump presidency’s political philosophy. In this speech, Trump echoes the harrowing national character prescribed by Henry Luce in 1941, founder of *Time* and *Life* magazines, for an “America as a masculine nation whose

manifest destiny was to loom like a giant on the global stage...The price for failing to flex the national muscle, he warned repeatedly, would be a terrifying loss of virility” (Faludi 22). Goals can be achieved by strength—indeed the *goals themselves* are assertions of strength, guided by a person presumably more successful than anyone despite claiming national circumstances make it impossible to be so.

Someone reading Day One of the Trump campaign through Connell can see how Trump is attempting to consolidate his identity within “transnational business masculinity,” a frame of masculinity that rises out of neoliberal global capitalism referenced in Chapter One. Because Connell argues that “the global corporate economy might be the setting for a new pattern of hegemonic masculinity,” and because global capitalism dictates that major forms of social power are corporate, the Trump brand became a natural touchstone for a new campaign which began to pitch itself to the American people by equating international dominance with business acumen (2005, 347). Much like the rise of the entrepreneur in neoliberal economies, corporate masculinities retained the same social atavisms while bridging class divides.

These had, nevertheless, key features in common: association with authority; social conservatism; compulsory heterosexuality; integration with a family division of labor; strongly marked, symbolic gender differences; and emotional distance between men and women. The men who were bearers of these configurations of practice generally controlled the key industries in the local economy, so the locally hegemonic patterns of masculinity were typically integrated with the local patterns of capitalism. (348)

Connell shows the way in which family enterprises, while slowly taken over by managerial structures, persisted in passing on masculinist ideology into the corporate mindset. For someone

like Trump, whose business is ultimately a family business despite its wide holdings, the masculinist resonances are all the clearer. After the Trump administration, the strongest public criticism of Trump's economic superiority (and thus, his masculinity) would come in the form of Attorney General Letitia James's 2022 civil lawsuit against Trump, his children, and the Trump Organization, alleging that hundreds of millions of dollars had been accrued through bank loans and tax breaks by repeatedly lying about the value of major assets and Trump's overall net worth. For Trump, who equates wealth with strength and business ineptitude with being a loser, such a public criticism held more danger than mere legal repercussions: it challenged the masculinist image he had spent years in office creating and defending. This explains why his public response from his TruthSocial account employed the same masculinist tactics we see in other responses discussed later.

@realDonaldTrump Racist A.G. Letitia "Peekaboo" James, the failed Gubernatorial candidate, is now running second to strong crime fighter MICHAEL HENRY. This could be a big upset because she has been a terrible A.G. when it comes to protecting the people of New York State. Murder, Rape, and Drugs are totally out of control-There has never been a more dangerous time than this. She is grossly incompetent, her staff knows it, and so does everyone else. MAKE NEW YORK SAFE AGAIN!!! (September 22, 2022)

Trump's flailing public defense and ad hominem attacks on James demonstrate how wounding such scrutiny can be to the masculinist subject, even when they are based on hard evidence, documentation, and simple numbers. But what further demonstrates this ethos is the troubling use of "racist" and "Peekaboo," which suggest Trump's feeling of being the victim of anti-white legal action. Redirecting the attention to unsubstantiated claims about James's career record is an

attempt to assert dominance by aptitude and capacity, and obscure wholly the question of guilt and financial travesty. But again, in such a case that should center on abstracts like insurance fraud, tax law, and documented evidence, the ever-present implication that this is a stain on Trump's masculinist image is detectable to the public. This can be seen in *The Daily Show* Trevor Noah's observation that, in lying about the size of his "triplex" apartment in Trump Tower to increase its market value (claiming it was 33,000-square-feet as opposed to the actual 11,000-square-feet), Trump "is gonna be the first person to ever get in legal trouble for claiming his apartment is a grower not a shower" ("Trump Sued by..." 2022).

Many of these buzzwords above (strength, loser, etc.) act as linguistic cues which "evoke prestructured beliefs in people's minds regarding the nature and causes of public problems" (Edelman *i*). Since research has shown that men who feel a sense of threatened masculinity have higher support for aggressive foreign policy, we can assume that such linguistic cues are not merely symbolic but indicative of formalizing masculinist performances (Willer 2013).¹⁷ Following Murray Edelman's findings that the separation of social problems by category reinforces the malfunctioning social system of which they are symptomatic (in this case, hegemonic masculinity), what we see in Trump's candidacy speech and other campaign issues are linguistic cues that shape masculinist policy: all other candidates are weak losers, and the US has taken a submissive, effeminate position in foreign relations.

Several polls immediately following the announcement support this reading. Favorability numbers for Trump reversed from 65% unfavorable view among Republicans in May to 57% favorability in July (Craighill and Clement 2015). While he was still splitting conservatives

¹⁷ From his brother-in-law, Marcus Barry: "He was as overbearing with his own executives as he was with reporters, always pressing a fanciful narrative which exaggerated his net worth, his ability as a manager, his relationships with women, etc. The narrative was more important than the reality" (Haberman 139).

down the middle and receiving “overwhelmingly negative” reviews from most other political groups, Quinnipiac reported by the end of that July that Trump favorability among right-leaning men compared to women was 24% to 15%, at a time when Trump was getting 20% of total support among the 17 Republican candidates (Quinnipiac 2015). The same poll also showed that, if Trump and Sanders were the candidates in the general election, Trump would have greater support among men by 4%—a striking comparison, considering how similar their working-class rhetoric would prove to be in that next year. This spread was prophetic of the exit polls in 2016, as on November 8th, 2016, Trump would win 52% of votes cast by men to Hilary’s 41%, and, in one of the most polarized, partisan races in recent memory, 9% of Democratic men would still vote for Trump, as well as 50% of Independent men (CNN 2016).

While none of these numbers can be determined *de facto* to be caused by resonance of hegemonic masculine performativity, experimental data seems to suggest it. In 2018, an empirical study tested “whether threat to masculinity can explain differential support for Donald Trump” and found that such threat “increases the desire for a masculine president (but not desire for a male president).” The study built off literature of compensation from Ridgeway (2011), Carrigan et al. (1985) and Connell’s theories referenced above, and considered them in result of the three-condition, three-subjects experiment (Carian and Sobotka 2018). Ultimately, “men who perceived a threat to men’s group position were significantly more likely to desire a masculine president.” These findings were consistent with those of NYU Psychology Professor Eric Knowles and Ph.D student Sara DiMuccio, who found that:

[S]upport for Trump in the 2016 election was higher in areas that had more searches for topics such as “erectile dysfunction.” Moreover, this relationship persisted after accounting for demographic attributes in media markets...In

contrast, fragile masculinity was not associated with support for Mitt Romney in 2012 or support for John McCain in 2008...Our data suggests that fragile masculinity is a critical feature of our current politics...[G]iven that experimental work has identified a causal connection between masculinity and political beliefs, we think the correlations we've identified are important. (Knowles and DiMuccio 2018)

This prioritization of masculinity over other democratic factors would explain some party fractures by gender in general election results, as well as formalize the effect of masculinist crises and subsequent masculinist performativity in response to (and embodied by) Trump.

Factors such as homosociality and the prioritization of masculinist performativity become easier to identify when the subject is less overtly political and more overtly sexual. Take, for example, the incident of October 7th, 2016, when *The Washington Post* released a video in which Donald Trump spoke privately with *Access Hollywood* host Billy Bush in 2005. In the video, Trump said of married women: "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything" (Fahrenthold 2016). Avoiding moralization so as to more objectively analyze this phenomenon, one non-gendered reason Trump's numbers might be expected to fall after this is because (even anonymous) respondents to polls are less likely (à la the Bradley Effect) to align themselves with ideas that are socially prohibitive or illegal, such as the kind of assault Trump nonchalantly described.

Yet astonishingly, 91% of Trump supporters in Ohio and 90% in Pennsylvania were unmoved by this comment, and claims that this loyalty is in favor of non-politically correct language fail to account that there is a gender gap in the same poll: women were 53% more likely than men (42%) to say the event worsened their opinion of Trump (Salvanto, 2016). That

Trump defended his statements as “locker room talk” does not, I think, require extensive analysis to locate within the masculinist ethos.¹⁸ While major figures in the Republican Party were attempting to distance themselves from the Party’s nominee after the *Access Hollywood* tape became public, voters were rushing to Trump’s side, including a crowd that gathered outside of Trump Tower in New York City specifically to show solidarity after the story broke. “It would be an early look at the future in which Republican leaders discovered the deep disconnect between what they found beyond the pale and what many of their voters did,” Maggie Haberman wrote, referencing a rally which took place during the same day in Wisconsin, in which Paul Ryan said to the gathered audience that that he was distressed by the tape but was drowned out by boos and chants of “Trump!” (254).

Such locker room talk was a staple for Trump long before the campaign. Infamously, Trump sat for an interview on Howard Stern’s radio talk show in 2010, in which he took the opportunity to stress his sexual prowess and heterosexuality. Haberman summarizes the interview as one in which “Stern’s audience heard Trump as an idealized version of a high-testosterone alpha male, unapologetic and refusing to bend to” political correctness:

To Stern, Trump talked about how much he loved sex, the number of partners he had at a single time, the way he liked to wander backstage at his beauty pageants while the contestants were getting dressed. “You see these incredible looking women, and so, I sort of get away with things like that,” he said of his behavior at the pageants. When news broke that golfer Tiger Woods was splitting from his wife due to his affairs, Trump said, “One thing we’ve learned about Tiger Woods,

¹⁸ Locker room talk was more than just a convenient rhetorical excuse for Trump; he consciously practiced it both as a personal boon to his image and as a political weapon to galvanize masculinist support. “Some former employees recalled him brandishing photos of scantily clad women with whom he claimed to have been involved. He appeared to keep the photos on hand to illustrate his boastful rendering of masculinity” (Haberman 67).

definite: he's not gay. Do you agree with that?" Stern agreed: "He is absolutely not gay." Trump and Stern laughed, then quickly moved to Stern teasing Trump. Stern pressed Trump on whether he had ever been with a man, or had sexual thoughts about one. "I've never had a thought, there's never been like a big thought process" (163).

Further to this point, such rhetoric and locker-room talk also began to characterize Trump's detractors and those insufficiently loyal to him. The slander "cuck," being a reduction of the misogynistic term "cuckold" denoting someone whose wife has been sleeping with other men, began to rise to prominence in various proclamations of the Right and Alt-Right during 2016, quadrupling its Google Trends count over the previous four years.

If you frequent corners of the internet conducive to Alt Right discourse (e.g. white nationalist message boards or the Twitter mentions of anyone critical of Trump), you've probably seen the word "cuck" bandied about... What's clear, though, is that it's become a favorite slur among Trump's most loyal supporters. In that rat's nest of anime avatars and meme-obsured gravitas, "cuck" is hurled at anyone perceived to have sold out their conservative values to be humiliated by a more liberal agenda. Jeb Bush was a cuck for supporting Common Core and amnesty for undocumented migrants... BuzzFeed's Joe Bernstein defines it as "mainstream Republicans who hold insufficiently conservative or even progressive positions on hot-button social issues like transgender rights, state use of the Confederate flag, and, especially immigration." (Clair 2016)

The term has more modern associations than its Shakespearean and Chaucerian slander. "Cuck" pornography, for instance, fetishizes the act of presumably lesser men engaging as voyeur to

their wives or girlfriends having sex with more capable specimens, often Black men. The sublimated urge for this kind of experience reveals latent anxieties of miscegenation, sexual incompetence, and the exchange of the female body as homosocial capital. Such rhetoric was leveled at the opposition, implying that their impotent manhood was unfit for public office.

A range of conservative commentators and bloggers referred to [2016 Vice-Presidential candidate Tim] Kaine as “Creepy Kaine.”...Some portrayed Kaine driving a van with no windows and “free candy” written on the side, while others questioned why he seemed to enjoy spending so much time with young boys in Honduras. Others called him a “cuckold” or “cuck.” These examples jumbled together a range of meanings to suggest that the image perceived by supporters as “safe” actually masked a nefarious character and aberrant masculinity. For instance, some implied a deviant sexuality connected with pedophilia. Such comparisons functioned, at least in part, to question Kaine’s integrity and his manhood, presented complex iterations of the “feminized” narrative some conservatives have long built up around the Democratic Party. Gender scholar Jackson Katz argued that the right has constructed Democrats as “weak and politically spineless” and that “millions of white male voters...equate liberal policies with emasculation and weakness.” To his detractors on the right—at least those who participated in the “Creepy Kaine” discourse—Kaine’s version of masculinity was not in line with hegemonic masculinity inasmuch as it came across as emasculated, and demonstrated a lack of virile heterosexuality, manly aggression, power, and dominance. (Boser 132)

While Trump never went so far as to call Hillary Clinton a cuck outright in the media or during debates, his repeated talking points about Bill Clinton's numerous affairs served as a dog-whistle for those who already used the term. Despite Hillary having a long political career based on a kind of gendered performativity that could court male voters (pant suits, neoliberal politics, crime policy, etc), that image could be destabilized by attacking her on that very masculinist field—whether Trump realized this is what he was doing is unknown. During one of his rallies in October 2016, Trump reinforced this by saying: “I don’t even think she’s loyal to Bill, if you want to know the truth. And really, folks, why should she be, why should she be” (Morin 2016).

A final example of pre-election masculinist performativity is also the most blatant. During the March 3, 2016 Republican Primary debate, Trump responded to Florida Senator Marco Rubio's personal jab that “his hands are the size of someone who is 5’2”. And you know what they say about men with small hands.” On live television, Trump declared: “And, he referred to my hands—if they’re small, something else must be small. I guarantee you, there’s no problem. I guarantee” (Washington Post 2016). Setting aside theory for a moment, one fact is astounding. Whatever the influence of masculine performativity may have been in politics past, two candidates for the Presidency of the United States of America stood in front of an audience of 16.9 million people and unabashedly claimed that penis size is a (dis)qualifying factor to hold office.

Perhaps as telling as the tone of this debate was, Trump's justification is even more illuminating. “What do I do?” he later asked *The New York Times*. “Do I stand back and just take incoming and act presidential?” (Parker 2016). The fact that Trump framed this issue as a dichotomy cannot be overlooked or overstated—to him, the choice was between defending his manhood or adopting the recognizable performance of an office he sees as impotent (by virtue of

letting said manhood be attacked). Framing the decision in this way was a conscious act which Trump thereafter maintained wasn't a choice at all: masculinity dominates decorum. In that same article, Trump once again translates this feeling of threatened masculinity into the rhetoric of policy precisely as he did in his announcement speech: "That's the problem with our country. Our country takes abuse from everybody and we don't do anything about it" (Parker 2016).

No legitimate polls after that debate attempted to measure the effect of this moment, accounting for gender, but perhaps the reaction isn't as important as the action, in this particular instance. The size of Trump's genitals became the focus of numerous other debacles, both before and during his presidency—from graphic descriptions of it given by Stormy Daniels on CNN to its depictions in political cartoons, animations, and sculpture—virtually all of which were hegemonically damning and progressively taboo. This is only worth mentioning because, in previous instances where imagery of presidential penises were demanded by the public (primarily when Paula Jones described that of Bill Clinton during trial), the discourse was comparatively absent of derision (even when it came to the accusation of Clinton's alleged case of Peyronie's disease). Yet in the case of Trump, deriding this particular conceit in masculinist performance was clearly a *political* tactic as much or more than a *personal* affront.

This is yet another example of a new way in which crises of masculinity and their performances are affecting political culture. Despite *The New Republic's* claim that "this locker-room banter belongs to an old tradition" of presidential politics since Jefferson accused Adams of having a "hideous hermaphroditical character," and Lyndon B. Johnson's penchant for revealing his eponymous appendage in the parking lot of the House Office Building, Trump is not typical in quite the same way (Heer 2016). Jefferson didn't write the quote in question (Berkes 2016) and, if there is to be an exemplar of the way in which masculine performativity

controls political narratives after Trump, it is certainly Lyndon B. Johnson and what he affectionately referred to as “Jumbo” (Frady 2002). No other examples of this “old tradition” are given by Heer, or demonstrate those masculinist performances’ capacities for designing the policy initiatives of the men who embody them. But the proof that this tradition has not faded—indeed, it has amplified—is clear in the record of the president and how his masculinist persona is weaponized in scrutiny of him, particularly in artistic activism.

In such artistic scrutiny, the public and media responded to a new level of explicit discourse provided by the then-candidate and former president—a masculinist performativity completely devoid of irony, and responding more loudly to masculinist crises than ever before. Due to Trump’s overcompensation, his repeated protestations of his potency, success, strength, and dominance—and the obvious untruth of too many of these claims—much of the electorate simply refused to succumb to the fear of exclusionism involved in calling out the emperor’s nudity. In other words: Trump made his penis an issue first, figuratively and literally, and in so doing made his strength, dominance, physical superiority, and success unmissable targets for scrutiny—though doing so comes with the risk of reinforcing the very hypocrisy such scrutiny intends to point out.

A key example would be the 2016 installation of five separate statues in Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, and Seattle, collectively called *The Emperor Has No Balls*. Each of the five statues, erected surreptitiously at the same time across America by activists disguised as construction workers, etc, were notoriously unflattering of Trump, depicting him completely naked in revealed obesity, gridded with bright blue varicose veins, mottled skin, and—most tellingly—sporting a barely visible penis, wholly obscured by his

weight and pubic hair. As is suggested by the title of the installation, there are no testicles to be seen.

Predictably (and necessarily), some of the first reactions to the installation were of those who celebrated the need to criticize Trump and art being a vehicle to do so, but ultimately felt that this exercise was one in body-shaming and masculine degradation, as put forward by Meghna Sridhar and quoted by *The Huffington Post*:

Nothing is being said by the piece that is difficult for one in the current political climate to say—that Trump is a joke, or that fat people must be shamed, or that male bodies that don't conform to masculine notions of genitalia deserve scorn. Indeed, the real naked emperors seem to be the installation's smug audience instead, parading around in seeming robes of progressive politics, which actually, upon closer inspection, are their own naked delusions of open minded, non-oppressive grandeur. (Jimmerson 2017)

There is absolutely a way in which Sridhar is correct: the execution of the installation and those who find it to be an appropriate criticism of Trump is an enforcement of a dehumanizing, regressive masculinist rhetoric. But what exactly did the installation set out to do, if not to body shame? How could the multitude of people responsible for its creation have missed that, in firing at Trump in this way, they were creating collateral damage? If we consider this piece to be one in which the semiotics of masculinism are the *primary language*, and that the subject of the art (i.e. Trump) is the *intended audience*, what is revealed is that the artists are speaking to the subject in the only language he understands; that Trump's masculinist ethos imprisons him in his own vanity, his delusions of sexual and masculine superiority, of classist elegance and dominance. All of these delusional "virtues" find their glaring opposition in the morbidly realistic figure of *The*

Emperor Has No Balls. There is no doubt that using the language of masculinism to criticize the masculinist ethos comes with collateral damage (as Sridhar rightfully says), much as Audre Lorde reminds us that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Yet what must be understood as well about such work is that when the subject of the art identifies himself entirely by such an ethos, it is expected that artists will engage the subject using that methodology. Whether this is in parody (as we will see later with sketches from *Saturday Night Live*) or in perhaps egregious realism as in *The Emperor Has No Balls*, to analyze these works only through feminist and progressive lenses, however true and necessary such critiques are, is to miss this objective. One must also consider that, if the intent is to wound or shame the subject, then criticizing the subject through its own perspective is an undoubtedly effective—if a socially irresponsible—method of doing so.

Another problematic example which illustrates this very phenomenon engaged Trump's homophobia by repeatedly satirizing his submissive political relationship with Vladimir Putin, turning it into a homosexual love affair. While this was a common and widespread method, used by comedy sketch writers and political cartoonists all over the world, perhaps one of the largest pushbacks to this came against Bill Plympton's short cartoon series for *The New York Times* in 2018, which "sparked outrage among a number of leaders and advocates in the LBGTQ community" (Kacala 2018). In it, Trump's real audio recordings are set over a series of animated shorts, in which Trump fawns over a shirtless Putin and indulges in teenaged romantic daydreams of him. They kiss, fawn, hold hands, and ride off into the sunset on a unicorn together.

Openly gay Condé Nast executive Phillip Picardi, who runs the company's new LGBTQ website, *Them*, also slammed the video as "homophobic."

“It is implying that being gay is an insult for both of these men. It implies that being gay would emasculate them,” Picardi wrote on Twitter. “It implies that calling them gay together would anger them and incite reaction. This is beneath us.” (Kacala 2018)

Picardi’s criticism of the shorts, exactly like Sridhar’s of *The Emperor Has No Balls*, is undeniably true, and true to a point beyond which some readers might appreciate, without an application of masculinist analysis. Plympton’s cartoon is homophobic, precisely *because* the subjects of it are homophobes. In the minds of Putin and Trump, gay masculinity is subordinate to heterosexual hegemony, and being depicted as gay is, to them, a legitimate slur of their masculinist superiority, an actual emasculation. If the goal is emasculation, there is no other method of doing so that Trump would recognize (even if such a method wouldn’t make another man, less dependent on masculinist projections, feel the same way). This is the same impetus that undoubtedly caused Stephen Colbert to say on the *Late Show* in 2017 that “the only thing Trump’s mouth is good for is being Vladimir Putin’s cockholster” (Kacala 2018). Artists and commentators were required to (re)perform masculinism in order to communicate with their masculinist audience of one man.

Art and commentary that wishes to wound the masculinist object on his own ground often uses the semiotics of masculinism to make it hurt. The question of whether engaging in the language of masculinism to criticize an object is a moral or right course of action for artists is one not for this dissertation. But what is clear is that many artists have been compelled to engage in this way because they know it is what will arouse the insecurities of Trump and other masculinist performers. When one becomes a public figure and defines themselves by projecting their masculinist ideals, presenting themselves as impenetrable to the criticisms of lesser men,

women, and whomever else they Otherize, it is an understandable impulse to strike back at him using the only language in which he is fluent. More importantly, the mere existence of this kind of art and commentary reifies the art's object as a masculinist image, taking inspiration from the subject himself and reinforcing that image to those who consume the art, continuing the cycle of Bulterian (re)performance.

What I feel must be said, as far as this dissertation is the place to say it, is that the ongoing cycle of masculinist performativity and rhetoric in the Anglosphere has demonstrably damaging consequences—far from tearing down the performers of masculinism, it seems to reify their victimization while perpetuating the idea that these standards of failed masculinity are sensible measurements of criticism. While I feel strongly about an artist's right to harm their oppressors, the use of masculinist criticism is inarguably a double-edged sword. A responsible theoretical practice is to ask oneself: "Is the harm I am doing to my target worth the harm of legitimizing this kind of discourse?" Different political moments demand political action, and whether the guillotine or the grotesque is the appropriate form of revolution is the kind of questions, lamely put, only history can decide. Still, those of us who labor to destabilize masculinist performativity would do well to remember that the material effects of that discourse are very real, and the cycle of performativity absorbs that discourse regardless of our intentions.

Masculinist Performativity in the Oval Office

Trump's election to the presidency in 2016 was a shock to polling experts, but the results were illustrative of masculinism's influence on the electorate. While 52% of all men voted for Trump (compared to women's 39%), white women in particular voted for Trump over Hillary Clinton 47%-45%, which created questions among analysts about the factor of gender in Clinton's

turnout (Pew Research Center 2018). Particularly after the numerous scandals of sexism which had rocked the Trump campaign in the previous weeks, that Trump could still receive more white women voters than Clinton suggested that factors of race and ideology were persuasive elements in favor of a candidate whose track record on women was so polarizing. However, after more time in office, those figures would begin to shift along gender lines.

In 2019, the Pew Research Center released a survey illustrating the widening gender gap in view of the government's role and presidential approval. Trump's approval rating was more sharply separated by gender than for presidents in the recent past: men's approval and disapproval tied at 47%, compared to a 32% approval, and a 62% disapproval rate among women. "Looking more broadly, over his first two years in office, Trump's average approval rating was much higher among men (44%) than among women (32%). This 13-percentage-point gender gap is wider than for any of his recent predecessors..." (Hartig, 2019). It is also wider by a couple of points than the difference between men and women voting for him overall in 2016 (cited earlier). So, it seems that, despite record low approval-ratings and historical-level scrutiny by the press, the public, and by international allies, Trump's rapport with American men at the very least maintained its resilience after his inauguration and even grew in strength.

One reason why is that Trump did more to embody the crises of masculinity on a national platform than any of his predecessors; he also made it central to major presidential decisions, exercising the homosocial bond in validating said crises. For Trump, the threat against masculinity is not just an individual neurosis: it is a matter of policy which affects even the selection of a Supreme Court Justice. During the Kavanaugh proceedings, when asked by a reporter if he had a message for young men in America, Trump responded:

It's a very scary time for young men in America, when you may be guilty of something that you may not be guilty of. This is a very difficult time. What's happening here has much more to do than even the appointment of a Supreme Court justice. It really does. You could be somebody that was perfect your entire life, and somebody could accuse you of something ... and you're automatically guilty. But in this realm, you are truly guilty until proven innocent. That's one of the very, very bad things that's taking place right now. (Sargent 2018)

While earlier presidents would have been noncommittal (or prioritized the protection of the victim while maintaining due process for the accused, as the Obama administration did with the “It’s On Us” initiative), Trump instantly understood the question to be one literally *for* young men, not *to* them. For the first time in their memory, young men in a rapidly changing social environment have been given the reflection of their *exact* fears in the highest office of the free world. The Quinnipiac poll posted in the midst of Christine Blasey Ford’s Congressional hearings shows that presumption of innocence is certainly gendered: 59% of men believed that Kavanaugh should be confirmed, to the 32% who said no. 47% of men believed Kavanaugh’s version of events compared to Blasey Ford’s 40%, and that number widened in white men to 57%-32%. With absolutely no official court proceedings, judicial due process, or the presentation of admissible evidence, 54% of men found Brett Kavanaugh to be honest compared to the 34% who didn’t (though, bizarrely, the numbers for men responding to Christine Blasey Ford’s honesty were almost identical). 52% of men felt that Kavanaugh had been treated unfairly during the hearings (41% didn’t) and 56% believed he was the target of a politically motivated smear campaign (39% didn’t)—which explains also why there was such support among men to reopen an FBI investigation, to presumably prove his innocence, on which the majority of them

were already convinced (Quinnipiac 2018). Breakdowns by race undoubtedly show this support trends toward white men and is tied to the general concern for the lateral freedom of hegemonic masculinity articulated by Trump.

Such insecurity about the position of men in civil society is, paradoxically, reflected in insecurity about their position among themselves. While reifying the collective fear that masculinity's capital in society is waning, Trump also demands an honored place within that homosocial community (hence, "locker room talk"). A particularly interesting example of this is in the limited artwork Trump chose to hang in the White House: a picture of his inauguration proven to contain a crowd enhanced in size by Photoshop and one of the 2016 electoral college map. There is also an oil painting by Andy Thomas, which depicts in Rockwellian fashion Donald Trump in a smoky, warm bar, hearkening to the reserved homosocial spaces of rural masculinity. Trump sits in the center of a host of previous Republican presidents: both Bushes, Reagan, Eisenhower, Ford, Nixon, Roosevelt (the Rough Rider, not the Democratic Socialist, naturally), and Lincoln. The table is appropriately cluttered with drinks all erring toward the darker side of the color spectrum (Reagan excepted, who drank Orange Blossoms). Roosevelt even seems to prefer his battered tin cup used in the field of combat to a bar glass. Nixon, his hand near the stem of a glass full of Chateau Lafite Rothschild, seems almost poised to toast: "We can all drink to the ladies."

But, despite how obviously the painting seeks to include Trump as a natural member of the good ol' boys club, it aesthetically separates him. Whatever joke has elicited uproarious laughter from the other men seems to have gone over the head of Trump, who looks quizzical. The muted pastels and earthy tones of the former presidents force Trump's starched white shirt and Italo Ferretti tie to stand out in garish contrast, even having put aside his \$5,000 Brioni suit

jacket. Before him sits a Diet Coke: even in the liminal temporality of *The Republican Club*, Trump doesn't drink. That the White House—the United States' receiving edifice for all foreign dignitaries, plenipotentiaries, heads of state, and diplomats—has elided the full selection of the Smithsonian Museum of Art to display this instead is implicative of the image Trump wished to broadcast to the American people and the world, seeing himself as a member of a rugged, fraternal, Presidential order.

Naturally, the bond with past (and passed) presidents holds little executive caché: Trump had to forge friendships with other heads of state more than with former American presidents. The most prominent of these new allies were arguably Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, and Trump's tactics of entreating both caused international debate. Contradicting his alpha-centric audition for foreign policy, Trump was surprisingly subservient to both autocrats—notably in his defense of Vladimir Putin in the 2018 Helsinki summit against accusations by U.S. intelligence of Putin's election interference and, with Kim Jong-un, following a contentious battle of nuclear threats. In all expressions of respect for either leader, Trump repeatedly emphasized their masculinity over their policy, philosophy, or even their indictments by U.S. intelligence officials for crimes such as election tampering and defiance of nuclear sanctions. From “the extremely strong and powerful” adulation of Putin to Kim Jong-un being “funny and tough, good negotiator,” Trump elevated his prioritization of masculinist personality from domestic to international politics: factors he considered for the Saudi royal family, Rodrigo Duterte, Recep Erdogan, Xi Jinping, and Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi (Russell 2018).

When asked in various contexts about these men, Trump responded in the case of Putin: “If he says great things about me, I'm going to say great things about him. I've already said, he is

really very much of a leader. I mean, you can say, oh, isn't that a terrible thing — the man has very strong control over a country”; about Kim Jong-un: “At a very young age, he was able to assume power. A lot of people, I'm sure, tried to take that power away, whether it was his uncle or anybody else. And he was able to do it. So obviously, he's a pretty smart cookie”; of el-Sissi: “I met during the campaign, and at that point there were two of us, and we both met. And hopefully you like me a lot more”; and congratulated Erdogan on his referendum victory despite being repeatedly told by his advisors not to do so (Montanaro 2017).

It was in the case of Kim Jong-un that the projected camaraderie by Trump could not occur until there was, first, a contest of wills. In early 2018, a rising tension between North Korea and the United States over North Korea's testing of intercontinental ballistic missiles and their nuclear capability reached its height. After Trump had promised to rain down “fire and fury” on the North Korean state during the previous summer, Kim Jong-un reminded Trump that the “Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.” What followed was one of the most egregious examples of Trump's masculinist performativity being used as a compass for foreign policy.

@realDonaldTrump North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the “Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.” Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger and more powerful one than his, and my Button works! (January 3, 2018)

After referring to Kim Jong-un as “Little Rocket Man” in a Tweet the previous November, this exchange led the media and political experts around the world to talk in earnest terms about whether Trump was intentionally stoking nuclear conflict over Twitter. Despite this, Trump began to immediately recharacterize their relationship as one in which the respect for each

other's strength, dominant attitude, and simultaneously a deference to the other were signs of an excellent international relationship; Trump began to take credit for North Korean denuclearization and the peace talks with South Korea that followed. Notwithstanding, what seemed to be a conflict centering on nuclear tension, international relations, and presidential power, the pervading subtext of masculinist crises were clearly readable, as demonstrated in a political cartoon by Chan Lowe in *The Week*, in which Trump and Kim Jong-un compare the sizes of their nuclear rockets, held quite obviously in a position that suggests their respective penises, with Kim Jong-un proclaiming, "*Mine's bigger!*" The cartoon sits under the caption: "What this is all about, really..." ("Latest Cartoons" 2017).

Of course, it is not unadvisable for the U.S. president to make strong personal connections with foreign heads of state—indeed, even with those who we regard as holding radically contrary values to American sensibilities and interests. It is rather the repeated nature of Trump's confidence in these men on the basis of their masculinist performativity which reifies masculinist crises, defines the administration, and which becomes such a crucial aspect in reperforming his character in dramatizations. That this element was so central to Trump policy was shown in Jeffrey Goldberg's 2018 *Atlantic* article, when a White House staffer told him that the Trump Doctrine is: "We're America, Bitch."

"We're America, Bitch" is not only a characterologically accurate collective self-appraisal—the gangster fronting, the casual misogyny, the insupportable confidence—but it is also perfectly Rorschachian. To Trump's followers, "We're America, Bitch" could be understood as a middle finger directed at a cold and unfair world, one that no longer respects American power and privilege.

(Goldberg 2018)

And do these (albeit less subtle) linguistic cues inform the Rorschachian response? Do the proliferators and audiences of masculine performativity look into the mirror of Trump and see the ideal man reflected back to them?

A Quinnipiac poll of July 2018 is informative. Surprisingly, only 46% of men approved of the way Donald Trump was handling foreign policy compared to 51% disapproval; only 41% of men believed he had strengthened the United States' position as leader of the free world, while 45% believed he had weakened it. However, what seems to suggest that the priority of masculine performance had finally had an adverse reaction by American men actually reveals itself to be in response to poor masculine performativity on the part of the President.

Of men, 50% believed that he had too friendly of an attitude toward Russia, compared to the 43% who believed he had the right attitude and the 2% who thought he was too unfriendly; only 40% of men approved generally of Trump's handling of policy with Russia; 37% of men were "very concerned" about Trump's relationship with Russia (25% somewhat concerned, 18% not so concerned, 11% not concerned at all)—all while 53% of men believed that the Trump campaign hasn't colluded with Russia. 47% of men believed the Helsinki summit was a failure for the U.S. (33% said success) and—this choice of wording is telling—49% believed Trump was "weak on Russia" as opposed to 41% thinking he was "strong". In other words, American men's concern about Trump's engagement with Putin had less to do with fears of conspiracy, and more to do with positions of strength, negotiating power, international image, and dominance of the presidential office (Quinnipiac 2018).¹⁹

¹⁹ In an uncharacteristically astute observation by Bill O'Reilly in his interview immediately following Trump's campaign announcement, when Trump said: "I would be willing to bet that I would have a great relationship with Putin. It's about leadership," O'Reilly pushed back: "Based on what? You're two macho guys?" ("The O'Reilly Factor..." 2015)

While it is true that Trump himself set the frame of discourse and success for this administration in a masculine ethos, he also set the frame for his failure by it. Having stripped away measurements of conflict escalation, objective markers of economic prosperity, establishment of pacts or military negotiations, or any other traditional goals by which presidential action is measured, conservative or liberal—Trump had instead idolized dominance, unfettered agency of leadership, and an unwillingness to let America be considered as runner-up. He had praised unilateral authority and then answered to someone else's. It was precisely on those points that, in the minds of those who see masculinist dominance as paramount, he had failed.

But while there were stumbles along the road, Trump consistently found ways to reinforce his masculinist image, by his own performativity and by others'. Kanye West inspired widespread curiosity after the 2016 election, during which he said that "If I would have voted, I would have voted for Trump" (Smith 2018). Concerned that such a visible leader in Black American artistry was in support of a man widely considered to be racist, fans and media alike expressed their displeasure. Confusion intensified after West appeared in Trump Tower for a photo-op with the then president-elect. Outside of sporadic Tweets and the occasional remark in passing, West never clarified the precise nature of his support until October 18, 2018, when he spent the day shadowing the president in the White House. In front of a throng of press inside the Oval Office, he explained why support for Trump transcends identity politics and personal pressures. Between articulating fears for prison reformation and middle-class stability, West said:

This [MAGA] hat, it gives me power in a way. You know, my dad and my mom separated. So, I didn't have a lot of male energy in my home. And also, you

know, I'm married to a family that—you know—not a lot of male energy going on...There was something about, when I put this hat on, it made me feel like Superman...So, I had the balls, because I have enough balls to put on this hat. (CNN 2018).

While there is an element of pathos here which obscures the framing just slightly, and while in larger contexts West was discussing legitimate and necessary issues, there is no doubt that West's attitude toward those issues and his support for the president were wholly expressed through the rhetoric of masculinist performativity. Nor should we give too much credit to the idea that some of this masculinist jargon (balls, etc.) are merely placeholders for non-gendered ideas like courage and mentorship as, in the efficacy of objective plans of action to combat systemic issues like poor housing, mass incarceration, and job growth, these are irrelevant concepts. What West recognized in Trump is a president who doesn't pretend expertise, intelligence, experience, and tested tactics are a way to accomplish anything. He saw someone who can power their way into better circumstances, and so emulated that tactic with success in his Adidas deal (the need for the male energy in question).²⁰

But Trump's utilization of West as an inroads to Black masculinist leadership was not new: his courting of Don King, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton during the '80s, '90s, and '00s are identical performances. An insidious combination of entrepreneurial masculinism with the racist anxiety of masculinist crises: Trump used racial groups and leading Black figures as a form of capital to profit off his own social investments. One of the rhetorical slippages that

²⁰ At the time, Kanye West had been working with Adidas on his Yeezy Boost elite sneakers since 2015, after leaving his partnership with Nike. Presumably, this comment is in reference to that shift, although Trump was not in office at the time. West also credited himself with course-correcting Adidas from a \$14 billion per year company (losing \$2 billion a year) to a \$38 billion per year market cap called "the Yeezy Effect." In the same discussion, West mentioned that the Hillary campaign slogan "I'm With Her" alienated him, that it didn't make him feel like "a guy who could play catch with his son." (CNN 2018)

betrays Trump's view of Black Americans as demographic monoliths and pawns is the use of the definite article "the," as in "the Blacks," writes Maggie Haberman.

Over my years of reporting in New York City, Trump was the only political figure other than another Queens-born politician, Andrew Cuomo, I ever heard publicly use that specific phrase. It reflected not just a minimizing view but a transactional one: ethnic and racial groups were simply discrete units to be won over as allies in elections, or in real estate or zoning battles. (64)

One might expect outspoken members of the Right to be less forthcoming about these feelings—to maintain that their position on issues like border patrol, tax reform, foreign policy, etc., are the results of sound logic, empirical data, and dedication to conservative ideals. But the masculinist power of Trump and the way in which his leadership both reflected and redefined the contingent voices of his Party defy this expectation. The testimony of conservative commentator Glenn Beck is an excellent second example of decoded responses to masculine performativity. Beck was a vocal opponent of Trump during the primaries, until a moment when he suddenly endorsed the president on his television show. The reasons?

There are no examples of men being men. James Bond. That's it. A movie. There's no male role models. Would you agree with that? So Donald Trump: here's a guy who marries a supermodel, is like, 'Yeah, I can make it with any model I want.' He's over the top, but he fights back, he doesn't flinch... he is the almost cartoon of an alpha dog. You know what I mean? And I think because we have taken alpha dogs and shot them all, when he comes to the table there's a lot of guys that are out there goin' 'Damn right!' (Goldberg 2019).²¹

²¹ A revealing anecdote. After the rebuilding of the Briar Hall Country Club in 1996 into a world-class golf resort, Trump invited *Golf* magazine editor George Peper to come play and write a review, along with Peper's thirteen-

To this conclusion, it is not only entertainment personalities who are drawn. University of Wisconsin emeritus and NYU sociologist Roger Friedland also found few answers for Trump's efficacy based on conventional political ideologies. He references the linguistic cues of masculinist performance forcefully when he writes that "Trump represents a turn to the masculine principle... Trump is an action figure for our times, a strong man against a bad history. It's his dick that called many to his side" (Friedland 2016).

Some of Trump's most definitive masculinist performances came in the last year of his term, in reaction to both the COVID-19 pandemic and in the 2020 presidential election. The coronavirus pandemic proved to be a catalyst for masculinist governance in both the United States and the United Kingdom (as well as in other nations led by similarly masculinist administrations). According to Eve Ng in "Unmasking Masculinity: Considering Gender, Science, and Nation in Responses to COVID-19" for *Feminist Studies*:

Male leaders who are "authoritarian, vainglorious and blustering," such as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Iran, and President Donald Trump in the United States, have presided over some of the world's highest COVID-19 infection and mortality numbers, in contrast to, for example, New Zealand under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Taiwan under President Tsai Ing-wen. (694)

Because COVID-19 represented such a threat to both the primacy of scientific discourse and the nature of national identity in response to the crisis, masculinist leaders reacted quite differently

year-old son. After asking Peper whether or not the resort could host a PGA event, Trump said (in front of Peper's teenaged son): "You know, being Donald Trump is a double-edged sword... People love me because I bring quality to everything. But people hate me because I love to fuck supermodels" (Haberman 136).

to the pandemic than administrations guided by other forms of ideology. According to Ng, Trump's staunch advocacy of Regeneron and his oblique support for conspiracy theories about the efficacy of hydroxychloroquine stemmed from the fact that, contrary to mask-wearing, "the language of drug treatments is more directly couched in war metaphors — a drug "fights" or "defeats" the disease or "kills" the pathogens in the way a mask does not. However, such metaphors are also common in discourse about addressing public health issues more generally, with references to "combat," "frontlines," and "war" itself, as scholars of the AIDS epidemic have discussed" (696). This rhetoric and several other tactics of Trump to play down both the devastation of the pandemic and the success of vaccine science to mitigate it all "reflect the hegemonic masculinist disdain for communitarian approaches to societal problems" (697).

Skepticism against the science of vaccines (along with public attacks on public health experts) play into the long-exercised masculinist trope of anti-intellectualism, as well. From the days in which Eisenhower derided intellectuals as "eggheads," to the present conflation of empirical sciences with liberal hoaxes, hegemonic masculinity has Otherized the practice of intellectualism by relegating it to the echelons of the effete, much as those who touted the manliness of physical labor rejected the work of the academic, technological, and other intellect-oriented industries as being beneath the honor of a man. Masculinism during the COVID-19 pandemic reached dangerous new levels: the efficacy of vaccines became more than ever a distinctly political issue, in which support of medical expertise was seen by the Right as intellectual simping or cucking by the Left, a delusion which Trump's statements and actions only empowered.

While to some extent, incidents such as Trump speculating about the ingestion of bleach as a COVID-19 treatment reflect a broader anti-intellectualism within

certain conservative circles, the widely accepted scientific method (for all its problematic elements) involves experimentation and testing premised on current theory and prior research. Especially for drug trials, this process requires a kind of caution and careful consideration of data that does not sit well with masculinist impulses toward quick action and clear results. Listening to scientists, in other words, is a potentially feminizing position to be avoided within the kind of cowboy masculinity espoused by Trump... (699).

Some in the conservative ranks who realized that much of the pushback against legitimate COVID-19 safeguards stemmed from masculinist idolatry of Trump were forced to employ that hegemonic rhetoric to turn the tide of conservative opinion, such as when Wyoming Congresswoman Liz Cheney Tweeted a picture of her father, former Vice-President Dick Cheney, wearing a mask, along with the caption: “#realmenwearmasks” (June 26, 2020). However, because the COVID-19 virus posed the greatest threat to those demographics which most incense the masculinist crisis (primarily Black Americans, who were more than twice as likely to die from the infection)—and because the concepts of personal autonomy, strength, and resilience all played into the masculinist matrix of anti-vaccination and anti-masking—Trump was incentivized to respond to the threat in the most masculinist fashion possible.

Presidents in the past have certainly been admired for their masculinity, and many operated under the common assumption that it was an essential quality to leadership. It becomes increasingly clear, however, that few if any presidents find exercises of masculinist performativity to be the most central piece of their governing strategy as Trump did, nor have so many Americans been so eager to praise that strategy for precisely what it is. That such performances are central to the character of Trump becomes apparent in analysis of his

dramatizations on stage and screen, without which such performances would be essentially uncritical, incomplete, or unreadable.

(Re)performances of Trump's Masculinism in Drama

During the summer of 2017, at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park, New York City, a scandal was occurring. For the newly-opened production of the Public Theatre's *Julius Caesar* as part of their free Shakespeare in the Park series, headlines of major newspapers referred to outrage, corporate withdrawals, and boycotts. The cause: director Oskar Eustis's decision to depict the eponymous character as Donald Trump. What resulted was one of the most publicized theatre scandals in recent American history. Many saw the choice as "offensive and inappropriate," tantamount to "assassinat[ing] him on a stage" (Paulson 2017). Alec Baldwin, who gained notoriety for depicting Donald Trump on *Saturday Night Live*, made a call for the public to support the theatre to make up for withdrawn sponsorship. Eustis, in response to the backlash, wrote in an email to the theatre's supporters:

Our production of 'Julius Caesar' in no way advocates violence toward anyone. Shakespeare's play, and our production, make the opposite point: Those who attempt to defend democracy by undemocratic means pay a terrible price and destroy the very thing they are fighting to save. For over 400 years, Shakespeare's play has told this story and we are proud to be telling it again in Central Park.

(Paulson 2017)

While arguments concerning Shakespeare's intention, censorship, patriotism, and general taste were rampant during the production's run, what was less discussed were Eustis's other provocative casting choices for the show—in the choice to give Calpurnia a Slovenian accent, in

the majority of Senators being comprised by actors of color and women, and perhaps most interestingly the choice of Elizabeth Marvel as a female Marc Antony. While news outlets were mostly concerned with Bank of America's pullout from funding and Donald Trump Jr.'s Tweets in response to the production, few seemed concerned with what was actually being staged. In short, Eustis's production did more than reassert the danger of using violence to maintain democracy: it also depicted contemporary masculinist performativity, both in its crisis and in its prospective nightmare.

To begin with, Shakespeare gave us in Caesar a character that translates seamlessly into post-war hegemonic masculinity. Leery of intellectualism, he dreads Cassius as a man who "reads too much" and "thinks too much," who "looks through the deeds of men" rather than performing them himself. Devout to the gods, convinced that all enemies will fly merely at the sight of his wrath, and thinking it "most strange that men should fear" at all, he seems from the text alone an exemplar of the masculinist icon. Caesar sees himself as more dangerous than Danger itself, and will not stay away from the Senate lest even the rumor that he does so on the bidding of his wife becomes public. Indeed, his acceptance of death only comes when he recognizes the murderous hand of a former comrade—if the fraternal order itself has been betrayed, "O, then fall Caesar." In fact, there is hardly a line in Caesar's short time on stage which does not allude to, invoke, celebrate, or portray a post-war masculinist ideal. To see *Julius Caesar*, even without an original directorial vision, is to see a reflection of seventy years of Anglo-American masculinist performativity (and, obviously, its continuing precursors since Elizabethan England).

In other words, audiences would be unable to come to the Delacorte in the summer of 2017 without seeing some embodiment of masculinity being murdered, even while other images

of it are villainized and heroized. But Eustis's choice to portray Caesar as Trump and the Senate as a diverse group of progressives pinpoints the masculinist ideology quite specifically within our time, and plays for the audience that hegemonic identity's worst fear: complete erasure of the ideal man by women, people of color, scheming intellectuals, and other subaltern groups. To what extent was this intentional? Did Eustis seek to provoke the furor of the masculinist crisis in such a specific and effective way, or was it merely a side effect of making a very limited point on violence in democracy?

One of the scholars who came the closest to finding out these answers is Jeffery R. Wilson. In his 2020 book *Shakespeare and Trump*, Wilson devotes an entire chapter to the Public's production of *Julius Caesar* by transcribing Oskar Eustis's answers to twenty questions about the production. In this chapter, Wilson presses Eustis a number of times on the similarities between Shakespeare's Caesar and Donald Trump, and what Eustis reveals are several performative references to hegemonic masculinity.

The narcissism, the grandiosity, the unstoppable ambition—famously in Caesar, he gives the best justification for his assassination seconds before he's assassinated when he describes himself as “constant as the Northern Star.” You could stick “I alone can fix this” into that last speech of Caesar's, and nobody would notice. So there are personality characteristics—which, by the way, don't have much to do with the historical Caesar, who's a much wilier, subtle, and sophisticated character, but do have to do with Shakespeare's Caesar. But the contempt for democratic norms, the belief that there are no rules that should apply to him—that feels to me not only very much like Trump; that feels very much like what an incipient dictator looks like. It's so shockingly obvious with our president

that he just has no belief whatsoever that he should be accountable the way other people are accountable. It's just an absent category in his thinking. (148)

Despite repeated referents of character which are demonstrably related to masculinist performativity, hegemonic masculinity is never specifically discussed with Oskar Eustis. Eustis reiterates to Wilson in this chapter that the goals of the production were to respond to a specific political moment, that “this is a story of a republic or democracy that is threatened to its very core by a populist charismatic leader who has clear aspirations to dictatorship. That’s the dilemma that faced the conspirators in Julius Caesar. And I feel it’s, unfortunately, a very exact analogy to the dilemma that we’re in as Americans” (139).

Although Eustis’s repeated claims that this production of the play is an indictment of violent action’s capacity to destroy the democratic process, conservative response reveals that other anxieties nonetheless were brought to the surface by his concept. A Fox News article opened its condemnation of the play with the following thesis: “A New York City play appears to depict Donald Trump being brutally stabbed to death by women and minorities” (“An NYC...” 2017). On June 12, host Jesse Watters on Fox News’s *The Five* said to co-host Greg Gutfeld in response to the *Caesar*: “I believe that it is more than just political pornography, I think it is deeper than that. I think under the guise of art, there is something they want to see happen” (“Fareed...” 2017). Conservative columnist David Marcus further shows the Right’s true anxieties when writing for *The Federalist*:

In the Public’s version, we see the *pink-hatted* resistance and cheers over the killing of Trump—and let’s be clear, it is Trump—by *black senators*. This racial divide is clearly nowhere in Shakespeare’s work, but an invention of director

Oskar Eustis. Why the divide? Brutus and his conspirators were anything but an oppressed minority. They were literally the most privileged of Roman citizens. Given that the analogy between Trump and Caesar makes absolutely no sense on its face, and that the circumstances of a fairly elected president being killed bears no resemblance to the killing of Julius Caesar, why was this choice made? Defenders of the production have suggested that since the assassins wind up losing in the end, the point of the production is that we shouldn't assassinate Trump. (Marcus 2017) [emphases, mine]

Marcus comes the closest to directly questioning Eustis's directorial intent in stirring the fears of masculinist hegemony, envisioning a Caesar brutally murdered by "pink-hatted" and Black rebels, a gendered and racially diverse mob bloodying the paragon of masculinist embodiment. In so doing, he demonstrates along with others that Eustis's conceived moral about the dangers of violent political action were eclipsed in the reception of those viewing the world through the lens of hegemonic masculinity: that the democratic institution wasn't the victim but rather the focus was on *who was doing the killing* even more than *who was being killed*.

Many leading voices and companies in the theatre world similarly rushed to utilize the performative embodiment required in theatre to reveal the dangers of Trump's masculinist policies and character to the public. Notable among these was the 2018 President's Day challenge issued by playwright Paula Vogel, imploring dramatists to write dramatizations of Trump in adaptations of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, a French absurdist drama written in 1896. Long a theatrical touchstone on the subjects of fascism, idiocy in power, and tyrannical obscenity, *Ubu Roi*'s use of Absurdism exemplifies Martin Esslin's definition of the genre, to "breach this dead wall of complacency and automatism" and shock the audience into existential and political

awareness (Esslin 393). And, like many Absurdist works, Vogel's suggestion of playing King Ubu as Donald Trump reveals the reality of his presidency through extraordinary circumstances far more than it parodies it.

This is because there is more that connects Trump to Ubu than what seemed to be the thesis for Vogel: a predilection for profanity, a tendency to garble language, and his imperious swagger. Ubu, like Trump, is an inescapably masculinist figure, dealing in setting himself specifically above the concern of other men, the dehumanization of his wife, a distaste for intellectualism, and in homophobia. In the 2003 Dover translation, in which the eponymous character's name is literally translated as "Papa Turd," we see him tell his wife that she looks "very ugly today" before setting in to dine on chicken without waiting for the appointed guests (21). When Captain Bordure and his men arrive, they rally together with Papa Turd to denigrate his wife's potato soup. After a carnivalesque meal, Papa Turd proclaims his love for Bordure after Bordure conspires with him to overthrow King Wenceslaus, being promised the title of Duke of Lithuania. When a Messenger arrives summoning Papa Turd to the King, Papa Turd quails in fear while Mama Turd refers to him as a "weakling," to which Papa Turd says in an aside that he shall pin the conspiracy on his wife and Bordure (25). Upon arrival at the King's Court in Warsaw, Papa Turd and Wenceslaus bond over having both been drunk all morning, and Papa Turd leaves unscathed to return to his plotting at home. At said meeting, he opens by saying that everyone shall give their opinion but "I'll give mine first" (27). Turd then reveals his plan to poison the King by slipping arsenic into his breakfast.

Bordure disagrees with this plot for its cowardice and the men call Ubu a swine.

Bordure I think we should strike him with a terrible blow of the sword, and split him open from head to tail.

All Fine! That's noble! That's the manly thing! (27)

To avoid the appearance of cowardice in front of the men, Turd eventually agrees to violent assault upon the king, binding the men to “fight valiantly” (28). Back at the King's Palace, the Queen attempts to persuade the King not to attend the parade at which the conspirators plan to kill him, in a striking echo of *Julius Caesar*. The King proclaims he shall go “with neither sword or buckler,” to “show how little fear” he has (30). Turd's coup proves successful, and during the opening days of his kingship he entertains himself by throwing gold into the crowds and watching the poor bloody each other to get it. He holds a race in which the poor scramble for a barrel full of money—but despite his classist entertainment, the people seem to love him for the opportunity.

Now that Ubu has what he desires, he no longer feels the need for Bordure. “Now that I don't need him anymore, he can go scratch his ass. He'll never get that duchy” (37). He waves away his wife's protests, stating that both Bordure and the exiled son of Wenceslaus, Buggerlaus, are no threats, a “little crumb” and a “fourteen-year-old kid” (38). Thus begins a purging of the Nobles, many of whom he homophobically criticizes as buggers, while he takes their lands and titles unto himself. (Throughout the play, Papa Turd also uses a Jarry neologism “hornstrumpot” for a number of men. In the stage directions, “strumpot” is a reference to his extremely large stomach, but it is possible there is a separate innuendo in the insult “hornstrumpot” which suggests a “strumpet” or harlot desirous of the innuendo “horn”—in other words, homosexual. This may also be the case with the homophobic “turdhorn.”) After this enters a procession of notables, all of whom are either foreign holders of office, intellectuals, or artists, and he has them tossed into the murder-hole he calls “the trap.”

After Bordure allies with the Emperor Alexis in an attempt to undo the reign of Ubu

which he helped to bring about, Ubu learns of the coming armed forces. Once again, his nerve to action is only brought about by the peer pressure of his council of men and his cajoling wife criticizing his masculinity.

Mama Turd There's only one way out, Papa Turd.

Papa Turd What's that, my love?

Mama Turd War!!

All Praise God! That's the honorable thing to do!

Papa Turd Oh sure, that way I'll get beaten even worse. (50)

In Act Four, a quick succession of events take place, including the flight of Mama Turd and the implied cuckolding of Papa Turd by the Champion Gyron, and the routing of the Polish Army under the leadership of Ubu, who “displayed the greatest courage. Without endangering myself in the least, I massacred four of the enemy with my bare hands, not counting those that were already dead when I dispatched them” (66). Ubu finds sanctuary with two soldiers, who are then set upon by a bear, and defeat it while Ubu cowers on a rock and prays, but then attributes their salvation to the fact that his prayer was heard sooner because he'd had the wit to climb up closer to heaven.

During Act Five, Mama Turd finds Papa Turd in the darkness and convinces him she is the Archangel Gabriel, who demands that he treats his wife with kindness. He protests, referring to her as “the vilest of shrews,” that there “isn't a single fault she hasn't got,” and jokes that she cannot possibly be unfaithful to him, as no man would ever want her, but yet is also a “slut” (73). Turd realizes that Gabriel is in fact his wife and moves to torture her as punishment, but this is interrupted by the arrival of Buggerlaus, and battle ensues. The Turds and their suite escape, find a ship sailing for France, and flee to the French countryside—but not before Ubu attempts to take

command of the ship during a storm, bellowing incoherent echoes of the captain's orders and congratulating himself for steering them out of the tempest.

The masculinism of Trump that resonates so strongly in Ubu was predictably an inescapable element for the bake-off adaptations. Vogel's call for Ubu plays resulted in scores of submissions performed in theaters across the country, and the thirty-six chosen for Vogel's event on February 19, 2018 are physically archived at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library on the Yale University campus. One of these plays, *After Us the Savage God*, written by Terry Milner, immediately reveals how much the masculinist performativity of Trump is reflected in Ubu and how necessary it is to stage. In his play, which is set on an abandoned golf course in South Florida, Fissure (Ubu/Trump) opens the action by begging Fistula (Mama Turd) to help him.

Fissure Help me find my balls I mean.

Fistula Haven't seen your balls in years and neither have you!

Fissure They're buried in the sand, just like your *plussie-plussie*. (Milner 1)

In another, *Ubu Rot* by Dale Perrault, Ubu meets with his physician (Dr. Jarry) in the Oval Office (which he refers to as the Ovum). Overrun with malapropisms, *Ubu Rot* shows us an Ubu obsessed with portraying a picture of virility and health to the people while also slipping into Freudian obsessions with sex and grandiosity.

Ubu My colon is tremendous! Cleaner than my desk. You live in my colon!

Napoleon had better people than this, didn't he Dr. Jarry?

Dr. Jarry I am not going anywhere near your colon, Ubu Rot. But I would say that when you invoke your colon in such a manner, people are inclined to be un peu incredulous.

Ubu That's right. Incredible. I'm bored. What's next? What's on? Negotiating is a series of sits and farts. Should I or shut eye? MA UBU NUMBER 3 FLOUTUS MODEL, WHERE ARE YOU? BY MY GOLDEN CANDLE, THERE'S NO PROBLEM DOWN THERE. Ma Ubu Number 3 FLOUTUS model signed a Non-Disrobing Agreement. Right here in My Ovum. "Read my pout. No new sexes."
(Perrault 5)

The Public's *Caesar* and Vogel's *Ubu Roi* challenge are far from the only dramatic touchstones to demonstrate the reification of masculinist performativity with the legacy, character, and policy of the former president. These (re)performances are present in televised drama and comedy as well. Showtime's recent mini-series, *The Comey Rule*, for example, dramatizes the memoirs of former FBI Director James Comey and the climactic end of his tenure during the early days of the Trump administration. Despite the show centering primarily around the modus, decorum, and the pitfalls of due process during an election season, a telling amount of Brendan Gleeson's performance as Trump and the dramaturgy of the story focuses on Trump's performances of masculinity. Most revealingly, after an episode and a half of suspenseful buildup to the introduction of Gleeson's Trump, the very first frame in which the show's antagonist appears is not, as one might expect, of him descending the escalator in Trump Tower, entering the White House for the first time, or taking the oath before his inauguration at the Capitol Building. Instead, it is of Trump walking down a catwalk during some kind of tech rehearsal for the Miss Universe pageant in slow-motion, underscored with ominous orchestration, and lighting upon a conventionally beautiful contestant, running his aged hand lasciviously up the smooth skin of her young arm, making full show of her exposed breasts and expectant eyes to show us that she is a sexual target in Trump's perspective. Three hours of political intrigue, White House

maneuvering, and national turmoil cannot begin to illustrate the entrance of a character until after we see his execution of masculinist ethos.

The importance of this element of Trump's character—both for performative realism and for what that element represents to the legacy of the administration—was received clearly by critics of the show. “With squinting, sneering intensity,” Daniel Fienberg wrote for *The Hollywood Reporter*, “Gleeson plays Trump as a clever and calculating bully of weaker men” (Fienberg 2020). A critic for *The Washington Post* wrote: “While never completely convincing, he does impart the right mix of ignorance, arrogance, and malevolence” (Stuever 2020). As pointed out in earlier examples, these collected reactions to the representation of Trump are certainly informed by the reactors' political awareness of Trump's character and history, but at the same time are consistently points of reference in the masculinist ethos, history, and performance, (re)performances without which the character of Trump would be unacceptable. What so many see when Trump is dramatized in various forms are symptoms of an overriding identity which is both shared with and emblematic of an entire demographic of people who see such traits as the essence of masculinity, and the antidote to the crises which threaten it.

Dramatization's capacity to document, reflect, and reinforce the masculinist performativity of Trump is not limited only to the dramatic genre: as it has done for centuries, comedy and parody also serve this purpose. Most notably in the comedic realm, Alec Baldwin's long-running portrayal of Donald Trump on *Saturday Night Live* gives us ample opportunity to see how a dramatization of the former president relies implicitly on embodying the masculinist ethos in acting and writing. *SNL*'s YouTube Channel uploaded over one hundred videos of aired sketches either centering on Donald Trump or his family and political allies between 2016 and 2020. About halfway through Trump's term, *Politico*'s Peter Canellos astutely caught the

nuanced disparity between the reaction from Trump and the “generous” take on his character given in the performance.

The sheer relentlessness of Trump’s disdain suggests that Baldwin’s impersonation must go beyond satire into something more subversive—that the 61-year-old actor is spewing poisonous propaganda against a duly elected leader...The hidden influence of this kind of comedy...lies in its ability to shape a narrative outside the news, interpreting people’s motives rather than just character...Baldwin’s vain but incompetent Trump is well within this tradition, with the audience chuckling along with his every ego-shattering overreach. But the long history of late-night comedy, especially the 44 years of “SNL,” shows that sometimes these comedy missiles really do land on the target. (Canellos 2019)

Perhaps they do, in more ways than Canellos considered. This version of Trump, for which Canellos believed Trump should be thanking Baldwin, is the bumbling, inept, and sometimes sympathetic figure hoisted on his own petard of Washington politicking. Canellos questions why Trump should be so outraged by this portrayal of himself when, in the end, it lends such a generous and even *likable* quality to the President. In asking this, Canellos is touching on the unspoken, liminal anxiety in which masculinist performativity is often found. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the concepts of capacity, aptitude, superiority, and success—particularly capital success, for Trump—are inseparable from the measurement of hegemonic manliness, and are central subjects to its crisis. To parody or question that capacity is, in essence, to question Trump’s manhood, the potency of the Party that elected him, and to show that such crises are legitimate threats to their ideological stability. Far from the more benign insinuations that Trump

may be a naïve or inexperienced political leader, *SNL* implies a Trump whose masculinist performance is, in fact, both joke and criticism.

But some of *SNL*'s sketches parody—that is, reveal—Trump's masculinist performativity far more directly. In one such sketch, uploaded to *SNL*'s YouTube channel on October 1, 2017, Trump calls Jeff Sessions (played by Kate McKinnon) into the Oval Office to scold him.

Trump You have been with me from the beginning and you know I value loyalty.

Sessions Yes, Mr. President, I'm very, very loyal.

Trump But you went against me on the DACA thing. And you wouldn't fire James Comey when I needed you to.

Sessions I know, I was a bad boy. Very bad, very bad. I should not have recused myself from the Comey calamity. I got spooked.

Trump Jeff, I need someone with real balls. Not what you have, which is two little Georgia pecans. Okay? I'm gonna have to do something right now.

Sessions I understand. Time for the belt. ("The Chaos..." 2017)

In this sketch, Trump ultimately comforts Sessions by sitting the Attorney General on his lap while Sessions calls him "Daddy." In another sketch, in which Trump appears in a parody of *The People's Court* to sue the federal judges who blocked his 2017 travel ban, Baldwin's Trump begins presenting his case to Marilyn Millian by saying: "Well, thank you, Judge—or, what do you call a lady judge? A flight attendant? Something like that?" As a character witness, Trump brings in a shirtless Vladimir Putin, strutting and flexing, and they embrace in a distanced, macho hug while the voice-over narrator refers to Putin as Trump's "long-time crush" ("Trump's People's Court..." 2017). The suggestion of a homosocial and even homosexual relationship between Trump and Putin was a leitmotif in *SNL* Trump sketches, as in the "Trump Argentina

Cold Open” in December, 2018. Trump laments “How could anyone think I colluded with Russia?” In response, the always-topless Putin enters from the Lincoln bedroom.

Putin Honey, why you still up? Come back to bed, baby.

Trump Vlad, I’m sorry, it’s just that I can’t believe you and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia had that whole handshake yesterday.

Putin Oh, what, that? That meant nothing to me. It was just a totally improvised handshake. I’m not, like, bros with him or anything. (“Trump Argentina...” 2018)

Then enters the Crown Prince in question, referring to Putin as “Vladdy-Daddy” and engaging him in an extended hug and secret handshake. Trump, wounded, says to Putin, “I thought I was your number one,” to which Putin responds, “Oh, totally, you’re not my side piece. You’re like my main girlfriend. This other guy is just a random hookup.” Yet Putin and the Crown Prince’s rapport grows more and more bombastic and fraternal while Trump sulks on the other side of the frame. These repeated jabs at a homosexual and homosocial connection between Trump and Putin are, like Plympton’s *New York Times* cartoons, undeniably homophobic, yet clearly strive to criticize the president’s masculinity in a manner that would be most devastating to Trump and to anyone who abides by the masculinist ethos.

During a sketch which parodies one of the 2020 Presidential Debates against Joe Biden, Trump demonstrates that he always carries a COVID-19 mask by withdrawing a lacy, pink Victoria’s Secret thong from his breast pocket, and denounces Chris Matthew’s declaration that “debates are a time-honored tradition and the bedrock of American democracy” as “gay” (“First Debate...” 2020). In a parody interview with Lester Holt, a subservient Paul Ryan brings Baldwin’s Trump a bowl of ice cream at the ring of a little bell. Trump dismisses him with “Beat it, nerd,” shortly before claiming to have invented the economic metaphor “priming the pump,”

which he defines as “tug[ging] on myself about half an hour before Melania comes in so she can find it easier” (“Lester Holt...” 2017).

SNL also reveals how the masculinist crises embodied by Trump are not only indicative of his administration and character but their power over his Party under his leadership. In “Brett Kavanaugh Post-Game Cold Open,” uploaded to the *SNL* YouTube Channel on October 7, 2018, the sketch parodies post-game sports coverage by taking CNN reporter Dana Bash into the “GOP Locker Room” party after the Senate confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Inside the locker room, the frat party energy is overwhelming, with GOP Senators dancing to loud music, violently embracing, and drinking beer with towels slung over their shoulders. Bash manages to pull Senator Mitch McConnell (played by Beck Bennett, who also portrays the shirtless and oily Vladimir Putin in the sketches mentioned above), to get his comments.

McConnell Republicans read the mood of the country and we could tell that people really wanted Kavanaugh. Everyone’s pumped, from white men over sixty, to white men over seventy! We did it! Pickup to P.J. and Squee!

Bash pivots to Lindsay Graham (Kate McKinnon), who dances by the camera, whooping.

Graham How amazing is this, huh? We made a lot of women real worried today, but I’m not getting pregnant so I don’t care! ... We thought we were gonna have to go with our closer Mike Pence: he was gonna jog in to Metallica’s “Enter the Sandman” and start throwing votes at a hundred miles an hour but thank the Male Lord that was not necessary.

Before long, Susan Collins (Cecily Strong), joins the interview while the party continues behind them.

Collins Listen, I think it’s important to believe women until it’s time to stop. But

I also believe that, you know, I'm a guy's gal, okay. I can party with big dogs and woo, woo, and we're gonna have fun tonight.

At which point, another GOP Senator leaps into frame, grabbing Collins by the shoulders and screaming: "Woo! That's our girl! Our ONE girl!" ("Brett Kavanaugh..." 2018).

The sketch then pivots to Kate Bennet, who "is with the losing team captain" Chuck Shumer. Alex Moffat's Shumer, a nasally and prudish outcast, wears a clean towel primly around his shoulders. As he is explaining the Democratic loss, Joe Manchin (the only Democrat to vote for Kavanaugh's confirmation and played by Mikey Day) saunters by Shumer and Bennet, only to give Shumer a sack tap, a common exchange of semi-violent dominance among young men in which they swat each other in the scrotum.

Shumer Hey, Joe, listen no hard feel—

Manchin Nut tap! Woo!

The sketch ends by returning to Bash in the GOP Locker Room, where the assembled Senators are now breaking open cans of Miller High Life and wearing goggles. Before the iconic closing of the cold open ("Live from New York, it's Saturday night!"), Lindsay Graham yells into the camera past an overflowing beer can: "Let's keep this horny male energy going to the midterms!" ("Brett Kavanaugh..." 2018).

Trump's response to the repeated parodies of him took a predictable turn. Rather than, as he suggests in the debate with Marco Rubio, engage in the presidential act of ignoring the slights, he doubled down on Twitter and other media outlets, firing back at Baldwin and the cast and crew in language which is clearly invested in masculinist politics. Instead of criticizing the accuracy of the pieces, Trump took aim at the show's presumed role in stoking political opposition to his campaign and presidency, as well as Baldwin's personal talent and past success,

denigrating his capacity to do art at all. Trump's responses demonstrate a typical one-up-manship of masculinist performativity: Baldwin's portrayal of Trump as a sore loser and a posturing male ironically incite Trump to prove the point in his Tweets, showing in almost real-time how the (re)performances of Trump reify the very ideology Trump utilizes as a political and public figure.

@realDonaldTrump Watched Saturday Night Live hit job on me. Time to tire the boring and unfunny show. Alec Baldwin portrayal stinks. Media rigging election! (October 16, 2016)

@realDonaldTrump Just tried watching Saturday Night Live - unwatchable! Totally biased, not funny and the Baldwin impersonation can't get any worse. Sad (December 4, 2016)

@realDonaldTrump Alex [sic] Baldwin, whose dieing [sic] mediocre career was saved by his impersonation of me on SNL, now says playing DJT was agony for him. Alex [sic], it was also agony for those who were forced to watch. You were terrible. Bring back Darrell Hammond, much funnier and a far greater talent! (March 2, 2018)

Although these (re)performances are typically in the critical vein (i.e. arguably from artists with leftist sympathies whose engagement of Trump is one that deconstructs his masculinist performativity rather than supports it), it is important to note that (re)performances which intend to do the opposite—the release of Trump's NFT card collection, merchandise at Trump events depicting him in Rambo costume or in Terminator style captioned "I'll Be Back," and other emulations of hypermasculinity which are clear endorsements—border on the parodic. While SNL and *Spitting Image* lob attacks at Trump's masculinism, their engagement in the semiotics

and grammars of masculinist performativity make them exceedingly useful case studies; the Public's use of Trump's image as Caesar and Gleeson's performance in *The Comey Rule* are (re)performances of Trump's masculinity that are critical but nonetheless sincere, efforts to encapsulate Trump's masculinism with some degrees of verisimilitude—efforts which, in (re)performances idolizing or celebrating Trump's masculinism in art from supporters on the Right, avert sensitive reflections of such masculinism in an attempt to glorify it beyond recognition. Perhaps more importantly, we must consider that the (re)performances which come from the most established forms of media distribution have the strongest effects on the discourse of public gender performances—and indeed, the ones which Trump has paid the most attention and offered personal responses to—and as these examples are often critical rather than sympathetic, giving less attention to (re)performances of Trump's masculinity that are more politically or personally adoring of him is a necessary omission, but these examples would surely be worthy of analysis in their own right, for they undoubtedly contribute to the cyclical performances of which Trump is a perpetuator and catalyst.

What these (re)performances illustrate, both onstage and on screen, is the essence of Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, the practices which prioritize an ethic of dominance over subordinate masculinities and women. In order for (re)performances of Trump to be read—that is, to be recognizable as Trump, insightful in their parody of him, or wounding in their criticism of him—writers and actors must selectively consider which facets of Trump's personality are critical to the truth of his person and his office, even in instances of parody in which the circumstances are absurd (which is why the Absurdist conceit of *Ubu Roi* also translates a strong element of truth to an audience). While any number of points in Trump's political philosophy, economic strategy, or personal idiosyncrasies may be similarly useful in

this task, these are not the most outspoken points of his character or political persona, and therefore the most immediate or useful touchstones by which an audience would recognize a dramatization of him. Instead, what abides the strongest in the political and dramatic memory of Trump is his blatant masculinist posturing, his embodiment of the crises of masculinity, and his continuous struggle for dominance through sexual mastery, business acumen, and homosocial accord—even if (and perhaps especially if) that dominance is feigned and fraudulent.

This is also why so many dramatizations of his person and presidency gravitate toward portraying, either in serious realism or in skewering comedy, the masculinist projections of the man and the office during his tenure. What is “written” into these performances is more than a document of one man’s political philosophy, presidential scandals, diplomatic ineptitude, or the effects of his policy. Contained within, under, and over these themes, like a dramatic palimpsest, is the defining factor of the man and thus his administration, his Party, and his presidential legacy, which is just as (if not more) important than less- or non-gendered aspects of his tenure. Drama and performance, in this way, contain and preserve elements of an American president and his administration that may not be recorded in more static media, and which are required in recalling the character in any performance at a later date. Reexamined aspects of this history in the future, even if they comment on or analyze the masculinist ethos of Trump, will always miss the masculinist reality of these characters and events without the kind of embodiment and representation which defines performance. What dramatization specifically accomplishes is to preserve both the hypertext and subtext of the Trump character, a man floundering in crises of masculinity while attempting to perform the requisite expectations of such masculinity *and* his office. The extent to which so much art and performance utilize this masculinist performativity, its semiotics, and its rhetoric is proof of how definitive such performances are to his character.

CHAPTER THREE

BORIS JOHNSON: MASCULINIST PERFORMATIVITY IN OFFICE AND DRAMA

There are many ways in which the office of British prime minister and American president are fundamentally different. The PM is not a person elected individually for the office, for example, but rather is the leader of the Party which holds the most seats in the House of Commons. The PM is not the Head-of-State, unlike the American president (that title is still held by the Sovereign of the Royal House—during Johnson’s premiership, the late Queen Elizabeth II). The prime minister has limited executive function while residing at 10 Downing Street, is not the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (again, a power held by the Monarch), and is subject to removal of office by royal fiat or a vote of no confidence by their Party. Unlike the president with Congress, the PM has the power to lobby the Sovereign to dissolve Parliament and call for a new general election in the event that political gridlock is hampering the business of the nation.

Nonetheless, there are also numerous ways in which the office of the PM is similar to that of the president in terms of cultural voice, representation, and in being the primary addressee of the nation’s concerns. PMs sit at the center of social conflict and economic change and can be arbiters of both. Governments can be characterized—as can the periods of time during which they govern—entirely by the policies and battles a PM chooses to focus on, much like their American counterparts (i.e. the “Thatcherite” era). PMs can become individual embodiments of both the policies and characters of their Parties, and their personal scandals, histories, and philosophies can become the defining referents for their Parties and governments irrespective of back-bench opposition, much in the same way American presidents can define a Party and public perception of their constituents. While Members of Parliament campaign in their constituencies,

British voters are well aware of the fact that their vote for a particular Party is, in essence, a vote for that Party's leader to become the next PM. Leaders are often chosen before general elections by being nominated within their own Party (a process whereby the nominees with the least amount of votes are whittled out until only two remain) and the two most popular nominees are offered to the civilian members of the Party to choose the Leader by popular vote. Inasmuch, while the electoral process by which an American president might seem to be a more direct reflection of the will of the nation, the British path to prime minister is still one by which the desires and fears of a Party and a large part of the nation are clearly embodied in the PM. All of these considerations indicate that, much as the genealogy of masculinist performativity in the U.K. and the U.S. run along related trajectories, the comparative offices of the president and prime minister are useful barometers for masculinist performativity and crisis in either country.

Boris Johnson: Masculinist Performativity on the Road to Premiership

Boris Johnson's masculinist image, like that of Nigel Farage, was manufactured consciously in an effort to court the support of far-Right voters and working-class white men, reinforce their agenda, and embody their crises. Candida Yates, in her 2010 paper *Turning to Flirting: Politics and the Pleasures of Boris Johnson*, identifies how Johnson's rise to Tory popularity with his election as the Mayor of London signified a shift in conservative British politics towards a masculinist ideal.

The fact that the Conservative party successfully fielded a flirtatious ex-public schoolboy as mayor signals perhaps their growing confidence in the retro brand of old-Tory 'toff' masculinity, where the playful flirtation with policies and people convey perhaps, a certain authenticity compared to the perception of New Labour

spin...Johnson's affair with journalist Petronella Wyatt may have cost him his cabinet position under the austere leadership of Michael Howard. Yet as political commentators point out, despite the continuation of neo-liberal socio-economic policies, the new Cameron Tories are now channelling a more traditional Conservative look than their Thatcherite predecessors, where back-to-basics morality goes by the way in favour of retrosexual masculine posturing. (6)

The "unlikely sex symbol" developed his Etonian "boys will be boys" modus in the days before his political career, particularly while working as an editor at the *Spectator* between 1999 and 2005 (6). While there, the escapades of the magazine staff—particularly the sexual antics—were "widely publicized...a pleasurable bacchanalian antidote to the stereotypical perception of 'politically correct' New Labour" (7). This kind of attitude, as with Trump, is often conflated with a kind of charisma—a "likeability" ascribed to provocateurs, renegades, and other flouters of a kind of morality associated with a too-sensitive progressivism, wherein the damning of political correctness is colored with the pleasure of being one's own man, un beholden to others, and untrammelled by consequences. Such "charisma" is, time and again, a feature of these figures' political popularity and a recurring facet of their (re)performed characters in drama.

Despite his appeal among the working class in later years, Johnson began a Classics education at Ashdown House in 1975, followed by Eton and Oxford (where he also studied Classics). It was in 1982, while Johnson attended Eton, that the headmaster wrote Johnson's father a letter which would profoundly characterize the masculinist performativity Johnson would retain for the future. Rory Stewart, former Secretary of State for International Development under prime minister Theresa May, read the letter aloud during the *Letters Live*

series at the Royal Albert Hall in 2019, “constituting [his] resignation from the Conservative Party,” in which the headmaster says:

Dear Stanley: Boris did take on several large extra commitments this half, and one does not want to discourage diversity but there is now no doubt as these reports make very plain that his regular academic responsibilities were sadly neglected as a result. Boris really has adopted a disgracefully cavalier attitude to his Classical studies. It is a question of priorities which most of his colleagues have no difficulties in sorting out. Boris sometimes seems affronted when criticized for what amounts to gross failure of responsibility, and surprised at the same time that he was not appointed Captain of the School for next half. I think he honestly believes that it is churlish of us not to regard him as an exception, one who should be free of the network of obligation that binds everyone else. Yours ever, Martin. (“Rory Stewart...” 2019)

While at Oxford, Johnson would be part of a wide swath of students that went on to be major players in British politics, including David Cameron, Nicholas Boles, and Jeremy Hunt. His childhood was described as a “ceaseless struggle for domination...a blood sport. Coming second would never do” (Purnell 48). At university he experienced a taste of fraternity life, joining the Bullingdon Club which is infamous for its alcoholic binges and acts of public vandalism (an association that would be a constant media reference for Johnson in later years). While there, he became President of the famous Oxford Union where “women threw themselves” at him (Purnell 130). The kind of fraternal life at Oxford during this period is vividly dramatized in Netflix’s *Anatomy of a Scandal* (2022), in which the debauchery of a Prime Minister and his best friend in the Conservative Party, under the auspices of *Omertà of the Libertines*, shockingly demonstrates

the ties between cultural institutions, politics, rape, homosociality, and masculinist performativity.²²

Afterwards, Johnson became a writer at the *Daily Telegraph*, spreading Euroskeptical lies which directly roused British masculinist anxieties of the time, “that the EU wanted to ban prawn cocktail crisps and British sausages, and to standardize the size of condoms because Italians had smaller penises” (Mount 2021). Indeed, it was his time as a journalist during the 1990s which primarily fueled his popularity in the Euroskeptical movement and the rise of the UK Independence Party, despite the fact that many of his stories were later shown to be wholly manufactured (Rankin 2019). He utilized racist and homophobic phrases in his writing, describing Africans and Black Britons as “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles” and homosexuals as “tank-topped bumboys” (Bienkov 2020).

The litany of his masculinist comments and actions as a journalist during this period would be compiled at the height of his political career, including the idea that “British colonialism in Africa is not a blot upon our conscience;” comparing Muslim women who wear burqas to “letter boxes;” that “the ‘Tottymeter’ reading is higher than at any Labour Party conference in living memory” (referring to the number of attractive women present while covering a 1996 Labour conference). He said that women were changing allegiances and joining the Labour Party due to its “planned erosion of male liberty” and that the Party had promised “women will be more promiscuous if Mr. Blair comes to power” while at the same time, he was convinced “it is the fickleness of their sex, they are following the polls.” While a journalist, he pinned a nude calendar above his desk at the magazine office; he wrote to his successor at the

²² In this series, a high-ranking Tory cabinet member is accused of rape by a staff member, compelling her abuser and his best friend (the prime minister) to recount a series of events from their days at university with the Libertines: sexual harassment, wild drunkenness, drug use, rape, and reckless death.

Spectator that the way to deal with the publisher was to just “pat her on her bottom and send her on her way;” that men who vote Tory will discover their wives “have bigger breasts,” and the list goes on (Bienkov 2020). In a blatant reference to masculinist crises of the period in August 1995, Johnson wrote in the *Spectator* that British men had a problem in their “reluctance or inability to take control of his woman and be head of the household,” at a time when Johnson himself was divorcing his first wife Allegra Mostyn-Owen after he had impregnated his mistress Marina Wheeler (Purnell 201). These scandals would become more pronounced after his impregnation of and engagement to Carrie Symonds during his term as prime minister.

Regardless of this track record of misogyny, racism, and generally masculinist posturing, Johnson gets validation for adhering to a masculinist image from the very people he objectifies, as his biographer writes:

Yet women adore him—even otherwise sensible ones ask him to sign their underwear or their bared breasts. And he laps up the attention. Even on his mayoral victory night, he made a beeline for the most attractive woman at the celebratory party and once tried to take one of his mistresses on a family holiday. But while women support, nurture, and organise him—and quite often much more besides—he is neither faithful nor respectful to them and on occasion, offensive. His philandering is infamous, yet he scoops up the female vote. It all forms part of his self-avowed policy on cake: that is ‘both having it and eating it.’ (Purnell 12)

Purnell writes quite extensively on Johnson’s long legacy of masculinist performativity (though she doesn’t refer to it that way). His “jurassic views” included “blaming the prevalence of hoodies and NEETs [Not in Education, Employment, or Training] ready to ‘mug you on the street corner’ on ‘the colossal expansion in the numbers of female graduates’” who marry other

graduates, resulting in a wealth gap that “forces women from lower-income families to work ‘often with adverse consequences for family life and society as a whole’...” (Purnell 221). In 2000, while Johnson was the Member of Parliament for Henley, he alluded to the repeal of Section 28 as “Labour’s appalling agenda, encouraging the teaching of homosexuality in schools” (Johnson 2000). And in 2014, he wrote a biography lionizing Winston Churchill, in which he ties himself in Windsor knots to acknowledge yet excuse the racism of Winston Churchill and his “things that now sound very sinister about eugenics” by claiming:

He did have what is now considered to be a racist interpretation of the difference between one society and another; but he hated the mistreatment of any race...He didn’t believe that the white man should hold the whip hand, as if by genetic right. He believed in merit. (Johnson 2014, 273)

His biography of Churchill also labors to point out that a suspicion of Churchill at the time of his engagement, that he hadn’t “even lost his virginity,” was in serious doubt (101). Johnson details the “lost list of youthful dalliances” of a man who, if he was “not held by his contemporaries to be a modern Casanova” was simply “too darned busy” to be so—not remotely because he lacked the appetite or capacity (103). Johnson’s defense of Churchill routinely relies on such hat-in-hand confessions of Churchill’s antiquated masculinity, but in the same breath uses the standards of the masculinist ethos to absolve his hero. Churchill, Johnson maintains, could have been a playboy if he wanted to.

But in the years before his ascension to prime minister, Johnson’s capacity to reflect masculinist ethos in British policy was immortalized in his role as a facilitator of Brexit and the passing of the Leave referendum. That such a referendum—purportedly based in non-gendered considerations like trade agreements, the integrity of the pound, and British over-spending for

EU policies—was in fact a subject of masculinist crises is reflected in the campaign’s most strident supporters (Johnson and Farage): their mobilization of “those feeling threatened by rapid social change, economic insecurity, and immigration” (Roose 110).

Julie MacLeavy characterized the Vote Leave campaign as one which resonated with “those feeling adrift and ‘left out’ of a changing economic and social environment...the process of deindustrialisation, the increasing dominance of a feminised service-sector employment in which masculinity is often seen as a labour market disadvantage, and an ongoing lack of meaningful alternatives to paid work as a basis for male identity have been linked to a ‘crisis of masculinity’” (Taylor 2018). Using political statistics from Birmingham as one case study in his book on hypermasculinity in British politics, Joshua Roose demonstrates how, in Birmingham during the time of the referendum, “the sustained decrease in the number of white residents in the city and the number of white residents attending churches has been paralleled by exponential growth in Asian communities, particularly amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims, who have kinship networks and financial responsibilities in their countries of heritage. Nigel Farage (demagogic populist) and Boris Johnson (pragmatist) both stepped into and exploited this context” (Roose 136).

For Johnson, Brexit was an opportunity to pit the idealism of a working-class, white, hegemonically masculinist Britain against the invading danger of immigrants, diversified labor, decentralized Christianity, and globalism. Stoking fear among working-class whites that the influx of immigrants would drain national social services and pose a threat to cultural identity and safety, Johnson’s Brexit was vividly analogous to Trump’s border wall, and appealed to the same ideological demographic. That Brexit had become a turning point in British masculinist politics was seen in numerous media.

In contextualising this aggressive language, political commentators have also remarked on the prominence of men in the Brexit campaign, drawing upon a longer-established concern about the dynamics between politics and the masculine...In her *Guardian* column, Catherine Bennett (2018) lamented that Brexit had become a “vehicle for hypermasculine displaying.” Similarly, in the political magazine the *New Statesman*, James Millar (2018) describes Brexit as a vortex of “toxic masculinity”. (Higgins 90)

According to Michael Higgins, Brexit was a moment in which “particular types of masculinity come to dominate...[They are] discursive activities [which] are crucial in establishing or reiterating particular types of political agency and power” (91). What Higgins calls “conviviality rituals” (one of these discourses) is simply a form of homosocial bonding and exchange. Another is male heroism akin to and inspired by fictional British exemplars like James Bond. A third considers the connection between masculinity and alcohol, as the pint “occupies a mythical place at the center of British male affability” (5). In 2018, Johnson galvanized this demographic and embodied much of it when he characterized Brussell’s demand for a £39 billion separation deal as a “divorce,” which invoked a “metaphor for domestic strife...a contrast between the empowered action of ‘exploiting’ and the associations of surrender and vulnerability,” an allusion which is also a direct referent to Johnson’s private life; his extra-marital affair was in no way a muzzle on his political exuberance, much to the disappointment of Tory moderates and Remainers, according to one *Express* article analyzed by Higgins (88). Higgins deconstructs this:

The first is the euphemism “wayward exuberance” to refer to an extra-marital affair... [which] implies an excess of energy and cheer, rather than misconduct. As such, this uses the assumption that exuberant masculine behaviour includes

sexual infidelity in order to assess Johnson positively...Notably too, where judgement is applied to Johnson, the focus rests on his thirst for publicity, on which matter Johnson is presented as having indulged his masculine instincts and defied his critics. (88)

The “certain authenticity” of masculinist performativity that Candida Yates had identified back in 2010 was still paying political dividends, and remained the central guiding tenet of Johnson’s political persona through the rest of his public service. It was later that former prime minister David Cameron would suggest that Johnson’s support of Brexit was a stunt to help his political career, but he described this play in terms revealing of its masculinist capital: “Whichever senior Tory politician took the lead on the Brexit side—so loaded with images of patriotism, independence and romance—would become the darling of the party,” and Johnson was unwilling to let someone like Michael Gove “win that crown” (Payne 2019). Whether or not backing Brexit was a carefully orchestrated tactic by Johnson to achieve the premiership (unlikely given his loud voice for EU skepticism during his time as a journalist), his conduct during the Leave campaign was simply too in character with his masculinist performativity to be a pure fabrication.

In his announcement that he would be backing the Leave campaign while he was still Mayor of London, he said in a manner evocative of Trump’s presidential campaign announcement that his intention was to make “a better deal for the people of this country, to save them money and take back control” (Witte 2016). During a 2016 visit to the UK, President Obama urged Britons to stay within the EU, after which Johnson derided the remark as a “part-Kenyan President’s ancestral dislike of the British empire” (Allegretti 2016). In an attempt to emasculate the Remain voters and proponents, Johnson joined those who referred to the Remain campaign as “Project Fear” (“Boris Johnson: EU exit...” 2016). And on May 9, 2016, Boris

Johnson gave a positively Churchillian speech to a gathered crowd, encouraging a Leave vote and relying on militaristic, glorified masculinism to a dramatic extent.

It is we in the Leave Camp—not they—who stand in the tradition of the liberal cosmopolitan European enlightenment—not just of Locke and Wilkes, but of Rousseau and Voltaire; and though they are many, and though they are well-funded, and though we know that they can call on unlimited taxpayer funds for their leaflets, it is we few, we happy few who have the inestimable advantage of believing strongly in our cause, and that we will be vindicated by history; and we will win for exactly the same reason that the Greeks beat the Persians at Marathon—because they are fighting for an outdated absolutist ideology, and we are fighting for freedom. That is the choice on June 23. (Calamur 2016)

A cursory look at his oratorical style reveals its masculinist rhetoric: his cadence that echoes so strongly Churchill’s “we will fight them on land, we will fight them on sea”; his allusion to the militaristic fraternity of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* St. Crispin’s Day speech, stopping just short of “we band of brothers”; the metaphor of stoic, outnumbered Britons as Greeks—originators of democracy, Classical logic, historically homosocialist, and immortalized hoplite combatants—against an Otherized enemy from a foreign land, barbarous and uncivilized in the eyes of its glorious opponents. It is a speech that elevates what Johnson had already expressed in more banal language: that the danger of remaining within the European Union came in the form of hordes of immigrants destabilizing British culture and labor markets, that Remain was a victory for the Other, and that those who supported it were submissive cowards anathema to the poetry of Shakespeare or the stalwart heroism of Athens. The crises of masculinity required a champion that Johnson was eager to embody.

It is a public performance which Johnson naturally carried with him into the General Elections in 2019. According to a paper in the *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties*, Boris Johnson “overwhelmingly used masculine visuals on Twitter” during the 2019 UK General Election campaign, as did his opponent Jeremy Corbyn, and that “Johnson demonstrated elements of “hypermascularity” exaggerating his strength and dominance in images of traditional, working-class masculinity” (Smith 470). The exercise of hypermascularity was undoubtedly necessary to court a far-Right demographic splitting further from the center-Right at the time. Indeed, the 2019 General Election demonstrated that “the stable constituency of support for Britain’s recent radical right parties” was hampering “the Conservatives across elections,” forcing the Tories to find ways to incorporate these ideologies into their general election strategy: they used a “combination of the election of a new leader, Boris Johnson, and a hardline proposition on Brexit” to invite far-Right voters into the fold (Evans 2021). According to a study by Evans, de Geus, and Green in 2021 analyzing how important evaluations of Johnson were across parties in the courting of far-right voters, the influential factor of masculinist crises was unmissable.

We also see...the commonly observed propensity for men to be more supportive of radical political parties than women. A similar shared appeal is seen among ‘small employers and the self-employed’—a long-established heartland for the radical right. There are some differences, however: the lower supervisory class is pro-Brexit Party but not pro-UKIP. Interestingly, although there are modest positive effects of declining household finances on UKIP support there are *negative* coefficients for the Brexit Party. (Evans 2021)

In Johnson, the Conservatives had found a figure whose Euroscepticism, masculinist panache, and outspoken toffish behavior created a nexus of masculinist appeal, carrying enough of the neoliberal and conservative center and the populist and radical Right to bring the Tories a strong demographic coalition. Across these disparate populations, as we have seen in earlier chapters, is the connection of masculinist performativity, with its shared languages bridging class and culture—an element of political performance that would prove its continuity during the prime minister’s handling of both the Brexit deal and the COVID-19 pandemic, the defining issues of his premiership.

Masculinist Performativity in Johnson’s Premiership

Johnson’s election to the premiership was a landslide victory. In the votes by Conservative Members of Parliament, Johnson won all five rounds; the general vote by Party members saw him trounce Jeremy Hunt with 66.4% of the vote, a clear favorite by Party officials and members throughout the process. However, that victory came with a deficit in female votes for Johnson during the Party election, which would be far more drastic when accounting for women across Great Britain. In a *YouGov/The Times* survey report of a poll taken from 1,119 members of the Conservative Party in July 2019, 76% of men and 70% of women would vote for Johnson; of those voting for Hunt, women would beat men by 6% (YouGov 2019).

Another YouGov poll around the same time showed that women across all Parties didn’t think Johnson would make a “very good good prime minister” opposed to men (9%-8%), nor a “fairly good prime minister” (20%-15%), and more were likely to think he’d made a “fairly bad prime minister” (14%-15%). Among women across all Parties, women were more inclined than men to think Hunt would be a “very good prime minister” (5%-6%), or a “fairly good prime

minister” (22%-24%). Men were overwhelmingly more likely to think that Hunt would be a “fairly bad” and “very bad” prime minister, voting 26% and 24% respectively to women’s 17% and 19%. In women across all parties, the preference for Boris Johnson “if you had to choose” over Jeremy Hunt was only 25% to men’s 33%; 40% to men’s 42% for Jeremy Hunt over Johnson. Perhaps most revealing, the same survey asked voters of all parties whether a candidate had a likable personality, with 40% of men and 32% of women saying that Johnson did. Fully 50% of women and 48% of men said he had “an unlikeable” personality. Only 11% of women felt he had a “good moral character” and only 12% felt he was “honest,” percentages which were beaten in each column by male voters by more than five points (YouGov 2019). That Johnson’s masculinist performances were the stuff of myriad news stories and political scandals by this point may account for the gendered disparity in his support.

Several months into his premiership, however, his grip on the female electorate was slipping further. According to *The Economist* in October 2019 (which referred to Johnson as “not such a ladies’ man”), Conservative voters were equally likely to be men or women, but Johnson’s approval had dropped to minus thirty among women (compared to minus fifteen among men).

After Mr. Johnson’s suspension of Parliament was judged unlawful by the Supreme Court last month, men were almost evenly split on whether he should resign, with 49% in favor and 48% against, in polls by Survation. Yet among women, 53% thought he should quit, whereas only 36% wanted him to fight on. Mr. Johnson’s Brexit strategy may also leave women voters cold. Although there was no real gender split in the referendum result, women are in general more cautious about the terms of departure, being less gung-ho about no-deal and less

likely to support ruses such as suspending Parliament. (“Boris Johnson is not...” 2019)

Much like Trump, a major masculinist milestone in the premiership of Johnson came during the outbreak of COVID-19. In its early days, Johnson was routinely seen shaking hands with people in public, including during his visits to hospitals wherein the first British cases of COVID-19 were being treated. His rhetoric to the British people was quickly infused with a Churchillian wartime message of staying strong and carrying on, while waiting a perplexingly long time to instantiate the first of the U.K.’s lockdowns in response to the spreading virus—though his well-known libertarian hesitation to limit the freedom of the citizen by doing so is yet another vestige of his masculinist performativity.²³ Once the seriousness of the disease became obvious even to the Oxbridge inner circle of 10 Downing Street, Johnson shifted immediately into a militaristic mien. On March 17, 2020, he announced:

[W]e must act like any wartime government and do whatever it takes to protect the economy...Yes this enemy can be deadly, but it is also beatable – and we know how to beat it and we know that if as a country we follow the scientific advice that is now being given we know that we will beat it. And however tough the months ahead we have the resolve and the resources to win the fight. (“Prime Minister’s Statement...” 2017)

He would also go on to say that every citizen of the U.K. had been “directly enlisted” in such a war effort against COVID-19, just as Trump had referred to himself as a “wartime president” in conflict against the same enemy (Hayes 2021). But Johnson was routinely criticized along with

²³ While libertarianism (and such policies which invoke it) are not de facto masculinist, this political philosophy utilizes rhetoric and parallels ideals which are definitive in masculinist performativity: autonomy, self-reliance, personal strength, aversion to a welfare state—ideas and policies which can be counterposed against a communitarian (or feminized) political strategy.

other strongmen leaders like Trump and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil for not wearing a mask during the earliest months of the pandemic—that is, until Johnson contracted the virus himself and endured a harrowing stay at St. Thomas’s Hospital, London.

But war-time responses to COVID-19 had greater social and legal effects than a passing glance reveals: and many of these effects substantially bolstered masculinist politicking. As Tufts master’s student Caroline Hayes writes:

In the U.K., Boris Johnson’s similar statement that every citizen was “directly enlisted” in the fight against the virus was followed by passage of the Coronavirus Bill, expanding government authority to detain and isolate people, as well as banning protests and shutting down transportation infrastructure. While the severity of COVID-19 necessitates strong restraint of human movement, the Coronavirus Bill goes too far. Its sunset clause is an absurdly long two years, and it dramatically expands policing power to silence and detain protestors and restrict civil resistance to authority. Most recently, these restrictions were invoked to suppress women’s protests in London over the murder of Sarah Everard, where women reported being dragged across the ground by police. In the same week, a policing bill was debated in Parliament that would “lead to harsher penalties for damaging a statue than for attacking a woman.” (Hayes 2021)

One of the strongest analyses of Johnson’s COVID-19 masculinist performance comes from R.H. Jones, Applied Linguistics Professor at the University of Reading. Both Johnson and Trump, according to a paper published in *Discourse, Context & Media* in 2021, “used the storylines of their diseases to frame public perceptions of the crisis and their handling of it, to construct for themselves identities as strong leaders, and to enlist their audiences in public rituals

of patriotism” (2). In the case of Johnson, this study reveals how the prime minister enacted a “highly controlled” form of crisis communication, in which information is undermined “by showing the leader was functioning normally” (4). Johnson downplayed the importance of his COVID-19 infection by posting a rather merry announcement of the fact on his Twitter page, “which softens the news by framing it as a matter of routine information...[then] Johnson quickly redirected his focus away from himself and towards ‘everybody who’s working to keep our country going through this epidemic,’... In this way he subsumed his own situation into the more general situation of the nation” (5).

After his hospitalization, releases of information about his status were “almost universally positive” (5). Officers from Downing Street even went so far as to tell the public that the prime minister was only being hospitalized as a precaution. All the while, the Tory government maintained that the prime minister was still in working shape and, more importantly, still in charge, “in line with traditional concepts of masculinity in which men’s social worth is defined by work” (5). As R.H. Jones alludes to in this same paper, the somewhat “heroic” return of Johnson to 10 Downing Street was effectively undermined by this kind of posturing—for how can the struggle be so heroic and the return so triumphant if the battle with the virus was so positive throughout? Realization of this oversight inspired a reversal in some of the narrative rhetoric on the part of the administration, requiring them to use metaphors such as “Boris is not out of the woods” and that he had “taken one for the team,” both of which “indexed the younger Johnson’s masculinity and framed his illness as a sacrifice he had undergone for the nation” (7). Johnson himself would use much more indulgent phrasing during an interview a few days after his release from hospital, invoking the plans of succession planned in case he died. Jones analyzes:

While this revised version of Johnson's disease progression had an important informational function, revealing to the public facts that had previously been hidden from them, it also had an important rhetorical function, transforming Johnson's illness narrative into a story of the heroic deeds of the doctors and nurses who cared for him and of the bravery and resilience of Johnson himself.

(7)

Retrospective narratives, according to Jones, create a conflict in the "competing codes of masculinity," one which maintains that "'real men' are meant to resist the care of doctors, and the other in which 'real men' are seen as 'problem solvers' who cooperate with doctors and assume...the role of expert patients" (7).²⁴ Jones goes on to explain how the same dilemma requires Johnson (and Trump) to decide how much credit to ascribe himself for his own recovery. Finally, Jones explains that "a key function of retrospective illness narratives" is a moral transformation that occurs from the battle—Johnson would appreciate that this stems from a Classical allusion to the "wounded healer" of Chiron in Greek myth. Such a martyrdom conveys a benevolent authority, akin to a Christological narrative, which suggests a transference of salvation from the suffering of one noble spirit.²⁵

Johnson's invocation of this figure came in the form of his references to his personal experience with the illness in his warnings to the public to comply with government restrictions, as well as the more general philosophical bearing he performed in relation to his illness. Colchester and Isaac (2020) remark, for

²⁴ This very dilemma is dramatized in Sky Atlantic's *This England* (2022), and is analyzed in the next section of this chapter.

²⁵ This struggle of the martyr also seems to be graciously central to *This England*, giving a magnanimous quality to Johnson which confused and concerned critics of the show. It is for these reasons that *This England* is used as a case study in the next section, despite it containing rather less boisterous (re)performances of masculinity than other examples.

example, on how often Johnson quoted Cicero during his illness, explaining why he wanted to continue working by citing the advice Cicero was given by his brother Quintus about the importance of remaining in Rome and staying visible to show his care for the people, and declaring in a video meeting with his cabinet after his release from hospital: ‘*Salus populi suprema lex esto*’ (‘Let the health of the people be the highest law’). More explicit links between Johnson’s experience with the illness and his leadership abilities came from his supporters such as his long-time ally David Woodling (2020), political editor of the Sun, who claimed: ‘Who better to revive the country than someone who has himself bounced back from the brink?’ (8)

Ultimately, the COVID-19 pandemic presented both the requisite and the opportunity for Johnson to utilize performances of masculinity, which solidified his image to the world as a powerful, competent, and manly fighter against an ignoble foreign enemy, as well as reified a politics of masculinity prevalent in the British public. Despite the different conclusion Johnson derives about how the public should consider the virus from Trump, “the subtext of both their narratives was essentially that same: that ‘defeating’ the virus was a matter of ‘strength’, ‘courage’, and technological innovation (in the form of ‘miracle drugs’) rather than of sensible public health measures or evidence-based government policies” (10).

In his final months in office, Johnson’s administration was rocked by allegations of wrongdoing as he hosted a number of parties at 10 Downing Street and various Westminster and Whitehall buildings while the rest of the country was in a coronavirus lockdown, spurring both public outrage and new masculinist performances. According to Anna Sanders and Dave Richards, both scholars at the University of Manchester, these parties represented a

“hypermasculinity [that] has notably manifested in a culture of risk-taking,” as well as a “culture of heavy drinking... emblematic of a culture of hypermasculinity in Johnson’s Number 10, reflecting his membership of the all-male, Oxford University Bullingdon Club” (2021). Partygate was both an extension of and independent from the COVID-19 pandemic which catalyzes so many of Johnson’s other masculinist performances: it exemplified a masculinist ethos that predated the pandemic at the same time it defied the submissive, communitarian (i.e. unmanly) spirit required to effectively battle the virus.

According to the Cabinet Office’s official investigation into Partygate, written by Permanent Secretary Sue Gray, one of these events “lasted for a number of hours. There was excessive alcohol consumption by some individuals. One individual was sick. There was a minor altercation between two other individuals” (16). At another, “A No 10 official sent a message on internal No 10 systems referring to ‘*drunkenness*’ and advising staff to leave No 10 via the back exit. The No 10 official informed the investigation team that they did this in order to avoid staff being photographed by the press outside” (23). A third describes a party which began at approximately 6:00 pm and ended around 1:00 am, during which anywhere from twenty to three or four people were drinking together (27). Another party followed similar timelines and activities, wherein the “intention to follow social distancing guidance” conclusively “did not happen” (28). At yet another:

There was food and alcohol available which had been bought and brought in by staff. Some members of staff drank excessively. The event was crowded and noisy such that some people working elsewhere in the No 10 building that evening heard significant levels of noise coming from what they characterised as a ‘party’ in the Press Office. A cleaner who attended the room the next morning

noted that there had been red wine spilled on one wall and on a number of boxes of photocopier paper. The event lasted for several hours, with varying levels of attendance throughout, including because officials left to attend official meetings. Attendance peaked during the awards ceremony. No 10 exit logs show a number of members of staff remaining in the office until after midnight. (32)

Gray's conclusions were that the way in which these events were developed and conducted were "not in line with Covid guidance" (36). She ultimately found that these were due to failures in leadership because of the attendance of the most senior civil servants, who "must bear responsibility for this culture" (36). Within such culture in her findings were "multiple examples of a lack of respect and poor treatment of security and cleaning staff" (36). The Permanent Secretary's investigation ultimately revealed a culture in Downing Street too similar to the fraternal excesses of Johnson's university days, a culture which he has never abandoned and of which he has had some hand in perpetuating in the highest levels of the British government.

The findings of Gray's investigation were released within weeks of *The Guardian* reporting that 56 Members of Parliament were "facing allegations of sexual misconduct," an indication of the prevalence of masculinist ethos among government leaders even after the progress of the #MeToo movement (MacSwan 2022). Although the Metropolitan Police had decided that Johnson was at criminal fault and served him a fine (which he paid, along with a public apology in the House of Commons), the public outrage had gained critical momentum. Partygate catalyzed a series of votes of no-confidence from Conservative MPs, ultimately leading to Johnson stepping down from office. In response to the government's attempts to play down the impact of Gray's report, opposition leader Keir Starmer MP invoked the cultural problem himself: "The culture is set at the top, the can should be carried by the prime minister.

He has the responsibility. I doubt he will, because he doesn't take responsibility for anything he's done in life...That culture has led to industrial-scale law-breaking" (Frodsham 2022).²⁶

By the end of his time as prime minister, Johnson's administration was tarnished by more than the scandal of Partygate and the COVID pandemic; it was branded with the masculinist performance which characterized both events, and increasing scrutiny of the masculinist culture which had elected and inspired that administration. In July 2022, sources at Downing Street admitted that "Boris Johnson oversaw 'nasty, misogynist culture' as Prime Minister." Published in *The Herald*, a source at Number 10 claimed "Johnson's arrival in Downing Street brought with it 'a very masculine culture...you know, lads down the pub.' They added: 'If you were a female in that sort of zone, it's actually quite uncomfortable to work in'" (Bol 2022).

(Re)performances of Johnson's Masculinism in Drama

Numerous pieces in drama, television, and film have staged Boris Johnson, both directly and allegorically. In British theatre, however, a major text of note is Robert Khan and Tom Salinsky's *Kingmaker*, which premiered at the St. James's Theatre in London in 2014, the Theatre Upstairs in London in 2015, and played the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2014. The productions were covered by major press across the United Kingdom and starred Alan Cox as Max Newman, a former Mayor of London unabashedly based on Boris Johnson. But, more than other dramatizations of Johnson, a dramatic analysis of the text reveals how centrally masculinist performativity serves as fulcrum for the play's conflict and its antagonist.

²⁶ This kind of scapegoating and delegation described by Starmer is also dramatized in *This England* (2022) in a rather tongue-in-cheek way. Johnson's dog, Dilyn, repeatedly follows Boris down the stairs of Number 10 and Chequers, after Johnson once again promises Carrie he will take Dilyn out. Once out of sight of Carrie, Johnson invariably passes the leash off to any passing adviser in the hallway, asking if they would do the honors, while handing them a dog-waste bag from his pocket. The inescapable message presented by these repeated scenes in the drama is that Johnson has a habit of asking his subordinates to clean up his shit for him.

The play is spearheaded by Eleanor Hopkirk, an MP who has gathered Newman and his unimpressive Conservative challenger Dan Regan in a secluded office to broker a deal; she is also there to confront Newman personally, as she believes he is responsible for the death of her brother at university. The very first lines of the play comment upon the gendered disparity in Parliament and British politics, in Hopkirk's experience.

Eleanor I was first elected to Parliament in 1997. I was the youngest Tory MP elected that year, not that anyone took the slightest bit of notice. There were dozens of Labour women elected to grab all the attention that the media could bring themselves to give to the ladies. Only twenty years ago, but my—hasn't politics changed? (1)

Later in the play, she refers again to the gendered dynamic of Parliament politics, during an intimate monologue in which she explains how a mentor "completely railroaded" her in her first year in the Commons; she realized she was "deliberately side-lined. My 'mentor' saw me as a rival and decided I needed to be terminated. What really hurt was it was another woman. I wouldn't have taken it from a man...but I felt completely alone when I realised even the women in this place weren't going to look out for me" (19).

In introducing Newman, Eleanor uses language which invokes the masculinist ethos, saying that although he's "such a nice chap," he can "also be a brute...A teddy bear crossed with a serial killer" (1). Newman himself is pompous and ingratiating with Eleanor, referring to her endlessly as "dear lady," and patronizing her in a misogynist manner. His tone for the former prime minister (clearly an allusion to Theresa May) is no different, comparing himself to her by asking "why have we put up with cava for so long, when we could have been having

champagne?” (5). When asked by Eleanor if that is his slogan, he replies “It hits the spot in the saloons and salons of Westminster” (5).

Newman’s exaggerated toffishness does more than create a sharp mimicry of Johnson’s bombast: is the element of his character by which his egregious masculinism can find its expression. He maintains that one should never “trust a baldie! A good head of hair is enormously important in Tory politics” (7). His reductionist understanding of the British voter is steeped in working-class simplification: “People all want the same things. Food in their tummies, someone to tell them they’re marvellous and twenty percent off. Could hardly be any simpler” (8). When Eleanor suggests that there might be another metaphorical curtain behind the veils he throws up to deceive the public, he dismisses her with “Interior design I leave to Patricia” (11). And when Eleanor insinuates that Regan might look like a hapless fall guy instead of an honest backstabber for conspiring with Newman to give him the premiership, Max banters:

Max You need to stick up for yourself. Be your own man.

Dan I am my own man.

Max Tell her that, then. (9)

In short order, Eleanor’s plan to confront Newman results in her antagonizing him personally, her tactics centered on convincing Newman that he is “a joke” who is unaware of his real political danger. This is an affront Newman cannot bear, and he finally loses his temper, brandishing the impenetrable armor of his flawed character—that he is loved precisely *because* he acts the man to an unquestionable degree.

Max All right then, let’s have it, Miss Hopkirk. Unlike almost everyone else in modern British politics, yes, Max Newman has weathered scandal after scandal, negative story after negative story. Affairs, dodgy deals, back-handers, lies,

betrayals, misrepresentations, moonlighting, embezzlement and I'm unkind to cats. But the public—well, they just don't care... You, dear, dear, dearest lady, are the figure of propriety and if offends their delicate sensibilities to picture you possessed of greed or lust. The cognitive dissonance hurts their heads and to make the pain go away, they lash out and banish you to the wilderness. But not me. (10)

All of this, to Newman, is part of the “great big enormous game,” the game he loves to win, even “if winning means making up your own rules as you go along” (12). It is in this monologue that Khan and Salinsky specifically dramatize Johnson's awareness of his own masculinist performativity, which is on some level a conscious fabrication despite the fact that “the raw material was given to [him] by God” (12). Although he somewhat laments the burden of the masculinist image required to be successful in his political position, Newman nonetheless knows that the required persona is the “foot-in-mouth jokester with a weakness for skulduggery and short skirts” (12).

When Eleanor finally comes to her point and directly accuses Newman for the harm he inflicted on her brother years previously, she resorts to the kind of language Newman will understand, mocking him in the vernacular of masculinism: “And for the big finish, lean forward like you're in a rugby scrum. Head down and battling for the ball while trying to scatter the questions away...” after which she applauds what the stage directions refer to as “his performance” (15). After her direct accusation, Newman attempts one last time to pacify her with a patronizing “Dear lady...” only for Eleanor to answer back with the kind of dominating violence Newman will finally understand: “If you call me that again, I will kill you where you stand” (20).

But the truth of whether or not Newman is responsible for the death of Eleanor's brother is ultimately unimportant to him. In a nonchalance that recalls both the Libertine attitude featured in *Anatomy of a Scandal* and of Trump's remark that he could shoot someone on 5th Avenue and get away scot-free, Newman demures:

Max You might as well have disinterred a photographic scrapbook of me snorting chuff-powder off the inner thighs of some lusty high-class prostitutes. It would probably only increase my boundless popularity anyway. These days the British are getting so French in their politics. And I am totally bi-lingual. (21)

This sang-froid diminishes when Newman's projected character finally breaks. What is crucial in this reveal is that, as Newman attempts to be honest and truly explain the nature of his friendship with Eleanor's brother, it is a confession utterly couched in masculinist insecurity. He explains that he "was jealous. Hugely jealous. Alistair was better looking than me. Cleverer than me. More charming than me. Of course he was heading for big things...I wanted to hurt him. And why? To satisfy my own poor, pathetic bruised ego" (22).

Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian*, reviewing the Edinburgh Fringe production, was one of the critics who could feel the masculinist pulse throbbing through this play, writing that the "play may not burrow all that far, but it does at least give a nod to the ambition and the monstrous egos that flourish in public schools and at Oxbridge, and which finds its expression in the back-stabbing, male-dominated corridors of Parliament" (2014). Other critics gleaned similar dynamics, saying that Hopkirk has "learned to play by, exploit and supplant the rules of men's political games" (Shore 2015). Even in reviews which skewer the play for a lack of realism, etc., there is an awareness that something true is being revealed about the masculinist tension in the drama which reflects real-world politics: "His cool demonstration of exactly how to manipulate

the media shows the Machiavelli beneath the Tigger, and there are good – if not exactly startling – points here about transactional politics, insidious spin and gender double standards” (Swain 2014).

Strikingly, Khan and Salinsky began work on *Kingmaker* with a question: why does Johnson’s political character seem to be, in Khan’s words, made of Teflon? Unsure about whether Johnson’s charisma was simply too powerful to be damaged by scandals and actions “that would leave most politicians in trouble,” the pair began work on the play in an effort to dramatize that seeming invincibility (Dean 2014). The work of this dissertation and theories of masculinist performativity provide an answer to that very political question: Johnson’s imperviousness (like Trump’s) stems primarily from a masculine performance so recognizable and revered among a substantial demographic that it transcends otherwise political considerations. Johnson acts the man in a way that carries greater importance for the demographics responsible for his decades-long political presence than his issues in policy or personal scandals—indeed, some of these directly *contribute* to his masculinist appeal. In writing *Kingmaker*, perhaps without realizing precisely why, Khan and Salinsky had coded into the character the answer to their original question, (re)performing a figure who would be unrecognizable without the masculinist elements analyzed above: hegemonic masculinity makes the men who embody it into Teflon.

In my interview with the playwrights about the political realities which influenced the play, the subsequent discourse was similar to Eustis’s answers to Wilson about *Caesar*. Khan and Salinsky ultimately offered comments on political philosophy and social climates which catalyzed a dramatization of Boris Johnson. But (also like Eustis) the masculinist influences within and beneath their answers are detectable. While discussing the inspiration for the play,

Khan and Salinsky told me that “Max starts to undermine [Hopkirk] and eventually by co-opting (or even corrupting) Dan destroys her (perhaps in a similar way that John in David Mamet’s *Oleanna* finds his life—and worldview—similarly starting to unravel)...” It’s telling that Khan and Salinsky’s first dramatic referent is of another character (and playwright) which is riddled with masculinist implications. When I asked them about how selecting Eleanor Hopkirk (who is responsible for the inciting incident in the play) influences the gendered dynamics of the text, they responded:

We started with Boris, and it made sense as he’s a sexist dinosaur (even if a sexist dinosaur that also seems to be popular with some women) for him to take a callow boy under his wing and make an enemy of and patronize a woman.

Khan and Salinsky were “fascinated by his seeming serial blundering but also how no mud ever seems to stick to him. We wondered how much of that was deliberate and how much accidental. Is it true, after all, that he deliberately untucks his shirt and ruffles his hair before going on television?” This fascination with the performativity of Boris Johnson, through the analysis presented throughout this dissertation, points to an answer which contains the essence of masculinist performativity, even if Khan and Salinsky were primarily concerned with the nature of performativity itself. They elaborated that Max Newman is “more than just Boris Johnson,” and referred me to an article they wrote for *The Huffington Post* in 2014, about Nicholas Hytner’s denial that the protagonist in the National Theatre’s production of *Great Britain* was intended to be a carbon-copy of Rebekah Wade.²⁷ That article states:

While that obvious analogue [Max Newman to Boris Johnson] may have been the

²⁷ Former CEO of News International, editor at *News of the World*, and infamous for a 2003 scandal for her alleged part in using illegal phone hacking to source stories. She was found not guilty in 2014.

start of writing the play, by the end of the process Newman had become an exemplar of many different politicians in many different circumstances, almost symbolically representing those rare politicians to whom the normal laws of politics seem to have been suspended. Politicians who—whatever their faults—seem in the eyes of much of the public able to commit serial indiscretions, misdemeanours and foul-ups that no other politician would be able to survive. So, with Max Newman MP you can see reflections of Nigel Farage, some mild indications of George Galloway, some lightly greased Alex Salmond.

Despite (or perhaps, undergirding) Khan and Salinsky's assertion that Newman is an amalgam of a *kind* of politician as opposed to a specific one, there is then the necessary question of: who fits the kind of politician being dramatized? The allusions they provide fall prominently within the masculinist political sphere, most particularly in the case of Nigel Farage. When I asked if they saw Johnson having desires and ideas in common with any notable figures in American politics, they responded: "There's an obvious parallel between Boris and Trump," while making only one distinction between the two—that Johnson possesses a self-awareness Trump does not. They also compare Johnson's "charisma" with Obama and Bill Clinton, which is also indicative of these figures' commonality in masculinist performativity and its popular effects in Anglo-American politics, as Clinton and Obama are such frequent referents in masculinist studies (arguably contributing to that very charisma, to some people).

Further to this, Khan and Salinsky responded that the British public (vis-a-vis Johnson) are looking for a politician

...that seems different from the mean, or the average, will always stand out. And

that a politician who has charm and charisma will always do well—whatever their politics might be. That’s true for Churchill as it was for Disraeli or Lloyd-George or Thatcher or Reagan or Clinton or Blair... This is something we explore in our more recent play *Gang of Three* where we suggest that Denis Healey (another charismatic politician but of the left) says to Roy Jenkins: “That’s the thing about leadership...the British public love a sense of joie de vivre. They want to vote for a showman. An entertainer. We should join forces. You write the lyrics and I’ll play the tunes. It could be a glorious combination.”

Once again, Khan and Salinsky’s responses point to a fascination with performativity that is clearly within a masculinist ethos, despite not employing that theoretical specificity. Though I am attempting to avoid analyzing their answers so heavily as to suggest masculinism was at the forefront of their minds, what is also clear by now is how influential the ideas, actions, and genealogy of masculinist performativity chronicled in the last three chapters are archived within the performance text of *Kingmaker*, and how much they have shaped the culture in which (and to which) Khan and Salinsky are presenting a character like Max Newman. Arguably, Khan and Salinsky even allow room for this kind of analysis, as they tell me: “Perhaps you can see an even truer insight into the man’s character [apart from his tendency to avoid answering difficult questions] when you see how he can more subtly manipulate those around him...”

Khan and Salinsky were also careful to point out that the ambitions Johnson harbored to be “World King” from a young age do not necessarily separate him from other politicians. But they do add that this ambition coincides with a political ideology that also falls within the masculinist ethos: “And that seems aligned to a number of other Conservative politicians, where political philosophy becomes subservient to expediency...More bleakly, top of Boris Johnson’s

agenda is arguably ‘is this good for Boris Johnson?’ Everything else is secondary.” In their response to my final queries, the playwrights illustrate that the “big question” *Kingmaker* attempts to solve is couched firmly within the considerations of performativity:

I think the big question we tried to solve is: to what extent is he in charge of his own destiny? Clearly, some aspects of the Johnsonian persona are a performance – like that deliberate hair-ruffling. And we didn’t want to fall into the trap of buying the bumbling cartoon act ourselves, when clearly behind the pratfalls and gaffes there’s a fierce intelligence and a psychopathic ambition. We eventually threaded the needle by having him explain that he was born with, or at least unavoidably saddled with, a propensity for clumsiness both of deed and expression – but rather than try and fail to remove those elements of himself, instead he repurposed and weaponised them. Indeed the real Boris Johnson – in his formative years – had glue ear which led to some deafness, which biographers have referred to.

That led us to what many people thought was the highlight of the piece – Max’s seeming contrition when the mask apparently falls away and we see something a bit more humble, a bit more human. But the irony is that this is the act. Just another way of being, which he has practised and cultivated for public consumption. It explains why none of that dirt ever sticks. He’s effortlessly protean and yet always seems to be genuine – because nobody would ever choose to present themselves like that. Would they?

Like Trump, dramatizations of Johnson are not confined to serious theatre: they include dramatic and comedic television as well. Among the most long-lived and popular British

political satires is *Spitting Image*, a raunchy puppet late-night show which first broadcast in 1984. Since then, the show has produced eighteen seasons, won ten BAFTAs, two Emmy Awards, and reemerged in 2020 on Britbox after going off the air in 1996. Its long history of parody has spoofed prime ministers as far back as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, as well as many national leaders. It has employed the voice talents of stars like Steve Coogan, and eminent writers like Alistair Beaton, Richard Curtis, Henry Naylor, and Ben Elton. After its revival in 2020, *Spitting Image* boasted the talents of John DiMaggio and Bill Odenkirk, and created an extraordinary number of sketches focusing on Boris Johnson and Donald Trump, both separately and together. The savagery and shock of the newest series was anticipated to rival that of its '90s predecessor when the first aired sketch of the 2020 season showed a Donald Trump who had delegated the responsibility of Tweeting his thoughts to his own prolapsed anus.

But despite claims in mixed reviews that the show had become predictable and safe, the 2020 series began with a masculinist criticism strong enough to cause the network to force refilming. Aired as part of the trailer for the new release, a sketch depicted Johnson and Trump in grotesque puppetry, sweating in a sauna, both chewing on a chicken leg (Johnson wiping it over his shining chest). Trump advises Johnson: "I wouldn't worry about some dumb T.V. show, Boris. I mean, how are they going to make us look stupid?" Their reverie is interrupted by Vladimir Putin (who is roughly a fifth of their height and flanked by two scantily-clad blondes), who demands they get out. When Trump and Johnson refuse to do so, the towels of all three are whisked away and Putin dispatches both by swinging his elephantine penis against Johnson and Trump's comparatively miniscule members.

An ITV source said: "We told them to take no prisoners with the trailer. And they

certainly didn't. But some of the senior executives couldn't handle the fact they were fighting with their willies. "They've given Boris and Trump tiny latex penises as well. They're really small, but Putin's is monstrous. Like a snake. It was eye-popping stuff." The four minute clip, set in a sauna, is now having to be re-filmed. ("Boris's Johnson Ban" 2020)

Moving past this setback, *Spitting Image* did not give up centering Johnson's masculinity in future sketches. One such sketch, compiled in "The Best and Worst of Boris Johnson" and uploaded by the *Spitting Image* YouTube Channel on January 27, 2021, captured Johnson's sexism, xenophobia, and sexual swagger within moments. In it, Boris Johnson admonishes Dominic Cummings:

Johnson Dom, this is bloody serious. Gravitas maximus. You truly will burn your crumpets, this time.

Cummings Oh really? Let me guess. You have qualms about my proposal to compost asylum seekers and spread them over the fruit trees of Kent?

Johnson No, that's in the next manifesto. It's far worse. You let Carrie [Johnson's partner] find out our nickname for her.

Cummings You mean Baroness Batshit knows we've been calling her Princess Nut-Nut?

Johnson Yes. Countess Cabbagebrain found out. And she's been making it very clear that she wants you gone.

Cummings Ugh, she's exploited your feeble-minded weakness. That's my job!

Johnson Sorry, Dom, I'm a man of principle. And that principle is bonking who I want, when I want. (*He admires a plaque on the wall that says "Coitus Eternitus."*) Yet thanks to you, I've been blue-balled until Christmas. So push off. ("The Best and Worst..." 2021)

After Dominic Cummings sucks out all of the ideas he supposedly planted in Boris's head during their administration together, Johnson is rendered an unthinking mess, only able to respond to concerns from Cabinet about Brexit with "pudding" and "titties," to which they shout: "This is great! The old Boris is back!" ("The Best and Worst..." 2021).

In another sketch, Johnson convenes a meeting with the coronavirus itself, embodied by a giant, multi-handed puppet with a feminine voice. Johnson opens a discussion with the virus by reminding her that "I am not led. I lead" ("Boris Johnson Sleeps..." 2020). After the virus corrects his Latin, Johnson suddenly swoons: "I had no idea you were so smart and sophisticated. And you're *female*?" Johnson announces that he's feeling a real "connection" with the virus and drapes his arm around her, before inviting her to go somewhere "more comfortable." The virus enthusiastically responds before the camera cuts to Johnson's bedroom in Number 10, panning from a painting of Vladimir Putin—shirtless, sword-bearing, and on horseback—down to the bed, underscored by sultry music. Johnson asks the virus to tell him about herself.

Virus Well, I've got a phospholipid envelope which encloses protein binders.

Johnson God, you're sexy. Let's hear something to get us in the mood. ("Boris Johnson Sleeps..." 2020)

At this point, Johnson clicks on a CD player, against which is balanced the CD case of "Margaret Thatcher's Greatest Hits," and her voice begins to fill the room. The virus is concerned that Johnson might not be attracted to her, as he is "not her first." But Johnson replies that he finds it

“to be an oddly weird turn-on, that you’ve already been inside several million men.” Johnson and the virus proceed to have sex, and the sketch cuts away to nine months later, as Johnson stands beside a hospital crib in a maternity ward. The baby virus has been given Johnson’s characteristic hairstyle, and Johnson offers up a similarly characteristic masculinist response: “Not my child. It looks nothing like me” (“Boris Johnson Sleeps...” 2020).

More serious British television has also produced dramatic artifacts of Johnson’s masculinist performativity. Most anticipated and hotly reviewed was 2022’s *This England*, written by Michael Winterbottom and starring Kenneth Branagh as Boris Johnson. The show is composed of fast-paced scenes in which around 100 characters are given voice, but very few for long enough to develop a dramatic arc. Combined with scores of clips from newsreels and documentary footage, the televised drama clearly intended to be a hard-hitting, brutal portrait of the prime minister during his first months in office and a world in defiance of a global threat with as much verisimilitude as possible. Although it is a drama that ostensibly centers on Johnson, it quickly becomes clear that the victims of COVID-19, their loved ones, and the healthcare professionals battling to keep everyone alive are the primary focus of the writing and direction. Given this, the relatively few scenes in which Johnson is exerting action worth analysis become all the more important, despite their relative lack of camera time within the duration of any single episode.

In the very first shot in which Branagh portrays Johnson, both Johnson and his new partner Carrie are out of frame. The camera pans through 10 Downing Street on Johnson’s first day in residence, while from the bedroom we can hear Johnson playfully saying to Carrie (played by Ophelia Lovibond): “As your prime minister I command you...Power is an aphrodisiac, and absolute power is absolutely aphrodisiacal.” Carrie giggles in response to this laughably sexy

talk before amorous noises are heard from the bedroom. This is followed immediately by a card which states: BORIS AND CARRIE’S BABY WAS BORN 9 MONTHS AFTER THEY MOVED INTO DOWNING STREET, inaugurating the series inescapably with the assertion that Johnson’s quest for (and performance of) power is sexually inspiring. (Compare this to the way in which *The Comey Rule* similarly gave Brendan Gleeson’s entrance as Trump the requisite distinction of his own sexual dominance at the beauty pageant.)

Later, while working on his book on Shakespeare as Carrie swims seductively in the pool, Johnson is asked what Shakespeare had to say on sex by his younger girlfriend. He responds:

Johnson Loved it! “Anytime, anyplace, anywhere.”

Carrie Was that Shakespeare, too?

Johnson No, no. That’s an old martini advert.

During the first episode, which is a rapid-fire series of scenes interlacing both documentary news footage of the spread of COVID-19 and dramatic storytelling, what is presented is two distinct worlds: one in which the globe is focused entirely on the threat of a new disease originating in Wuhan, China and its traversal internationally, the other of a British government wholly consumed with the completion of Brexit and Dominic Cummings’s near-Machiavellian reorganization of Downing Street’s power — all while Johnson fumbles ineptly with control of his dog, the details of his last divorce, Carrie’s pregnancy, and his children who have apparently discontinued speaking with him. While the world struggles against an existential threat, Johnson struggles to maintain control of his own family.

In another scene, as a group of Special Advisers (SPADs) are having a pint together after a dressing down by Dominic Cummings around February 14, 2020, one of their number compare

Cummings to Thomas Cromwell in a “medieval court.” One SPAD responds: “That would make Boris Henry VIII. He’d actually make quite a good Henry VIII.” Another says, “Who does that make Anne Boleyn, then?” The third says, “Carrie,” to which the second rejoins: “Not that Boris has the same problems in the old *procreation* department as old Henry.”

Back in the private residence at 10 Downing Street, as they watch a movie starring Kate Winslet about epidemics, Johnson demurs to Carrie that it’s “a bit like homework.” They talk some more about whether the movie is of any interest, before Johnson euphemises:

Johnson I’m more of a *Carry On* man, myself. *Carry On, Doctor. Carry On Up The Khyber*. Carrie ... on the prime minister.

Episode Two opens as Johnson is responding to a documentarian’s prompt “Africa” with: “The problem is not that we were once in charge but that we aren’t in charge anymore.” To “women,” he says: “Hot totty.” To “gay men,” he responds: “Tank-topped bum-boys.” Shortly afterwards, Dominic Cummings holds a meeting with a special adviser in which he’s told that the public trusts scientists, to which Cummings responds: “I thought we hated experts?” At the very top of Episode Four, Johnson responds to the query of a reporter about his infidelity with: “We seek cities because there are more girls at the bar of reproductive choice.” Throughout both episodes, while Johnson is stricken with COVID-19 himself, he is routinely plagued by surrealist dreams in which the women of his life haunt him in black-and-white. In Episode Six, as Carrie admonishes Johnson to sack Cummings, Johnson dissuades her by changing the subject: “I thought the whole point of having a young girlfriend was you got lots and lots of sex.”

Despite comparatively low camera time and the short duration of most scenes, the majority of moments featuring Johnson contain some (re)performances of his masculinist ethos. What is interesting about this is the way in which several critics note the lack of sexual

raffishness in Branagh's portrayal and Michael Winterbottom's writing, as though the scenes quoted above do not form the lion's share of Johnson's private moments or accurately portray his masculinist embodiment. Voiding Johnson of his real-life belligerent, masculinist panache altogether makes him into someone too sympathetic, though that is arguably what the series hasn't done (even if the show doesn't trumpet Johnson's masculinism in every scene). Instead, propping up his retrospective narrative of a suffering healer leads critics to think that Winterbottom has given Johnson a pass.

Lucy Mangan wrote for *The Guardian* that the show "makes the hugely sympathetic portrayal of Johnson, as a man pulled in many directions by a new wife (to be), baby and dog, saddened by a distant relationship with his other children, a biography on Shakespeare overdue and now – oh what a sea of troubles! – a pandemic to deal with on top of everything else, which would have raised eyebrows at the best of times, seems absolutely bananas" (Mangan 2022). Alex Fletcher for *BT TV* writes: "Branagh's Boris Johnson is buffoonish and endlessly distracted by his personal life, but the drama avoids a hatchet job. It doesn't really delve beyond the Johnson caricature or attempt to apportion blame. Instead, the series positions the former PM as a hopeless and tragic figure – and importantly the series also cuts off before any of the party-gate saga kicks in" (Fletcher 2022). "To leave out" the parties, writes Alison Rowat for *The Herald*, "is like making a drama about the Titanic and omitting the iceberg" (Rowat 2022).

What these and other critiques of the show either fail to appreciate (or simply do not appreciate enough) are the recurrent commentaries by the scenes described above that paint Johnson as nothing more than a toffish playboy controlled by his own self-interest. Whether it is in the mad scramble to maintain newly-acquired power, to exercise some control over his departing family, to fully express his sexual prowess with Carrie, or to uphold the Tory values

instantiated in him by a long history of masculinist culture, Branagh's Johnson seems to dodge the danger of the show's true conflict—the COVID-19 virus—at every possible opportunity until it eventually hospitalizes him. After which, *This England* does the very thing which R.H. Jones demonstrates is a central tactic of masculinist leaders battling COVID-19: it (re)performs Johnson's retrospective narrative of martyrdom, archiving through drama the idea that Johnson suffered on behalf of a nation despite his multiple distractions, and underwent a transformation for his people that required strength, resilience, dedication, and unwavering courage to endure. Evoking sympathy with this struggle, whether or not Winterbottom intends it, creates an artifact of the masculinist narrative Johnson himself had performed for the public. Had a less sympathetic portrayal of Johnson—replete with his scandals, more inviting of his lasciviousness, more focused on his racism, more boisterous in its chauvinism—been portrayed, it would certainly have documented a masculinist performativity more easily readable as Johnson. As it is, however, *This England* archives a more nuanced form of Johnson's masculinist performance, while still containing enough of his hypermasculinity to make it a readily identifiable portrait, and useful for performance theorists, critics, and scholars to appreciate how one dramatic artifact contains and (re)performs a moment in political masculinist performativity.

Ultimately Johnson—like Trump—is a figure that many performers can easily *impersonate*, but the metrics by which a performance of him is either powerful in its criticism or particularly readable by an audience (even when what is being read is contested in different readings) contain his masculinist performativity as a central element. Johnson's history as a student, journalist, public figure, Member of Parliament, and prime minister are so replete with his proliferations of a masculinist culture, his care for the demographic it most affects, and his own masculinist performativity that any dramatization of him missing this fundamental element

is essentially incomplete. As dramatic (re)performances of Johnson continue to reify this phenomena and turn it into documented fact, what is preserved is the masculinist genealogy of Britain in one man's lifetime: the culture that bred him, educated him, lauded him, and immortalized him in its highest public office is codified in those (re)performances. Because of this, the question of masculinism's effect on British politics and the Johnson premiership is not one for the political philosophers alone. It is in part the work of performance philosophers and dramatists to determine how what began with a kind of performance continues—for it does not “end”—with (re)performances of the same. Masculinist performativity feeds off the audiences of the political rally as much as it does the audiences of the theatre, and fully understanding this cyclical interdisciplinarity requires the continued study of both.

CONCLUSION

There is something more to the special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom than shared language, culture, military interests, and economic partnership. From its inauguration during the unclothed meetings of Churchill and Roosevelt, the special relationship has also carried with it the homosocial bond of a two-man boys' club, demanding that real "men" step into the requisite offices and informing the kind of men and women who aspire to do so. That ethos, being generated, cultivated, and reflected by the cultures these leaders emerge from, does not dissipate when they leave office. Their departures and their legacies are defined by the masculinist performances which brought them to office in the first place.

No better example of this can be found than that of January 6, 2021. The January 6th Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building is awash with masculinist performativity and rhetoric—to such an extent that a full analysis of the event is worthy of its own dissertation. But among its main themes are 1) a man's unwillingness to accept defeat, and 2) his willingness to mobilize violence to turn defeat into victory. The speech Trump gave that morning which incited the following violence was riddled with masculinist verbiage, imploring his supporters to "fight like hell," while the audience chanted back "fight for Trump" (Naylor 2021). Tellingly, Trump has been reported by witnesses under oath to have called Vice President Mike Pence a "wimp" just before the riot broke into the U.S. Capitol, as Pence would not follow Trump's commands to decertify the necessary votes to overturn the election results (Schnell 2022).

At rallies and conventions around the country in the following months, supporters would arrive bearing flags with Trump's face superimposed on the body of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, comically over-muscled and claiming "I'll be back"; still others Photoshopped

Trump’s head on top of Sylvester Stallone’s Rambo, bearing gargantuan biceps and a grenade launcher. Nearly two years after his ousting from office, Trump would rock the political media world when he made a “major announcement” concerning the release of his online NFT trading cards—a series of images sold for \$99 each, chronicling his “life and career,” but were laughably amateurish artworks depicting Trump in fantastically masculinist manners, such as him baring his Superman-man like chest and shooting lasers from his eyes, wearing a duster with the Wild West as his background, palming a football on the 45-yard-line, and brazenly holding aloft the torch of Lady Liberty while heavenly glories stream behind his head.

As for Johnson, though his departure from office was far more decorous, it was still a continuation of masculinist performativity. Standing in front of Number 10 in July 2022, Johnson’s characterization of his government’s accomplishments was that of strength, leadership, and perseverance against impossible odds:

And of course, I’m immensely proud of the achievements of this government: from getting Brexit done to settling our relations with the continent for over half a century, reclaiming the power for this country to make its own laws in Parliament, getting us all through the pandemic, delivering the fastest vaccine rollout in Europe, the fastest exit from lockdown, and in the last few months, leading the West in standing up to Putin’s aggression in Ukraine. (“Read Boris Johnson’s...” 2022)

Johnson also mentioned that the “brilliant and Darwinian” system of British politics would find the right leader to replace him, undoubtedly making an allusion to Darwin’s concept of the fittest being the ones to survive—a masculinist trope which is also a misreading of Darwin’s actual point. Matthew Flinders, a politics professor at the University of Sheffield speaking with the *LA*

Times, referred to Johnson's premiership as "unconventional" (a rhetorical queue which my earlier analysis demonstrates is indicative of a heightened, self-aware masculinist performativity), but that now, "in a different time," Britons were looking for a leader displaying arguably more feminine social performance qualities: "more sensible, calm, and delivery-focused" (Kaleem 2022). Flinders went on:

"I don't think Boris knows how to do anything quietly," Flinders said. "I'm not sure this saga is quite over yet. He isn't someone who I think could exist beyond the limelight. He won't want to just be a celebrity. He has always craved attention, status and respect." (Kaleem 2022)

Flinders observation was almost prophetic, as in a seeming rejection of the masculinist bombast of both leaders, the U.S. and U.K. ushered in a new president and prime ministers with arguably polarized performative demeanors than their predecessors. Biden and Liz Truss, while certainly evincing masculinist performances of their own, are undoubtedly counterpoised to Trump and Johnson in their social, sexual, and political reserve. Indeed, the election between Trump and Biden, characterized by the media in the Introduction of this piece as a referendum on masculinity, resulted in the largest voter turnout in American history, in which the comparatively effeminate Biden (in hegemonically masculinist terms) earned a record win in major part because of his performative contrast to Trump. Liz Truss's short term was followed by Rishi Sunak, whose performative separation from Boris Johnson is about as differentiated as can be found within the Conservative Party as a person of color, analytical, of a primarily economic expertise, stiff and robotic in comparison to Johnson's bombast, recorded as saying that the Conservative Party is a welcome place for trans people and members of the queer community, and nothing of the playboy which Johnson openly paraded himself.

The legacy of both men does not stop in January of 2021 or July of 2022, and their performativity has left an indelible stamp on their respective offices, Parties, and the political memory of both figures. But as much as they are the result of culminating performances of masculinity in both cultures—the rise of demographics more threatened by the crisis of masculinity in representative politics than ever before—to what extent has their time in the political limelight amplified or further normalized such performances in either country? Are performances of masculinism on this scale, which before might have been blips on the political radar or small surges in the waves of democratic import, now establishing masculinism as an ethos that will remain in Anglo-American politics on the same level for the foreseeable future?

In the United States, the answer is surely “yes.” I opened this dissertation with FOX News’s segment on the crisis of masculinity, but in the wake of Trump there are numerous performances from Republican figures which continue to demand analyses of masculinism, many of which are increasingly bizarre. Such performativity infects everything from the economy to foreign relations. Some cursory examples include: on October 1, 2022, Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene accused Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg (himself an out gay man) of wanting to “emasculate the way we drive and force all of you to rely on electric vehicles,” prompting Buttigieg to aptly respond that: “My sense of manhood is not connected to whether or not my vehicle is fueled by gasoline or whether it’s fueled by electricity” (Ring 2022). Senator Josh Hawley (from the FOX News interview in the Introduction) gave an address at the 2021 National Conservatism Conference on “The Future of the American Man,” in which he accused the Left of attempting to destroy the concept of masculinity as—in his mind—defined by the Founding Fathers through increasingly intense deconstruction (“Senator Josh Hawley...” 2021). Former Representative Madison Cawthorne

rose to prominence through the use of aggressive social media videos showcasing his masculine superiority, such as when he hacked away at a tree with his own fists. In 2022, Republican J.D. Vance became infamous during his run for the Ohio U.S. Senate for having previously Tweeted such epithets as “Masculinity is good.”

Perhaps more importantly, the connections between Trumpism and masculinism are as much causal as they are derived from the same cultural conditions. One of the fiercest groups in advocacy of the Trump presidency and the January 6 insurrection, the Proud Boys, were forced to turn over organizational documents during the sedition trial of five of their members in January 2023. These documents revealed that certain performances of masculinism had been *consciously elevated* into active dogma by a group whose political existence was dedicated to the furthering of Trumpism in the United States.

This is our religion ... A Proud Boy may not ejaculate more than once every thirty days [...] if he needs to ejaculate it must be within one yard of a woman with her consent. The woman may not be a prostitute. (Ramirez 2023)

Other citations from the initiation documents and members handbook include: “This is about rebuilding the patriarchy,” “America was not stolen from the Indians and it was not built on slavery,” “All other cultures are not merely different from us. They are worse,” and “No wanks” (Davis 2023). Furthermore, the trial has revealed that, during their private meetings, the Proud Boys sing an “anthem” somewhat paradoxically taken from the Broadway musical *Aladdin*, in which the eponymous character claims:

I’ve wasted time / I’ve wasted me
So say I’m slow for my age / A late bloomer, Okay, I agree /
There’s no good reason that you should believe me

Not yet, I know, but / Someday and soon

I'll make you proud of your boy. (Italiano 2023)

This is a niche example of how the cycle of Butlerian performativity comes full circle: a performance of masculinity becomes adopted by its audience and either reflected or repurposed in their own masculinist performativity—in this case, ritualistically. As such, the Proud Boys demonstrate what waits at the political crossroads of masculinism: a performance of heterosexual, patriarchal, white supremacist masculinity that employs the violent and insurrectionary to remake the nation in its own image. Indeed, the Proud Boys are a group that even bridge masculinist performativity in the social world with masculinist ritual performance in the private, and who felt that the time had come for their ideology to face its enemies politically. That Trump was elected was a notorious encouragement to far-Right elements in the United States who believed that his inauguration was a seal of approval on their public and political existence; figures from the alt-Right Nazi Richard Spencer to organizations like the Oathkeepers and Proud Boys proclaimed that they were no longer members of the silent majority and felt that their ideologies were truly reflective of America's moral character. His subsequent loss was a clarion call for them to double down on these commitments.

And though performances of masculinity are more numerous and pronounced in conservative politics (given masculinism's occupation at the crossroads of white, middle-, and working-class heterosexuality), they are not absent from liberal politics. Notably and recently, in the case of John Fetterman's 2022 run for Senator from Pennsylvania, his opponent Mehmet Oz described Fetterman as a man who looks like he's "kicking authority in the balls. He's saying 'I'm the man. I'll show those guys who's boss'" (Teh 2022). Although Oz meant to criticize Fetterman's demeanor and wardrobe as one being defiant of convention and unsuitable for

Washington, his criticism drew ridicule for giving Fetterman masculinist capital and making him sound like a superior man. Fetterman quickly took advantage of the moment by Tweeting Oz's interview along with a digital campaign sign which read FETTERMAN: KICKING AUTHORITY IN THE BALLS. Physical signs, tee shirts, and hoodies bearing this unofficial slogan became commercially available almost immediately. Altogether, a large compendium of post-Trump performances of masculinity could (and should) be compiled in such a way as to illustrate the persistence that ethos continues to employ in the wake of the Trump presidency.

In the United Kingdom, discussions of masculinism also continue in public discourse. An initiative to combat toxic masculinity and to “support and respond meaningfully to the diverse experiences of boys” was launched in the UK in 2022, based on a report published by the Global Boyhood Initiative, which aimed

...to shed new light and build critical understanding of boys, boyhoods and masculinities in the UK today through critical analysis of available UK and international data relating to the state of UK boys aged 4-13, alongside interviews conducted with experts in gender, masculinities, and boyhood. (Ward 2022)

Such a need to “address harmful masculine norms” undoubtedly arises from a perpetuated culture of masculinism in the UK in the last several years. In November 2022, Laura Bates wrote an op-ed for *The Guardian* which highlighted the same report, concluding “There is no ‘war on men’ — we now know feminism is good for boys” (Bates 2022). The intersectional crux of masculinism is central to the report and not omitted by Bates, as she writes:

The idea that white, working-class boys are neglected and “failing” is “both manufactured and misleading,” the report states. White boys are in fact less likely than Black Caribbean, Black African, and Bangladeshi students to claim free

school meals, and less likely to be excluded from school than Black Caribbean boys. White boys who do not receive free school meals get higher grades than some minoritised groups, too. With this in mind, it's worth asking who benefits from peddling these misleading claims, and why? Perhaps it's those who want to keep the status quo as it is. (Bates 2022)

Mere months after Johnson's departure, *The Economist* printed a story entitled: "The new masculinity: Who speaks for the Great British lad?" (2022). Its writer sees the world of English masculinism as being overturned by a different Lad, a world in which "[p]hrases such as 'toxic masculinity' have gone from niche academic terms to overused"; Prince Harry has shed his bad-boy party attitude in order to be a mental health advocate; advertisements for "lager-soaked legends" are exchanged for PSAs about male depression—a world in which "the old lad is dying and the new lad cannot be born" ("The new..." 2022). As well, predating the arrest of Andrew Tate in Romania by only a couple of months, British *GQ* featured him in "How Andrew Tate built an army of lonely, angry men" (Sarkar 2022). Tate, raised in Bedfordshire and a star on the UK version of *Big Brother*, occupies a central place in the "manosphere — an online media ecology of blogs, websites, and content creators dedicated to nurturing masculine grievance and outright misogyny" (Sarkar 2022). His subsequent arrest and infamy have revitalized him as a figure at the center of British masculinist culture, and reflective of a masculinism which transcends the British borders. Moreover, in December 2022, researchers at the University of Liverpool announced a sociological project regarding "UK 'lad cultures' and young people's experiences of them...in the context of social networking sites" (Haslop 2022). The goal of the project is to

...provide a broader and more nuanced view of how 'lad cultures' are reproduced

and the types of discourses that dominate conversations, from those that have been associated with sexual harassment and homo/transphobia, to other versions of the ‘lad’ associated to sports, friendship, and leisure. (Haslop 2022)

The project has so far concluded that lad identities and cultures are “still a well established part of digital and offline youth cultures in the UK” despite being discussed negatively in the media in recent years; that lad identity still retains stereotypical performances such as “aspiring to be physically strong, part of drinking culture, show power through their body or assert dominance in social situations or with women” (Haslop 2022). Their findings also acknowledge the paradoxical reinforcement of masculinity by those who are conscious of its pervasive power, that they “reify” lads by acknowledging they’re “getting the best women, having the best car, etc.” Ultimately, their study shows, lad identity “was very much positioned as a hegemonic form of masculinity by most of the young men we interviewed” (Haslop 2022).

Anglo-America, in short, has brought the subject of masculinity to the center stage: popular and scholarly literature are concerned with it, political discourse is replete with it, and attitudes both corporate and artistic are being shaped by both countries’ shifting cultures in relationship to it. The elections of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson may have been the next in a long line of evolving performances of masculinity in the White House and Number 10, performances which were defined by and reflective of the cultures both men emerged from, but it is arguably true that never before has so much attention been paid to the nature of such performances in both offices and in society. That such attention is being paid is indescribably important—as we have seen from this work and from recent events, the connections between performances of masculinity in offices of power and exercises of that power in authoritarian, violent, and even fascistic ways are ever more clear. That the United States and the United

Kingdom have developed Republican and Conservative Parties whose chosen leaders champion anti-progressive policy while embodying such radical forms of masculinist performativity is but one (albeit major) example of this phenomenon.

As scholars of performance philosophy, drama, and politics, it is crucial for us to contribute our understandings to masculinist performativity and its connection with far-Right politics in every venue we can, because the “rise of far-right parties in many parts of the world threatens the world of human rights and social justice” (Greig 4). Despite the fact that this dissertation is concerned primarily with masculinist performativity in the Anglo-American sphere over roughly the last decade, it is an ethos which is coming into greater prominence around the world. Alan Greig’s research for OXFAM in 2019, “Masculinities and the Rise of the Far-Right,” is unequivocal in concluding this connection exists on a global level.

In 2016, Oxfam first analyzed the electoral ascendancy of far-right populist political parties, and the charismatic leaders representing far-right movements. This analysis concluded that civil society organizations working on human rights and social justice issues, both domestically and in the fields of international development and humanitarian response, must prioritize understanding the narratives and discourse the far-right uses to attract supporters and advances its political agenda...This report was commissioned to examine the ways in which varying narratives and tropes of masculinity and femininity have both shaped and been used by the far-right in its mobilization of support and polarization of debate. (4)

In many ways, this dissertation is an attempt to heed Greig’s edict, to “prioritize understanding the narratives and discourses the far-right uses,” although I do not suggest that masculinism is an

ethos and a performance that is endemic solely to far-right movements—merely that in recent years conservative parties and governments have been more conscious and effective at electing individuals and mobilizing demographics which respond to those performances on an extremely public level. Because “narratives of masculinity in crisis, widespread in many societies, constitute a discursive opportunity for the far-right” in a way they do not equally do upon the Left, and because the most controversial and definitive leaders in American and U.K. politics in the last several years have been Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, the discipline is naturally going to find conservatives figures more useful for analysis (5).

For Greig, the “emblematic hero in the emasculated male” is a symbol that is galvanizing to several major governments (5). Crises of masculinism have featured in recent far-Right political movements in the U.K., Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Romania, and Finland (40). Furthermore:

The feeling that (White/majority) masculinity is in crisis continues to be a powerful “discursive opportunity structure” through which the far-right can fuse its racist ethnonationalism with a broader anti-feminism and gender conservatism. In the figure of the victimized (White/majority) male are condensed a set of resentments and anxieties about the economic and social transformations undermining established racial and gender orders. Through its symbolic practice of crisis masculinities, the far-right heightens the affect of aggrieved entitlement and anxious anger on which it relies for its appeal. (44)

The performative language in Greig’s description is compelling. His research is a work of political science and his solutions for the problem (ensuring that campaign messages problematize the gender binary; making sexual and reproductive rights central to a vision of

democratic societies; and strengthening the capacity to build a public's support of gender justice) are in this vein. However, what his research underscores is that the problem of masculinism (in its current hegemonic state) has reached pandemic levels. It is incumbent upon any and all of us whose insight can help us characterize and define this problem more thoroughly to aid in the effort.

In the years to come, masculinism will continue to be a feature in drama. But whatever else it does, this dissertation has shown that the kind of masculinism which defines certain political leaders has, in the last several years, been preserved in the archival force of the performance text. For this to occur, such a performance must be so central to a figure's political and personal character that it is a necessary component of the writing and reperformance. These (re)performances thus become historical artifacts and political touchstones for understanding our recent history. "Our experience on the past alters," said Irwin in Alan Bennett's *History Boys* (2005). "Looking back, immediately in front of us is dead ground. We don't see it, and because we don't see it there is no period so remote as the recent past."

For many interested in the major political events of the U.S. and U.K. in the last several years, it is possible that the dead ground is congested with issues of the economy, of border crises, of working-class antagonisms, taxes and health care, student loan debt and European Union membership, COVID vaccines and personal scandals—and miss the momentous influences of masculinism completely. The more obvious points of this history comprise an unweeded garden beneath which the fertile soil of masculinism goes unnoticed. But the plays (and television and art and pop culture, to varying extents) which chronicle these figures, by virtue of their encapsulation of masculinism, cannot let us forget how integral it was—through drama, the recent past becomes less remote.

Perhaps this makes remembering masculinism and applying our skills to political understanding a *particular* responsibility for theatre scholars. Judith Butler's metaphor of performativity as a rehearsed act that requires actors to reproduce reality is more than apt—it is a reminder that there is no discipline in which performance theory has nothing to contribute. In a subject as fraught with concepts of performance as gender and in a world in which gendered performance is shaping policy on the most dramatic levels, what do we offer to make sense of the disorder, to better inform those struggling to understand a rapidly polarizing political sphere as to how we got where we are? How do we help them see the recent past?

This dissertation is a small step towards that goal. I have attempted to demonstrate that the interdisciplinarity between dramatic and political study is more than just relational: that some texts are inherently political artifacts as much as performance texts; that drama provides an essential function as recording documents of political phenomena; and that they are vehicles of (re)performance which perpetuate certain elements of a political reality similar and different from our own. In answering such questions as: “how has masculinism informed and changed a culture over a period of time?” we should draw on all the quantitative elements at our disposal. We should also read the plays: the plays don't merely inform what happened—their continued production shapes what happens next. Performances, by their very nature, are alive. They can never be dead ground.

APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPT OF OCTOBER 27, 2022 EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH *KINGMAKER*

PLAYWRIGHTS ROBERT KHAN AND TOM SALINSKY

1. **Why did you select Eleanor Hopkirk to be the protagonist of this story?**

In fact, we didn't. The play was first conceived in the margins of the production of our first play *COALITION* in 2012. We wanted to do a play about Boris Johnson and the first idea was a sort of spin off of *COALITION*, where one of the characters from that play would face off against Max Newman as a slightly veiled Boris Johnson in a theatrical roman-à-clef. As most first thoughts are, that was clearly wrong, and we decided we needed some fresh adversaries for Max to fight and so the characters of Eleanor and Dan were conceived. While it seems that Eleanor is the protagonist because she speaks first, sets the scene and initially drives the action very soon we see some equal and opposite actions as Max starts to undermine her and eventually by co-opting (or even corrupting) Dan destroys her (perhaps in a similar way that John in David Mamet's *OLEANNA* finds his life – and worldview – similarly starting to unravel) And to develop that theme as soon as she inserts herself into events she faces opposition and conflict. But isn't that also the case for Max and Dan?

So, we actually viewed it as a multi-protagonist story, that's why everybody gets a monologue to let the audience into their private thoughts. You might conversely think that Eleanor is instead the heroic figure in the play. But is she? Perhaps that depends on how much she is being truthful to herself or the audience. We know that Max may well be an unreliable narrator, but so might she be, and so might Dan be. Perhaps it also depends on whether there is actually a diary, whose existence is closely disputed. We want the audience to find their own answer to that question, though.

2. **What about that selection influences the gendered dynamics of the conflict?**

We started with Boris, and it made sense as he's a sexist dinosaur (even if a sexist dinosaur that also seems to be popular with some women) for him to take a callow boy under his wing and make an enemy of and patronise a woman. But that doesn't mean Eleanor is not also a flawed character, and Dan certainly is, as we all are.

3. **What about Boris Johnson's personal character was important to include in your dramatization of him? Why?**

Because while we might loathe his opinions and his politics Boris Johnson is a Falstaffian, absurd, extraordinary, interesting, intriguing, deeply flawed "*teddy bear*"

that's been crossed with a serial killer". We were fascinated by his seeming serial blundering but also how no mud ever seems to stick to him. We wondered how much of that was deliberate and how much accidental. Is it true, after all, that he deliberately untucks his shirt and ruffles his hair before going on television? This is all very theatrical and contradictory, and contradiction lies at the heart of the theatre. But Max Newman is more than just Boris Johnson.

Let us quote some words from an article we wrote about the play for *Huffington Post* in 2014:

Only a day or so after the verdicts in the phone hacking trial are delivered, the National Theatre has announced a new play, GREAT BRITAIN, written by accomplished playwright Richard Bean and described as a "grotesque satire" about the tabloid press. The lead character, played by Billie Piper, is the editor of The Free Press, a mass-circulation paper seeking an even bigger readership. Director Nicholas Hytner is at pains to say that this character is in no way based upon Rebekah Brooks. So, any similarity between the fictional Paige Britain and any other person living or dead (as the legal disclaimer usually goes) is purely coincidental; what on earth could you have been thinking?

But Nick, why so coy? After all, the character of Paige Britain is not Rebekah Wade in the same way that George Jones in THE ABSENCE OF WAR clearly wasn't Neil Kinnock, Lambert La Roux in PRAVDA wasn't Rupert Murdoch and Brecht's THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF URTURO UI was self-evidently a play about the Cauliflower Trust set in the little town of Cicero and not about Hitler's deadly rise at all.

But Hytner's denial perhaps represents a more complex literal truth. All those characters were inventions of the writers, reflecting certain facts about their analogues in real life but on the stage, they became characters in their own right, whatever their original influences, living and breathing in the minds of the audience with their own needs, wants, objectives and motivations.

Writers often say that their characters seem to take on a life of their own, and perhaps that's not too surprising. When we think about people we know, we summon up an imaginative model of their characteristics and can run simulations to predict their likely reactions in any given circumstance. And once a character has taken form in a writer's mind, a similar process arguably occurs. So, Lambert La Roux is inspired by Rupert Murdoch (becoming South African not Australian in the process) and Paige Britain will surely derive traits from Ms Wade but I'm sure without the budget needing to stretch to a magnificent flamed haired wig (sorry, Billie). And so, in those plays the characters can adapt to the fictionalised

circumstances the writers place them. This allows the playwright freedom to explore those situations and allows the satire through in a more subtle way.

In our own debut play COALITION – presented at the Edinburgh fringe in 2012 – the lead character was called Matt Cooper. This was a character clearly inspired by the suffocating political travails in which Nick Clegg found himself, but creating a new character gave us the freedom to explore fictionalised situations and allowed our leading actor (Thom Tuck) room to develop a living, breathing character that might respond in a Clegg-like way, without resorting to parody.

In KINGMAKER, our lead character is this time called Max Newman (played by Alan Cox), a bumbling, charismatic former Tory Mayor of London who seizes his opportunity to stand for the leadership of the Conservative party and become prime minister. Sound familiar? Ahem, who could we possibly mean?

While that obvious analogue may have been the start of the writing of the play, by the end of the process Newman had become an exemplar of many different politicians in many different circumstances, almost symbolically representing those rare politicians to whom the normal laws of politics seem to have been suspended. Politicians who – whatever their faults – seem in the eyes of much of the public able to commit serial indiscretions, misdemeanours and foul-ups that no other politician would be able to survive. So, with Max Newman MP you can see reflections of Nigel Farage, some mild indications of George Galloway, some lightly greased Alex Salmond.

Or as Alan Cox also said in the UK *Observer* newspaper at the time, “Peter Morgan was an early master, but some of the newer pieces are more like speculative theatre. They help you to examine situations by looking at them from a distance. *Kingmaker* is a dense political story, rather than one that gets lazy laughs. It invites conjecture and it quickens the thinking. You can get a glimpse of the power structure.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/03/boris-johnson-figure-leadership-kingmaker>

A final point on this: we did consider writing the character as Boris Johnson himself – not a Boris Johnson type disguised as a man called Max Newman – because while there may be sounder commercial reasons to do so, no theatrical or other representation we have ever seen of Johnson seems to survive first contact with the attempt to portray him. The risk is the performance tends to become a cartoon, or an impression, or an impersonation which just seems to warp the space of everything around it. The only portrayal so far that arguably doesn’t fall into this trap is Kenneth Branagh’s recent THIS ENGLAND, even if perhaps his performance is under-stated and possibly over sympathetic (depending on your politics).

4. What does Boris Johnson's political career say about what kind of man the British public wants in leadership?

I think it says that being a politician that seems different from the mean, or the average, will always stand out. And that a politician who has charm and charisma will always do well – whatever their politics might be. That's true for Churchill as it was for Disraeli or Lloyd-George or Thatcher or Reagan or Clinton or Blair. I think that type of politician will always be attractive whether it be in Britain or anywhere else. It also means that a politician that wields their charisma to gain electoral success can use that power for good or ill or something in between. There are many, many counter-examples.

But for the UK there does seem – and this is covered in the play – that the rigid British class system still reverberates. While much of that has broken down over successive decades it does still seem that politicians with 'the right accent' will do better electorally, although we have no scientific proof of that.

This is also something we explore in our more recent play *GANG OF THREE* where we suggest that Denis Healey (another charismatic politician but of the left) says to Roy Jenkins:

That's the thing about leadership... the British public love a sense of joie de vivre. They want to vote for a showman. An entertainer. We should join forces. You write the lyrics and I'll play the tunes. It could be a glorious combination.

5. What made writing Johnson for the stage difficult? How did you overcome those obstacles?

As we touch on above, it's tempting to make him a cartoon character, which we tried to avoid. It's also tempting to make him sympathetic. And in the hands of Alan Cox who is a brilliant and subtle actor, Max's portrayal at points could be seen to be sympathetic which contradicts the prejudices of the writers but maybe that is no bad thing. And of course, this character is only partially about Boris Johnson, although looking back at our many email debates about this play as writers, there was a moment where we did go back through the script to make the dialogue and 'verbal tics' closer to Johnson's than it was in earlier drafts. We were also keen, in places, to come close to breaking the fourth wall, with Max treating the theatrical audience as if it was a real political audience, something picked up on by director Hannah Eidinow in her staging of the piece.

6. In what ways does writing a parody of Johnson reveal what's necessarily true about him?

By exaggerating specific features, a deeper truth is (hopefully) revealed. You will read in the play a section about the ‘Max Newman interview shuffle’ which is a dramatization of the many techniques Boris Johnson uses to avoid answering difficult questions. That is, we think, a very accurate de-construction of his methods. That is arguably a little more ‘tell’ than ‘show’ but the audience always seems to identify and get on board with that. Perhaps you see an even truer insight into the real man’s character when you see how he can more subtly manipulate those around him when he pretends to be genuinely shocked about the death of Eleanor’s brother.

7. Aside from political philosophy, what are the ideas and desires that define Johnson, either as a dramatized character or a political figure (or both)?

I suspect (perhaps unkindly) that you couldn’t get much further than the seven deadly sins as the ultimate summation. I’m sure he would personally appreciate the Greco-Roman antecedents of that. I’m sure he would also appreciate some Shakespeare, there being no spurs to prick the sides of his intent save vaulting ambition, that o’erleaps itself and falls on th’other.

Johnson was, after all, known from a young age for wanting to be World King, but that doesn’t entirely separate him from other ambitious politicians. And that seems aligned to a number of other modern Conservative politicians, where political philosophy becomes subservient to expediency, although we would want to be careful not to sign up to the lazy thought that “all politicians are all as bad as every other.” More bleakly, top of Boris Johnson’s agenda is arguably “is this good for Boris Johnson?” Everything else is secondary.

8. Do you see Johnson as having these ideas and desires in common with notable figures in American politics? Who and why?

There’s an obvious parallel between Boris and Trump, but I think the key difference is that Boris Johnson does have a certain amount of self-awareness. If you want to see more discussion of this, his former chief of staff Dominic Cummings tweets and blogs a great deal about Johnson’s ability to occasionally switch into what he calls “self-aware mode”. Perhaps there are also some further similarities with Clinton and Obama in terms of charisma and the ability to tell a story, even if you don’t agree with it.

9. What do you hope an audience learns about Johnson by watching *Kingmaker*?

I’m not sure it’s our role to educate the audience, they are too clever for that, and they easily may know more than we do anyway. But informing, provoking and entertaining them is a good thing for a play to try and do. We also know that just as Shelley was probably wrong about poets being the unacknowledged legislators of the world,

dramatists generally don't turn votes either. That's for the politicians who put themselves out there to do so, including Boris Johnson. The other more illuminating starting point was trying to contrive a situation in which the fewest possible people could determine who governs Britain. The recent Tory leadership election also shines some light on this issue.

10. Explain any part of the process of conceptualizing, writing, or staging Johnson as a dramatic character which you would like us to know and hasn't been addressed by earlier questions -- ditto for Johnson as a political figure.

I think the big question we tried to solve is: to what extent is he in charge of his own destiny? Clearly, some aspects of the Johnsonian persona are a performance – like that deliberate hair-ruffling. And we didn't want to fall into the trap of buying the bumbling cartoon act ourselves, when clearly behind the pratfalls and gaffes there's a fierce intelligence and a psychopathic ambition. We eventually threaded the needle by having him explain that he was born with, or at least unavoidably saddled with, a propensity for clumsiness both of deed and expression – but rather than try and fail to remove those elements of himself, instead he repurposed and weaponised them. Indeed the real Boris Johnson – in his formative years – had glue ear which led to some deafness, which biographers have referred to.

That led us to what many people thought was the highlight of the piece – Max's seeming contrition when the mask apparently falls away and we see something a bit more humble, a bit more human. But the irony is that *this* is the act. Just another way of being, which he has practised and cultivated for public consumption. It explains why none of that dirt ever sticks. He's effortlessly protean and yet always seems to be genuine – because nobody would ever choose to present themselves like that. Would they?

WORKS CITED

- Abram, Nicola. *Black British Women's Theatre: Intersectionality, Archives, Aesthetics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Addison, Paul. *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Allegretti, Aubrey. "Boris Johnson And Vote Leave Castigated For 'Racist' EU Campaign In Run Up To Referendum." *Huffington Post*, May 26, 2016.
https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/eu-referendum-boris-johnson-leave-brexit-racist_uk_5746e90be4b0ebf6a3295148
- Armengol, Josep M. "Gendering the Great Depression: Rethinking the male body in 1930s American culture and literature." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol 23, no 1. 2014. pp. 59-68.
- Asherson, Neal. "The war for minds...but not hearts." *The Guardian*. 12 September, 2004.
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/sep/12/theatre.politicaltheatre>
- Ballantyne, Aileen and Singer, Angela. "Thatcher winds down curtain with 'tragedy' of jobless." *The Guardian*. October 11, 1980.
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1980/oct/11/conservatives2001.conservatives>
- Baron, Ava. 2008. "Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze." *International Working-Class History* No. 69, Working-Class Subjectivities and Sexualities: 143-160.
- Bates, Laura. "There is no 'war on men' — we now know feminism is good for boys." *The Guardian*. 8 November, 2022.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/08/feminists-war-on-men-misogyny-boys-gender-stereotypes-masculinity>

Bennett, Catherine. "Brexit is lost in toxic masculinity. No wonder women are turning against it." *The Guardian*, 9 September, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/09/boris-johnson-brexit-toxic-masculinity>

Bennett, Jessica. "Trump, Biden, and the Tough Guy, Nice Guy Politics of 2020." *The New York Times*, 1 November, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/01/us/politics/trump-biden-masculinity-2020.html>

Berkes, Anna. 2016. "Hideous hermaphroditical character (Spurious Quotation)". The Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia. <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/hideous-hermaphroditical-character-spurious-quotation>

Biekov, Adam. "Boris Johnson called gay men 'tank-topped bumboys' and black people 'piccaninnies' with 'watermelon smiles'." *Insider*, June 9, 2020.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/boris-johnson-record-sexist-homophobic-and-racist-comments-bumboys-piccaninnies-2019-6>

Blais, M. & Dupruis-Déri, F. "Masculinism and the Antifeminist Countermovement." *Social Media Studies*, vol 11, no 1, 2012. pp 21-39.

Bol, David. "Downing Street admits Boris Johnson oversaw 'nasty, misogynist culture' as Prime Minister." *The Herald*, July 14, 2022.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20280363.downing-street-admits-boris-johnson-oversaw-nasty-misogynist-culture-prime-minister/>

"Boris Johnson is not such a ladies' man in electoral terms." *The Economist*, October 3, 2019.

<https://www.economist.com/britain/2019/10/03/boris-johnson-is-not-such-a-ladies-man-in-electoral-terms>

“Boris’s Johnson Ban: ITV Bosses ban Spitting Image from flashing Boris’s tiny ‘Johnson’.”

The Sun, August 23, 2020. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/12479482/itv-bosses-ban-boris-tiny-johnson/>

“Boris Johnson: EU exit ‘win-win for us all’.” *BBC News*, March 11, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35783049>

Boser, Beth L. and Anderson, R. Brandon. “America, Meet Your New Dad: Tim Kaine and Subordinate Masculinity,” *Nasty Women and Bad Hombres: Gender and Race in the 2016 US Presidential Election*, edited by Christine A. Kray, Tamar W. Carroll, and Hinda Mandell. University of Rochester Press, 2018. pp. 121-139.

Burstyn, Varda. *The Rights of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*. University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Calamur, Krishnadev. “Boris Johnson’s Case for ‘Brexit’.” *The Atlantic*, May 9, 2016.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/05/boris-johnson-brexit/481815/>

“Campaign Address on Progressive Government at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, California.” *The American Presidency Project*. Accessed 4 November, 2021.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/campaign-address-progressive-government-the-commonwealth-club-san-francisco-california>

Canellos, Peter. 2019. “Why Trump Should Be Thanking Alec Baldwin.” *Politico*.

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/05/17/trump-snl-impression-baldwin-saturday-night-live-226920/>

Carian, Emily K. and Sobotka, Tagart Cain. 2018. “Playing the Trump Card: Masculinity Threat in the U.S. 2016 Presidential Election.” *Sage Journals* (4).

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2378023117740699>

Carrington, Kerry, and Scott, John. 2008. "Masculinity, Rurality, and Violence." *The British Journal of Criminology* 48(5): 641-666.

Clair, Adam. 2016. "The Surprising Etymology of the Alt-Right's Favorite Word, "Cuck"." *Paste Magazine*. <https://www.pastemagazine.com/politics/donald-trump/the-surprising-etymology-of-the-alt-rights-favorit/>

Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. [Second Edition]. University of California Press, 2005.

— *The men and the boys*. Polity Press, 2000.

—"Understanding Men: Gender Sociology and the New International Research on Masculinities." *Social Thought & Research* 24(1/2), 2001. pp 13-31.

—"Understanding Neoliberalism." *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*. Editors Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.

Connell, R.W. and Wood, Julian. "Globalization and Business Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities*, vol 7, 2005. pp. 347-364

Conroy, Meredith. *Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

Costigliola, Frank. *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War*. Princeton University Press, 2012. E-book.

Côté-Boucher, Karine. "Risky Business? Border Preclearance and the Securing of Economic Life in North America." *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*. Editors Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.

Craighill, Peyton M. and Clement, Scott. 2015. "Trump's popularity spikes among Republicans." *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the->

fix/wp/2015/07/15/trumps-popularity-spikes-among-republicans/?utm_term=.b8485a2b1564

Cuordileone, K.A. "Politics in the Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960." *The Journal of American History*, vol 87, no 2. Sept, 2000. pp. 515-545.

Davis, Charles R. and Italiano, Laura. "The Proud Boys' initiation manual has a detailed 'No Wanks' policy." *Business Insider*. January 23, 2023.
<https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-initiation-manual-details-no-wanks-masturbation-policy-2023-1>

Dean, Robert D. "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy." *Diplomatic History*, vol 22, no 1. Winter, 1998. pp. 29-62.

Duerst-Lahti, Georgia. "Gender ideology: masculinism and feminalism." *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, eds Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur. Cambridge University Press, 2008. pp. 159-192.

— "Seeing What Has Always Been: Opening the Study of the Presidency." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol 41, no 4. October, 2008. pp. 733-737.

Dulong, Delphine, et al. *Boys Don't Cry! Les coûts de la domination masculine*. Presses University de Rennes, 2012.

Dupuis-Déri, F. "State antifeminism." *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, vol 5, no 2, 2016. pp. 21-35.

Edelman, Murray Jacob. 1974. *The Language of Politics*. ERIC Institute of Educational Sciences. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED098789>

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. E-Book. Vintage Books, 2001.

- Evans, Geoffrey, de Geus, Roosmarkin, and Green, Jane. "Boris Johnson to the Recsue? How the Conservatives Won the Radical-Right Vote in the 2019 General Election." *Sage Journals*, October 28, 2021. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00323217211051191>
- "Ex-FBI chief James Comey says Trump 'morally unfit to be president'." 2018. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43779359>
- "Exit Polls". 2016. *CNN Politics*. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>
- Fahrenthold, David. 2016. "Trump recorded having extremely lewd conversation about women in 2005." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-Recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4_story.html
- Faludi, Susan. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. William Morrow and Company, 1999.
- "Fareed Zakaria raves about Trump-inspired 'Julius Caesar'." 2017. *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/fareed-zakaria-raves-about-trump-inspired-julius-caesar.amp>
- Fienberg, Daniel. 2020. "'The Comey Rule': TV Review." *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-reviews/the-comey-rule-tv-review-4052936/>
- Filipovic, Jill. "Masculinity is a force in the US election - and women are responding accordingly." *The Guardian*, 1 October, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/01/masculinity-is-a-force-in-the-us-election-and-women-want-no-part-in-it>
- Fradly, Marshall. "The Big Guy—Review: The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate, by Robert A. Caro." *The New York Review of Books*.
- Friedland, Roger. 2016. "Donald's Masculinity. It's all about the sex of the state." *Reset Doc*.

- <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/donalds-masculinity-its-all-about-the-sex-of-the-state/>
 Frodsham, Isobel. 2022. "UK government trying to undermine Sue Gray report, says Starmer." *Breakingnews.ie*. <https://www.breakingnews.ie/world/sir-keir-starmer-government-is-trying-to-undermine-sue-gray-report-1309449.html>
- Garrett, Roberta. "Gender, sex, and the family." *British Cultural Identities*. eds. Mike Story and Peter Childs. Routledge, 2002. pp. 111-138.
- Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2018. "A Senior White House Official Defines the Trump Doctrine: 'We're America, Bitch'." *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/a-senior-white-house-official-defines-the-trump-doctrine-were-america-bitch/562511/?utm_source=twb
- Goldeberg, Jonah. 2019. "Trump and Masculinity." *The National Review*.
<https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/donald-trump-and-masculinity-in-decline/>
- Goodwin, Michael. "Britain's vote for freedom proves power is with the people." *The New York Post*, 24 June, 2016.
<https://nypost.com/2016/06/24/brexit-strengthens-global-effort-to-unseat-unresponsive-elites/>
- Greig, Alan. "Masculinities and the Rise of the Far-Right: Implications for Oxfam's Work on Gender Justice," *Oxfam Research Background Series*, 2019. Accessed November 1 2020.
<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/masculinities-and-the-far-right/>
- Griffin, Ben. "Masculinities and Parliamentary Culture in Modern Britain." *The Palgrave Handbook of Masculinity and Political Culture in Europe*. Eds. Christopher Fletcher, Sean Brady, Rachel E Moss, and Lucy Riall. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2018. pp. 403-434.

- Haberman, Maggie. *Confidence Man: The Making of Donald Trump and the Breaking of America*. Penguin Press, 2022.
- “Half of U.S. Voters Say Russians Have Something On Trump, Quinnipiac University Poll Finds; But Voters Say Both Sides At Fault For Bad Relations.” 2018. *Quinnipiac University Poll*. <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2557>
- Harsin, Jayson. “Toxic White masculinity, post-truth politics, and the COVID-19 infodemic.” *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol 23, issue 6. August, 2020. pp. 1060-1068. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1367549420944934>
- Hartig, Hannah. 2019. “Gender gap widens in views of government’s role—and of Trump.” *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/11/gender-gap-widens-in-views-of-governments-role-and-of-trump/>
- Haslop, Craig et al. “#Ladcultures: social networking sites, ‘laddism’ and young masculinities.” *UK Research and Innovation*. Updated 15 December, 2022. <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FP010628%2F1#/tabOverview>
- Hayes, Caroline. 2021. “Power Grabs, Pussy Grabs, or Both? What gender analysis can teach us about state war rhetoric during COVID-19.” *Gender Policy Journal*. <https://gpj.hkspublications.org/2021/03/19/power-grabs-pussy-grabs-or-both-what-gender-analysis-can-teach-us-about-state-war-rhetoric-during-covid-19/>
- “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech.” 2015. *Time*. <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>
- Heer, Jeet. 2016. “The Presidential Penis: A Short History.” *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/131117/presidential-penis-short-history>
- Hickey-Moody, Anna. *Deleuze and Masculinity*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2019.

Hitchens, Christopher. *Blood, Class, and Empire: The Enduring Anglo-American Relationship*.

Nation Books, 1990.

Higgins, Michael. 2020. "Political masculinities and Brexit: men of war." *The Journal of*

& Politics, vol 19, no 1, pp. 89-106.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. Harvard

University Press, 1996.

Hunt, Leon. *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. Routledge, 1998.

Irelan, Scott R. "Remember the Forgotten Man? New Deal Masculinity in EP Conkle's Prologue

to Glory." *The Theatre Annual*, vol 61. 2008. pp. 57-66, 82.

Italiano, Laura and Haroun, Azmi. "At meeting, Proud Boys sing 'Proud of Your Boy,' a weepy

ode to mom from Broadway's 'Aladdin,' documents show." *Business Insider*.

January 23, 2023. [https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-sedition-trial-](https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-sedition-trial-secretly-sing-broadway-ode-mom-meetings-2023-1)

[secretly-sing-broadway-ode-mom-meetings-2023-1](https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-sedition-trial-secretly-sing-broadway-ode-mom-meetings-2023-1)

Jimmerson, Ellin. 2016. "The Emperor Has No Balls: Are The Trump Statues Body Shaming Or

Legitimate Political Commentary?" *The Huffington Post*.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-emperor-has-no-balls_b_11650800

Johnson, Boris. "Another Voice." *The Spectator*, April 15, 2000,

<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/15th-april-2000/8/another-voice>.

— *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History*. E-book. Riverhead Books, 2014.

Jones, Rodney H. "The wounded leader: The illness narratives of Boris Johnson and Donald

Trump." *Discourse, Context & Media*, vol 41, 2021.

<https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2211695821000362?token=C4537262898843A>

6529F6B2CFA03237B94DACA093CA03290D44BC4BC259A79FFE11D53D61DD9E9
04FDFEA94E891A1410&originRegion=us-east-1&originCreation=20221106165520

Katz, Jackson. *Leading Men: Presidential Campaigns and the Politics of Manhood*. E-book, Interlink Books, 2013.

Kelly, Joshua. *A Patriot for Men: The Politics of Masculinity in John Osborne's "A Patriot for Me"* 2016. *All Master's Theses*. 360. <https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd/360>

Kimmel, M. and Bridges, T. "Masculinity." *Oxford Bibliographies*. Oxford University Press Online. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0033.xml>. Accessed March 2021.

— "Invisible Masculinity." *Society*, vol 9. 1993. pp. 28-35.

— *Manhood in America: a cultural history*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Knowles, Eric and DiMuccio, Sarah. 2018. "How Donald Trump appeals to men secretly insecure about their manhood." *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/29/how-donald-trump-appeals-to-men-secretly-insecure-about-their-manhood/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3cda23741bdc

Kurtzleben, Danielle. "Trump Has Weaponized Masculinity As President. Here's Why It Matters." *NPR Politics*, 28 October, 2020.
<https://www.npr.org/2020/10/28/928336749/trump-has-weaponized-masculinity-as-president-heres-why-it-matters?t=1606226584463>

"Latest Cartoons." *The Week*.
<https://theweek.com/cartoons/692957/political-cartoon-kim-jong-un-north-korea-nuclear-missile-president-trump>

- Leighton, Jared. ““Character Assassins”: How the FBI Used the Issue of Homosexuality against the Black Freedom Struggle.” *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, vol 2, no 2. Fall/Winter, 2016. pp. 151-185.
- Lorde, Audre. 1979. “Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist’s Response.” *Conditions: Four*. Quality Paperback Book Club: New York.
- Lu, Alexander and Wong, Y. Joel. “Stressful Experiences of Masculinity Among U.S.-Born and Immigrant Asian American Men.” *Gender and Society*, vol 27, no 3. June 2013. pp. 345-371.
- MacSwan, Anna. 2022. “Three cabinet ministers reportedly facing allegations of sexual misconduct.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/23/three-cabinet-ministers-reportedly-facing-allegations-of-sexual-misconduct>
- Mailer, Norman. *Armies of the Night*. Signet Classics, 1968.
- Maitland, Jonathan. *The Last Temptation of Boris Johnson*. Salamander Street Modern Plays, 2020.
- Marcus, David. “Assassinating President Trump as ‘Julius Caesar’ is Bad Politics, Not Good Art.” 2017. *The Federalist*. https://thefederalist.com/2017/06/13/assassinating-president-trump-julius-caesar-bad-politics-not-good-art/?utm_source=The+Federalist+List&utm_campaign=455bfed9aa-RSS_The_Federalist_Daily_Updates_w_Transom&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_cfcb868ceb-455bfed9aa-53197077
- Marks, Peter. “Hare’s Strong ‘Stuff,’ Weakened by Time.” *The Washington Post*. 27 June, 2008. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/26/AR2008062604128html>

Martin, James. *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction*. E-book. Routledge, 2014.

Martin, Sara. *Masculinity and Patriarchal Villainy in the British Novel: From Hitler to Voldemort*. E-book. Routledge, 2019.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. Penguin Books, 1998.

Milner, Terry. *After Us the Savage God*. 2018.

<https://newplayexchange.org/plays/163137/after-us-savage-god>

Montanaro, Domenico. 2017. “6 Strongmen Trump Has Praised—And The Conflicts It Presents.” *NPR.org*. <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/02/526520042/6-strongmen-trumps-praised-and-the-conflicts-it-presents>

“More U.S. Voters Say Don’t Confirm Kavanaugh, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; More Voters Believe Ford Than Kavanaugh.” 2018. *Quinnipiac University Poll*. <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2574>

Morgan, Peter. *Frost/Nixon*. Faber and Faber Ltd, 2006.

Morin, Rich. 2013. “Study: Polls may underestimate anti-gay sentiment and size of gay, lesbian population.” *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/09/study-polls-may-underestimate-anti-gay-sentiment-and-size-of-gay-lesbian-population>

Moser, Benjamin. *Sontag: Her Life and Work*. HarperCollins, 2019.

Mount, Ferdinand. “Ruthless and Truthless.” *The London Review of Books*, vol 43, no 9. May 6, 2021. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n09/ferdinand-mount/ruthless-and-truthless>

Ng, Eve. “Unmasking Masculinity: Considering Gender, Science, and Nation in Responses to COVID-19.” *Feminist Studies*, vol 46, no 3. 2020. pp. 694-703.

“NYC Play Appears to Depict Assassination of Trump.” 2017. *Fox News Insider*.

<https://insider.foxnews.com/2017/06/11/donald-trump-julius-caesar-stabbed-death-women-minorities-shakespeare-central-park>

O'Brien, Cormac. "Following in Caryl Churchill's Footsteps: Rosemary Jenkinson's Spaces of Masculine Interrogation in 'The Bonfire'." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol 19, no 2. Fall, 2013. pp. 395-414.

Osborne, Jeff. 2008. "Constituting American Masculinity." *American Studies* 49(3/4): 111-132.

Pappas, Stephanie. 2019. "APA issues first-ever guidelines for practice with men and boys." *Monitor on Psychology* 50(1): 34.

Parker, Ashley. 2016. "Donald Trump on Why He Defended the Size of His Hands (and More)." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/03/04/donald-trump-on-why-he-defended-the-size-of-his-hands-and-more/>

Paulson, Michael and Sopan, Deb. "How Outrage Built Over a Shakespearean Depiction of Trump." *The New York Times*, 12 June, 2017.

Payne, Adam. "David Cameron says Boris Johnson backed Brexit to 'help his political career' and lied during the campaign." *Insider*, September 15, 2018.
<https://www.businessinsider.com/cameron-johnson-backed-brexit-to-further-career-lied-during-campaign-2019-9>

Pearce, Michael. *Black British Drama: A Transnational Story*. Routledge, 2017.

Perrault, Dale. *Ubu Rot*. 2018 <https://newplayexchange.org/plays/163043/ubu-rot>

Peterson, Michael. *Straight White Male: Performance Art Monologues*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Peterson, Sandy. *The Performance of American Contemporary Conservatism*. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2016. Dissertation.

Pew Research Center. "An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters."

August 9, 2018.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 2005.

“Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 17 March 2020.” *Gov.uk*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-17-march-2020>

Ramirez, Nikki McCann. “The Proud Boys Have Really Strict Rules About Jerking Off.” *Rolling*

Stone. January 23, 2023. [https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/proud-](https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/proud-boys-trial-rule-book-masturbation-ban-1234666317/?sub_action=logged_in)

[boys-trial-rule-book-masturbation-ban-1234666317/?sub_action=logged_in](https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/proud-boys-trial-rule-book-masturbation-ban-1234666317/?sub_action=logged_in)

Ranken, Jennifer and Waterson, Jim. “How Boris Johnson’s Brussels-bashing stories shaped

British politics.” *The Guardian*. July 14, 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/14/boris-johnson-brussels-bashing-stories-shaped-politics>

“Read Boris Johnson’s resignation speech.” *The New York Times*. July 7, 2022.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/world/europe/boris-johnson-resignation-speech.ht](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/world/europe/boris-johnson-resignation-speech.html)
ml

Robinson, Sally. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. Columbia University Press, 2000.

Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*.

Verso, 2007.

Roose, Joshua M. *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity, and the Populist Epoch*.

Routledge, 2020.

Roosevelt, Curtis. *Upstairs at the Roosevelt’s*. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

“Rory Stewart reads a letter from Eton about Boris Johnson’s conduct at school.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Letters Live, October 4, 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKC180Axx3A>

Rushdie, Salman. *Joseph Anton*. Random House, 2012.

Russell, Graham. 2018. “Brothers in nuclear arms? Trump defends Vladimir Putin and ‘funny’ Kim Jong-un.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/15/donald-trump-defends-vladimir-putin-funny-kim-jong-un-russia-north-korea>

Sanders, Anna and Richards, Dave. “The gendered dynamics of ‘partygate’: leadership and hypermasculinity at the centre of Johnson’s administration.” May 30, 2022.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/gendered-dynamics-partygate/>

Salter, Gregory. *Art and Masculinity in Post-War Britain: Reconstructing Home*. Bloomsbury, 2020.

Salvanto, Anthony. 2016. “Poll: Gender gap in views on Trump tape describing advances on women.” *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-gender-gap-in-views-on-trumps-2005-tape/>

Sanger, David, et al. “U.S. and Britain Plan to Announce Renewed Atlantic Charter.” *The New York Times*, June 10, 2021.

Sargent, Greg. 2018. “President Trump and the war on men.” *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2018/10/02/donald-trump-and-the-war-on-men/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cb56d46a1a5f

Sarkar, Ash. “How Andrew Tate build an army of lonely, angry men.” *GQ*. 15 August, 2022.

<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/andrew-tate-tiktok-fame-men-2022>

Savran, David. *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers; The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of*

- Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*. University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- Schenkann, Robert. *All the Way*. Grove Press, 2014.
- “See Kanye and Trump’s full White House meeting.” 2018. *CNN Politics*.
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2018/10/11/kanye-west-trump-white-house-meeting-full-vpx.cnn>
- “Sen. Hawley: Men are in crisis.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Fox News, 10 November 2021,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqkWJZTYnr8>
- Sexton, Jared. “Donald Trump’s Toxic Masculinity.” *The New York Times*, 13 October, 2016.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/opinion/donald-trumps-toxic-masculinity.html>
- Simpson, Ruth et al. *Gender, Class, and Occupation: Working Class Men Doing Dirty Work*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2016.
- “Sinews of Peace, 1946.” *America’s National Churchill Museum*,
<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html>.
 Accessed 20 February 2021.
- Sjoberg, Laura. “Feminism.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, eds R.A.W. Rhodes and Paul ‘t Hart. Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 71-82
- Smith, Allan. 2017. “A group of major pollsters just released an autopsy report to explain why the polls were such a disaster in 2016.” *Business Insider*.
<https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-hillary-clinton-why-polls-wrong-2017-5>
- Smith, David. “What Churchill said about Britain’s immigrants.” *The Guardian*. 5 August, 2007.
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/aug/05/race.past>
- Smith, Jamil. 2018. “The Kanye West Question: The enigmatic rapper’s conflicting ideologies

- may ultimately lead his fans to a fork in the road.” *Rolling Stone*.
- <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/the-kanye-west-question-630505/>
- Smith, Jeff. *The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fictions on the Page, on the Stage, Onscreen, and Online*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.
- Smith, Jessica. “Bulldozing Brexit: the role of masculinity in UK party leaders’ campaign imagery in 2019 UK General Election.” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol 31, no 4, 2021. pp. 470-487
- Sperling, Valerie. *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Stuever, Hank. 2020. “Showtime’s ‘The Comey Rule’ is replaying a nightmare while we’re still having it.” *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/tv/the-comey-rule-review/2020/09/08/0ef22132-eccd-11ea-ab4e-581edb849379_story.html
- Squirrell, Tim. 2017. “The evolution of ‘cuck’ shows that different far-right groups are learning the same language.” *The New Statesman*. <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/2017/08/evolution-cuck-shows-different-far-right-groups-are-learning-same-language>
- Stewart, Heather and Smith, David. “‘Opposites attract’: Theresa May signals strong relationship with Donald Trump.” *The Guardian*, 27 January, 2017.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/26/opposites-attract-theresa-may-signals-strong-relationship-with-trump>. Accessed 1 February, 2021.
- Sweeney, Brian N. 2014. “Masculine Status, Sexual Performance, and the Sexual Stigmatization of Women.” *Symbolic Interaction* 37(3): 369-390.
- Taylor, Ros. “Leave-voting men, Brexit, and the ‘crisis of masculinity’.” *The London School of*

Economics Blog, October 24, 2018. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/10/24/leave-voting-men-brexit-and-the-crisis-of-masculinity/>

Teh, Cheryl. “Dr. Oz is getting dragged on Twitter for saying his Democratic opponent John

Fetterman looks like he's ‘kicking authority in the balls’.” *Business Insider*. 28

September, 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.in/international/news/dr-oz-is-getting-dragged-on-twitter-for-saying-his-democratic-opponent-john-fetterman-looks-like-hes-kicking-authority-in-the-balls/articleshow/94505260.cms>

“The Chaos President Cold Open.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Saturday Night Live, 1 October 2017,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7e4vFMJmBIc>

“The Fox News GOP debate transcript, annotated.” *The Washington Post*, 3 March, 2016.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/03/the-fox-news-gop-debate-transcript-annotated/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cb5b11fd4243

“The new masculinity.” *The Economist*. 19 November, 2022.

“The O’Reilly Factor: FOX News June 16, 2015 5:01pm-5:20pm PDT.” *Internet Archive*.

https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_20150617_000100_The_OReilly_Factor/start/240/end/300

“Trump Sued by New York AG & Putin Threatens to Use Nukes.” *YouTube*, uploaded by The

Daily Show With Trevor Noah, 21 September 2022,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA_RrPz2IyI&t=334s

“Trump Tops Republic Pack By Wide Margin, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; But

Dems Trump Trump in General Election.” 2015. *Quinnipiac University Poll*.

<https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2264>

Vaughn, Justin S., and Michaelson, Stacy. “It’s a Man’s World: Masculinity in Pop Culture

- Portrayals of the President.” *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*. E-book. University Press of Kentucky, 2003.
- Walker, et al. 2018. “Strong Men, Caring Women: How Americans describe what society values (and doesn’t) in each gender.” *Pew Research Center*.
<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/interactives/strong-men-caring-women/>
- Walsh, Fintan. *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2010.
- Walsh, Lourdes. “How leaders like Boris Johnson took toxic masculinity in politics to terrifying new heights.” *The Independent*, 13 October, 2019.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/boris-johnson-brexit-politics-toxic-masculinity-corbyn-eu-a9153081.html>
- Ward, Fiona. “This new initiative aims to address toxic masculinity in boyhood.” *Glamour*. 10 November, 2022. <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/toxic-masculinity-in-boys-report-uk>
- Ward, M.R.M. *From Labouring to Learning: Working-Class, Education and De-Industrialization*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2015.
- Whittaker, Kathryn Ann. *Representing the ‘Crisis’ in Masculinity: British and North American Male Playwrights, 1900-2005*. University of Lancaster, 2009. Dissertation.
- Willer, Robb, et al. 2013. “Overdoing Gender: A Test of the Masculine Overcompensation Thesis.” *American Journal of Sociology* 118(4): 980-1022.
- Williams, Grant. *Hollow Men: Subordinate Masculinities in Contemporary American Drama*. University of Pittsburgh, 2013. Dissertation.
- Williams, Zoe. “Virility test: Boris’s press-up charm offensive falls flat.” *The Guardian*, 28 June,

2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/28/virility-test-boriss-press-up-charm-offensive-falls-flat>

Wilson, Dolly Smith. "Gender, Race and the Ideal Labour Force." *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity, and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain*. Eds. Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster. Routledge, 2008. pp. 89-104

Wilson, Jeffrey R. *Shakespeare and Trump*. Temple University Press, 2020.

Winterbottom, Michael, creator. *This England*. Sky Atlantic, 2022.

Witte, Griffe and Adam, Karla. "London Maybe Boris Johnson backs 'Brexit,' boosting anti-E.U. campaign." *The Washington Post*, February 21, 2016.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/londons-mayor-a-big-beast-of-british-politics-ready-to-make-a-call-on-brexit/2016/02/21/17108581-db19-458d-8834-ef4a639d8165_story.html

Wylie, Andrew. *Sex on Stage: Gender and Sexuality in Post-War British Theatre*. Intellect, 2009.

Yates, Candida. "Turning to Flirting: Politics and the Pleasures of Boris Johnson." *Rising East*, vol 2(1), no 2. 2010. <http://www.uel.ac.uk/risingeast/essays/2010-02-17.htm>

"YouGov Survey Report: Conservative Party Members." July, 2019.
https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/o3ysq0336y/InternalResults_190707_ConMembership_Entryism_w.pdf

"YouGov Survey Report: GB Adults." June, 2019.
https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/xxfl3ra00b/YouGov%20-%20Voting%20Test%20With%20Potential%20Conservative%20Leader%202.pdf

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*. Wayne State University Press, 2007.

Zakin, Emily. "Psychoanalytic Feminism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011.

Accessed 11 November, 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis/>