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Henry IV, Part 1

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Theme

posted Aug 4, 2013, 9:16 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 4, 2013, 9:16 PM]**

Lies and Deceit

Henry IV Part 2 is full of acts of deception. When the play opens, Rumour announces that it plans to "stuff" the ears of men with "lies." Soon after, Falstaff swindles Mistress Quickly out of money and breaks his promise to marry her. Prince John then deceives the rebel leaders at Gaultree Forest and sentences them to death for treason. We're also reminded that Prince Hal's public persona is built on a lie – he's been hiding behind a disguise since *Henry IV Part 1*. It seems that *nobody* in this play can be trusted (except, perhaps, the Lord Chief Justice, who seems to be the only straight-shooter in the entire lot). And it's no wonder, given that the monarch, King Henry IV, took a "crooked" path to the throne. Shakespeare makes us wonder if the only difference between the commoners and the nobility is that the nobles justify their deception as a form of "political strategy."

Warfare

There's a whole lot of talk about warfare, but very little action in *Henry IV Part 2*. Instead, the play looks back on the events surrounding the battle at Shrewsbury (from *Part 1*) and even looks ahead to the war Henry V will wage against France in the play *Henry V*. Like the other Henry plays, *Part 2* reminds us that civil war is a family affair – civil strife is frequently associated with domestic abuse. The play also reveals that King Henry IV's unfulfilled plans for a crusade are hardly more than a diversionary tactic. At other times, Shakespeare points to the kinds of corruption and deceit that inevitable accompany war – Falstaff is up to his old tricks

again, taking bribes from recruits and devising a scheme to defraud the military so he can receive a wounded soldier's pension. Even Prince John, the military leader in charge of the king's forces, manages to avert a bloody battle only after he deceives the rebel leaders.

Rules and Order

In *Henry IV Part 2*, the king's reign continues to be troubled by civil rebellion. The difference, however, is that the rebel leaders proceed with more caution than we saw in *Part 1* (mostly because the impetuous Hotspur has been killed). The rebels' careful deliberation, however, doesn't prevent them from being suppressed – Prince John easily tricks them into laying down their arms before any battles can be waged. The riotous antics of Falstaff continue in *Part 2* and Shakespeare introduces new and rowdy characters (like Pistol and Doll Tearsheet) who thumb their noses at authority. However, Prince Hal doesn't participate much in the revelry, as he looks forward to his future as king. By the play's end, order is restored – the rebels are put to death and Falstaff is banished by his beloved Hal as the play looks forward to civil order and unity.

Time

"We are time's subjects" notes Hastings as the rebels make preparations for another insurgency against the king (1.3.8). This is a sharp reminder that even in the midst of civil rebellion and chaos, there's one certainty – *everyone* is "subject" to the passing of time. In *Henry IV Part 2*, the spirited and larger than life Falstaff is aging and Henry IV is at death's door as the play anticipates the moment when Prince Hal will be crowned King Henry V. While characters in the play look forward to the future, they are also hyper-aware of the past. Memory plays a prominent role here and the play is deeply interested in the way we interpret (or misinterpret) our pasts and how our understanding of history can shape future events. While some (like Shallow and Justice) look on the past with fondness, others recall bygone events in an attempt to explain present circumstances, to imagine what the future might be like or, to speculate about how things might have been if only the past were different.

Power

Both *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2* offer an elaborate meditation on kingship. In *Part 2*,

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RECENT SITE ACTIVITY

Shakespeare focuses on the anxieties surrounding succession and the transfer of power between father and son. For Henry IV, kingship has been an exhausting and draining experience. Because Henry usurped the crown in *Richard II*, he spends most of his reign defending his position and worrying about what will happen when his unruly son, Hal, takes over. When Hal replaces his father and becomes Henry V, his position is more legitimate because he's inherited the throne by lineal succession. At the same time, Hal must prove that, despite his wild youth, he's fit to rule the country.

Family

Throughout the tetralogy, Shakespeare is interested in family bonds (especially father-son relationships), particularly when they intersect with politics. Even though Prince Hal saved his father's life at the battle of Shrewsbury in *Henry IV Part 1*, the troubled relationship between the king and his heir continues to parallel the civil rebellion in England. It also threatens the possibility of reestablishing any kind of political unity and order. As King Henry IV nears his death, he accuses Prince Hal of wanting him dead, an issue that Shakespeare also explores in plays like *King Lear*. Hal's success as a king seems contingent upon his making amends with his father and rejecting his surrogate father-figure, Falstaff. Hal's banishment of Falstaff and his acceptance of the Lord Chief Justice as a new "father" confirm his "reformation" from a wayward son to a monarch who will uphold civil order.

Weakness

Henry IV Part 2 is consumed with images of illness, decay, and disease. King Henry IV is dying, Falstaff is plagued by illness that accompanies old age (and an excessive lifestyle) and even the lowly commoner, Bullcalf, claims to have a "whoreson cold." At other times, the entire country imagined as a human body wracked with disease, which is an appropriate metaphor for a commonwealth that's plagued by civil rebellion and turmoil. This theme can be traced back to *Richard II*, when Henry's father, John of Gaunt, accused King Richard II of corrupting England and subjecting the country to "infection" (*Richard II*, 2.1.3).

characters

posted Aug 4, 2013, 9:12 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 4, 2013, 9:12 PM]**

Henry IV Part 1

Before we think about Hal's character in *Part 2*, let's recap Hal's trajectory in *Henry IV Part 1*. In *Part 1*, Hal spent most of his time carousing with his low-life Eastcheap pals and taking every opportunity to thumb his nose at authority, which caused a huge rift between Hal and his father, King Henry IV. Henry IV worried about what would happen when Hal inherited the crown. Hal shocked the audience at the end of Act 1, Scene 2, when he delivered an infamous speech that was all about how his bad behavior was just a disguise or a role to be played. Hal said that he was *pretending* to be a degenerate in order to stage a dramatic "reformation" that would amaze his critics and make him a better king (*Henry IV Part 1*, 1.2.29). By the play's end, the prince redeemed himself on the battlefield by saving his father from the Scottish Douglas and by killing the rebel Hotspur. As a war hero, Hal shrugged off his bad-boy reputation and demonstrated his ability to govern. (You might want to read our in-depth

Sir John Falstaff

Usually called Falstaff but sometimes called Jack. A fat, cheerful, witty, aging criminal, he has long been Prince Hal's mentor and close friend. He pretended to have killed Hotspur at the Battle of Shrewsbury, and Prince Hal--the actual killer--agreed to go along with the lie. For this reason, everyone gives Falstaff much more respect than he deserves.

Lord Chief Justice

At first, Prince Hal is set in opposition to King Henry IV's Lord Chief Justice (LCJ), the guy appointed to uphold "the majesty and power of law and justice" (5.2.9). Apparently, the LCJ once threw the prince in the slammer for boxing him on the ears. This is just an old fashioned way of saying Hal once smacked the Lord Chief Justice upside his head and has been at odds with the guy ever since. After King Henry IV dies and Prince Hal officially becomes King Henry V, the LCJ is worried that the new monarch will punish him.

When Hal becomes the King Henry V, he needs a trusty advisor and new BFF, especially since

being friends with the degenerate Falstaff is now out of the question. This job calls for the Lord Chief Justice, wouldn't you say? The Lord Chief Justice seems to be the only honest and impartial guy in the entire kingdom, which is why Hal thinks it's a good idea to have him on his side. He says to the LCJ "My voice shall sound as you do prompt my ear / And I will stoop and humble my intents / To your well-practiced wise decision" (5.2.4). In other words, from here on out, the LCJ has got the king's *ear*. Hal also embraces the LCJ as a "father" figure, which means that the Lord Chief Justice has taken the place of Falstaff, who was Hal's surrogate father figure in *Henry IV Part 1*.

Mistress Quickly

Mistress Quickly is the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern, where every degenerate in Eastcheap likes to hang out. Because of her association with the topsy-turvy world of the tavern, Mistress Quickly is an important figure that embodies the play's rebellious spirit. Recently widowed, Mistress Quickly falls prey to Falstaff's deception – he swindles her out of a lot of money after promising to marry her. Here's an example where Mistress Quickly orders two officers to arrest Falstaff:

I pray ye, since my
exion is entered and my case so openly known to the
world, let him be brought in to his answer. A
hundred mark is a long one for a poor lone woman to
bear: and I have borne, and borne, and borne, and
have been fubbed off, and fubbed off, and fubbed
off [...]
Do your offices, do your offices: Master
Fang and Master Snare, do me, do me, do me your offices.

Mistress Quickly says that since her legal action ("exion") has been entered and made known to the world, she wants Falstaff to answer for his crimes against her. There's only so much she can "bear" (put up with) because Falstaff owes her so much money. At the same time, her complaints are full of double entendres, which makes her lawsuit seem a bit silly. Perhaps inadvertently, she implies that her legal case *and* her body are "openly known to the world." She also says she "bears" the burden of Falstaff's debt, with a pun on "bearing" the weight of Falstaff as a sexual partner. The unintentional bawdiness of her speech is comically

exaggerated when she says been "fubbed off, and fubbed off, and fubbed off" and when she orders the officers to "do" their duties on her behalf: "do me, do me, do me," she says. Mistress Quickly, like her speech, is also *totally* out of control.

Doll Tearsheet

Doll Tearsheet is a smart, saucy, knife-wielding, prostitute, who hangs out at the Boar's Head Tavern. She's Mistress Quickly's BFF and Falstaff's favorite "companion." Unlike Mistress Quickly, Tearsheet is pretty smart and can definitely hold her own in a verbal smack down. She can also hold her own in a bar brawl, which she does in Act 2, Scene 4, when she gets into a little dustup with Pistol. All of these activities make Doll Tearsheet an unruly figure – she flouts male authority, civil order, and social convention. Though the Henry plays seem to celebrate this kind of disorder and rebellion, it ultimately restores order at the conclusion of *Henry IV Part 2*, when Doll and the other Eastcheap rowdies are put in their places. At the end of Act 5, Scene 4, Doll and Mistress Quickly are arrested for murder on the streets of London.

Pistol

Pistol is a "swaggering" officer (or "Ensign") who serves under Falstaff in the king's army. Despite Pistol's military duties in the service of the crown, like the rest of the rowdy Eastcheap crew, he is a significant figure in the play's portrayal of civil disorder.

What, you want evidence? Let's see, Pistol's favorite hobbies include brawling in taverns (with men *and* women) and talking trash, which famously results in him being thrown out of his favorite bar, the Boar's Head Tavern in Act 2, Scene 4. By the end of the play, Pistol is also implicated in the murder of a man (we're not given much information about this) when two officers arrest Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly in Act 5, Scene 4. So, we might say Pistol is kind of a "pistol" – that is, he's explosive, violent, dangerous, and we never know when he might "go off." He's also kind of fun, in a "gosh he's not a good guy, but happens to be entertaining" kind of way.

The title page of the 1600 Quarto edition of the play (which promises the "the humours of Sir John Falstaff, and the swaggering Pistoll,") suggests that Shakespeare's original audiences *loved* this outrageous character. What's so funny about a violent guy with a big mouth? Well, part of

it has to do with the fact that Pistol tends to misquote lines from famous Elizabethan plays like Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (c. 1588), which was known for it's big, bold language and violence. The fact that Pistol mangles the lines suggests that's he's kind of a poser and not entirely in control of his own outrageous language, which seems to make him all the more dangerous and comical.

Page

A boy whom Prince Hal has assigned to serve Falstaff as his page; he carries Falstaff's sword and runs his errands.

Poins, Peto, Bardolph

Friends of Falstaff and Prince Hal. Formerly highwaymen and robbers, they have, like Falstaff, gained money and prestige since the Battle of
Shrewsbury. Poins is the smartest of the bunch and the closest to Hal. Bardolph, an insatiable drinker, has a famously bright red nose.

Ancient Pistol

An army ensign ("ancient" meant "ensign" in Elizabethan English), he serves under Falstaff and is extremely aggressive and prone to fighting.

Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, Feeble, and Bullcalf

Army recruits whom Falstaff inspects in Gloucestershire (III.ii). Only Shadow, Wart, and Feeble come with him to the war; the others bribe their way out.

Archbishop of York

A powerful northern clergyman who leads the rebellion against King Henry IV.

Mowbray and Hastings

Two lords who conspire with the Archbishop of York to overthrow King Henry IV.

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland

Usually called Northumberland but sometimes called Percy. A powerful northern nobleman whose brother Worcester and son Hotspur have recently been killed in battle against King Henry IV.

Travers

Northumberland's servant.

Hotspur

Dead before the play begins, he is often referred to in its early scenes. He was Northumberland's son and a leader of the rebellion against the

king. He was also called Percy or Harry Percy. Prince Hal killed him at the Battle of Shrewsbury, but everyone thinks that the killer was Falstaff.

Lord Bardolph

An ally of Northumberland who brings him the false news of Hotspur’s success in I.i. (Not to be confused with Falstaff's friend Bardolph.)

Owen Glendower

A mysterious and influential leader of a group of rebel guerrilla fighters in Wales, his character never actually appears in the play.

Mistress Quickly (the Hostess)

Proprietor of the seedy Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, London. She has a dim wit but a good heart.

Doll Tearsheet

Falstaff's favorite prostitute and a good friend of Mistress Quickly. She has a bottomless repertoire of insults and seems to be both fiercer and smarter than most of the law officers hanging around Eastcheap. She may be in love with Falstaff.

Fang and Snare

Incompetent officers of the law upon whom Mistress Quickly calls to arrest Falstaff in II.i.

Justice Shallow and Justice Silence

Middle-class country landowners who are also justices of the peace (minor local law officers). They are cousins. Shallow is an old school friend of Falstaff's. The two both live up to their names: Justice Shallow talks endlessly about trivial topics, while Justice Silence barely ever opens his mouth--except to sing raunchy songs when he gets drunk.

Davy

An honest, industrious, and talkative household servant of Justice Shallow.

Summary

posted Aug 4, 2013, 8:59 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 4, 2013, 8:59 PM]**

In the first years of the 15th century, England is in the middle of a civil war. Powerful rebels have assembled against King Henry IV in an attempt to overthrow him. They have just suffered

a major defeat at the Battle of Shrewsbury, but several rebel leaders--including the Archbishop of York, Lord Mowbray, and Lord Hastings--remain alive and continue to wage war against the king. King Henry, aging prematurely because of his anxiety over the war and over his oldest son, Prince Hal, has recently become very ill.

Prince Hal has spent most of his teenage years raising hell in taverns with a group of lowlife friends. His closest friend and mentor is Falstaff, a jovial, aging, witty criminal. Falstaff and some of Hal's other friends have won wealth and power at the Battle of Shrewsbury. We watch Falstaff, now an army captain, drink in a London tavern and travel around the countryside to recruit young men to serve in the upcoming battles. Prince Hal, meanwhile, knowing that he will have to take the reins of power when his father dies, has vowed to change his ways and become responsible. He has started to spend less time with his old friends.

The rebel leaders gather their forces to battle the king at the Forest of Gaultree. They are disappointed when the powerful Earl of Northumberland does not offer soldiers to support them. (This is the second time he had refused to offer aid; the first time, at the Battle of Shrewsbury, his refusal led to his son's death in battle.) Prince John, the king's second son, leads the king's army to meet them at the forest. Prince John says he will agree to all the rebels' demands, but as soon as the relieved rebels have sent their soldiers home, he arrests them for treason. The rebels protest this injustice, but the prince has them executed.

Meanwhile, at his palace in London, King Henry IV grows increasingly sick. He is worried about what will happen when his wayward son becomes king. Prince Hal comes to the palace; his father gives him a tongue-lashing, and Prince Hal, in an eloquent speech, vows that he will be a responsible king. His father forgives him and then dies. Prince Hal, now King Henry V, tells the Lord Chief Justice, the highest law official in England, that he will now view him as a father figure.

After the rebels have been executed, Hal is formally crowned King Henry V. Falstaff and his companions come to London to greet him, but in the middle of a public street, the king rejects Falstaff, telling him he must never come within ten miles of the king or court again. He may have a pension, but the king will have nothing more to do with him. Then the young king goes to court to lay plans for an invasion of France.

Symboles

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Representative Characters

Like most of Shakespeare's other history plays, *1 Henry IV* does not make great use of symbolism as a literary device: the play concerns real people and events and so tells a much more concrete story than a more symbolic play like *Macbeth* or *The Tempest.* The most important symbols, generally speaking, are the characters themselves, and what they represent is simply the set of ideas and traits with which they are involved. Glyndwr represents both the Welsh motif in the play and the motif of magic, while Hotspur represents rebellion and the idea that honor is won and lost in battle.

The Sun

The sun in *1 Henry IV* represents the king and his reign. Both Harry and his father, Henry, use an image of the sun obscured by clouds to describe themselves—the former in Act I, scene ii, lines 175–181, and the latter in Act III, scene ii, lines 79–84. For King Henry, the clouds that blur his light come from his own doubts about the legitimacy of his reign. For Harry, these clouds are the shades of his immaturity and initial refusal to accept and adopt his noble responsibilities. Having accepted his royal duties, Harry can anticipate shining through these clouds and radiating his full regal glory.

Motifs

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Doubles

1 Henry IV explores many different sides of a few major themes. Its primary technique for this multifaceted exploration is one of simple contrast. The differences between Harry and Hotspur make a statement on different perceptions of honor, just as the differences between the Boar's Head Tavern and the royal palace make a statement on the breadth of England's class differences. In utilizing contrast as a major thematic device, the play creates a motif of doubles, in which characters, actions, and scenes are often repeated in varied form throughout the play. For instance, Falstaff and the king act as doubles in that both are father figures for Harry. Harry

and Hotspur act as doubles in that both are potential successors to Henry IV. Falstaff's comical robbery in Act II, scene ii serves as a kind of lower-class double to the nobles' Battle of Shrewsbury, exploring the consequences of rebellion against the law.

British Cultures

As befits the play's general multiplicity of ideas, Shakespeare is preoccupied throughout much of *1 Henry IV* with the contrasts and relationships of the different cultures native to the British Isles and united under the rule of the king. Accents, folk traditions, and geographies are discussed and analyzed, particularly through the use of Welsh characters such as Glyndwr and Scottish characters such as the Douglas. Shakespeare also rehearses the various stereotypes surrounding each character type, portraying Glyndwr as an ominous magician and the Douglas as a hotheaded warrior.

Magic

A strong current of magic runs throughout the play, which is primarily a result of the inclusion of the wizardly Glyndwr. Magic has very little to do with the plot, but it is discussed by different characters with uncommon frequency throughout the play. As with the subject of honor, a character's opinion about the existence of magic tends to say more about the character than it does about the subject itself. The pragmatic and overconfident Hotspur, for instance, expresses contempt for belief in the black arts, repeatedly mocking Glyndwr for claiming to have magical powers. The sensuous and narcissistic Glyndwr, by contrast, seems to give full credence to the idea of magic and to the idea that he is a magician—credence that says more about Glyndwr's own propensity for self-aggrandizement than about the reality of magic itself.

Theme

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Principles

While "honour" is perhaps the play's most important theme, it's also the most difficult concept to pin down. In the mouths of various characters, the definition of honor ranges from being synonymous with an individual's courage on the battlefield to a mere "word" used in an attempt to elevate the physical horrors of warfare to something more lofty and intangible. From *Henry IV Part 1*'s beginning, Hotspur is praised as the very embodiment of honor, while Prince Hal is marked by the "stain" of "dishonour." This allows the play to consider the kind of behavior that

makes one a good leader and a strong king. In this way, honor is closely related to the theme of "Power."

Power

Henry IV Part 1 offers an elaborate meditation on kingship. As a monarch who has usurped the throne and alienated his most important allies, King Henry must figure out a way to maintain power while the rebels challenge the legitimacy of his reign. The play also considers the qualities and characteristics that make one a good leader by examining the younger generation. By contrasting the calculating and manipulative Prince Hal to his courageous and valiant foil, Hotspur, Shakespeare explores the relationship between principles and monarchy. The play's dramatization of the crisis of succession would have also resonated with an important Elizabethan political issue – at the time *Henry IV Part 1* was written, Queen Elizabeth I had no children and no heir.

Warfare

Throughout *Henry IV Part 1* we're reminded that civil war is a family affair, one that threatens to tear apart the collective kingdom. The play begins and ends with portrayals of warfare and promises that civil strife will continue in the sequel, *Henry IV Part 2*. In the play, war is largely associated with masculinity and honor. For Prince Hal especially, the battlefield is a place for redemption and transformation. While several members of the nobility attempt to elevate the physical horrors of war to something lofty and noble, the play also gives voice (via Falstaff) to the idea that the violence of warfare is meaningless and hollow.

Family

Family relations are at the heart of *Henry IV Part 1*. Shakespeare is particularly concerned with father-son relationships between Hal and King Henry, Hal and his surrogate father-figure, (Falstaff), and Northumberland and Hotspur. On the one hand, the meditation on family relations offers a way for the play to humanize the historical figures Shakespeare makes into characters of political intrigue. Yet, the play also reminds us that civil war and the struggle for the crown is a *family* affair. Male relationships dominate the play, but *Henry IV Part 1* also takes a look at husbands and wives. As it contrasts the relationships between the Percys and the

Mortimers, it explores Elizabethan notions of gender and sexuality.

Art and Culture

Henry IV Part 1 makes several self-conscious references to the workings of Elizabethan theater. Most notably, the wild impromptu skit at the Boar's Head tavern presents a "play-within-a-play" that offers an opportunity for Shakespeare to explore the relationship between rebellion and the stage. Because it's a space where Prince Hal can practice being "king," the tavern is also a kind of training ground or important rehearsal space for the young man who will inherit the throne. Frequent play-acting and character impersonation throughout *Henry IV Part 1* give voice to the notion that "kingship" is just another "role" to be played. The play's concern with meta-theatricality aligns it with other important works, including *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Rules and Order

The play's concern with "Rules and Order" is closely linked the theme of "Power." In *Henry IV Part 1*, two stories of rebellion and disorder run parallel – the story of Prince Hal's "teenage" rebellion against his father and the rebel uprising led by the Percy family. While the play makes clear the gravity of both threats to stability in Britain, it often deflates the seriousness of civil and familial disobedience with comedic episodes and parody. Rebellion is frequently associated with effeminacy and women and should be considered along side "Gender." Shakespeare's also interested in the relationship between theater and rebellion.

Language and Communication

For Shakespeare, the mastery of languages, speech, and rhetoric is closely aligned with authority and control. Early on, *Henry IV Part 1* establishes freedom of speech as a powerful tool of rebellion and resistance to authority, especially for Hotspur. Yet, it becomes clear throughout the play that Hal's capacity for language acquisition establishes him as a man fit to rule, whereas Hotspur's lack of rhetorical control and disdain for foreign speech reveals him to be an unfit leader. At times, language is associated with manipulation, deceit, and effeminacy, but, as in all Shakespeare's work, language is ultimately synonymous with power. The play also famously portrays a broad spectrum of language as it covers various regional and class

dialects spoken in England and Britain

Gender

Henry IV Part 1 offers an interesting meditation on gender. For the most part, the play is concerned with masculinity and honor and relations between men – fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, brothers, cousins, male colleagues, and so on. Given that the play's main story line is one of primogeniture (how the prince will inherit the crown from his father), this is unsurprising. The play's three female characters are marginally significant but the play goes out of its way to dramatize and examine relations between husbands and wives. In *Henry IV Part 1* women are always linked with rebellion and are frequently viewed as threats to masculinity.

Major Characters

posted Aug 4, 2013, 8:15 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 4, 2013, 8:15 PM]**

Prince Harry

The complex Prince Harry is at the center of events in *1 Henry IV.* As the only character to move between the grave, serious world of King Henry and Hotspur and the rollicking, comical world of Falstaff and the Boar's Head Tavern, Harry serves as a bridge uniting the play's two major plotlines. An initially disreputable prince who eventually wins back his honor and the king's esteem, Harry undergoes the greatest dramatic development in the play, deliberately transforming himself from the wastrel he pretends to be into a noble leader. Additionally, as the character whose sense of honor and leadership Shakespeare most directly endorses, Harry is, at least by implication, the moral focus of the play.

Harry is nevertheless a complicated character and one whose real nature is very difficult to pin down. As the play opens, Harry has been idling away his time with Falstaff and earning the displeasure of both his father and England as a whole. He then surprises everyone by declaring that his dissolute lifestyle is all an act: he is simply trying to lower the expectations that surround him so that, when he must, he can emerge as his true, heroic self, shock the whole country, and win the people's love and his father's admiration. Harry is clearly intelligent and already capable of the psychological machinations required of kings.

But the heavy measure of deceit involved in his plan seems to call his honor into question, and his treatment of Falstaff further sullies his name: though there seems to be real affection between the prince and the roguish knight, Harry is quite capable of tormenting and humiliating his friend (and, when he becomes king in *2 Henry IV,* of disowning him altogether). Shakespeare seems to include these aspects of Harry's character in order to illustrate that Falstaff's selfish bragging does not fool Harry and to show that Harry is capable of making the difficult personal choices that a king must make in order to rule a nation well. In any case, Harry's emergence here as a heroic young prince is probably *1 Henry IV*'s defining dynamic, and it opens the door for Prince Harry to become the great King Henry V in the next two plays in Shakespeare's sequence.

Sir John Falstaff

Old, fat, lazy, selfish, dishonest, corrupt, thieving, manipulative, boastful, and lecherous, Falstaff is, despite his many negative qualities, perhaps the most popular of all of Shakespeare's comic characters. Though he is technically a knight, Falstaff's lifestyle clearly renders him incompatible with the ideals of courtly chivalry that one typically associates with knighthood. For instance, Falstaff is willing to commit robbery for the money and entertainment of it. As Falstaff himself notes at some length, honor is useless to him: "Can honour set-to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. . . . What is honour? A word" (V.i.130–133). He perceives honor as a mere "word," an abstract concept that has no relevance to practical matters. Nevertheless, though Falstaff mocks honor by linking it to violence, to which it is intimately connected throughout the play, he remains endearing and likable to Shakespeare's audiences. Two reasons that Falstaff retains this esteem are that he plays his scoundrel's role with such gusto and that he never enjoys enough success to become a real villain; even his highway robbery ends in humiliation for him.

Falstaff seems to scorn morality largely because he has such a hearty appetite for life and finds the niceties of courtesy and honor useless when there are jokes to be told and feasts to be eaten. Largely a creature of words, Falstaff has earned the admiration of some Shakespearean scholars because of the self-creation he achieves through language: Falstaff is constantly creating a myth of Falstaff, and this myth defines his identity even when it is visibly revealed to be false. A master of punning and wordplay, Falstaff provides most of the comedy in the play (just as he does in *2 Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor,* and *Henry V*). He redeems himself largely through his real affection for Prince Harry, whom, despite everything, he seems to regard as a real friend. This affection makes Harry's decision, foreshadowed in *1 Henry IV,* to abandon Falstaff when he becomes king (in *2 Henry IV*) seem all the more harsh.

King Henry IV

The title character of *1 Henry IV* appears in *Richard II* as the ambitious, energetic, and capable Bolingbroke, who seizes the throne from the inept Richard II after likely arranging his murder.

Though Henry is not yet truly an old man in *1 Henry IV*, his worries about his crumbling kingdom, guilt over his uprising against Richard II, and the vagaries of his son's behavior have diluted his earlier energy and strength. Henry remains stern, aloof, and resolute, but he is no longer the force of nature he appears to be in *Richard II*. Henry's trouble stems from his own uneasy conscience and his uncertainty about the legitimacy of his rule. After all, he himself is a murderer who has illegally usurped the throne from Richard II. Therefore, it is difficult to blame Hotspur and the Percys for wanting to usurp his throne for themselves. Furthermore, it is unclear how Henry's kingship is any more legitimate than that of Richard II. Henry thus lacks the moral legitimacy that every effective ruler needs.

With these concerns lurking at the back of his reign, Henry is unable to rule as the magnificent leader his son Harry will become. Throughout the play he retains his tight, tenuous hold on the throne, and he never loses his majesty. But with an ethical sense clouded by his own sense of compromised honor, it is clear that Henry can never be a great king or anything more than a caretaker to the throne that awaits Henry V.

characters

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King Henry IV

The ruling king of England. Henry is not actually all that old, but at the time the play opens, he has been worn down prematurely by worries. He nurses guilty feelings about having won his throne through a civil war that deposed the former king, Richard II. In addition, his reign has not brought an end to the internal strife in England, which erupts into an even bigger civil war in this play. Finally, he is vexed by the irresponsible antics of his eldest son, Prince Harry. Regal, proud, and somewhat aloof, King Henry is not the main character of the play that bears his name but, rather, its historical focus. He gives the play a center of power and a sense of stability, though his actions and emotions are largely secondary to the plot.

Prince Harry

King Henry IV's son, who will eventually become King Henry V. Harry's title is Prince of Wales, but all of his friends call him Hal; he is also sometimes called Harry Monmouth. Though Harry spends all his time hanging around highwaymen, robbers, and whores, he has secret plans to transform himself into a noble prince, and his regal qualities emerge as the play unfolds.

Harry is the closest thing the play has to a protagonist: his complex and impressive mind is generally at the center of the play, though Shakespeare is often somewhat ambiguous about how we are meant to understand this simultaneously deceitful and heroic young prince.

Hotspur

The son and heir of the Earl of Northumberland and the nephew of the Earl of Worcester. Hotspur's real name is Henry Percy (he is also called Harry or Percy), but he has earned his nickname from his fierceness in battle and hastiness of action. Hotspur is a member of the powerful Percy family of the North, which helped bring King Henry IV to power but now feels that the king has forgotten his debt to them. In Shakespeare's account, Hotspur is the same age as Prince Harry and becomes his archrival. Quick-tempered and impatient, Hotspur is obsessed with the idea of honor and glory to the exclusion of all other qualities.

Sir John Falstaff

A fat old man between the ages of about fifty and sixty-five who hangs around in taverns on the wrong side of London and makes his living as a thief, highwayman, and mooch. Falstaff is Prince Harry's closest friend and seems to act as a sort of mentor to him, instructing him in the practices of criminals and vagabonds. He is the only one of the bunch who can match Harry's quick wit pun for pun.

Earl of Westmoreland

A nobleman and military leader who is a close companion and valuable ally of King Henry IV.

Lord John of Lancaster

The younger son of King Henry and the younger brother of Prince Harry. John proves himself wise and valiant in battle, despite his youth.

Sir Walter Blunt

A loyal and trusted ally of the king and a valuable warrior.

Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester

Hotspur's uncle. Shrewd and manipulative, Worcester is the mastermind behind the Percy rebellion.

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland

Hotspur's father. Northumberland conspires and raises troops on the Percy side, but he claims that he is sick before the Battle of Shrewsbury and does not actually bring his troops into the fray.

Edmund Mortimer, called the Earl of March

The Welsh rebel Owain Glyndwr's son-in-law. Mortimer is a conflation of two separate historical figures: Mortimer and the Earl of March. For Shakespeare's purposes, Mortimer matters because he had a strong claim to the throne of England before King Henry overthrew the previous king, Richard II.

Owain Glyndwr

The leader of the Welsh rebels and the father of Lady Mortimer (most editions of *1 Henry IV* refer to him as Owen Glendower). Glyndwr joins with the Percys in their insurrection against King Henry. Well-read, educated in England, and very capable in battle, he is also steeped in the traditional lore of

Wales and claims to be able to command great magic. He is mysterious and superstitious and sometimes acts according to prophecies and omens.

Archibald, Earl of Douglas

The leader of the large army of Scottish rebels against King Henry. Usually called "The Douglas" (a traditional way of referring to a Scottish clan chief), the deadly and fearless Douglas fights on the side of the Percys.

Sir Richard Vernon

A relative and ally of the Earl of Worcester.

The Archbishop of York

The archbishop, whose given name is Richard Scrope, has a grievance against King Henry and thus conspires on the side of the Percys.

Ned Poins, Bardolph, and Peto

Criminals and highwaymen. Poins, Bardolph, and Peto are friends of Falstaff and Prince Harry who drink with them in the Boar's Head Tavern, accompany them in highway robbery, and go with them to war.

Gadshill

Another highwayman friend of Harry, Falstaff, and the rest. Gadshill seems to be nicknamed after the place on the London road—called Gad's Hill—where he has set up many robberies.

Mistress Quickly

Hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern, a seedy dive in Eastcheap, London, where Falstaff and his friends go to drink.

Summary

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Note: 1 Henry IV has two main plots that intersect in a dramatic battle at the end of the play. The first plot concerns King Henry IV, his son, Prince Harry, and their strained relationship. The second concerns a rebellion that is being plotted against King Henry by a discontented family of noblemen in the North, the Percys, who are angry because of King Henry's refusal to acknowledge his debt to them. The play's scenes alternate between these two plot strands until they come together at the play's end.

When the play opens, military news interrupts the aging King Henry's plans to lead a crusade. The Welsh rebel Glyndwr has defeated King Henry's army in the South, and the young Harry Percy (nicknamed Hotspur), who is supposedly loyal to King Henry, is refusing to send to the king the soldiers whom he has captured in the North. King Henry summons Hotspur back to the royal court so that he can explain his actions.

Meanwhile, King Henry's son, Prince Harry, sits drinking in a bar with criminals and highwaymen. King Henry is very disappointed in his son; it is common knowledge that Harry, the heir to the throne, conducts himself in a manner unbefitting royalty. He spends most of his time in taverns on the seedy side of London, hanging around with vagrants and other shady characters. Harry's closest friend among the crew of rascals is Falstaff, a sort of substitute father figure. Falstaff is a worldly and fat old man who steals and lies for a living. Falstaff is also an extraordinarily witty person who lives with great gusto. Harry claims that his spending time

with these men is actually part of a scheme on his part to impress the public when he eventually changes his ways and adopts a more noble personality.

Falstaff's friend Poins arrives at the inn and announces that he has plotted the robbery of a group of wealthy travelers. Although Harry initially refuses to participate, Poins explains to him in private that he is actually playing a practical joke on Falstaff. Poins's plan is to hide before the robbery occurs, pretending to ditch Falstaff. After the robbery, Poins and Harry will rob Falstaff and then make fun of him when he tells the story of being robbed, which he will almost certainly fabricate.

Hotspur arrives at King Henry's court and details the reasons that his family is frustrated with the king: the Percys were instrumental in helping Henry overthrow his predecessor, but Henry has failed to repay the favor. After King Henry leaves, Hotspur's family members explain to Hotspur their plan to build an alliance to overthrow the king.

Harry and Poins, meanwhile, successfully carry out their plan to dupe Falstaff and have a great deal of fun at his expense. As they are all drinking back at the tavern, however, a messenger arrives for Harry. Harry's father has received news of the civil war that is brewing and has sent for his son; Harry is to return to the royal court the next day.

Although the Percys have gathered a formidable group of allies around them—leaders of large rebel armies from Scotland and Wales as well as powerful English nobles and clergymen who have grievances against King Henry—the alliance has begun to falter. Several key figures announce that they will not join in the effort to overthrow the king, and the danger that these defectors might alert King Henry of the rebellion necessitates going to war at once.

Heeding his father's request, Harry returns to the palace. King Henry expresses his deep sorrow and anger at his son's behavior and implies that Hotspur's valor might actually give him more right to the throne than Prince Harry's royal birth. Harry decides that it is time to reform, and he vows that he will abandon his wild ways and vanquish Hotspur in battle in order to reclaim his good name. Drafting his tavern friends to fight in King Henry's army, Harry accompanies his father to the battlefront.

The civil war is decided in a great battle at Shrewsbury. Harry boldly saves his father's life in battle and finally wins back his father's approval and affection. Harry also challenges and defeats Hotspur in single combat. King Henry's forces win, and most of the leaders of the Percy family are put to death. Falstaff manages to survive the battle by avoiding any actual fighting.

Powerful rebel forces remain in Britain, however, so King Henry must send his sons and his forces to the far reaches of his kingdom to deal with them. When the play ends, the ultimate outcome of the war has not yet been determined; one battle has been won, but another remains to be fought (Shakespeare's sequel to this play, *2 Henry IV*, begins where *1 Henry IV* leaves off).

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