

The Trials of Becoming a Hero

Hero worship has existed in this world since the beginning of time, from the Jews honoring Moses, to the Germans honoring Adolf Hitler. Becoming a hero is a very difficult thing to accomplish. One must be successful in gaining the reverence of one's peers while at the same time not developing too big of an ego. Two examples of men trying to become heroes are Prince Henry and Dr. Faustus. Both, in their respective plays, have the capabilities of becoming a hero, but only Prince Henry succeeds while Dr. Faustus fails.

At the beginning of *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, Faustus is a well known doctor and is looked up to by his friends. Hal, on the other hand, starts out in *Henry IV, Part I*, spending much of his time in a tavern engaged in talk with robbers and hoodlums, therefore being looked down upon by the high society which he is supposed to live in. While it appears that Faustus seems to be headed to becoming a hero and Hal seems to be throwing away his chances, the audience can see from their soliloquies, that they both plan on changing their ways; Hal for the better and Faustus for the worse.

Faustus has risen to a great point in his life. He was born to "parents base of stock (line 11)," but still has managed to gain a degree from the University of Wittengberg, thus acquiring much respect from the professional world. From the onset though, Faustus has his mind set on other things; such as magic and necromancy. Hal, on the other hand was born to a high society. Even though he does all of these mischievous things, he plans on repenting and returning to his father.

The audience can see from Hal's soliloquy at the end of Act I, scene 2, that no matter how unruly the individuals are that he hangs out with, they do not have an influence on him:

Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wondered at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapors that did seem to strangle him. (line 152-158)

From the onset, Hal informs the reader that he is only befriending these unruly individuals to have some fun, but when the time comes, he will take on the serious role of being a prince.

In opposition to this, the only thing that influences Faustus is evil. When he calls upon his friends Valdes and Cornelius to teach him magic, he does this only to draw himself closer to evil:

Philosophy is odious and obscure,
Both law and physic are for petty wits;
Divinity is basest of the three,
Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile.
"Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me. (line 106-109)

The reader can see from here how enthralled Faustus is with magic.

From the magic that Faustus performs, he comes to sell his soul to Lucifer. Though Faustus brings this all upon himself, he is not doomed for an after-life of hell, but still has the chance to repent. Four different times, his conscience, in the form a good angel and a bad angel, fight over his soul. Though Faustus has many thoughts not to go ahead with his deal with the devil, the audience can easily see that in the back of his mind, that Faustus knows that he will go through with it:

EVIL ANGEL. Ay, but Faustus never shall repent (Line 194)."

Once Faustus signs the contract with the devil, he does not once think about turning back towards God.

Hal on the other hand, does not plan on staying on his corrupt path. He

realizes at the beginning of the play that he will eventually have to take on the responsibilities of a prince, but for now, when there are no obligations to take on, he will enjoy himself.

When Hal is rebuked by his father, King Henry IV, he takes this chance to change his ways and receives forgiveness from his father. In this scene, Prince Henry is taking that step towards becoming that hero which he is capable of becoming.

Faustus though, does not jump on his opportunity. At the end of his life, his conscience appears to him, this time in the form of an old man who pleads with Faustus to leave his damned course and repent:

Ah Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail
To guide thy steps unto the way of life,
By which sweet path though may'st attain the goal
That shall conduct thee to celestial rest. (line 26-29)

Mephistophilis, however, appears and presents Faustus with a dagger and threatens: "'Faustus, come thine hour is come!' (line 41)." Faustus asks Mephistophilis for forgiveness and offers to reaffirm his vow with Lucifer. This is Faustus' last chance to become a hero, but he lets it slip through his fingers.

One might think that Dr. Faustus actually does repent, and that he does become the hero he deserves to be. In his final words he denounces Mephistophilis and wishes he had just a little more time so he could "repent and save his soul (line 64)." However, when one delves deeper into the life that Faustus lived, it is obvious that he did not repent. During his twenty four years of "voluptuousness", not once does Faustus' conscience cause him to think about repenting. Only at the beginning of the play, before he begins to be served by Mephistophilis, and at the end of his life, when he realizes that he is damned and that he has no opportunity to repent, does he even entertain the idea of atoning. Thus, Dr. Faustus can never be considered a hero.

However, unlike Dr. Faustus, Prince Henry does accomplish the feat of becoming a hero. While at the beginning of the play, it appears that Hal does not really care what happens to himself or his father's kingdom, throughout the play, he slowly takes on his role of prince. He finishes his destiny of becoming a hero with his defeat of the warring Percys.

A hero is defined as "b. a man of courage and nobility famed for his military achievements c. a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities and considered a model or ideal (Webster's dictionary)." Prince Henry exemplifies both of these definitions. After he defeats his enemy, Hotspur, it is obvious that the people of England changed their view of him and began looking up to him. Now with this new found admiration, Prince Henry has gained the title of 'hero.' Dr. Faustus on the other hand, never reaches this point in his life. Numerous times, he has the ability to repent and turn around his life, but his desire for evil prevails. Both characters possessed the right qualities to become a hero, but only Prince Henry took advantage of them. As the audience can see, the only thing that matters is what someone perceives of themselves. No matter how much influence society has on someone, if they have it in them to succeed, they will. Consequently, anyone can prevail in becoming a hero.

