

CAVALIERS, HEROES, AND DEVILS: A METAPHORIC CRITICISM OF DAN GILBERT'S ATTEMPT TO DETHRONE THE KING OF CLEVELAND

Iris J. Valenta
Communication Arts

DESCRIPTION

- Who is LeBron James?
 - A professional basketball player drafted out of high school
 - One of the greatest players to ever play in the NBA, winning various awards in his first seven years
- Why is he so important to Cleveland?
 - As seen in Cleveland and the U.S.
 - Symbolized Cleveland's revival in the sports world
- The Decision
 - In June 2010, James announced that he would leave Cleveland to play for the Miami Heat
- Artifact: Gilbert's public letter criticizing James
 - A scolding letter written in response to The Decision

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What do the metaphors used in Dan Gilbert's public letter to Cleveland Cavalier fans reveal about his perceptions of LeBron James and Cleveland's situation after his departure?
- Looking specifically at some of the metaphors utilized, what does Gilbert's attempt to rhetorically shift James from "angel" to "devil" tell us about his view of the professional athlete in general?

METHOD

- Metaphoric Criticism
 - Goal is to find the explicit and implicit metaphors in order to form an overall idea of the rhetor's message.
- Steps of the method:
 - Reconstruct context
 - Search for metaphors
 - Group metaphors into common themes according to tenor or vehicle.

METAPHORS

LeBron James	Dan Gilbert/ Ownership
As villain	As hero
As native son	
As fallen god/king/hero	

ANALYSIS

- Gilbert/Ownership as hero
 - Points organization as the knight in shining armor that will slay the evil that is LeBron James
- Makes a promise to vanquish Cleveland's new-found foe.
 - "The good news is that the ownership took all the rest of the hardworking, loyal, and devoted staff over here at your dismissal. Cleveland fans are betrayed, you see NEVER will betray you" (Gilbert)

ANALYSIS

- LeBron as native son
 - James, from Akron, Ohio, played for the Cavs for the first 7 years of his NBA career.
- Gilbert uses phrases such as:
 - "Our former hero, who grew up in the very region that he departed"
 - "shameful display of selfishness and betrayal by one of our very own"
 - "Inherently from our home grown chosen one"
- Brings up a sense of family and connection with LeBron James that makes the hurt and betrayal more poignant

ANALYSIS

- LeBron as fallen god/king/hero
 - Throughout James' career he's been touted as "The Chosen One," "The King." These metaphors set up the expectation that James is the basketball god. Gilbert directly and viciously attacks this premise with perhaps the most powerful line in the letter: "Some people think they should go to heaven but NOT have to die to get there. Sorry but that's simply not how it works" (Gilbert)
- Directly attempts to knock James out of the sky
 - Develops a new metaphor: James as devil

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Research Question #1
 - Gilbert's perceptions of James
 - Appears to label LeBron, despite once being just as embraced with the star as the fans were
 - Gilbert's perceptions of Cleveland Cavalier's situation
 - Appears to view Cleveland's situation as dire, judging by the intensity of his response

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSIONS

- Research Question #2
 - Shift from "angel" to "devil" tells us something significant about how view of athletes in general
- We are so hard on professional athletes. We are unreasonably putting unrealistic expectations on them and then crucifying them if they fail.
- LeBron is simply a man looking to be the best at his profession and to make decisions based on what is best for him and his family.

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- Why is he so important to Cleveland?
 - An icon in Cleveland and the U.S.
 - Symbolized Cleveland's revival in the sports world
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 - In June 2009, James announced that he would leave Cleveland to play for the Miami Heat
- Artifact: Gilbert's public letter criticizing James
 - A scalding letter written in response to *The Decision*



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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ANALYSIS

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 - Gilbert directly and viciously attacks this premise with perhaps the most powerful line in the letter.
 - "Some people think they should go to heaven but NOT have to die to get there. Sorry but that's simply not how it works" (Gilbert).
- Directly attempts to knock James out of the sky
 - Develops a new metaphor: James as devil



ANALYSIS

- Gilbert/Ownership as hero
 - Paints organization as the knight in shining armor that will slay the evil that is LeBron James
 - Makes a promise to vanquish Cleveland's new-found foe.
 - "The good news is that the ownership team and the rest of the hard-working, loyal, and driven staff over here at your hometown Cavaliers have not betrayed you nor NEVER will betray you" (Gilbert).



IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Research Question #1
 - Gilbert's perceptions of James
 - Appears to hate LeBron, despite once being just as enamored with the star as the fans were
 - Gilbert's perceptions of Cleveland Cavalier's situation
 - Appears to view Cleveland's situation as dire, judging by the intensity of his response



IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSIONS

○ Research Question #3

- Shift from “angel” to “devil” tells us something significant about view of athletes in general
 - We are too hard on professional athletes. We are constantly putting unrealistic expectations on them and then crucifying them if they fail.
 - LeBron is simply a man looking to be the best at his profession and to make decisions based on what is best for him and his family.



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