Prince Hal Essay, Research Paper

In The First Part of King Henry the Fourth, Shakespeare presents Prince Hal; a young man faced with his coming of age as king. Prince Hal is torn between a world filled with youthful irresponsibility and a world that consists of adult political seriousness. Shakespeare uses several dramatic foils to highlight Prince Hal?s inner conflict. One foil Shakespeare uses is the contrast between the childish Sir John Falstaff and the old-fashioned war-like Harry (Hotspur) Percy. Shakespeare also uses Hotspur as a rival for Prince Hal to measure himself against. Another foil is the parallel between Falstaff acting as a parental guide for Prince Hal and the guidance of King Henry IV the prince?s actual father. Shakespeare also uses setting to highlight the two worlds that divide Prince Hal. Shakespeare constantly switches back and forth between the atmosphere of a noisy tavern and the sober arena of the political world. In the end Prince Hal resolves his coming of age and takes on his own adult existence that is separate from that of his father?s.

In King Henry the Fourth Part 1 Shakespeare contrasts the hedonistic Sir John Falstaff with the virtuous warrior Harry (Hotspur) Percy. Falstaff is the prince?s fat jolly companion. Falstaff is first introduced to us as a drunk, lazy, womanizer (1.2. 2-12). The prince and Falstaff engage in activities in which are not considered to be appropriate for a prince. The duo; drink, commit foolish crimes, and mock each other. Falstaff?s zest for life is his most honorable characteristic. Falstaff?s friendship allows Prince Hal to explore and vent his childish energy. Hotspur embodies all the characteristics of a traditional noble warrior; he is brave, loyal, and full of chivalry. All Hotspur?s virtues are Falstaff faults. Conversely Falstaff?s virtues are Hotspur?s faults. Hotspur presents Prince Hal with a princely chivalric measuring stick to compare himself to. But Hotspur is also proud, impatient and unwilling to compromise his authority. In contrast Falstaff gives the prince exposure to the merriment of the common world, but he is a thief and a compulsive liar. These are the two worlds in which the prince must choose, Falstaff?s world of childish freedom and Hotspur?s world of constricting adult decisions.

Shakespeare made the character of Hotspur to be the same age as Prince Hal so that the two could be compared as rivals. King Henry himself eludes to the fact that he wishes that Prince Hal and Harry Percy were switched at birth(1.1.86-88). Hotspur represents all the attributes King Henry wants for his son. King Henry admires Hotspur?s warrior like mentality because he feels that it foreshadows his ability to rule. Prince Hal?s version of rebellious behavior is frowned upon because it rejects the conventional values of princely valor. The prince in the beginning of the play foreshadows his rise above his childish behavior. He says that he like the sun will break through the obression of the clouds (1.2 189-211). I think Hotspur symbolically represents the clouds overshadowing the prince. That is why at the end of the play the prince kills Hotspur (5.4). This action is symbolic representing Prince Hal?s conquering of his adult self.

Throughout the play Shakespeare presents his audience with the question of who is a better role model for prince, King Henry or Sir John Falstaff. In the Tavern Falstaff and Prince Hal take turns playing the role king and crown prince (2.4). Falstaff is presenting his argument that he should always be the prince?s favorite companion. Falstaff states that is better to be like him; old, fat, and jolly, then to be like his father; serious, stubborn, and not well liked. On the other hand King Henry asks the prince to be like he was, the respected Bolingbroke (3.2. 29-91). The King wants the prince to take control and be the noble son he needs in this time of civil unrest. This is just another example of the two worlds that the prince must choose from. Either the prince will take on Falstaff apathetic attitude when he is king, or he will become like his father a serious controlling ruler. I think prince Hal adapts both attitudes. He takes serious control of his political world, but he does not forget about his youthful exuberance.

To highlight even more the two worlds that divide the prince Shakespeare contrasts two totally different settings. Shakespeare constantly switches back and forth between a noisy tavern and the very serious political world. The atmosphere in the tavern is very comic and personal. The political arena is very serious and socially charged. Prince Hal is the only character who plays a major role in both settings. This says something special about Prince Hal?s character. The prince is capable of understanding the struggles of the common folk in the tavern, but he can also compete in a noble run world. I think Shakespeare is saying that a good leader exhibits these qualities, the noble leadership and understanding of the plight of the common people. Prince Hal success as king in Henry V is do to his well rounded character.

Prince Hal inner conflict reaches it?s climax at the battlefield of Shrewsbury (Act 5). He had to become the leader he promised to be earlier in the play (1.2. 188-211). This task he successfully conquers when he defeats Hotspur, who symbolically represents his adult self. At this climatic moment the prince views the scene; there lying down Falstaff and the dead Hotspur (5.4.87-110). This was like a scale weighted at both sides for the prince. The prince chooses to become an adult leaving Falstaff behind, but not forgetting about what his friend represents. I think this is why Falstaff survives the battle; so his aura does not seem to be forgotten by the prince. The prince becomes the leader his father wanted, but not exactly in the same likeness as King Henry the Fourth. The prince displays a more generous side than his Father and Hotspur, when he releases Douglas (5.5 25-31). Prince demonstrates all the good qualities of the foil characters, without having many of their flaws.