

How did shakespeare portray the concept of honor in henry iv part 1

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How did Shakespeare portray a concept of honour in Henry IV part 1? In this world, there exists, since the dawn of civilisation of mankind, a thing that we are fighting and dying for—that is honour. Shakespeare explores the theme of honour in Henry IV part 1 in a rather interesting way by having it presented in a different form varying from character to character. Henry IV wants to protect his honour by using any means available to vanquish the rebels, his sinful act to King Richard also keeps haunting him and shakes his own faith in his honour.

While his son's dishonourable acts in the beginning of the play wearies him further. Superficially, one may think Prince Hal is a typical young slacker whose life has been fully lured by the glamorous but immoral world of liquor, gambling, prostitution and crime, the truth is, unbeknownst to anyone, the prince is scheming to reform himself from an idler into a more responsible and competent heir to the throne. Here, his vision of honour of behaving like the royal is an impetus for him to seek new behaviour which will bring him more merits, making him an honourable figure the status he deserves.

Or Hotspur, honour is everything, ironically more valuable than his wife. His excess obsession of honour induces many political mistakes, most notably his decision to confront the king at Shreswbury despite having less number of troops. In other words, Hotspur's passion for honour blinds him from the reality. For all his chivalry and valor in the battle, Hotspur is proved to fail at being a military strategist as well as effective leader. It is none other than the lazy, unscrupulous and coward Sir Falstaff whose existence in the play represents the values that totally oppose the fore-mentioned concepts of honour.

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His disenchanted view on honour can make the audiences see that the reason behind other characters' action are single-minded and irrational or more poignantly worthless. Overall, the exhilaration of the play partially arises from Shakespeare' way of presenting honour in various forms, paralleling the play to the real world where different people all know honour with different interpretation. King Henry IV whose name is the title of the play, is not in fact the protagonist, however the play speculates what has occurred during his turbulent reign. In Richard II, the audiences see him as dynamic and brave, indicating his kingly qualities.

All the audiences must then be bewildered upon seeing him in this play. Suspicious, stressful and sick was the king after all dishonourable acts he did to King Richard previously. Shakespeare tries to explore how the sin of being viciously dishonourable comes back to haunt its perpetrator. Despite the king's regret of what he did to Richard and his passion to redeem himself by going to crusade, this sin seems to block all the means for the king to purify himself. The rebellion of the Percys and rebellious nature of his son led him to grow very ill.

Act one scene one, he moaned about his son and mistakenly praises Hotspur's qualities, saying that Hotspur is " a son (of Percy) who is the theme of honour's tongue, implying that Hal brings him with nothing but shame and disgrace. His anger even drives him further to contemplate that if he only and Northumberland could switch sons, " would have I (himself) his Harry and he mine. Fortunately, in the end the king gains back honour by defeating the rebels and his son, who used to represent everything he scorns

and acts dishonourably, has redeemed himself and proves to be an effective warrior.

Henry Momouth or affectionately known as Hal is an interesting character as well as complex. At the beginning, the audiences see Hal as a drunken idler who acts nothing like an heir to the throne. Unexpectedly, Hal, in Act 1 scene 2 < makes it clear that he doesn't plan to live the rest of his life in this world of immorality, in fact he claims that he is pretending to be this sort of person then when the right moment comes, he is going to transform himself into a person with all characteristics of the king. "Reformation, glittering over faults, will do more goodly and attract more eyes" expresses his prediction that his "reformation" would make his subjects surprised and therefore gains more popularity for him which is necessary in order to keep the kingdom stable. Hal has a vision that the great honour of being king will at the eventually fall on him whether he likes it or not. This vision of future honour is the impetus of Hal's self-reformation. Henry Hotspur was a renowned warrior whose actions and decisions all have been influenced by the concept of honour.

Unlike other characters, Hotspur' was too obsessed with honour, resulting in a single-minded decision making. For all his chivalry, Hotspur was an utter political failure. Act 4 Scene 1, despite possessing less troops, HOTSPUR, without opening his mind for Worcester and Vernon's suggestion, decided to confront the king's troops the next day. Moreover, this sort of obsession makes Hotspur far from being diplomatic. Whenever he is angry, he always bursts and doesn't listen to anyone but himself. All this proves that, comparing to Hal, he is not deserved to wield the power.

However, despite these differences, he and Hal share only one common belief in one respect of honor. Both of them make it clear that in order for one to gain honor, another one must die first. "Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse, meet and never drop til one dropped a corpse" said Hotspur in Act 4 scene 1 before the battle of shrewsbury. This line best exemplified the fore-mentioned point. Falstaff lacked any sort of honor. "what is honor? A word", expressed Falstaff, demonstrating his disenchanted attitude towards honour. Although having been opposing this concept, at the end of act 5 scene 4, Falstaff seems to be self-contradictory when he commented that he would embrace a new and more honourable lifestyle only if he gains honor and status after the battle. From this, it is clear that Falstaff would embrace the concept of honour only if honor comes to him first. Therefore he does not oppose honour for ideological reason but rather for practical reason as through out the play honour in any form doesn't seem to come to him. In conclusion, different characters in this play have different concepts of honour