Wheaton Writing

A Journal of Academic Writing

Wheaton College

2021-2022

Sponsored by the Department of English, the First Year Writing Program and the Writing Center

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Jameson First-Year Writing Award Winner

Jameson Critical Essay Contest Winner

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First-Year Writing equips students to grow as writers in the Wheaton College classroom and beyond. The course is designed to prepare students to write effectively in a variety of social contexts and to improve student learning and performance in many other facets of their undergraduate education. To better address this variety of contexts, students practice communicating their research in genres beyond the traditional research paper. Winners of the Jameson First-Year Writing Award are chosen through a two-step process: instructors nominate students' papers from their classes, and then a panel of judges selects the best papers from the nominations. The following paper received the Jameson First-Year Writing award in 2021-2022.

How Biased Media Affects the Modern American Political Climate

JOSHUA PIAZZA

MANY PEOPLE HAVE LEARNED one of the most important unwritten rules of public discourse: never bring up politics, ever. As fruitful as a healthy conversation about political opinions and propositions might be, many political discussions quickly turn to poor-spirited debates and, occasionally, outright brawls. However, these specific cases beg a certain question: why do people react in this manner? Part of the answer is how common news sources, such as television and news outlets and mainstream social media, present the information in a violating manner that breaches a certain code of conduct—that of civility. Statements that have been made to stir people up using controversial language often clash with the standards of civility, primarily centered around politeness. Specifically, the biases shown by both talk show hosts and columnists contribute to lighting the fires that lead to political division. The issue with the use of incivility in news content is how it discourages civilians from paying attention to current events and hurts the credibility of news organizations. Because of this, Americans are dissatisfied with the status quo and desire more civil approaches of reporting compared to the current climate littered with all types of uncivil rhetoric.

Incivility among news broadcasting companies generates a counterproductive political divide, hence the need for civil media reform. The concept of civility and incivility is much more dynamic and multidimensional than just the plane of politeness. Incivility, particularly, can present itself on either a more public level or a more personal level. Public-level incivility refers to a lack of reciprocity and is tied closely to democratic governance, such as policy makers viewing opinions other than their own as illegitimate and thus refusing to work with those who hold those thoughts (Muddiman et al. 818). On the other hand, personal-level incivility encompasses the concept of politeness violation and uses threats to attack an opponent's character (817). One study sought to document which specific forms of verbal incivility, coined under outrage, were used across news media along with their frequencies. The five most common forms, which had an average usage of 10% or greater, consisted of mockery, misrepresentative exaggeration, insulting language, name-calling, and ideologically extremizing language (Sobieraj and Berry 33). The same study also displayed that both American partisan political views use this type of language, although some types were more popular with conservatives than liberals and vice versa (28-29).

Identifying and understanding these specific kinds of incivility provide the foundations needed to understand some of the possible issues with opting to use this kind of speech. Each one of the top five forms of personal-level incivility can be expected to drive people away; nobody enjoys being mocked, insulted, offended, or misrepresented. Moreover, this rhetoric encourages silencing opposing partisan

viewpoints. Listening only to a perspective one agrees with results in avoiding receiving insults as well as a collective consensus about who should be insulted (specifically, the opposing political party) with no checks and balances. Embracing this toxic behavior, no matter one's partisan leaning, would further provoke the use of three overarching kinds of bias: partisan bias, affective bias, and informational bias.

Partisan bias is surprisingly regarded as the least problematic bias of the three, despite Americans complaining about it the most. Doris A. Graber and Johanna Dunaway explain that "implications of partisan news are mixed. Partisan slant in news has not always been viewed negatively" (353). These statements imply that some partisan prejudice enhances journalism rather than hindering it. Moreover, news stories with partisan predisposition were shown to be overall more substantive than more objective writing (353). The presence of partisan bias in modern media helps mask the more prevalent effects of the other two.

Affective bias seeks to draw an emotional response from the recipient of the news by casting current events in a more cynical or negative tone. Graber and Dunaway summarize two trends concerning affective bias. The first is that modern media produces "more news content critical of government, politicians, and their policies" rather than "stories focusing on substantive issues" (346), implying that coverage of politics tends to focus more on the people involved instead of the underlying issues that provoked the situation. The second is that the tone of political news content is more frequently negative and skeptical (346). These two trends ultimately attempt to condition an audience to think in a particular manner in order to trigger more visceral responses to future negative news about the opposition.

Informational bias is defined by Graber and Dunaway as "removing important information, context, and perspectives from the news" and can be split up into four separate categories: personalization, dramatization, fragmentation, and authority-disorder bias (350). Personalization occurs when a story is taken and twisted in a manner that emphasizes the elements more appealing to human interest rather than the actual politics being debated. Dramatization often seeks to exaggerate a news story by removing contextual details describing a situation or issue. Fragmentation results when connected stories are selectively isolated from each other, resulting in an undermining of the public's understanding of the overarching problem. Finally, the authority-disorder bias questions a leader's capacity to minimize or control chaos should a political event go awry or something like a natural disaster occur (350-52). All four of these categories intend to shepherd consumers' thoughts in the direction the journalist desires. Collectively, these forms of bias and outrage influence how Americans view issues and select their individual news sources.

Despite the disproportionate amount of negative and uncivil news, studies show that people prefer civil journalism. Ashley Muddiman et al. conducted research that focused on three sets of competing hypotheses addressing this issue. The first was designed to test whether civil or uncivil online news articles prompted more interaction with users. The second was designed to test whether civil news or uncivil news featuring both public- and personal-level incivility prompted more interaction with users. And the third was designed to test how users selected the articles they did—whether it was a violation of expectations or a calculated response to out-group incivility (819-21). They found that civil online news articles generated the

most interaction, measured by the number of clicks. These findings yield "civil" as the first supported hypothesis and "civil more than both public- and personal-level incivility" as the second supported hypothesis (823-24). They also found that calculated responses to out-group bias dictated users' decision making rather than violation of expectations, yielding "calculated response to out-group incivility" as the third supported hypothesis (828-29). These results exhibit that people gravitate towards more civil writing when given the opportunity. If this is the case, why is negativity and incivility so common in modern media?

Negativity and incivility are so prominent for two reasons. The first reason is the difference between print and video content. Muddiman et al. performed their experiment strictly with selected written news articles and not televised news (818). The second reason is that incivility sells. When Diana C. Mutz conducted a study comparing civil versions of a program with uncivil versions of the same program, the result was that "the uncivil versions of the program were consistently perceived as more entertaining by a significant margin" (42). Put simply, incivility catches and holds attention. As a result, news stations use incivility as a critical strategic piece to keep viewers entertained by information that would otherwise bore them (42).

This continuous use of incivility through bias and outrage ultimately comes with a price for news organizations. Despite its uncanny ability to redirect people's attention exceptionally well, incivility also causes viewers and, in some cases, journalists to become dissatisfied and reduce their trust with the media source over time (Graber and Dunaway 358). According to Graber and Dunaway, "Journalists also complain that news is becoming less objective and more ideological, contrary to the ideal that news should be as objective as possible and commentary should appear only on the editorial pages" (359). This highlights the fact that even journalists are unsatisfied with the current state of news production and desire changes to promote civility within public news broadcasting. In regard to the public, significant portions of the audience believe journalists miscommunicate stories and fail to empathize with the people in stories that they share (359). Essentially, the public sees the entire scheme as a cash grab. On top of poor perception of the journalists themselves, "negative and vitriolic news coverage, partisan coverage, and politicians' attacks on the media contribute to public distrust of the news" (360). Not only are news companies disliked, their audiences also doubt the verity of their content.

If this is the case, why do news corporations neglect to modify their broadcast strategies? Critics of civil news reform might claim that reform is unnecessary. They claim that keeping the news as it is still attracts viewers, arguing that more instances of incivility provide a greater quantity of opportunities to hook those paying attention. Some studies also show that "[t]he effect of political incivility on political participation . . . is practically non-existent" (Riet and Stekelenburg 219). If there exists no correlation between the presence of incivility in the news and candidates' polling numbers, then the current system is not actually broken and should be left alone. However, what these critics fail to consider is that the news is the primary method used to obtain political information for many Americans. Those who ignore the news become ignorant, and those who heed biased news become biased themselves, creating a great political schism. Thus, civil reform is indeed necessary in modern news broadcasting and journalism.

The media can salvage its reputation by diminishing the use of currently used

incivility tactics, replacing them with more civil content; civility in news attracts audiences. Online catalogs and published articles can adapt to this style easily, but the shift requires more effort from television programs—and understandably so, considering some incivility is necessary to stimulate viewers. Despite this, these shows do not need as much incivility as they currently take advantage of, which would enable an intriguing, dynamic flow between entertaining arguments and civil conversations. If producers believe the reduced incivility alone would fail to regain viewers' attention, they should consider using other visual stimulators like the South Korean news networks did when covering their 2012 presidential election. Mutz explains that "the Seoul Broadcasting System . . . ran animations based on popular movies and sporting events to show who was surging ahead or falling behind" (214). Providing a novel approach to displaying information or storytelling while minimizing pointless bickering is what the media needs to help rescue their reputation.

Americans now crave news content presented in civil manners amid the current sea of uncivil reports. Americans should not have to dig for honest, civil news—rather, it should be mainstream. Instead, news rooms dump substantial quantities of uncivil language into their stories since civil alternatives require too much searching to discover. Televised media may attempt to defend itself by claiming that incivility is crucial to increasing viewership, despite the fact that numerous mass media companies lose viewers regularly. Scientific evidence shows that Americans tend to choose civil news stories over uncivil ones, implying that Americans shun news content compliant with the uncivil status quo. News organizations must see that continuing to produce uncivil news will ultimately hurt both their integrity and finances. Alternatively, seeing creative, civil news media reform would generate a reversal of recent effects—an increase in satisfaction, an increase in trust, and an increase in viewership.

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Jameson Critical Essay Contest Winner

The Jameson Critical Essay Contest awards prizes to outstanding undergraduate academic essays that are written from a distinctly Christian perspective. Submissions are accepted from students in all academic divisions. Faculty judges selected the following essay for the Jameson Critical Essay award in 2021-2022.

The Impotence of God: Theodicy in "The Town-Ho's Story" of *Moby-Dick*

DANIEL REES

The first time that the reader experiences the eponymous White Whale's violence in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is curiously not through any direct means, but "by a circumstance of the Town-Ho's story, which seemed obscurely to involve with the whale some wondrous, inverted visitation of one of those so-called judgements of God which at times are said to overtake some men" (Melville 240). This description of the story as circumstantial, obscure, and inverted makes the story's function in *Moby-Dick* anything but clear. Critics have long puzzled over meaning of this chapter, with Sherman Paul opening the discussion by arguing that it is an allegory of Christian justice and democracy, reading Steelkilt and Radney as representatives of good and evil respectively, resulting in an interpretation of the novel where Radney is destroyed when he rejects Christian democratic ideals. Don Geiger disagrees, positing that the chapter is an inversion of a Christian allegory with Steelkilt as an "angry Christ" (468), resulting in his interpretation of the book as Melville's frustrations with "a tyrannous God" (471). William Spofford and Edward Rose both disagree with the allegorical framework of Paul and Geiger by arguing that neither Radney or Steelkilt is solely at fault; Spofford first articulates that Steelkilt is not a Christ figure, and Rose builds upon this to more fully articulate the ambiguities of the story.

However, these arguments do not synthesize the ambiguities with the themes of justice as future critics do, resulting in incomplete interpretations. Allen Austin, Marcia Reddick, John Cyril Barton, and Philip Egan provide more holistic interpretations, with Austin reading Steelkilt as Satan, the captain and the whale as God, and Radney as Christ, therefore arguing that God does not punish Satan but instead kills his own son. Reddick finds that both Steelkilt and Radney are evil and that the whale taking only Radney is fundamentally unjust, noting that "Melville's view of life is too dark" for "simple stories of good and evil." Egan's emphasis on the rehearsal of Ishmael provides an answer to why the story is narrated in such a strange, twice-told manner. Finally, Barton's focus on Lima and the Spanish inquisition causes him to read the story as "apocrypha" (176). However, there has been inadequate synthesis of these themes in the action of the whale and what effects it has on the story. The story is neither an allegory of Christian justice nor purely ambiguous. Instead, the characterizations and ultimate act of the whale's divine punishment of Radney, but not Steelkilt, present an inverted theodicy as an expression of *Moby-Dick*'s frustration with the seeming injustice of God.

Ishmael's role in the story as the narrator has been something that has long puzzled critics of "The Town-Ho's Story," but most who address it agree that its primary function is to question the story's reliability. However, it does more than this alerting the reader to the religious and spiritual elements

of the narrative to come. As Egan notes, "The story is neither a simple repetition of a legend, nor a simple piece of invention, nor even a combination of the two. We must suppose that Ishmael is synthesizing a tale from at least two sources and is further enriching it with his own imagination" (342). Egan argues that Ishmael's audience, their interruptions, and Ishmael's swearing on the Bible are all features that define his narration (339). The audience also defines the narration, as they frequently interrupt and cause Ishmael to digress about features of the text which otherwise would be relatively insignificant, such as his description of Lakemen and Canallers that complicates good and evil in the story. Ishmael conveys it in Lima "to a lounging circle of my Spanish friends, one saint's eve" (Melville 240), and this setting and audience heighten the religious tones of the frame narrative. The audience is representative of Christian decadence, and the description of their passive posture foreshadows the inaction of God in the coming narrative. Additionally, the setting of Lima on a saint's eve, a city described later as having "churches more plentiful than billiard-tables, and for ever open – and 'Corrupt as Lima'" (Melville 247), sets up the theme of spiritual perversion. A city that should be a bastion of holiness with its intense Catholicism and high churches-to-billiard-tables ratio is as corrupt as anywhere else, providing a commentary that devotion to God has not improved this city. The unbelieving audience in a religiously corrupt city sets up the passage as being inherently tied to impotent spirituality, and the corruption of this city foreshadows the corrupt nature of God's justice in the story.

Furthermore, Ishmael's final assertion on the Bible contributes to the theological elements of the narration, but also its ambiguity. A key feature of this passage is its similarity to the Peruvian inquisition (Barton 165). Don Sebastian "quietly" inquires of Ishmael whether he is finished, and receiving an affirmative answer, presents an accusation against him that questions the story's truth in a "suit" (Melville 256). The gravity of Don Sebastian's quiet tone combined with the legal language put Ishmael in a scenario not unlike an inquisition. This inquisitorial nature is carried further when one of the company references "Auto-da-Fés" (Melville 256), or burnings of heretics. Ishmael cares not for the increasing danger, humorously requesting the "largest sized Evangelists you can" (Melville 256). He finds it comical to imply that Catholics give more credence to symbols based on dimensions rather than substance, and this cavalier attitude for religious norms raises the question of whether or not his oath is seriously intended. Though the request may not be Ishmael's humor, it is at least Melville's irony, for there is no subtlety in the request that is dripping with satirization of Catholic rituals. Additionally, the use of "Evangelists" instead of the entire Bible clues the audience into the idea that the preceding passage was related to the Gospels and justifies scrutinizing the narrative for caricatures of spiritual beings, specifically Christ figures. His request to bring the priest, which is completely unnecessary to the oath, adds to the satire of Catholicism; it is "an elaborate inside joke—an attack upon Catholic authority and a quest for truth through inquisitorial practices" (Barton 165). These elements make his subsequent oath and the truth of his narrative completely impotent as a method of finding truth in the story. The inquisition of the Dons highlights the perils of Christian justice while presenting a legitimate inquiry into truth, but Ishmael's answer provides no certitude to their inquiry. This ambiguous ending to the chapter provides Ishmael with a way of

providing no answer as his answer to the theodicy he presented through Moby-Dick's singular judgement of Radney.

Within Ishmael's story, the characterization of Steelkilt and the captain provides a second layer of conflict between a Satan figure and a God figure, respectively. Steelkilt appears to be a Christ figure, with Geiger and Paul reading him as such, but he is more accurately a Satan figure (Austin 237), the "cozening fiend" (Melville 244) that possesses Radney (Spofford 268). Steelkilt contains elements of Christ, primarily the description of his hanging between two crucified thieves, but even while he is crucified, he hisses and writhes, reminiscent of snake-like motion (Melville 251). He refuses to be flogged (248), is unwilling to turn the other cheek when touched by Radney's hammer (246), and says, "I come in peace (255)," contrasting Christ's claim that, "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (*King James Version*, Matthew 10.34). These features do not align him with Christ, but rather serve to create an ironic reversal, for Steelkilt's character shares more in common with a Miltonic Satan: "Heroic stature, enormous pride, indomitable determination, and fiery hatred" (Austin 238). There are even Satanic elements to his character, such as being locked in the hold with one third of the crew and hissing demonically (Austin 240). Instead, Steelkilt is best read as a Satan figure; he is "a sort of devil indeed" (Melville 242), and the elements of Christ that he does possess exist so that they may be reversed into Satan's features.

On the other hand, the captain represents a powerless God in the allegorical framework, as Austin notes by pointing to the exile of Satan into the hold with one-third of the crew and drawing upon the role of the captain in Melville's broader work (238). Yet the captain, after the initial act of banishment, has no power over Steelkilt and can only punish the followers who betray Steelkilt (Melville 251). Steelkilt gains complete power over this iteration of God, even inverting God's week by commanding him to rest on an island for six days before resuming on the seventh (Melville 255). This God has no power to punish the mutineer, and this represents a total failure on God's behalf to even attempt justice against Satan. This view of God supports reading this chapter as an inversion of the theodicy of Job, a portion of the Bible which Melville draws heavily upon in *Moby-Dick*. This captain has no control over the leviathan of Moby Dick, he has no power as Satan usurps his kingdom, and Steelkilt, as Satan, even has the power to threaten God with divine justice in the form of lightning (Melville 255). The God represented in the character of the captain is not a God of love, but a God of leniency toward the one most deserving of punishment, Satan.

Radney, the first mate, represents a sort of Christ figure, but it is unclear whether he represents Christ or inverts Him. Reddick reads him as an inverted Christ figure, referencing Radney's whipping of Steelkilt (Melville 252), contrary to Christ's reception of whippings, and the mate's metaphorical spitting on Steelkilt's face (Melville 244-245), when Christ is the one expectorated upon in scripture (Reddick). More than this, he has bones broken (Melville 246). Contrary to this, however, he has a resurrection before punishing Steelkilt, seeming to give him moral authority despite his sins. Radney emerges from his berth in the morning, where he has lain since his wound, wrapped in bandages, similar to Christ's or Lazarus' resurrection, and proceeds to punish Steelkilt in the impotent captain's stead (Melville 250-251). The whipping is hesitant and long overdue, but the Satan figure gets punished for his rebellion, representing a possibility that God, at least in the form of Christ, is just.

However, there is a flaw in the punishment, which for mutiny should be death. Christ merely whips Satan, and then allows him to go free, and therefore the punishment does not fit the crime. Though some justice has been given, it is not enough, and this will come back to haunt both the captain and Radney. Ultimately, it matters little whether Radney's character is an inverted or traditional Christ figure, as he fails in the same way that his Father, the captain, does. This presents them both as equally culpable for Steelkilt's actions which follow. Both have the moral authority to punish Steelkilt, but the captain is too lenient and the Christ too merciful. As Austin writes, "The captain's action is altogether without explanation—The mystery Melville himself cannot fathom, for it represents God's permissiveness towards Satan, an act beyond human comprehension" (241). The theodicy that this reading of the characters in "The Town-Ho's Story" presents is a challenge to the message of the Evangelists: If Christ really died and rose again to conquer evil, then why does Satan still prosper and dominate the earth with evil? For Satan is still "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it," (Job 1.7), and Ishmael has "seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney" (Melville 257).

This analysis of the allegorical symbolism of each character as a different spiritual entity sets up the final and most significant passage of the story: the actions of Moby Dick, a second representative of God, which represent the ultimate inversion of justice. Radney is taken by the whale while no one else is harmed, a "strange fatality" that occurs "as if mapped out before the world itself was charted" (Melville 254). Radney's character is littered with predestination language, being described as "the predestined mate" (Melville 245) right before he touches Steelkilt's cheek, as well as "doomed and made mad" (Melville 242) in his initial characterization by Ishmael. The mate has been predestined to an unjust end by God while the mutineer escapes this divine punishment, creating the ultimate reversal of justice. Complicating this injustice is the fact that Moby-Dick acts as the representative of the God of damnation in this passage. The critics unanimously argue that the whale functions as a divine agent, and all of the other spiritual parallels seem to support reading the whale as another divine figure, but as Rose notes, "Not only could Melville not believe in any conception of God, Calvinistic or Emersonian, he could not believe in belief" (541). The story itself is described as an "inverted visitation of one of those so called judgements of God which at times are said to overtake some men" (Melville 240). This heavily qualified statement throws all certainty out the window and leaves the audience to decide whether the actions of the whale in the story are from God or not. Therefore, it is possible that the whale merely represents the cruelty of nature, just as there is a possibility of Christ being just. However, considering Moby Dick's divine symbolism which has already been presented in "The Whiteness of the Whale," it is also possible that it is a representative of God, and specifically a God that damns the undeserving to Hell. The captain is the God of leniency, a twist on the traditional description of the Deity as the God of love, and in the same way this vengeful God taints the justice of God. Radney's shirt is seen caught in the "teeth that had destroyed him" (Melville 254-255), similar to descriptions of Hell, an abyss, which the whale resides in, with "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13.50). This God of damnation has the power and authority to punish Satan, but instead kills his own son, a twist on the positive sacrifice represented by the Gospels. This is the God who damns sinners to eternal torment in Hell, descending with

Radney into the abyss just as Christ is described as descending into Hell in the Apostle's Creed, yet in this instance it is because Radney has been condemned. No reason is given for why Steelkilt is spared, just as no reason is given for the captain's inability to punish Steelkilt, and this moment presents a frustrated theodicy that cannot account for how God does not punish the guilty and damns those that seem innocent.

As a result of the God of leniency and the God of damnation's inability to punish Steelkilt's evil, his continuing life becomes more and more corrupt. He convinces almost the entire crew to mutiny with him, humiliating the captain and escaping justice with finality, even inverting God's week. This final act represents Satan's total hegemony over God's will, thus representing the final inversion of the story of Job in this chapter. In Job, it is clear that God is in control for the entire book, but in "The Town-Ho's Story," it is clear that Satan is the one with the authority. It presents a reversal of the theodicy of Job, where at the end of the story God and evil are not fully reconciled, but it is clear that God has the supreme power to allow evil to happen even if it seems contradictory. In "The Town-Ho's Story," God allows evil because He chooses for unknown reasons not to stop it, and the guilty go unpunished. Yet the resurrected Radney's whipping of Steelkilt presents a possibility for justice, and the whale's ambiguously divine nature forecloses strong conclusions. Thus, the theodicy, though close to reaching a guilty verdict, presents a hung jury to the reader and leaves them to find their own meaning in the seeming evil in the nature of God.

The Town-Ho's theodicy is frustrated, convoluted, and ambiguous, presenting great frustration for Christian and atheist alike, but ultimately the point which this chapter and Moby-Dick make about life is that despite Ishmael's assertion, "Surely all this is not without meaning" (Melville 26), it is impossible to determine the nature of God's justice though it be searched for with the monomania of Ahab. With this futility in mind, perhaps swearing on the Bible is the solution to this lack of clarity regarding knowledge of God's justice. Ishmael swears that a story that provides no answers and told to him by a representation of Satan is absolutely true, allowing the book to laugh at the hope of solving any of its conundrums of justice and meaning.

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The E. Beatrice Batson Shakespeare Essay Contest Winner

This essay contest is sponsored by the E. Beatrice Batson Shakespeare Society to recognize outstanding research papers about Shakespeare and Christianity written by Wheaton College undergraduates.

Ideal Kingship in Shakespeare's Henry V

KATHRYN RYKEN

THE FIRST TIME JOHN Dover Wilson saw Shakespeare's *Henry V* performed, in the fall of 1914 while tensions were brewing between England and Germany, it was enlightened to him as a story relevant to his own situation in history.[1] The insurmountable odds stacked against the English as they faced French troops at Agincourt manifested the same boiling-up of conflict experienced by the English in the second decade of the 20th century, and Shakespeare's play offered answers to the questions floating through the minds of many Englishmen approaching the First World War. What sort of person can bring an army to conquer such an insurmountable odds? Who will step up to lead and how will they do so? In *Henry V*, Wilson saw Henry as Shakespeare's argument of the ideal king in the already beloved historical King Henry, the perfect leader who can answer such questions in the face of certain danger. The trends of contemporary thought stand in opposition to this admiring gaze towards Henry, arguing that despite Shakespeare's attempts to assert him as a good king, he cannot abandon Henry's irresponsible use of military force, holy facade, feigned humility, needless brutality, and so on.[2] These arguments, however, do not grant the complexity of the argument Shakespeare is crafting in the play nearly as much credit as it deserves. Shakespeare's establishment of Henry as "the mirror of all Christian kings" (2.0.6) borrows from the epic tradition and external narratival supports to argue that ideal kingship emphasizes humanity as Henry is shown as most clearly human in the most crucial moments of the play.

From the opening plea of the Chorus for a "muse of fire" (1.0.1) to illuminate the play and cause it to "ascend the brightest heaven of invention" (1.0.2), Shakespeare invokes the epic tradition to establish the historical Henry V as the heroic and idealized king in the imagination of his Elizabethan audience. The Chorus's framing of the play is a quintessential epic convention which serves to preserve the familiar historical facts of the story[3] for the audience while bearing the epical tone throughout the play. Their call for "a muse of fire" to divinely inspire the play is reminiscent of Homer's opening "Tell me, O muse"[4] or "Sing, O goddess."[5] Their repeated requests for the audience "kindly to judge" (1.0.35) any inaccuracy or inadequacy that the play might have in its attempt to portray a story of such great importance are also epic in nature. Structurally, the play represents the narrative

[1] Dover Wilson, John. "Introduction." King Henry V. 1947.

[2] McCloskey, John C. "The Mirror of All Christian Kings." The Shakespeare Association Bulletin 19, no. 1 (1944): 36–40.

[3] Shakespeare, William, and J. H. Walter. *King Henry V.* London ;: Routledge, 1988.

[4] Homer., Samuel Butler, and Louise Ropes Loomis. *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York: Published for the Classics Club by W.J. Black, 1944.

[5] Homer., Samuel Butler, and Louise Ropes Loomis. *The Iliad of Homer*. New York: Published for the Classics Club by W.J. Black, 1942.

of an epic in its telling of a national hero at war who is favored by God with elevated style and impressive scale. Shakespeare borrows heavily from characteristics of epic poetry, including the beginning invocation to the muse as well as the glorification of warriors, the challenges and insults of war, its conclusion with the winning of Princess' Katherine's hand in marriage. Even the use of the epithet "the warlike Harry" (1.0.5)[6] as the first introduction of Henry is epic in nature by recreating the epic voice's naming of "the swift-footed Achilles" and so on. Each of these elements builds towards the overall impression that Shakespeare is presenting his own epic, rather than another drama, tragedy, or a typical historical play. This use of the epic tradition demonstrates Shakespeare's authority as a truly great writer, belonging in the company of Homer, Ovid, Virgil, and Dante while contributing to the case he will build for Henry as a hero. Thus, in Shakespeare's epic, Henry fills the role of the hero, placing him alongside Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas as a truly great man. These strategies support Henry as the ideal king from within the play.

The external situation of the play within Shakespeare's other works contributes to the satisfaction of Henry as the ideal king both in the narrative arch of Shakespeare's historical plays about English kings and through the story of Henry's life. As the conclusion of the second tetralogy, *Henry V* stands opposite of *Richard II*, which tells the story of the ill-fated reign of Richard II whose poor leadership saw him rely heavily on his divine right to the throne to establish his authority. His undoing was at the hand of his assumptions of kingship, that his kingship was due him by divine and hereditary right. *1* and *2 Henry IV* tell of Henry Bolingbroke's illegitimate claim of the crown. With the character arch of Hal after his introduction in *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare lays more groundwork to build up the audience's anticipation to witness the misguided youth Hal become Henry V, the hero with whom they were already familiarized. They loved the charisma of Prince Hal and now long to see him come into his own. From the lovable rascal to the confident king who fulfills the presupposed plot of his victory at Agincourt, the audience knew the future ahead of the misfit and loved him all the more for having witnessed his growth throughout the journey. Once he has become King Henry, his kingship in *Henry V* serves as the good king against whom Richard II is measured.[7] The play itself finalizes the tetralogy and the character of Henry rises to fill the void of chaos with orderly kingship, to provide good leadership where Richard's reign was left wanting.

Neither the internal support of Henry as Shakespeare's epic hero nor the external establishment of Henry's leadership as the longed-for order of ideal kingship, however, are complete without a certain degree of fortitude proved by Henry's leadership itself. Unless Henry's character is able to hold their weight, these structures will crumble, and run the risk of disappointing an audience anticipating seeing their national hero step up to the throne. Critics have moved to propose a different view of Henry in the play, though, as a figment of over-glorified propaganda who is not held responsible for the bloody details of his kingship. In these readings, "the mirror of all Christian kings" is a false facade that obscures the messier parts of Henry's character. They capitalize on moments such as his threatening speech to Harfleur, his

[6] Berry, Edward I. "'True Things and Mock'ries': Epic and History in 'Henry V.'" Journal of English and Germanic Philology 78, no. 1 (1979): 1–16.

[7] Thayer, C. G. (Calvin Graham). *Shakespearean Politics : Government and Misgovernment in the Great Histories*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983.

command to kill French prisoners during the battle at Agincourt, and his unnecessary efforts to win over Princess Katherine to assert Henry as "a savage barbarian unrestrained by Christian ethics in his ruthless pursuit of victory" (37)[8] and emphasize the characteristics of Henry that reflect Machiavellian ideals, most notably deception and ruthlessness.[9] These interpretations, however, do not give due credit to the complex image of an ideal king that Shakespeare is proposing.

Henry is engagingly realistic as a character, largely due to the ways that he is realistically complex. In his "Preface to Shakespeare," Samuel Johnson wrote: "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion" (413-414).[10] In his hearty charisma, intensity, even in his moments of brutality, Henry is compelling as a character because he has significant depth. Part of this complexity is due to Shakespeare's incorporation of Machiavellian traits into Henry's character, as critics are correct to point out. Henry's dealings with the traitors in the second scene of Act 2 exemplify both Machiavellian deception and ruthlessness. The Chorus's prologue to the act provides the audience with the dramatic context beforehand; they enter the scene with the foreknowledge that Cambridge, Masham, and Northumberland have "confirmed conspiracy with fearful France" (2.0.27) for money, and Henry is likewise aware of their treachery. He carefully lays his trap for the traitors, posing the situation of a man who disparages the king, carefully using the royal "we" to invoke the significance of the king's position for England, and baiting them to respond to his apparent extension of mercy to the offender. Upon their insistence that he is too merciful, Henry presents his accusations of his three advisers and launches into a diatribe against their treachery. This psychologically deceptive game of cat and mouse appears as a flash of wrath from the idealized king Shakespeare had been so careful to present.[11] In his cruelty, Henry displays both Machiavellian qualities: the deception into which the three traitors fell and his ruthless condemnation of their crimes. His rhetorical brilliance is on full display in his colorful, varied language, a gift typically connected with Shakespeare's villains, not his heroes. His conviction of their crimes is thorough, slowly gaining momentum, leading to a full blast interrogation of their former virtues and landing in the slow presentation of the weight of their crime: "this revolt of thine, methinks, is like another fall of man" (2.2.139-40) and his deliverance of them over "to the answer of the law" (2.2.141). Henry's message here is that the natural consequences of their actions have arrived, not his personal wrath or cruelty. They have transgressed and they will answer for their own violation of English law. His response to them, although admittedly brutal, is justified by the severity of their conspiracy and the hypocrisy of their cries for mercy despite their previous counsel for Henry to withhold his mercy for the disparager in his trap. Even so, Henry tells them, "I will weep for thee" (2.2.137). These are some of the men closest to him in the world and Henry appropriately grieves for his friends,

[8] Ibid.

[9] Herbel, Jerry E. "Shakespeare's Machiavellian Moment: Discovering Ethics and Forming a Leadership Narrative in Henry V." Public Integrity 17, no. 3 (2015): 265–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2015.1033914.

[10] Johnson, Samuel, and Edmund Fuller. *Selections from The Lives of the English Poets & Preface to Shakespeare*. New York: Avon Books, 1965.

[11] Richmond, Hugh M. *Shakespeare's Political Plays*. New York: Random House, 1967.

revealing an interior self that wrestles with personal feeling and duty. His actions in this scene reveal Henry's caliber as a king, his confidence in making decisions, his high appraisal of the responsibility he bears. Shakespeare's incorporation of these ideas into the character of Henry gives him the opportunity to look accurately at Henry as a human being who is admittedly imperfect, while also making a claim about the complex nature of kingship. The idealized king is clearly portrayed as being cunning, ruthless, and deceptive. Shakespeare acknowledges these as being true of Henry, accepts them, and even makes the argument that these too make Henry a good king because he uses them to the good end of protecting England. Henry's ruthlessness does not simply coexist with his responsibility to uphold the law—it supports it. His Machiavellian qualities lay claim to his commitment to protect England, in spite of their negative connotations.

Shakespeare's evidence for the humanity of the ideal king culminates in the beginning of the fourth act, as Henry approaches the climactic battle at Agincourt. He spends the night before the anticipated battle walking among the camp, visiting with his soldiers and encouraging them, then sitting alone contemplating the situation he has found himself in. Henry's humanity is emphasized in this scene through his fundamental longing to live in right relationship with other human beings and with God.

The previous scene concludes with the French, bragging to one another of the coming battle they feel sure to win, calling the English "foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear" (3.7.37) and speculating at how "poor Harry" (3.8.18) must dread the dawn. These insults make the prologue to Act 4 more pivotal as it shifts to describe the English encampment. The Chorus, in their intermediary prologue, describes the eerie quiet and consuming darkness filled with tension as "the hum of either army stilly sounds" (4.0.5) while they await the rising of the sun. In this "foul womb of night" (4.0.4) the "poor condemnéd English" (4.0.22) sit by their fires contemplating the coming battle "like sacrifices" (4.0.23), while the Chorus shifts its attention to "the royal captain of this ruined band" (4.0.28) who walks through the camp to comfort and encourage the men with his presence. The first scene of the act then paradoxically rounds out Shakespeare's argument of the humanity of ideal kingship. It begins with Henry speaking to the dukes, admitting the gravity of their situation and asking to borrow Sir Erpingham's cloak. Henry puts it on in order to walk around the camp without revealing his identity to his men. Without ceremonial clothing to signify his kingship, Henry can be simply a man. He walks among his subjects as one of them, only enabled to do so through means of a deception. In contrast to other Machiavellian characters of Shakespeare's imagination, Henry appropriates the tools to his own purposes. Iago and Edmund deceive others for their own ambitions of power, Hamlet disguises his mental state in hopes of evading suspicion in his own plot to murder the king, but Henry uses deception for a common good.[12] His donning of the cloak coincides with moments that evidence Henry as a humble, deeply compassionate leader. Here Shakespeare's Christian context is inevitably influential. His faith provided the image of the ideal king in Jesus, who likewise descended from his royal position of power to walk among broken humanity. Henry descends from his position for the "poor condemnéd English," "every wretch, pining and pale" (4.0.41) whom he calls "brothers, friends, and countrymen"

[12] Ringwood, Frances. "Shakespeare's Mavericks and the Machiavellian Moment." Shakespeare in Southern Africa 32, no. 1 (2019): 38–48. https://doi.org/10.4314/sisa.v32i1.5.

(4.0.34), in actions that mirror the incarnation of Christ, the divinity who put on flesh to descend and dwell among men. In his actions that most reflect the idealized kingship of Jesus, Henry simultaneously engages in a deception, which contributes to Shakespeare's case that Machiavellian traits may be used for good.

Then, on the eve of the climactic day of pain and suffering, Henry goes off by himself to pray, echoing the solitude Jesus sought in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his own suffering. Henry first monologues on the weight he feels leadership to be, responding to his men's claims that the king is responsible for the souls of each man that dies serving the king by fighting in his war, exclaiming first:

> Upon the King! "Let us our lives, our souls,
> Our debts, our careful wives,
> Our children, and our sins, lay on the King!"
> We must bear all. Oh, hard condition,
> Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath
> Of every fool whose sense no more can feel
> But his own wringing (4.1.207-13).

Henry's struggle is against the part of himself that is not his natural existence, but the body politic, which Ernst Kantorowicz argued is the king's second personhood which consists "of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People" (7).[13] In his kingly personhood, Henry bears the significance of every one of his subjects. This is illustrated well in his use of the 'royal we' in his exasperated "we must bear all." The hard condition of his life is the reality that he was "twin-born with greatness" and is unable to separate himself as an individual from his role as king. He twists "subject" to make himself the subject of his own subjects, which touches thematically on his chief frustration with his kingship: the separation it creates between himself and his people. Henry goes on to interrogate the ceremony that laid upon him the burden of the body politic and thus created this separation. He asks, "Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form, creating awe and fear in other men?" (4.1.34-5). What separates him from others while making him the subject of their expectations and criticism? His answer is in the question itself: only social rank makes him any different from his subjects. Yet these mere ceremonies form a chasm that isolates Henry from other people and leave him deeply longing for genuine human community.

Critics have called this soliloquy "strangely externalized and formal, in no sense a revelation of the private workings of a mind," (218)[14] which paints Henry as the stiff facade of Shakespeare's excessively idealized king, yet certainly this is the most vulnerable state in which the audience receives Henry throughout the entirety of the play and it characterizes him as warmly human in his longing to be in relationship with other people. This is the only place in the play that Henry is alone, making this speech the audience's glimpse into the inner workings of his mind and his true emotions. Despite his intense treatment of the traitors and his appalling threats to Harfleur, this soliloquy is more representative of Henry's emotions than any other scene because of his consciousness of the body politic and its absence in his solitude. His monologue is dripping with sarcasm, frustration, and despair. Look no further than "O be sick, great greatness" (4.1.228) to see the warm

[13] Kantorowicz, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology.* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997.

[14] Barton, Anne. *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*. Cambridge [England]; Cambridge University Press, 1994.

blood pumping through Henry's words. These are Henry's true feelings poured out, his contemplation of self, his frustration with his lot in life, his desire for connection with other people. At a base level, Henry is longing for human connection. The responsibility of kingship, the body politic places him on the throne high above his subjects. Rather than seeing this only as a privilege or an opportunity for control, he feels himself "subject to the breath of every fool." Only in solitude can Henry come to terms with the weight of this burden. Everything else he says in the play is said with the consideration of his audience, what the message will be to each witness through his diction, delivery, and deportment. His condemnation of the traitors is said to the offenders themselves, in addition to the rest of the country that will look at what Henry does and he communicates in no uncertain terms that the law will be upheld in Henry's reign. His speech to Harfleur directly tells them how confident he is in his soldiers, and indirectly reassures his men of the same thing. Here only in the entirety of the play, Henry is able to express his true thoughts and feelings, his frustration, isolation, even his hopelessness at the position he has come to occupy in life. The ceremonies that make Henry king isolate him from other people and he can only realize any sort of genuine connection, paradoxically, through deception. The incarnation is motivated by God's longing to dwell among humankind and Henry's disguise is aimed at the same goal. He deceives others in order to be able to connect with them. In this way, Henry is most human and most representative of the ideal king at this pivotal moment of the play.

Henry's monologue is interrupted, then he offers a prayer on behalf of his men, directly addressing God and consequently giving the audience a clear view into Henry's attitude towards God. He begins:

> O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts.
> Possess them not with fear. Take from them now
> The sense of reck'ning if th'opposed numbers
> Pluck their hearts from them (4.1.266-69).

He does not pretend to possess any righteousness that God ought to reward, does not make any appeal about the justice of the cause, nor does he even present any sort of plea for God to grant the English the victory. He humbly begs God to bestow courage upon his men, presumably already having the desire for them to fight honorably that he encourages them with in the next scene's famous Saint Crispin's Day speech. His prayer reveals Henry's care for his men. Even though he leads them into physical harm, his desire is for their moral character. Again, the audience ought to take Henry's words as genuine; here in his solitude, he has no one to impress or convince other than God. This speech can have one of two connotations given the gravity of the situation: as either a last-ditch petition made in desperation or a solemn surrender of that which Henry cares most about to the highest power he might entrust it to. Surely the tone of the prayer points to the latter. His sentences are remarkably short, particularly given the rambling paratactic syntax of his more impassioned speeches. In their lack of rhetorical complexity, the sentences of this prayer correspond with a king who is at his weakest moment. He is deferential and sincere before the "God of battles." in the face of the impending conflict. His second request is simple as well, that God might not punish the English soldiers for the misdeeds Henry's father made in "compassing the crown" (4.1.282).[15] This awareness of his sinfulness before God sees Henry

[15] Ibid.

participating in the appropriate human role in the created order. He does not conflate himself with God in his high rank in society or pose himself in any position of favor that might make him deserving of any divine gift. Indeed, the weight of guilt he feels is apparent in his list of penances he had done to atone for his father's sins: re-burying Richard's body and anointing it with "more contrite tears than from it issued forcèd drops of blood" (4.1.273-4), paying five hundred poor "who twice a day their withered hands hold up toward heaven to pardon blood" (4.1.276), and building two chantries where priests "sing still for Richard's soul" (4.1.279). His guilt communicates a longing to be restored to right standing with God and his pursuit of atonement through these penances reveal just how desperate he is for this reconciliation. Henry also occupies the state of humanity most fully in this moment in his guilt, on bended knee, and in his longing for a right relationship with God.

Shakespeare's efforts to establish Henry as the ideal of kingship are not undone by his human flaws, rather they contribute to the complexity of the argument. Henry's human-centered kingship fits neatly into the greater narrative of Shakespeare's histories. If Richard II's *undoing* was caused by his inaccurate view of kingship that conflated himself with the supernatural authority laid on him in that role, Henry's *making* is, antithetically, his accurate view of kingship that sees himself as "but a man" (4.1.99). If Richard represents unstable leadership by his reliance on the ceremonies of kingship that connect his physical self to the body politic and the authority of the divine, then surely Henry's insistence that beneath all the ceremonial garb the king is as human as any other man reflects also the stability of his kingship. In terms of Shakespeare's adoption of Henry as the hero of his epic, he represents the epic tradition while transporting it into his Christian context. Homer's heroes were "godlike" in their rage or cunning; Henry is like God in his abandonment of his high status in pursuit of a relationship with humankind.

This reading of *Henry V* that emphasizes the king at his best moment when he is most human challenges literary thought around the play by viewing Henry not as a hypocrite or a single-faceted figment of political propaganda, but as Shakespeare's argument for the complex nature of an ideal king. He establishes Henry as the ideal king, then at the pivotal moment of the play shows him to be most human instead of most godlike. He fills the role of hero when he is most godlike, but Shakespeare's God is found in human flesh through the incarnation of Christ, who humbled himself in the form of a human being because he longed to exist with men and for them to be reconciled to Him. Henry then is the human embodiment of ideal leadership who reflects God in his moments of greatest humanity as he dons a Machiavellian disguise to put off his body politic and be just another human being. Henry cannot justifiably be Shakespeare's shallow nationalist hero, rather he is a complex character who makes an argument that kingship is a pursuit of mirroring God not in his divinity, but in his humility and his desire for the redemption of humanity. In his human manifestation of kingly humility, Henry becomes "the mirror of all Christian kings" by mirroring the kingship of Jesus Christ.