

# The Phallocentric Playground

It can be difficult to test any given hypothesis. Thomas supposed that he would be a happier adult if he had a dog and a child. The dog drops him whenever anyone better comes in the room. The young son, observing him critically for the first time says, “Daddy has love handles”. Rona smiles, pleased with her child’s grasp of an advanced sentence formation. Thomas responds by adjusting his expression from disappointment to acceptance. To be generous, Thomas finds, is sometimes more than he can give.

Adults, more than children, have the capacity to be serious. Thomas’ friend Craig propositions, “Say the word ‘breasts’ without smiling.” Thomas glances surreptitiously at Craig to secure camaraderie. His friend holds his gaze firmly in a professional manner. Thomas formalizes his posture. He then looks to the side nervously, suppressing the high-pitched ill laugh that threatens to spill out like sick. He shakes his head sadly. Refusal to say ‘breasts’, his friend mentally jots down.

Craig of course can say ‘breasts’ without thinking. Yet this aptitude to speak with a level of authority and without pause, can, in certain situations, count against. For instance his girlfriend Lee asked, “Why do you watch porn?” “It gives me pleasure”, Craig answers, not missing a beat. Lee, as a consequence, feels removed from Craig and his candour. Craig sleeps on his side. Lee has taken to staring at his back in bed for prolonged periods. With his head out of sight, the back’s broad expanse becomes an unfathomable plane. She cannot say that she understands him. Yet Craig is honest and can listen. He must learn to internalise his external monologue.

“Breasts”, thinks Thomas levelly and therefore, he feels, successfully, on glimpsing a high street chain sex shop. “Boring”, thinks the sex shop security guard, who stands with his back to this adult playground, staring through the shop window and far away. Butt plugs, dildos, crotch-less panties and furry handcuffs, surely what could be better? Seeing the people who buy them of course. The security guard had assumed he was in business the day he secured this position. Yet he learns there are still duties within the pleasure zone. The daily grind of halting those desiring free love and removing unpaid items from their persons takes away the fun.

Thomas and Rona’s duty is to love and nurture their child, through help, encouragement and the support of serious endeavour. Thomas chooses to emphasise his own hobbies in order to demonstrate to the child the ways in which we construct ourselves as individuals over time. Perhaps their child in later development will take violin lessons. Yet mastering the strings and the bow is difficult. Perhaps the child will stop being the child who plays the violin. The violin will no longer be needed.

“I want fun”, says their son. 30% of parents are bored when playing with their children. Thomas and Rona refuse to be this statistic. They realise that play allows us to do things beyond what we can do in ‘real’ life – we can pretend. The child’s favourite place is the local play park, a place they visit again and again. Let any risk be softened by woodchip, reasoned adult intervention and springy tarmac. “Isn’t this fun?” shouts their child. “That’s right”, they answer brightly.

Thomas takes turns with the other adults to crouch at the bottom of the slide, all catching their children who shriek with glee. Into their arms, then out of their arms. As his son runs away, Thomas stands to his full height, only to see, from this elevation, that the length of the chute is secured by two large balls at either side of its base thus rendering it into a lazy phallus. Thomas quickly glances at Rona’s face to perceive if she shares in his unwanted recognition. Her calmness suggests that there is no problem. “I am sometimes cold towards my spouse”, he thinks. He must mention this to Craig. He turns and grasps her hand and she smiles.

The time that the summer has left is short. At the boundaries of the phallocentric playground, the purple flowers of the willow herb march up the stems of these once tumescent plants. This space, once waste ground is now a happy ground, replete with swings and seesaws. It used to be a cruising ground where the Canadian fireweed spat seeds out over clandestine couplings.