

**Name:** Scott O'Neil  
**Affiliation:** University of Rochester (Ph.D. Student)  
**Paper Title:** "[Co]mingling Kings and Clownes': The Tragicomic Mode and Choric Manipulation"

Shakespeare's *Henry V*, for a play often said to portray a brief period of peace—a "Camelot"—in the midst of the Wars of the Roses, tends to generate plenty of scholarly chaos. Donald Hedrick referred to the wooing scene at the conclusion of the play as "violence to genre" (470). Antony Hammond, on the other hand, offered his delightfully blunt observation that the "only intelligible conclusion is that the duality is built into the play: Henry is a great hero, and a cold, conniving bastard" (144).

Building from Hammond's argument, I argue that *Henry V*, as both a character and a play, is a masterpiece in duality. The anachronistic and uncharacteristically regular Chorus adds a Tragicomic mode to a heroic—if not completely accurate—history play. My paper will focus on the impact of this Tragicomic mode, and the ways in which it mediates between the various natures of Henry V as both an illegitimate ruler and a popular heroic figure. Utilizing Annabel Patterson's work on Renaissance history writing and Colin Burrow's notion of reading plays with an eye towards the political implications of various spheres of authority within an audience, I will argue that the duality seen in Shakespeare's play resulted from a need to please two distinct audiences with two very different notions of the true nature of the historical Henry V.

Ultimately, through an analysis of the history genre, its peculiar generic function in Renaissance political society and a consideration of historical events of 1599, I will argue that the tragicomic Chorus in *Henry V* can best be read as a literary bridging device—allowing Shakespeare to appease the conflicting social and political needs in his various audiences. In short, my paper will argue for a reading of the wooing scene not as "violence to genre" but rather as a nuanced comingling of genres necessitated by the duality inherent in the title character's various "natures" as defined by his popular and courtly audiences.