

HEAVINESS UNDER THE GOLDEN CROWN

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Abstract: In Henry IV Part Two, Shakespeare explores the complexities of kingship, revealing the profound responsibilities and burdens that accompany the crown. This paper examines the qualities essential to being a great king, as portrayed in the play. These include an understanding of kingship as not just a symbol of power and wealth but as a heavy burden requiring immense personal sacrifice, a willingness to change one's character to fulfill the demands of leadership, and a commitment to justice and law above personal interests. Through the character development of Prince Henry, who matures into King Henry V, the play illustrates the importance of self-awareness, transformation, and moral integrity in effective leadership. By contrasting Henry's earlier carefree behavior with his later dedication to justice, Shakespeare emphasizes the role of a ruler as both a servant of the state and an upholder of laws.

Keywords: Kingship; Shakespeare; Leadership; Justice; Transformation

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of kingship has been a recurring theme in literature, especially in the works of William Shakespeare. The role of a king is often portrayed as one of great power and authority, but also one that comes with immense responsibilities. Some believe that a responsible king should have the ability to get things done, while others argue that being feared by his people is more important [1]. In the play "Henry IV Part Two," Shakespeare delves into the complexities of what it takes to be a great king. The most important factors include having a profound understanding of the identity as king, the willingness to make changes in one's personality in order to rule effectively, and the ability to see justice as a crucial evaluation in society [2]. This paper will explore these qualities in detail, using examples from the play to illustrate how Shakespeare portrays the ideal king [3].

1.1 Historical Context of Shakespeare's Kingship

The historical context of Shakespeare's time provides a rich backdrop for understanding his portrayal of kingship. The Renaissance period, during which Shakespeare wrote, was marked by significant political and social changes. The concept of the "divine right of kings" was still prevalent, suggesting that monarchs were appointed by God and thus held absolute power. However, this idea was increasingly challenged by the emerging ideals of humanism and the rule of law. Shakespeare's plays often reflect these tensions, exploring the balance between power and responsibility, authority and justice [4].

During the Renaissance, there was a revival of classical ideas, including the concept of the "ideal ruler" as described by thinkers like Machiavelli and Plato. Machiavelli's "The Prince" argued that a ruler must be willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain power, even if it means acting immorally. In contrast, Plato's "Republic" emphasized the importance of moral integrity and the common good. Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship in "Henry IV Part Two" suggests a nuanced perspective that balances these two extremes. While power is essential, it must be tempered by a deep sense of responsibility and an understanding of the burdens that come with it [5].

1.2 The Play "Henry IV Part Two"

"Henry IV Part Two" is the second part of Shakespeare's historical tetralogy, which includes "Richard II," "Henry IV Part One," and "Henry V." The play continues the story of Prince Henry (Hal), who evolves from a carefree youth into a responsible ruler [6]. This transformation is central to the play's exploration of leadership and governance. By examining the qualities essential to being a great king, Shakespeare offers valuable insights into the nature of effective leadership and the importance of moral integrity in governance.

2 THE QUALITIES ESSENTIAL TO BEING A GREAT KING

2.1 A King Needs to Have a comprehensive Cognition of the Identity of Kingship

2.1.1 The burden of power

The role of a king is often romanticized as one of power, wealth, and privilege. However, Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship in "Henry IV Part Two" reveals a much more complex reality. A king is not merely a symbol of authority but also a bearer of immense responsibility. This is evident in the character of Prince Henry, who undergoes a profound transformation as he comes to understand the true nature of kingship [7].

In one of the most poignant scenes of the play, Prince Henry, believing his father to be dead, takes the crown prematurely. King Henry IV, still alive, confronts his son with the words: "You are eager for a power which will one day overwhelm you." This moment serves as a turning point for Prince Henry, who begins to realize that the crown is not a mere ornament but a heavy burden. The king's words highlight the idea that power, while attractive, comes with significant responsibilities that can weigh heavily on a ruler.

Prince Henry's understanding of kingship deepens as he reflects on the nature of the crown. He describes it as "a polished symbol of distress; a golden object of worries, that keeps the eyelids open wide, forced to face night after night without sleep." This metaphor encapsulates the idea that the responsibilities of a king are relentless and often sleepless. It suggests that the joy of power and wealth is overshadowed by the burden of decision-making and the need to ensure the well-being of the kingdom [8].

2.1.2 Historical and literary context

Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship is rooted in the historical context of the Renaissance, a time when the role of the monarch was both revered and scrutinized. The Renaissance saw a revival of classical ideas, including the concept of the "ideal ruler" as described by thinkers like Machiavelli and Plato. Shakespeare, drawing on these traditions, presents a nuanced view of kingship that emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and sacrifice.

For example, Machiavelli's "The Prince" argues that a ruler must be willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain power, even if it means acting immorally. However, Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship in "Henry IV Part Two" suggests a different perspective. While power is essential, it must be balanced with a deep sense of responsibility and an understanding of the burdens that come with it. This view aligns more closely with the humanist ideals of the Renaissance, which emphasized the importance of moral integrity and the common good.

2.1.3 The role of the crown in Shakespeare's works

Shakespeare's exploration of kingship is not limited to "Henry IV Part Two." Throughout his historical plays, he repeatedly examines the complexities of power and responsibility. In "Richard II," for example, Shakespeare portrays a king who fails to understand the burdens of his position, leading to his downfall. In contrast, "Henry V" shows a king who embodies the qualities of an ideal ruler, combining strength with compassion and justice.

By examining these different portrayals of kingship, Shakespeare provides a rich tapestry of leadership styles, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. In "Henry IV Part Two," the focus is on Prince Henry's journey towards understanding the true nature of kingship. This journey is central to the play's exploration of leadership and governance, as it highlights the importance of self-awareness and personal sacrifice.

2.2 Great Leaders Needs to Have the Willingness and Faith to Change Himself in order to Show Worthwhile of the Kingship

2.2.1 The transformation of prince Henry

The journey from prince to king is not merely a change in title but a transformation of character. This is exemplified in the character of Prince Henry, who begins the play as a carefree and irresponsible young man. His early associations with Falstaff and his band of rogues highlight his youthful indiscretions and lack of seriousness towards his future role. King Henry IV, recognizing the potential danger of his son's behavior, criticizes him, saying, "It's very rare that a bee will make a new nest in a dead animal's carcass. Likewise, I will be very surprised if Hal ever leaves behind his companions." This metaphor suggests that Prince Henry's current environment is corrupting him, and that he must break away from it to fulfill his destiny as a great king.

The turning point for Prince Henry comes when he ascends to the throne as King Henry V. His first test comes in the form of Falstaff, who, unaware of the change in Henry's character, greets him enthusiastically, expecting to benefit from their old friendship. However, King Henry V's response is clear and decisive: he denies any previous acquaintance with Falstaff, thereby signaling a complete break from his past behavior.

This act of disavowal is significant because it demonstrates King Henry V's commitment to justice and the rule of law. Falstaff, a character known for his opportunism and self-interest, represents the antithesis of the values required of a king. By rejecting Falstaff, Henry V shows that he is willing to put aside personal loyalties for the greater good of the kingdom. This transformation highlights the idea that a great leader must be willing to change themselves in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their position.

2.2.2 The concept of self-fashioning

Shakespeare's portrayal of this transformation is rooted in the Renaissance concept of "self-fashioning," a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt to describe the process by which individuals shape their identities through their actions and choices. Prince Henry's journey from a carefree youth to a responsible king is a prime example of self-fashioning, as he consciously chooses to shed his old identity in favor of one that is more aligned with the demands of kingship.

This idea of self-fashioning is not only relevant to the character of Prince Henry but also to the broader context of Renaissance literature and culture. During this period, there was a growing emphasis on the importance of personal development and the cultivation of virtues. Writers like Erasmus and Thomas More explored the idea that individuals could shape their own destinies through education, self-reflection, and moral choices. Shakespeare's portrayal of Prince Henry's transformation reflects these ideals, suggesting that true leadership requires both personal growth and a commitment to the greater good.

2.2.3 The Role of mentorship and guidance

Prince Henry's transformation is not only a result of his own self-awareness but also the influence of his father, King Henry IV. The relationship between father and son is central to the play, as it highlights the importance of mentorship and guidance in shaping a future king. King Henry IV, despite his own flaws, serves as a role model for his son, emphasizing the importance of responsibility and duty.

This theme of mentorship is also evident in the character of the Chief Justice, who plays a significant role in Prince Henry's development. The Chief Justice's unwavering commitment to justice and the rule of law serves as a powerful example for the young prince. By interacting with these influential figures, Prince Henry learns the importance of integrity and the need to put the interests of the kingdom above his own.

2.3 Lastly, a King Needs to Recognize the Importance of Justice, and the Fact that King Can Never Go Beyond Law

2.3.1 The theme of justice in "Henry IV Part Two"

The theme of justice is central to Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship. A great king must not only understand the burden of power but also recognize the importance of upholding the law. This is exemplified in the relationship between Prince Henry and the Chief Justice.

When Prince Henry ascends to the throne, he initially accuses the Chief Justice of imprisoning him. However, the Chief Justice responds by reminding him that no one, not even the prince, is above the law. This confrontation forces Prince Henry to confront the reality that justice must be impartial and that even the crown cannot exempt him from the rules he is sworn to uphold.

Ultimately, Prince Henry, now King Henry V, recognizes the importance of the Chief Justice's role and asks him to continue in his position. He says, "You did arrest me, and for that I ask you to continue in your role, remembering this: you must always be as brave, just, and impartial as you have been with me." This statement marks a significant moment in Henry's development as a king. He acknowledges that justice is not merely a tool of power but a fundamental principle that must guide his rule.

2.3.2 Historical and literary context

Shakespeare's emphasis on justice reflects the Renaissance fascination with the rule of law and the idea of a just society. The works of thinkers like Thomas More and Erasmus, who wrote extensively on the subject of governance and justice, influenced Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship. By highlighting the importance of justice, Shakespeare suggests that a great king must be both a servant of the state and an upholder of the law.

The historical context of the Renaissance also plays a crucial role in understanding Shakespeare's portrayal of justice. During this period, there was a growing emphasis on the importance of legal institutions and the rule of law. The Renaissance saw the rise of constitutionalism, which argued that even monarchs were subject to the law. This idea was a significant departure from the earlier notion of the divine right of kings, which suggested that monarchs were above the law.

Shakespeare's "Henry IV Part Two" reflects these historical debates. By portraying Prince Henry's journey towards understanding the importance of justice, Shakespeare suggests that true leadership requires a commitment to the rule of law. This idea is particularly relevant in the context of Renaissance political thought, which emphasized the importance of a just and equitable society.

2.3.3 The role of justice in effective governance

The theme of justice is not only central to Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship but also to the broader context of effective governance. A just society is one in which the rule of law is upheld, and where individuals are treated fairly and impartially. By emphasizing the importance of justice, Shakespeare suggests that a great king must prioritize the well-being of his subjects over his own interests.

This idea is particularly relevant in the context of Renaissance political thought, which emphasized the importance of a just and equitable society. Writers like Thomas More and Erasmus argued that the primary role of a ruler was to serve the common good, rather than to pursue personal power or wealth. Shakespeare's portrayal of Prince Henry's transformation reflects these ideals, as he evolves from a self-centered youth into a ruler who understands the importance of justice and the rule of law.

3 CONCLUSION

Being a great king requires more than just the title or the trappings of power. It demands a deep understanding of the responsibilities that come with the crown, the willingness to transform oneself to meet the demands of leadership, and a commitment to justice and the rule of law [9]. Shakespeare's "Henry IV Part Two" provides a compelling exploration of these themes through the character development of Prince Henry, who evolves into the wise and just King Henry V. By examining the qualities essential to kingship, Shakespeare offers valuable insights into the nature of effective leadership and the importance of moral integrity in governance [10].

Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship in "Henry IV Part Two" is not only relevant to the historical context of the Renaissance but also to contemporary discussions about leadership and governance [11]. The qualities that Shakespeare identifies as essential to being a great king—self-awareness, transformation, and a commitment to justice—are timeless ideals that remain relevant in any era. By exploring these themes through the character of Prince Henry, Shakespeare

provides a powerful reminder that true leadership requires both personal sacrifice and a dedication to the greater good [12].

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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