

Vigilante
by Bryan Quinonez

(1095-1291) The Crusades

Times were different.

Murder

+

Rape

+

Pillage

=

Heaven.

People were different.

(15TH CENTURY) ROBIN HOOD

INTENTIONS WERE DIFFERENT.

FROM:

RICH & UNWORTHY

TO:

POOR & GRATEFUL

SINCERELY,

JUSTICE.

"HEROES" WERE DIFFERENT.

(1877) BILLY THE KID

WANTED POSTERS WERE DIFFERENT.

**THE LAND OF
OPPORTUNITY**

=

NOTORIOUS FAME.

CRIMINALS WERE DIFFERENT.

(1914-1918) World War I

Allegiances were different.

Never Seen Before

=

Never Ending

"Enemies" were different.

(1947-1991) Cold War

Security was different.

Unidentifiable Enemies

=

Unidentifiable Motives

"Intelligence" was different.

(2003-20__?) Anonymous

Vigilantes are the same.

Morality.

JUSTIFICATION.

INFAMOUS.

New Era.

Information.

Present

=

No Face

=

No Consequence

The times are not...

Vigilante

VIGILANTE

VIGILANTE

Vigilante

Vigilante

Vigilante

Dear Megan,

My definitional text centered around the word *vigilante*. To me, vigilante can be just as much a hero as a villain, the distinction comes from intentions of actions. And while vigilantes can have any number of intentions, they usually divide into two groups of either prioritizing the individual or the community.

Vigilantes ideally work for the common good, emphasizing the need to protect the community over individual gain. However, this concept can easily be turned into an way to promote one's own agenda and have an audience from the common people who often support and boost up an eventual "leader" figure. I believe that the term vigilante is very idealistic and very easy to corrupt.

The word vigilante connects to the class due to its constant use to describe the Anonymous hacker collective. Anonymous embodies many of the qualities that are "required" of a vigilante while constantly changing their own agenda and either exemplifying behavior that people consider malevolent or expressing behaviors of social justice activists.

Therefore, I decided to approach the term from a darker approach and focus on the conflicts that have come from vigilante interactions. I believe that a poem can encompass this atmosphere well since it can condense so many themes and emotions into stanzas. Poems can often leave a reader confused and with a desire to reread it, learning new things the more they go through it.

In this case, I believe that I do not have a specific type of reader. I believe that my poem is accessible for a large range of people considering that most of the events/people involved are

well-known. I believe that my poem would attract people who are interested in human nature and a seemingly repetitive history of mistakes people make. Vigilantes have existed as long as society has, therefore, people who want to discuss the utility and morality of vigilantes may want to read my poem.

My poem is short and split into 6 stanzas. Each stanza covers a different period of human history, extending as far back as the 11th century and reaching current events of the 21st century. Stanzas are boldly titled with a time period and a major event that correlates with it. Each stanza emphasizes a different type of vigilante with some having much more positive connotations than others.

The first stanza has to do with the Crusades, a nearly two century long conflict organized by Church-based government in order to reclaim “promised land” when in reality the war was organized in order to gain land and wealth for Western Europe. The religious aspect of the war made soldiers confident that their actions would bring them safe passage into heaven therefore justifying the violent means in which to reclaim Jerusalem. In this instance, the vigilantes would be the soldiers who claimed to be fighting for the prosperity of their kingdom and to give their people access to holy land.

However, most of these soldiers simply justified murder, pillage and rape through personal safe passage to heaven, enforcing “justice” through their own means that would never seem justifiable under normal humane circumstances. I wanted to emphasize that even though the Crusades were established for holy purposes, they can be rounded down to three things: murder, rape and pillage. These words are followed by the word “Heaven” as they’re put in an equation format, implying that these things combined lead to a safe passage to the afterlife in a

very religion-oriented time period. I emphasized the importance of religion in this time period with the line “times were different” that immediately follow the stanza title. The last line of the stanza, “People were different,” further extends this point by showing how there was no system of morality in society that would make a clear distinction between right or wrong. In today’s world, most people would not feel inclined to fight in war because of heaven, especially not if they had to murder, pillage and rape to get there. However, in this time period, violence was not necessarily a crime as much as a means to an end.

The second stanza involves Robin Hood, possibly the most powerful example of a vigilante. What makes Robin Hood so much of a vigilante is the fact that there is such a strong polarization between whether or not he is a good person.

To the few rich and wealthy, Robin Hood was a no good villain who took from their wealth as a clear act of theft with no regard to how it would affect them to have their wealth stolen.

To the many and poor, Robin Hood represented a hero who would save them from an oppressive upper class who had no care for their well being even though most of these wealthy people would often be associated with government/royal positions.

This difference in perspective is emphasized in the letter-like format of the middle portion of this stanza. These lines play at the idea that Robin Hood would send a package of cash that comes *from* the “rich and unworthy,” as he would describe them, *to* the “poor and ungrateful.” And because Robin Hood is known for being very sly, the *letter* would be signed “Sincerely, Justice.” He would call himself justice as he acts upon what is right from his perspective.

The idea of *justice* plays into the lines that surround the centerpiece as even though Robin Hood would steal things from people, which is usually looked down upon, his actions were meant to help people, therefore “intentions were different” since similar behavior would not be allowed in today’s society. The stanza is finished off by “‘heroes’ were different” because even though Robin Hood was considered a hero by the common public, he was still a thief and therefore displayed qualities unlike the stereotypical hero.

The third stanza takes a twist from the heroic nature of Robin Hood in terms of intentions but remains similar with the idea of notorious fame. The Wild West timeframe is one of the most chaotic and lawless periods of American history besides the Roaring 20’s. In this time, vigilantes could consist of everything from the dangerous cowboys that became popular in film and media to the villainous outlaw. The villain was only a serious threat if they had the infamous wanted poster, such as Billy the Kid, one of the most famous criminals of the time. In a sense, Billy the Kid and other vigilantes like him represent some of the worst America offered in its early history. And so, in a similar fashion to the Crusades stanza, this stanza is also put in an equation-like format as a “land of opportunity,” which would presumably imply positive opportunities, is just as likely to lead to an opportunity for “notorious fame.”

The lines that surround this discuss what it means to have a wanted poster and what it means to be a criminal. In correlation to current day events, wanted posters are far less about an individual person and more about a part of their identity. People who stand with ISIS are criminals just as people who are actively a part of Anonymous are considered criminals. You no longer have to be an outlaw with a rapid trigger finger to be considered a threat.

The fourth stanza switches into a different type of vigilante as the U.S. began getting involved in global conflicts. This marked a new era of warfare for the U.S. which would not end anytime soon, therefore the beginning of the War to End All Wars would be something that has never been seen before as the lines in between explain. The idea of allegiance comes into play here as the discussion of what it means to be a vigilante becomes even more about a person's affiliations with an organization or group rather than their actual identity. Enemies were still clear major political and military figures however as two sides began to develop in this war, who a person associated with began differentiating if they were a comrade or a threat and the definition of an enemy began shifting.

The fifth stanza is truly where current day warfare and conflict become more clear, as current day "enemies" become more clear. The Cold War was the war that never existed as everything had to do with obtaining intel and the competitive conflict between Russia and the United States. Besides political figures, spies from both nations remained hidden and the idea of anyone and everyone being untrustworthy only spread with time.

To Americans, CIA operatives were heroes who risked being captured in foreign soil and yet still fought to make sure that Russians would not cause nuclear warfare. Because so much of the *warfare* consisted of espionage, there was an increase in "unidentifiable enemies" which lead to the direct correlation of an increase in "unidentifiable motives." This is the center of the stanza because this pattern becomes common with time and serves as a hint to the current state of vigilantes.

At the same time, the United States was just as dangerous if not even more dangerous as they had already unleashed nuclear weaponry in actual war and possessed the knowledge to make more.

Because this war was so information-heavy, securing this information was crucial. Therefore, security became less about protecting physical assets and more about what knowledge a country possessed, as expressed by the lines “security was different” and “intelligence was different” as the two correlate directly with one another.

And finally, the last stanza combines aspects from all of the previous stanzas through the first half of the middle lines that have a word or two to generalize the points from each stanza. The first stanza discussed a lack of *morality* that many vigilantes have. The second stanza was about a need for *justification* which drives the often illegal/criminal activity vigilantes participate in. The third stanza was about how people become *infamous*, implying an often dangerous fame that vigilantes have since most of the time they are well known and persecuted by authority figures of a time period. The fourth stanza emphasized a shift from the past, implying a *new era* for vigilantes as technology become increasingly present in human life. The fifth stanza takes the importance of technology further by implying that the new era comes from the increased importance of *information*, the new issue of current day conflict.

When all of these things are pieced together they begin adding up to the definition of vigilante, which is blantly emphasized by the word vigilante being written six times over for each of the six stanzas. The word takes many forms and each of which are true and can be added together or be separate entities.

The second half of the lines discuss the idea that after so long of characterizing people or nations as the enemy, there is no longer a distinct enemy. Half of the battle against or for vigilantes is just trying to find them. And while the idea of “no face equals no consequence” may seem pessimistic, it also opens doors as it shows that we live in a time where people can rebel the most against oppressive forces and achieve the most. If anything, now is the best time to be a vigilante in human history, and whether that’s a good thing or a not is up to each reader.

And so, the reader/audience would have to know a bit about history as there is little to no explanation to each event described, which could be seen as a shortcoming. However, I carefully picked events, conflicts or people that the common person can distinguish fairly easily. Another thing that makes the poem friendly is the chronology effect which I incorporated with each stanza. Along with the differing fonts for each stanza that give them each their own mood/feel the timestamps give the reader a lot of guidance in maneuvering through the poem.

I believe that this poem is strong in that it leaves many dots for the reader to connect. The tone of each stanza is clear and there are definitely biased views of each of these events but not to a degree that blocks the opportunity to disagree or develop different outcomes than the ones I originally intended.

Also, small details play a big part in how this poem is portrayed. The title has no particular font because the word has not yet obtained any correlation or connotation to the reader, however, with each stanza, the term vigilante changes a bit more until the end when everything is combined. The falling effect of the words make each individual word or phrases pop out more and the “equals” in some stanzas represents the direct correlation of cause and effect when it comes to human interactions. Also, the pattern of periods and its abrupt absence at the end of the

poem show that time does not stop now and that there will be more attributes to the definition of a vigilante as it has already changed repeatedly in the course of one thousand years.

While there are more negative attributes to the stanzas, there is a lot of good that comes from the term vigilante and what it means to fight for the public or oneself, making this poem a debatable and concise medium.

Thank you for reading and hopefully you enjoyed the poem and came up with your own analysis of human history.

Sincerely,

Bryan Quinonez