Power, Sympathy, and Cruelty in the *Tristia* and *Henry V*

"In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed."

- Abraham Lincoln’s Reply to Stephen Douglas’s Speech (Ottawa 1858)¹

In 1858, Lincoln proclaimed the centrality of public sentiment in shaping political policy. In an era deeply concerned with sentiment and at least ideally governed “by and for the people,” such a proclamation is hardly surprising. Surely, the recognition that success in a democratic system requires shaping political affect does not give a person pause. This essay, however, examines the role of affect in the operation of imperial power, or more precisely, in two contexts on the cusp between shifting forms of government – Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and Ovid’s *Tristia*. *Henry V* articulates the rise of national sentiment while dramatizing the history of dynastic monarchy. Ovid’s *Tristia* analyzes imperial power just as Rome transforms from a republic to an empire. Moreover, both texts engage affect in metaphors draw from the non-human and non-civilized world. In these texts, both individual subjectivity and imperial power are inflected by a reciprocal relationship between affect and environment. By analyzing *Henry V* in terms of the *Tristia*, we can see the role of public sentiment in the construction of imperial will.

Our ambivalence toward the character of Henry is by now a critical commonplace.² In her essay on the play, Claire McEachern interrogates how as audience members and critics we repeatedly assume

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democratic sympathy and hegemonic political power to be at odds, in contrast to an early modern
discourse that saw “the convergence of tyranny and fellowship in the terminology of personification.”  
Following McEachern’s analysis, I want to understand Henry not as a master manipulator who performs
fellow-feeling and tyrannical power at turns but as negotiating the possibilities of a system of governance
that relies on sentiment.

Henry’s response to Scrope’s betrayal exemplifies the multiple forms of sentiment involved in the
operation of political power in the play. Having just freed a prisoner who had “railed against our person”
(2.2.41) against the advice of Scrope and other conspiring nobility, Henry sends these aristocratic traitors
to their execution.  In this scene, the functioning of Henry’s monarchic power is everywhere understood
in terms of affect. The conversation preceding Henry’s command to free the soldier who criticized him
immediately follows a discussion in which Henry claims that “We carry not a heart with us from hence / 
That grows not in a fair consent with ours / Nor leave not one behind that doth not wish / Success and
conquest to attend on us” (2.2.21-4). Cambridge, Grey, and Scrope heartily agree with this estimation of
the absolute and universal fellow-feeling the people of England offer to Henry. Cambridge proclaims
“There’s not, I think, a subject / That sits in heart-grief and uneasiness / Under the sweet shade of your
government” (2.2.26-8). Both Henry and the nobility offer a picture of universal good will and shared
loyalty.

Henry’s command to release the prisoner comes in this context. He opines that it was “. . . excess
of wine that set him on” (2.2.42) rather than an actual dislike of the king or his policies. Scrope responds
to Henry’s largess calling it “. . . mercy, but too much security” (2.2.44). Both “mercy” and “security” in
this context are affective states. They imply a disposition toward compassion and a dangerous lack of
concern for one’s own person respectively. Henry takes them as such and attributes the exhortations of
Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey to “. . . your too much love and care for me” (2.2.51). Both the prisoner’s

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2 The definitive formulation of this critical ambivalence is Norman Rabkin, Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V,”
4 All citations to Shakespeare’s plays refer to The Norton Shakespeare (Based on the Oxford Edition), 3rd Edition,
guilt or innocence and the disposition to be merciful or secure are understood in terms of the affective disposition of the various parties involved. Of course, the release of the man who “railed against his person” is a prelude to Henry’s accusation of the three nobles as traitors working for the French. Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey beg for mercy on being accused, and Henry retorts “The mercy that was quick in us but late / By your own counsel is suppressed and killed” (2.2.77-8). His feelings, he claims, have been swayed by their counsel, and one suspects that Henry has engineered the scenario precisely for this act of justice. Indeed, this scene can be seen as an instance of the political machinations whereby Henry displaces blame for his actions as he does when he warns Ely to “. . . take heed how you impawn our person” (1.2.21).

However, the scenario of judgment Henry creates in this scene is not simply a political ploy which molds political sentiment to displace blame. Rather, it is a complex emotional system in which both Henry and his subjects – noble or common – play a role. In order to make his claim for universal good will, Henry must dismiss the criticisms of the prisoner as not genuinely felt but simply the result of intoxication. Similarly, the lack of mercy Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey suggest becomes an overzealous care for Henry not a betrayal of their English brother in arms. In this political operation, to be English is to “carry a heart that grows in fair consent” with the king’s. It is to share absolute affective harmony with Henry. Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey must be shown not to possess this disposition, must not only be cast out but figured as fundamentally different in temperament than the true English folk who support Henry. Not only does Henry orchestrate the situation to highlight the aristocrat’s lack of sympathy for their English brothers in arms, he explicitly calls out Scrope as lacking the temperament that unites them. He calls him “thou cruel, / Ingrateful, savage, and inhuman creature” (2.2.92-3), invoking a language of cruelty that associates him not only with a specific affective disposition – one that lacks proper sympathy – but with the northern and eastern edges of Europe. Henry goes on railing at Scrope, the bedfellow who betrayed him, saying:

If that same demon that hath gullied thee thus
Should with his lion-gait walk the whole world,
He might return to vasty Tartar back
And tell the legions, “I can never win
A soul so easily as that Englishman’s.”

(2.2.119-23)

At the very moment he invokes Scrope’s Englishness, he pictures Scrope as more easily seduced than any soul between Tartar and England, associating his perfidy with the vasty and desolate land of Tartar. As this essay will argue, the choice of Tartar here is not coincidental but evokes a particularly harsh disposition. The aim of Henry’s rant is to separate Scrope absolutely from the loving disposition he performed and thereby reify true Englishness as an absolute form of sympathy with the monarch.

Of course, this whole elaborate scenario can be understood simply as affective manipulation on Henry’s part. However, a reading of Ovid’s Tristia suggests a more complicated operation of power. In the Tristia, Ovid ostensibly seeks amelioration of his exile and as Matthew McGowan argues, simultaneously critically analyzes the operation of imperial power. Like Henry, Ovid understands mercy and punishment in terms of affective disposition and associates betrayal with the northern and eastern lands of his exile. Figuring merciless power in terms of the harsh geography of his exile, he understands the landscape of the Black Sea region as an extension of Caesar’s imperial power. In so doing, however, he estranges Caesar and those friends who have betrayed him from the Roman disposition that should define them, and as Henry defines Englishness in terms of brotherhood, defines Romanitas in terms of an emotional disposition toward sympathy. Ovid finds himself literally swept up in this political and affective system, describing his own emotions in terms of the turmoil of the Pontus. This description portrays Roman political power as rightly susceptible to the emotional states of others. This operation is the one Henry adopts in Henry V and the vicissitudes of which Shakespeare explores in the play.

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5 Matthew McGowan,
6 Ovid was exiled to a Roman colony in Tomis in what is now Romania on the coast of the Black Sea. Ovid and early modern English writers typically refer to the Black Sea as the “Pontus” or “Euxine” sea.
In the *Tristia*, Ovid understands his fate as a direct result of Caesar’s wrath (*ira*), and his appeals make his case largely in emotional terms. He prays to the Gods that Caesar may feel what the Gods already know – that his transgression was a mistake rather than a crime: “*quod vos scitis, poenae quoque sentiat auctor*”? Using the verb “*sentiat*”, Ovid understands the remedy not in terms of knowledge – the gods have the certainty of knowledge but he does not expect Caesar to – but in terms of feeling. Caesar’s feelings about the crime must be changed. His understanding is figured in emotional terms. This way of perceiving Caesar’s power, as exercised through an emotion, wrath, that must be mollified, runs throughout the poem. Ovid later hopes that his friend’s prayers may be efficacious because his own “*quae pro me duro non tetigere deos*” [did not affect the cruel gods] (1.9.4). The key to the relief of his suffering is to change the emotional disposition of the powerful, especially Caesar. Ovid writes about this change in terms of emotional transformation. The cruel gods (*duros deos*) must be affected (*tetigere*), literally touched as if to make an impression. Cruelty under these circumstances – and I would argue that this idea of the brutality of state power represents the dominant one in the early modern period – is figured as a lack of feeling, a refusal to be swayed by emotional appeal. Relief of suffering is achieved through an emotional entreaty that softens this lack of feeling, making an impression on the powerful.

Frequently enough, emotional imperviousness is understood as foundational to state power. The monarch should ideally be moved solely by reason and never by emotion. *Julius Caesar*, in Shakespeare’s play is an exemplar of this sort of political figure, and his tyranny is on full display when Cimber pleads for the return of his brother from exile. Like Augustus Caesar’s continued anger against Ovid, Julius’ Caesar’s refusal to grant Publius Cimber’s return is a refusal to be moved. In the play, Caesar proclaims:

> I must prevent thee, Cimber.

> These couchings and these lowly courtesies

> Might fire the blood of ordinary men,

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And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
Into the lune of children. Be not fond,
To think that Caesar bears such rebel blood
That will be thaw’d from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, sweet words,
Low-crooked court’sies and base spaniel-fawning.

(3.1.36-44)

Caesar understands Cimber’s pleas as attempts to “fire his blood” and turn it from the decree of banishment, and he refuses this appeal, saying that his blood will not be “thaw’d from the true quality / With that which melteth fools.” His blood is constant as if it were frozen solid, and this constancy maintains the blood in its “true quality.” From Caesar’s point of view, the exercise of appropriate power is the imperviousness to emotional manipulation, “sweet words, / Low-crooked court’sies and base spaniel-fawning.” These sorts of appeals are only efficacious, according to Caesar, in that they “melteth fools.” The melting away from constancy is the susceptibility of fools. Of course, Mettelus’ plea is a deliberate strategy to detain Caesar to make way for the conspirators’ attack, but it also a demonstration of the very imperiousness that the conspirators claim necessitates Caesar’s death. Indeed, in the context of a play that so thoroughly examines state power, this treatment of the appeal for the return of an exile exemplifies how the imperviousness to sympathy and emotional appeal produces tyranny.

However, this constancy is at the core of many conceptions of both masculinity and the practice of governing in the early modern period. Caesar distinguishes himself from other men with a lesser sense of constancy:

. . . men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshaked of motion: and that I am he,
Let me a little show it, even in this;
That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd,
And constant do remain to keep him so.

(3.1.68-74)

Uniquely in his mind, he rules by holding his motion unassailably and by being not “flesh and blood, and apprehensive” as other men are. The qualities that are understood as central to authority and state power are the very ones that Ovid and others understand as cruelty. They are ones explored most directly in Ovid’s poetry of exile but also imaginatively in *The Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare takes up these issues in a number of political dramas including not only, as we see here, the Roman plays but also English histories.

This disposition toward constancy, a central but contested feature of state power, Ovid understands most often in terms borrowed from natural phenomena much like the terms Caesar uses to describe his unwillingness to allow the return of Publius Cimber. In the *Tristia*, Ovid uses the word *crudelem*, the Latin word most etymologically related to the English “cruel,” only very rarely. Rather those words most often translated as “cruel” are in Ovid’s Latin *saevus*, *durus*, and *ferus*, all words that he also uses to describe the area to which he has been exiled and its people. While death, warfare, and his enemies are *saevus* (1.4.27, 1.5.73, 2.1.176, 4.1.78), so are the raging waters of the Pontus (1.10.8) on which he is exiled and the winds of Boreas that blow across it (3.10.51). Similarly, a treacherous friend is “*dure*” or “cruel one” (1.18.14) and the gods who are not effected by his prayers are “*duros*” (1.9.4), and the winter of his exile, where the seas can be crossed by carriages, are “*durus*,” literally, like Caesar’s blood, hardened to the point of freezing solid. The wild roar of the sea is “*ferus*” (1.11.7) and the people around him are a cruel race “*fera gens*” (3.10.5). However, a treacherous enemy, “*ferox*” also assails him, attacking the shadow of his former self with bitter words (3.11.31). These terms move back and forth from describing “natural” phenomena – the rough seas of the Pontus, the bitter cold of the north, and the

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8 For a discussion of Ovid’s exploration of the limits of this neo-stoic formulation of fortitude, see Lisa S. Starks-Estes, *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare’s Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid*, 2014.
wildness of its people – and the emotions and dispositions of Ovid and especially of the powers with which he pleads.

At moments, the place of Ovid’s exile figures forth the internal disposition of the exile himself. For instance, in the epilogue to the first book of the Tristia, Ovid exclaims, “ipse ego nunc miror tantis animique marisque / fluctibus ingenium non cecidisse meum” [I myself now marvel that amid such turmoil of my soul and of the sea my powers did not fail] (1.11.9-10). The turmoil (fluctibus) is both the uproar of the sea and of his soul, both of which are possessive. There is not syntactic distinction between the two, strengthening the connection between external surroundings and his internal state. Ovid uses this deliberate sliding between external and internal, between those forces which act upon a person and those which are most personal to him, repeatedly to characterize how power functions in the poem. The powerful unsettling of the sea is the equally alarming upheaval in his own soul, and his “powers” (ingenium) are barely able to withstand the assault which is simultaneously a contest between powerful forces beyond his control and the turbulent emotions of his own being.

While some form of “durus” is used to describe the hardness of both the frozen waters of the Pontus and the disposition of Caesar or other powerful figures, other examples of this slippage between external forces and internal disposition abound. One prominent example is the manifestation of Jove’s power, the lightning bolt. When describing how friends began to distance themselves after his fall, Ovid writes, “saeva neque admiror metuunt si fulmina, / quorum ignibus adflari proxima quaque solent” [I wonder not if they dread the fierce lightnings whose flames are wont to blast everything nearby] (1.9.21-22). Though not directly referencing Jove, in using lightning to describe the power that has descended on him, he is associating Caesar’s wrath and power with the king of the gods. This lightning, a manifestation of Caesar’s power that implies his proximity to Jove, is “saeva.” In a similar usage, “saevum praelustri fulmen ab acre venit” [cruel is the bolt that falls from the glittering citadel of renown] (3.4.6). Elsewhere, Ovid explicitly connects Caesar’s power to Jove’s lightning bolt, writing “me quoque, quae sensi, fateor

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"Iovis arma timere" [I too admit – for I have felt it – that I fear the weapon of Jupiter] (1.1.81). He describes the power of Jove’s bolt using the word “saevi,” exclaiming “vidi ego pampineis oneratam vitibus ulmum, / quae fuerat saevi fulmine tacta Jovis” [I have seen an elm laden with the tendrils of a vine even after it has been blasted by the thunderbolt of angry Jove] (2.1.143-44). While the description is clearly meant to refer to the power of the thunderbolt, “saevi” modifies not “fulmine” but “Jovis.” Jove himself is cruel or savage, not as elsewhere the bolt. Again, the adjectives Ovid uses to describe cruelty and power are as likely to describe the harshness of the natural environment as they are to describe individual dispositions. Indeed, the easy slippage between these two usages connects individual dispositions inextricably to the ambient environment. A few lines after Ovid describes Jove’s bolt, he writes of his own feelings, “ac veluti ventis agitantibus aequora non est / aequalis rabies continuque furor” [As in the winds that buffet the seas there is no steady, no constant madness” (2.1.149-50). The fury of his inner turmoil ebbs and flows like the winds that buffet the seas. The use of these metaphors and the easy assignation of terms to both emotional experience and environmental forces connects these figures in an emotional ecology, the ecology of cruelty and pity in which cruelty is a frozen solidity that is mollified by sympathy and pity.

One of the most prominent versions of this set of tropes whereby emotions and power are described in ecological terms is the association of the temperamental hardness of cruelty with literally being born of mountains or nursed by tigers. Ovid uses this trope especially to describe those who have betrayed him. In addressing “an enemy,” he writes:

Quisquis es, insultes qui casibus, improbe, nostris
meque reum dempto fine cruentus agas,
natus es e scopulis et pastus lacte ferino, et dicam silices pectus habere tuum.

(3.11.1-4)

[Whoever thou art that dost mock, wicked man, at my misfortunes endlessly bringing an indictment against me, thirsting for my blood, born art thou of crags and fed on the milk of wild beasts, and I will assert that thy breast is made of flint]
Being born of mountains and nursed by wild beasts ("ferino," whose root is one of the words Ovid frequently uses to indicate cruelty), the enemy is unfeeling. His breast, then, is made of flint. Again, cruelty is understood in terms of a lack of feeling and this lack of feeling is described in terms of the hardness of rock and the wildness of beasts. Interestingly, the word "silices" is also the name of a mountain in Asia. Just as Ovid associates the turmoil of his soul with the raging waters of the Pontus and Caesar's unyielding with the frozen water around him, this association is one of a place. The connection not only to the environment but specifically to the wild northern part of the world to which he has been exiled is even more explicit in his address to "a traitorous friend," wherein he writes:

non ego te gentium placida reor urbe Quirini,
urbe, meo quae iam no adeunda pede est,
sed scopolis, Ponti quos haec habet ora sinistri,
inque feris Scythiae Sarmaticisque iugis:
et tua sunt silicis circum praecordia venae,
et rigidum ferri semina pectus habet,
quaeque tibit quondam tenero ducenda palato
plena dedit nutrix ubera, tigris erat:
aut mala nostra minus quam nunc aliena putares,
duritiaque mihi non agree reus.

(1.8.37-44)

[You were not born, I think, in Quirinus' peaceful city, the city that my feet must enter nevermore, but of the crags which stand upon this coast of the ill-omened Pontus, or in the cruel mountains of Scythia and Sarmatia. Your heart also is girt with veins of flint, and seeds of iron are implanted in your unyielding breast. She who once nursed you, offering full udders to be drained by your tender throat, was a tigress; or else you would think my woes less foreign to you than you now do, nor would you stand accused by me of hardheartedness]
The crags here are specifically those on the coast of the Pontus where he has been exiled. The mountains are the “cruel” (“feris”) mountains of Scythia and Samartia, both areas associated with the northern part of Asia. Again, the heart is surrounded by “flint” (“silices”). The temperamental hardness of the cruel is thus, the harshness of the unyielding landscape of the exile. Significantly, both of the passages refer not to people literally born in the harsh regions around the Black Sea but to those in Rome who have betrayed him. To be sure, Ovid almost always describes the peoples of the region to which he has been exiled as “ferus”, but the assignation of such a birth particularly describes the cruelty of betrayal. Such treachery requires a lack of sympathy only explicable through the resort to natural phenomena whose extremity must be located elsewhere, specifically in the frozen north at the edge of the empire, just as Henry reached for the “vasty Tartar” to describe Scrope’s betrayal.

The words Ovid uses to describe cruelty, whether it is the cruel power of Caesar or the betrayal of a friend, are associated with the landscape of his exile. This landscape not only describes but shapes an emotional temperament. The fluidity of these boundaries between person and environment is characteristic of Ovid’s poetry. In some ways, Ovid’s Metamorphoses is an extended meditation on this problem. Though there are many others, the transformation of Actaeon provides an important example in this particular context because of its emphasis on the workings of power and the blamelessness of the victim. Indeed, the story of Actaeon is one of several included in the Metamorphoses but also referenced in the Tristia. In the Tristia, Ovid emphasizes Actaeon’s blamelessness, calling him “inscius” [unwitting] (2.1.105), and then remarks that “scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est, / nec veniam laeso numine casus habet [Clearly, among the gods, even ill-fortune must be atoned for, nor is mischance an excuse when a deity is wronged]. Here he indicates that the exertion of state power is not limited by culpability. Indeed, sometimes that power must be exerted – Ovid uses the gerundive of obligation here signaling the sense of requirement – even if the transgression is “fortuna” [mischance] rather than deliberate crime.

While in the Tristia Ovid at least ostensibly accepts this reality, in the Metamorphoses he questions this very operation of power. In Golding’s translation of the Metamorphoses, Ovid ends the tale
of Actaeon writing “Much muttring was upon this fact. Some thought there was extended / A great deale more extremitie than needed. Some commended / Dianas doing: saying that it was but worthily / For safegarde of hir womanhood. Eche partie did applie / Good reasons to defended their case” (3.3.305-309). Diana’s actions are the subject of some debate and each party to the debate is able to defend his or her case with “good reasons”. This incident brings into relief the very questions of the operation of state and judicial power that appears not only in the Tristia but in early modern plays such as Julius Caesar and Henry V. The transformation at the center of the story (which like so many of the others in the Metamorphoses crosses boundaries between human person and the natural world) is the result of Diana’s wrath when she discovers that Actaeon has seen her unclothed in her bath. In her anger, Diana transforms Actaeon into a stag which is then consumed by Actaeon’s own hounds. Diana’s rage causes a mutation from human into dumb animal. Indeed, much of the description details Actaeon’s helplessness when he goes to explain his predicament but, robbed of human speech, is able only to utter the bleats of the deer. This transformation puts the hunter, Actaeon, in the place of the hunted. The huntsmen cheer on Actaeon’s hounds and wonder at Actaeon’s absence from the felled dear. In Golding’s translation, “All well he could have found in heart to see / His dogges fell deedes, so that to feele in place he had not bee” (3.299-300). Ovid specifically remarks on how Actaeon would normally have felt at the sight of the dogs tearing their prey to pieces, rather than feeling their sharp teeth. Diana’s anger, thus, causes Actaeon to feel the helplessness of the stag and not incidentally to feel the helplessness she feels at having been surprised by Actaeon.

The debate then is whether or not this is just operation of power. The question is not so much whether Actaeon acted deliberately but whether regardless of his intention, womanhood needs to be safeguarded. He uses the story of Actaeon in a similar way in the Tristia, as an example of the need to defend a position of power through punishing mistakes as well as deliberate transgression. This sort of demand comes about especially in cases in which power resides in an individual, where power is

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personalized. In such a situation, a crime has been committed regardless of intent and punishment is required to guard the integrity of the powerful. In exploring the emotional landscape of his relationship to Caesar and powerful friends in the *Tristia*, Ovid both explores the possibilities negotiating such relationships through affect can have for redress of his situation and highlights the terrible power that relies on emotion and must defend itself against attack regardless of the intention of the attacker. Transformations that cross the boundaries between personalized human emotion and depersonalized forces of nature are a fruitful way of signifying such an operation of state power which requires the translation of individual might into state power and state power into individual integrity. Thus, Ovid’s description of his own exile and the power dynamics involved in it draws on the same explorations available in his earlier work.

Shakespeare takes up these same issues of hegemonic power in his political drama. As I have argued, Henry’s response to Scrope’s betrayal in the beginning of *Henry V* unfolds across a terrain of affect that defines a lack of sympathy as an improperly English disposition. Rather than understanding this operation of political affect as disingenuously orchestrated by Henry simply to garner sympathy and displace blame, I see the drama examining in this scenario the same questions Ovid raises in the *Tristia*: What is the role of sympathy in state power? When is its lack a form of tyranny? When is it necessary for the operation of a kind of hegemonic or tyrannical power? Ovid deliberately places his pleas in an emotional register. Doing so both flatters Caesar, suggesting how the landscape of Ovid’s exile is an extension of his power, and opens the way for a criticism of the political imperatives created in an imperial context. This conundrum – sympathy both shapes imperial authority and undermines it – is at the heart of *Henry V*. In the Scrope episode, Shakespeare demonstrates both the vulnerability of Henry’s rule in its reliance on the sympathy among all English people and how such sympathy can be the basis of defining Englishness.

Similarly, before the gates of Harfleur, Henry uses metaphors of the non-human world to express affective states just as Ovid did. In peace time, he proclaims, men are best adorned by “modest stillness and humility” (3.1.4), but when the blasts of war rage, his soldiers must take on the attributes of the forces
of nature, the stiff sinews of the tiger and the rock that overhands the tempestuous ocean (3.1.6; 3.1.14).

The military force required of the fierce warrior is at once both personalized and associated with explicitly non-human forces. As in Ovid’s text, the cruelty required is a matter of controlled affect. The soldiers are to “Disguise fair nature with hard-favour’d rage” (3.1.8). This rage that has the same attributes of rigidity that Ovid attributed to the wrath of Caesar. In Ovid’s description, Caesar’s rage is best described with reference to the ferocity of animals and the unforgiving nature of the seas. Once again, the ability to exert force, the exercise of military power, requires an inhuman disposition, one that like the tiger or the cliffs cannot be swayed from its purpose by the pleas of individuals.

Henry’s description here of the disposition which his troops should literally embody – the commands demand that they engage in the bodily action, the stiffing of sinews and the terrible aspect of the brow (3.1.7; 3.1.9) – suggests something more generally about the operation of hegemonic power as he understands it. Henry describes an individual whose “natural” disposition is affable, composed of “modest stillness and humility” but who must take upon himself another disposition, one of “hard-favour’d rage”.

This transformation – a transformation understood in terms of becoming more at one with an unforgiving natural landscape – exemplifies our experience of Henry who from one moment to the next moves from being the prince who is “sworn brother to a leash of drawers” (I Henry IV, 2.4.6-7) to being the powerful, wrathful ruler who threatens Harfleur with raping and pillaging. The depiction is one in which the personable monarch and the victorious conqueror are mutually exclusive. The disposition of warrior is to totally eclipse the peace-time mercy that is the English soldier’s true nature. And yet, the language itself suggests a different relationship between the disposition of warrior and his normal affability. The ferocity of the warrior is a “disguise” that merely obscures his “fair nature.” In fact, the transformation here is imagined to be a routine one in which affect is modulated through the summoning of the blood and the alteration of the aspect. We are suddenly in the world of The Metamorphoses in which the boundaries between human and natural frequently break down under circumstances of extreme
emotion. The temperamental conversion that soldiers undertake in battle is a species of the larger mechanism whereby both hegemonic power and brotherhood operate through sympathetic affect.

Much of Shakespeare’s political drama revolves around the role of affect in the operation of hegemonic power. While it might be easy to see sympathy and imperial will as at odds, as Caesar does in his description of his singular steadfastness, Ovid’s *Tristia* draws our attention to the importance of sympathy not only in preventing tyranny but in extending imperial power. In so doing, Ovid both critiques the operation of imperial power and seeks of mode of redressing its harshness. Specifically, using the imagery of the non-natural world, he presents the landscape of his exile as a manifestation of the power of Caesar’s displeasure. This strategy makes a plea for sympathy even as it articulates the affective nature of Caesar’s power. Shakespeare’s Henry uses a similar language to evoke an English national identity based on fellow-feeling. In fact in punishing Scrope, he constitutes English identity on the basis of this shared sympathy. Similarly, he calls on this kind of sympathy in rallying his troops before Harfleur. They are all imagined to be brothers, who like Henry, call on terrifying rage and then return to modest stillness. The notion of mutual love he invoked in describing his troops’ attitude towards their conquest of France becomes the basis for a unified exertion of force. Of course, elsewhere in the play (in fact in the very next moment when the soldiers are shown to be comically at odds) this harmony is shown to be false. However, taking seriously Ovid’s assertion that hegemonic power works on the level of affect should make us rethink an analysis that sees Henry as offering a false idealization in his call for sympathy. It might enable us to see the play as a meditation on how such idealizations both offer the possibility of redress of hegemonic excess and warn us against the temptation to see tyranny and sympathy as at odds.

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12 Many readings that see sympathy and hegemonic power at odds also point to the hollowness of these assertions. For instance, Maurice Hunt cautions us against “imagining this [social] leveling as a reality,” “Brothers and ‘Gentles’ in *The Life of King Henry the Fifth,*” *Comparative Drama* 49.1 (2015): 71-94, esp. 84.