

Individual and collective interest in politics



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In Shakespeare's King Henry IV, the people in the places of leadership manipulate the ordinary citizens for their own gain. In the wartime environment, basic common sense is sacrificed for the benefit and personal gain of people in power. Major Cathcart continually chases his desperate yet futile end goal of promotion, to the cost of the men in his squadron, ordinary civilians and even the progression of the war effort. Heller provides a cynical portrayal of war, one where the ultimate arbitrary nature of leadership positions is exploited, becoming the ultimate goal of the powerful instead of the good of soldiers and civilians. In Shakespeare's play Henry IV part 1, the King is portrayed as a Machiavellian leader, while the prince's connection with the people show a more empathetic and inclusive style of leadership, although it is revealed to be part of a ploy to manipulate others in order to become a better leader. Even Prince Hal, it seems, is unable to rule innocently, and in this portrayal, Shakespeare challenges the idea of the divine right of leadership. It establishes the dramatic irony of Harry's character, known to no one but the audience and the prince himself. It also exposes the complexities and ambiguities of Harry's mind, showing an apparently virtuous young man who can manipulate and lie to others to achieve his somewhat selfish, albeit important, goals.

Yossarian and Falstaff are both anti-heroes who challenge the manipulation of the ordinary people by leaders who exploit their power for selfish gain. The very nature of Catch-22 embodies the inefficiency of the government and the fact that people are no longer treated as individuals. It is ultimately revealed that the catch represents the justification of any action taken by men in positions of power, without fear of punishment, as they ' have a right

to do anything we can't stop them from doing.' In his refusal to fly any more combat missions, Yossarian is 'rocking the boat', speaking out against the manipulation of leaders and the injustice of war and regaining a semblance of independence. Thus his actions are ultimately one of independence and courage rather than cowardice as it is portrayed by the military who have no patience for people who do not do as they are expected. The ridiculousness and inefficiency of the military in protecting justice and its citizens is further exemplified in the pointless mission to bomb a civilian village in order to create a roadblock, which will ultimately make little difference to the war effort but will destroy the lives of many innocents. The absurdity of this situation is further highlighted in the Colonel's insistence of a neat bomb pattern; an entirely fabricated notion which only serves to highlight the absolute power of General Peckam, who enjoys exploiting his power for personal gain and enjoyment. Heller satirizes military logic once more, this time regarding a raid on a small Italian village to create a roadblock. The villagers pose no threat and are all civilians, but the village will be reduced to rubble which will be cleared in a couple of days anyway. The raid would be more efficient if the bombs were spread out along the hills, away from the village, blocking more of the road; but that will not do. Colonel Cathcart, always trying to impress General Peckem, calls for a tight bomb pattern "for me, for your country, for God, and for that great American, General P. P. Peckem."

In Shakespeare's King Henry IV, an outdated system of rule and ideals of nobility are put into question by critiquing the effectiveness of a Machiavellian style leadership under the chaotic backdrop of rebellion. The

commonwealth's disillusionment with the existing manipulative monarchical system is made clear in Falstaff's diatribe on honor, which highlights that the idea of honor only benefits people in positions of power. The metaphor 'honour pricks me on' creates a violent image which highlights the harmful implications of relying on such an outdated notion. The personification of honor, which 'pricks him on' creates imagery of violence which perfectly mirrors Falstaff's pragmatic view that honor often compels people to do more harm than good. Falstaff therefore concludes that honor is worthless, "a mere scutcheon," and that he wants nothing to do with it. In a play obsessed with the idea of honor, this speech comes out of nowhere to call into question the entire set of moral values on which most of the characters base their lives. It is one of the remarkable aspects of Falstaff's character that he is able to live so far outside the normal mores and expectations of his society; this speech epitomizes Falstaff's independent streak. And highlights the inadequacy of the monarchy, which relies on notions of honor to justify the morality of their actions. This is supported when it becomes evident that everyone, even Hal, are scheming for power. Even those reluctant for power must scheme in order to become a leader. Honor is merely a disguise, created to justify the scheming actions of leaders though arguing that it benefits all. This is very well mirrored in Yossarian's belief in the futility of war and the injustice of a country which does not care for its individuals; the war-time equivalent of honor, that the war is benefiting all, is harmful to individuals. Falstaff is not merely a shameful opportunist, but a pragmatist with eerily relatable truths.

Hal's meeting with his father in the setting of the cold and austere court, a dramatic contrast to the warmth and vitality of the tavern, highlights how Machiavellian notions of power and ambition can conflict with morality. Shakespeare provides incisive insight into contrasting notions of power; Hal's ideal of leadership is a man who understands and empathizes with the commoners, juxtaposed with Henry's belief that by minimizing contact with the common people he can maintain his carefully constructed aura of respect and mystery. Continuing the celestial motif in 'Sunlike majesty, when it seldom in admiring eyes,' Henry accentuates that an air of mystery is essential to command the respect a King requires. He describes Richard II's constant presence as being 'soon kindled and soon burnt', a metaphor which powerfully serves as a reminder that Hal is the direct antithesis of the King's ideal of leadership. Originally the King was acting for the collective interest as he thought he would be able to lead England better, but gradually lost sight of his duty to his people as he became blinded with power. The audience is afforded a glimpse into the king's private sphere and an insight into the strained relationship between the King and the Prince, which highlights the king's insecurities about the legitimacy of his rule, which he typically keeps hidden from the rest of his court through a carefully constructed image which he manipulates. Through his portrayal of Hal as a man who has initially lost his father's respect and fallen from grace, though ultimately redeemed through his actions, Shakespeare comments that the merit and virtues of a leader are more powerful than the idea of a divine chain of being. However, even Prince Hal is not immune to the selfish scheming and manipulation required to succeed in court. In his soliloquy Hal reveals his clandestine manipulation of the commonwealth in order to

improve his image and gain respect when he finally succeeds his father. ' Yet herein will I imitate the sun // who doth permit the base contagious clouds // By breaking through the foul and ugly mists // Of vapours that did seem to strangle him. Hal never wanted to be king ' pay the debt I never promised', but he still realizes the importance of manipulation is securing power, which highlights the unfair treatment of the commonwealth, who are only expendable pawns in a much bigger game. The recurring motif of the robes symbolize leadership as something which can be cast off or put on: links to appearance vs. reality. The transformation of Hal from wastrel to " so sweet a hope" for England revolves around his acceptance of royal duties and a touch with the commoners of the tavern. In Machiavellian fashion, Hal realizes that future kings will need to have the support of the populace, who believes in the humanity of their leaders rather than a divine right of rule. Shakespeare explores this to emphasize the shifting political dynamics of the Elizabethan era and new ideas about power and the divine right of rule. Both Hal and his father realise they need to challenge existing paradigms of leadership expectations to develop a rapport with the people who will support them as king. Hal does not reject his father's ideology or refuse to engage with him, but schemes in his own way. In mankind's interminable struggle for power, the motivations of certain individuals may be unclear as they attempt to manipulate people for political advantage. What is clear, however, is that control and lasting influence are the ultimate goals in the dangerous game of politics.

By exploring the tension between the individual and the collective interest, Keller criticizes the purpose of war and the consequences of selfish

leadership in *Catch 22*. Through a recurring theme of irrational logic, when only considering actions from the public sphere, individual sacrifices and consequences seem irrelevant if it ultimately benefits the collective. 'Imagine a man his age risking what little life he has left for something so absurd as a country!' This rhetorical question from Nately's Old Man, whilst initially seeming outlandish, is ultimately filled with truth and critiques the irrationality of war. His claim to his rights as an individual highlights the ludicrousness of forced submission upon consideration of the individual's perspective, showing how soldiers and civilians alike suffer from society's forced imposition of the war for the 'supposed' greater good. By juxtaposing the benefits and consequences of war both from a collective and individual viewpoint, Keller challenges the impossibility of society in recognizing individuality, while still making collective decisions which will benefit society as a whole, suggesting the political implications of nationalism coexisting with democracy. Yossarian, symbolizing the self-preserving pragmatist, vows to survive at all costs, seeing the ultimate fragility of life being highlighted by war. 'It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who's dead'. However, Clevinger, an idealist who only cares for victory, explores the institutional viewpoint that people give up their identity and their duty for their own survival when they become soldiers, by repeatedly insisting that they had 'no right to question' their orders. This highlights the humanist ideology that man is 'programmed' with natural survival instincts, through which an attempt at overwriting through a culture of courage and selflessness is generally unsuccessful. Nevertheless, whilst self-sacrificing nobility is an image aspired to by many, self-preserving cowardice is ultimately the more universal, though admittedly hidden

perspective, and, perhaps, the more logical viewpoint in war. Paradox: the weakest nations survive: pragmatism over honour. “ There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can’t all be worth dying for.” Yossarian’s friends are dying because Colonel Cathcart keeps changing the definition of a tour of duty. The numbers are abstract, but the deaths are real. The author’s passionate indignation reveals horror and corruption and sometimes tragedy as well as comedy. Reinforces that wartime is the ultimate breakdown of logic and integrity. Thus, Heller reinforces that lying and the manipulation of words is immoral, but ultimately supports individual gain, mirroring how in politics, efficiency is sacrificed for an easily manipulated image.

Through manipulating the portrayal of the world around them, Shakespeare and Heller influence their audience’s perceptions on political systems and events. Shakespeare juxtaposes methods of leadership to highlight the prevalence of manipulation in the political sphere in King Henry IV, while Heller’s anti-war novel Catch-22 emphasizes the struggles of reconciling collective and individual interest by exploring the manipulation of words and image.