

The tension between
the powerful and the
powerless: political
manipulation in "al..."



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Oppressive norms of conformity that individuals are expected to adhere through political confinement from tyrannical legislators serve as a catalyst for societal conflict between the powerful and powerless. This political interference in individual's lives is explored in ' Barry Levinson's' Wag the Dog and in ' Kurt Vonnegut's' short story, All The King's Horses. Both composers depict the outcomes of oppressive political movements that damage the unity between social classes and the autonomy of the individual. This representation of people and politics is deliberately fashioned to persuade us to initiate active participation in politics by placing an emphasis on the ramifications of societal conflict by corrupt leaders. This ultimately demonstrates the diverse ideologies of the different social classes in society infringed by the strains established by political intervention.

People subjected to overbearing and restrictive political constructs rigidly enforcing oppressive expectations ultimately uncover independence through conflict; political or social. Levinson composed Wag the Dog as an appreciation to the faceless many who suffer under tyrants, contextually alluding to orthodox beliefs dictating the president's supremacy. By using idiom in " If the tail were smarter the tail would wag the dog", Levinson represents the citizens as subjects to manipulative powers established within a polyarchy whilst politicians individuality holds immense power validating their transgression of existing barriers through the potency of the dynamic political agenda, depriving the development of individual thought. Similarly as stated by ' Eleftheria Tabouli', " photographs of warfare have nothing but reproduced particular conceptions of war and not the war it really was", where " conceptions" are molded to align with perspective favoring corrupt

parties. Levinson takes advantage of the form, a film to highlight the strange phenomenon that a corrupt ' leader' is shrouded while strategists are imposed with the responsibility to fabricate a renewed reputation to ' distract public opinion'. Paradoxically the most powerful person in society is the most immature, the imbalance of power between the immature dictator and mature subjects leads to conflict, ultimately demonstrating that this power play of politics is the source of conflict.

Similarly, within his short story, Vonnegut reveals the role of people in politics through his representation of a network of responses from individuals under governing bodies. Through Colonel Kelly, who is represented as a metonym for the Government, Vonnegut encourages the reader to question politicians and their suitability as representatives of the people. This is evident in " of the lieutenant in those terms - no longer human, but a piece", where Vonnegut depicts politicians as belittling the freedom of citizens.

Vonnegut then represents the everyday citizens through Margaret. The use of asyndeton in " she had taken refuge in deaf, blind, unfeeling shock", is designed to typify the reaction of ordinary people to political news, suggesting that the ordinary citizen is incapable of any action of consequence due to their limited power. This complements the author's portrayal, as it encourages increased political engagement within readers through a deeper understanding of the detrimental effects that unregulated power can have on the society. Vonnegut, through his portrayal of political systems as a cause of grief, represents how abuse of power, and the absence of civic participation, can create a political context where the ordinary citizen is subject to the unreasonable demands of the tyrant much

as Mussolini made unreasonable demands of his soldiers when invading Abyssinia. This is further evident in Stephen Burts analysis, "that want to tell us so easily what to want, what to do, what to think", strengthening the idea that individuality and self-expression are inherently foregone and lost. Thus, it is clear that in his representation of people within *All The King's Horses*, 'Vonnegut' portrays the source of ideology's power as humanity's apathy, to provoke action in rejecting such systems of total control and lack of freedom.

In "Wag the Dog", Levinson warns about the destruction of autonomy when we cede too much control of our lives to the governing forces and allow ourselves to be reduced to the faceless individuals. Power is innately held within the spectrum of the names. The emotive "go to war to protect your way of life" creates an ominous atmosphere triggering defence mechanism against external and unbeknown forces where the individual's actions are predetermined by governing bodies implanting inclination. The reader gets a hint that the state has betrayed the people when the inquirer asks "what difference does it make if it's true?" which metaphorically represents political lies and deceit, resulting in the destruction of autonomy of both the society and its people. Transparency allows viewers to acknowledge governing bodies are known to the greatest cumulative power resides in the bottom half of the social hierarchy, the dramatic irony prevalent throughout the film works in effect with satire in the government's forces desire to leashing its citizens due to the fear or rebellion and deceiving them to obtain greater power. Levinson uses his form to reflect the consequent impossibility of the maintenance of autonomy. Thus the composer, warns against the

destruction of autonomy due to political authority, and urge the individual to challenge the hierarchical nature of governing forces.

Correspondingly, the representation of political ideologies in Vonnegut's *All the King's Horses* facilitates his representation of humanity as 'an incoherent profusion', as the composer warns the reader that following political doctrines inevitably leads to nihilism. By metaphorically depicting the Cold War, explored through the representation of conflicting ideologies, as 'a chess game', which like a battle, 'can very rarely be won ... without sacrifices,' the author persuades the reader of the ramifications of these political systems, manipulating the audience to share his view that the cause of war is essentially humanity's preoccupation with retribution and the impact of oppressive political regimes perception of citizens as dispensable – 'without sacrifices'. The citizens are like pawns that are thrown in the firing line and exploited to achieve the leader's political objectives. Vonnegut's representation of the human condition, as innately flawed, aims to provoke re-evaluations of this fallacious mindset towards the apparent instability of society under the burden of corrupt leaders. This is furthered in his representation of America and Russia's political motivations as simply viewing the other as 'the enemy', which, paired with the revelation that "no official State of war" exists, through Major Barzov's dialogue, condemning both Governments as being unable to justify the impact of their actions in championing their ideologies. Likewise, Auden's emotive language in 'Wag the Dog', convinces us that the destructive ramifications on life are not worth the defense of political ideals, especially when these ideologies destroy individual freedoms within society. Henceforth, both composers challenge

the individual to challenge authority and tyrannic regimes as further urged by Stephen Burt, “ He might just rise”, being a motif for responders to examine the issues facing society to reach a moderate conclusion and prevent social degradation, denying the proposition of revolution and absolute control.

Ultimately, all representations are inevitably acts of manipulation as composers seek to reshape our views. In Barry Levinson’s film, as well as Kurt Vonnegut’s short story, both composers’ seek to enlighten the responder to the dangers of political ideologies and their impact upon the division created within society into two distinct nationals, branded by their level of freedom and power. Both composers’ seek to represent the impact that power constructs on everyday citizens fulfilling their authorial intentions to encourage action and change through the importance of resistance to the loss of freedom and recognition of the consequences of war. As such the composers highlight the inherent tension between the powerful and powerless through encouraging a revolution for change by faceless individuals limited by the enforcement of control and freedom by despotic legislators.