

## About This Volume

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This volume, like all the others in the Critical Insights series, is divided into several different sections. It begins with an introductory essay in which a major scholar addresses some of the key concerns associated with the topic at hand. It then moves to four “contextual” essays that look at the topic from four different points of view. The first essay emphasizes a historical approach; the second provides a sense of previous discussions of the topic; the third adopts a particular “critical lens”; and the fourth offers a comparative analysis of at least two different texts. The “critical contexts” section is then followed by at least ten (and in this case eleven) different “critical readings” in which the topic is explored in relation to numerous and varied texts, such as films, works of literature, works of nonfiction, and so on. The volume then concludes with a variety of helpful resources, including a bibliography, a list of additional relevant texts, and a comprehensive index.

In this volume, the introductory essay—actually an interview—comes from Ben Railton, the scholar who has written more, perhaps, than anyone else about the connections between patriotism and literature. Railton describes the genesis of his fourth book—*History and Hope in American Literature: Models of Critical Patriotism*. This book focuses “on literary works that portray at length some of America’s hardest and worst histories,” works “that come in their conclusions to images of what I called ‘hard-won hope,’” including “optimistic visions of America and its future” rooted in “light that had been found (and could only be found) through engaging the darkness.” Railton argues that “these texts modeled both critical optimism and (especially) critical patriotism,” offering “visions of how the nation has failed to live up to its ideals but also of how

shadowed by its sexist history” and that there is “an ugly racist streak in much Australian patriotism” (160–61). While granting Keller’s point that a patriot will be predisposed to “resist evidence that throws her picture of her [. . .] into question,” Kleinig observes that the same tendency applies to friendships or family relationships; that the tendency can be overcome; and that “one’s loyalty may be tested or refined” (161). In closing, Kleinig repeats his original concern about patriotism, namely that it can be “exploited so dangerously” and may be used for “ill-considered and hugely destructive wars,” and that to counter such danger “every country needs a significant but loyal opposition” (162).

### **Final Words: Simon Keller**

Keller restates his position that patriotism is a vice that “by nature produces an ugly and dangerous kind of self-deception” or a “kind of bad faith.” To illustrate this problem, which he thinks is inherent in patriotism, he uses the analogy of cruelty: cruelty is a vice, he says, because it “involves, by its nature, a preparedness to inflict [unjust] suffering on others” (163). He next considers the definitions of patriotism that ground the different positions taken by Kleinig, Primoratz, and himself, and determines that his own is “probably the least inclusive” because it involves a “positive picture of the country,” meaning a “picture that represents the country as having some good distinguishing characteristics at its heart” (166). But a country’s political characteristics are not the only grounds for a patriot’s endorsement of her country; it can be any characteristic that the patriot sees as central to her country’s nature, such as a “distinctively Australian conception of mateship” (166). Accordingly (Keller continues), Primoratz’s example of Čapek’s Lot poses no problem to his own definition of patriotism. As to Primoratz’s “egocentric” patriot who insists that his loyalty needs no other basis than the fact that “This is *my* country, *my* home,” Keller thinks that a person who genuinely has no knowledge of her country and can say nothing positive about the country cannot be called a patriot (167).

Keller thinks patriotism is “its own beast,” far more complex and compound than other kinds of loyalty (167), and gives two

way Olivier had staged this episode, contending that in Branagh's production, "all is solemn, and hard to follow."

In general, Ebert thought that "Branagh and his actors go for emotion or styles of delivery at the cost of clarity, and so the new 'Henry V' is more appropriate for viewers familiar with the play; Olivier's version was literally intended for everyone."

Nevertheless, Ebert wrote that, "these observations aside, Branagh has made quite a film here," adding that his "direction wisely goes for realism in the battle scenes. They are not wars of words, but of swords." But Ebert felt that in these scenes "Branagh seems determined to account for every French death, and the battle wears on, steel against steel and horse against man, endlessly. There is," he thought, "too much of it—as if, having spent the money for all of those extras and all of those costumes, he wanted to get his money's worth. And yet, at the end, when the exhausted king confesses, 'I know not if the day be ours or no,' we share his exhaustion and his despair at bloodshed." In Ebert's opinion, Branagh

is only keeping up with the state of the art when he soaks his battles in blood and mud. What happens as a result is that the scenes in court seem to exist on a different level of reality—especially the long scene of flirtation and proposal between Henry and Katherine, which ends the film. We have seen so much real blood that we have no patience for social gamesmanship, and the movie would probably play better if Henry had simply swept Katherine into his arms and forgotten the elaborate phrasemaking.

On the whole, however, Ebert offered more praise of the film than reservations.

### **Positive Reviews**

All the rest of the reviews surveyed here can easily be classified as "positive," except for the ones more fittingly termed "very positive." One of the "positive" assessments, by Vincent Canby, appeared in

with similar offerings of tender grief and love into  
the cemeteries of our Northern martyrs. And yet,  
in one aspect, how needless to point the contrast.  
(Melville, *Published Poems* 183)

Two aspects of Melville's understanding of patriotism are on display here, and although they point in different directions in terms of his attitude toward the Civil War, they are also intimately connected. Melville acknowledges the universality of the experience of loss and mourning for those who have had to bury a loved one who has died in battle, but he also recalls the difference between the moral content of the cause of the South and that of the Union. The emotions of pain and bereavement are equally powerful for both sides in the war, but in the final line Melville reminds us that one side fought for slavery and one side fought against it. Even in this complicated, and at times troubling, meditation on the losses experienced in the Civil War, Melville never loses sight of his conviction that patriotism must have moral and ethical content in order to be admired.

Melville's version of patriotism is thus tied inextricably to a cluster of concepts that required it to be a self-reflective, even self-critical, variety of patriotism based in ideals rather than national identity. Melville's impulses toward pacifism meant that he consistently resisted the glorification of warfare in the service of national self-interest. His commitment to equality, and especially equality across racial and class lines meant that he was devoted to liberty and equality as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and at the same time it led him to caustic criticism of the failure to embrace equality.

Melville's patriotism, and Melville's America, are both aspirations to be achieved rather than fortresses to be defended. Throughout his career, Melville is skeptical of simple equations of national power with virtue, and he is also powerfully moved by the idea of a nation that could be based on a shared commitment to a common humanity rather than exclusion. As such, Melville's patriotism is the patriotism of those who fought against slavery during his time, and for equality after his time, and not that of those

the quantities of labour necessary for acquiring different objects seems to be the only circumstance which can afford any rule for exchanging them for one another. If among a nation of hunters, for example, it usually costs twice the labour to kill a beaver which it does to kill a deer, one beaver should naturally exchange for or be worth two deer. It is natural that what is usually the produce of two days' or two hours' labour, should be worth double of what is usually the produce of one day's or one hour's labour. (1.6.1)

When a hunter prepares a beaver, the hunter has lost the opportunity to prepare two deer. The opportunity cost of preparing a beaver is the loss of two deer. Conversely, should the hunter prepare two deer, the hunter loses the opportunity to prepare one beaver. With this simple example where there is one input (labor) and two outputs (beaver and deer), cost enters into the theory of choice: with a given input, it is either one beaver or two deer. In the real world, the inputs are more, the outputs are more, and the costs more grievous than animal skins. But the results are the same: you cannot have your cake and eat it too.

If economics is the dismal science, then tragedy is the dismal art. Tragedy, like economics, sees a world of privation where, to gain  $x$ , one gives up  $y$ . In *All My Sons*, the characters confront opportunity cost. Take Ann. In the prehistory of the play, she had been engaged to Larry Keller, an army pilot. He died in the war. At the same time, her father, Steve, and Larry's father, Keller, were tried for selling cracked airplane cylinder heads to the Army Air Force. They were accused of welding over hairline fractures and passing off the heads as good. Twenty-one pilots died. Keller was exonerated. Steve, however, was convicted. Ann is incredulous that her father should have been so base:

KELLER. Annie, the day the news came about Larry he was in the cell next to mine . . . Dad. And he cried, Annie . . . he cried half the night.

The recent trials and convictions of persons once high in New Deal positions, and other New Deal followers, point out to us the high price that the United States has paid for ignorance. If it is denied that it was ignorance, then the implications are even more serious. Anyway, it is well known that in those days anybody who endorsed the Constitution was a “capitalistic reactionary,” and to admit patriotism was to be classed as a “dirty chauvinist.” Anybody worth a samovar of tea was a “liberal,” was known as an “intellectual,” and went about talking about “directives” instead of plain orders.

Negroes suffered from this like everybody else. Only, if you were a Negro, you were even more detestable. You were a “black reactionary,” or a “black chauvinist,” or belonged to the hated “black bourgeois.” (150)

Hurston herself had felt the sting of such charges, but, in her typically Hurstonian way, she not only refused to back down but became, if anything, even more outspoken in favor of views she considered patriotic but which her opponents condemned as reactionary. Hurston asserts that “Taft’s open-faced Americanism will be welcome to great hordes of Negroes, who, like their white compatriots, have been part of the American underground for so long. Yes, there has been an American resistance army for a number of years, a sort of guerrilla band doing what they could to restore constitutional government” (150). Hurston saw her patriotism as part of a greater, transracial (and ideally post-racial) movement.

### **Taft, “Liberals,” and True Liberty**

Hurston warns that Taft, as a potential nominee, will have to deal with the recent corruption of the word “liberal”— a term she says is now used by many communists to disguise their true motives and loyalties, and a term often “debauched . . . to mean ‘pro-Negro.’”

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