

2 Henry IV (Summer 2009)

The Second Part of King Henry IV begins not with kings or rebels but with Rumor, who enters “painted full of tongues” (upon which “continual slanders ride, / ... Stuffing the ears of men with false reports”), to summarize the action from the previous play:

I run before King Harry's victory,
Who in a bloody field by Shrewsbury
Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,
Quenching the flame of bold rebellion
Even with the rebels' blood.

[Induction, 1–8 & 23–7]

Alas, Shakespearean history is rarely so straightforward, and Rumor quickly doubles back:

But what mean I
To speak so true at first? My office is
To noise about that Harry Monmouth fell
Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword,
And that the king before the Douglas' rage
Stooped his anointed head as low as death.
... The posts come tiring on,
And not a man of them brings other news
Than they have learned of me. From Rumor's tongues
They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs.

[Induction, 27–40]

In other words, Shakespeare begins by reminding us, through the most literal of devices, that what we expect to be true and what in fact is true are often at odds. The play that follows is a marvelous dramatization of Rumor's meaning. The most poignant thwarted expectation belongs to Falstaff, who races to the doom prepared for him by the newly crowned and virtuous Henry V. But Shakespeare establishes the pattern even before *Part II* begins, with the retrospectively ominous words that close *Part I*:

Then this remains, that we divide our power.

You, son John, and my cousin Westmoreland,
 Towards York shall bend you with your dearest speed
 To meet Northumberland and the prelate Scroop,
 Who, as we hear, are busily in arms.
 Myself and you, son Harry, will towards Wales
 To fight with Glendower and the Earl of March.
 Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway,
 Meeting the check of such another day;
 And since this business so fair is done,
 Let us not leave till all our own be won.

[*IHIV*, V.v.34–44]

King Henry IV speaks these lines, unwittingly ironic. Henry's powers are indeed divided throughout *Part II*—he does not appear onstage with all his sons until late in Act IV, and scarcely fifteen lines later he is dead, wasted by sleepless nights and an unnamed illness that, perversely, has *undivided* a far dearer power: Observes the Duke of Clarence, “The incessant care and labor of his mind / Hath wrought the mure that should confine it in / So thin that life looks through and will break out “ [IV.iv.118–20].

Henry dies having learned of his son John's victory over Scroop and the other rebels (minus Northumberland, preoccupied with finding “many thousand reasons” not to fight [II.iii.66])—though John purchases victory with an equivocation so despicable, it is difficult to believe this same man fought valorously at Shrewsbury Field. Thinking on such later deeds, we remember Shrewsbury even more fondly and, to return to King Henry's closing speech, we may note that whatever “fairness” Lancastrian rule possessed truly did end with *Part I*. The business of *Part II* is plainer: Let us not leave till all our own be won ... by any means convenient.

Indeed, scene after scene in this second play reminds us of the first, and every comparison only quickens our nostalgia. Both plays begin with rumors concerning Hotspur; the difference, of course, is that in *Part II* the scene-stealing young rebel is

dead. The ensuing scenes both feature Falstaff, only in *Part II* his sparring partners are not Hal and Poins but his tiny page, whose wittiest contribution is simply to stand next to Fat Jack, and the Lord Chief Justice, whose idea of wit is to inform Sir John that he lives “in great infamy” [I.ii.133–4]. Next come scenes of plotting against the king: *Part I* features Hotspur’s magnificent rants against “this vile politician, Bolingbroke” [*IHV*, I.iii.240]; *Part II* settles for uninspired debate amongst interchangeable rebels, who alternate between doubting each other’s commitment and cursing the commonwealth for foisting King Henry upon them.

The story is the same in Act II, in which plots by Hal and Poins to embarrass Falstaff both times lead to extended detours through Eastcheap. But what a difference a play makes! The tavern scene in *Part I* contains some of the most spirited repartee ever written: Falstaff’s dazzling defense of his cowardice at Gad’s Hill, the “rehearsal” of Hal’s confrontation with his father, even Hal’s petty mockery of the poor waiter Francis—all are performed with delightful gusto. By contrast, in *Part II* the joke on Falstaff is nastier—“Let’s beat him before his whore” seems to be the gist of it [II.iv.251]—and, unsurprisingly, Hal can summon very little enthusiasm; after exchanging fewer than a hundred lines with Falstaff, he berates himself for wasting “the precious time” [II.iv.353], turns, and exits. Falstaff shall not see him again until the crushing rejection that ends the play.

In other words, Shakespeare continually tempts us with happy memories only to wrench us back to a dreary present. As though to acknowledge the impossibility of reliving the past, following Hal’s aborted reunion with Falstaff, Shakespeare ends the scene-by-scene parallels and lets the new play find its own path: through Gaultree Forest

and the treachery of Prince John, toward Gloucester and Justice Robert Shallow, and finally within striking distance of France. An unusual strategy for a sequel, which suggests Shakespeare intended more than merely to capitalize on former glories. We'd do well to remember this as we re-examine the several characters from *Part I* who return for another go-around—beginning, as before, with the protagonist,

Prince Hal

Consider the turn in Hal's fortunes between the end of *Part I*, when he rides in triumph with his father toward Wales, and his first entrance in *Part II*. We have already learned from Falstaff that the fighting did not go as planned, and that "his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales" [I.ii.100–1]. Falstaff himself must accompany Prince John against another set of rebels, having been "severed" from Hal, apparently by order of the king [I.ii.198–200]—suggesting that in spite of Hal's great deeds at Shrewsbury, the father still does not entirely trust the son. Is it possible he doubts the deeds were even Hal's? When last we saw Hotspur's corpse, it was in Falstaff's possession, and Hal seemed willing—even glad—to let his old companion claim the honor of the fatal stroke. ("For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have" [*IHIV*, V.iv.154–5].) Northumberland's servant Morton reports that he saw with his own eyes "Harry Monmouth ... beat down / The never-daunted Percy to the earth, / From whence with life he never more sprung up" [I.i.110–2] ... except that *we* never see Morton see this—he is not even a character in *Part I*—and we might suspect him of overstating what he knows in order to make his story more compelling (a trick we have already seen Lord Bardolph play).

However one interprets these signs, it is clear that for all Hal's careful planning, he has overestimated the effect of any single glorious act when set against a hard-earned reputation for profligacy. Well into *Part II* he remains the subject of sermons, particularly by the Lord Chief Justice, who harps continually on the evil influence that Falstaff has had on the prince. We learn that Hal has given the austere justice a "box of the ear" [I.ii.189]—and been imprisoned for it. The precise timing of this incident is one of the minor mysteries of the *Henry IV* plays. Unquestionably it happened—both Hal and the Lord Chief Justice concede it—yet it is never mentioned in *Part I*; the story buzzes through *Part II* like breaking news. Even before Shrewsbury it is difficult to imagine the calculating Hal behaving so recklessly—why would he court such disgrace *after* announcing his "reformation" to the world? Why ... unless the world has proved inattentive?

As noted, Shakespeare leaves it ambiguous whether Hal has been duly recognized for slaying Hotspur. Excepting several brief references early in the play, when the question of his death is still unsettled—and of course the moving elegy spoken by his wife (who is never heard from again)—it is almost as though Hotspur did not exist. Not one member of the royal party speaks his name—not the king, not Prince John, not even Hal himself. The Lord Chief Justice grants that Falstaff's "day's service at Shrewsbury hath a little gilded over [his] night's exploit on Gad's Hill" [I.ii.145–6], yet this walking symbol of integrity says not a word about the greater service done by Hal. Does he even know it happened? Does anyone? In *Part I*, Hotspur seemed to fill every line not already occupied by Falstaff—even in death, his near-total absence from *Part II* is astounding.

With his great victory over Hotspur apparently not even a memory, Hal seconds the king in a losing campaign in Wales. Upon retreating to London, he finds his younger brother entrusted to lead a campaign of his own. Deprived of the chance to earn further glory, Hal has little to do but lounge around the capital and wait for his ailing father to die. When this becomes tiresome, he seeks out the least disreputable of his former crew, Poins. (Best not to succumb too quickly to a desire for “small beer” [II.ii.6].) But idleness eventually gets the better of him, and one night he has too much to drink and instigates a quarrel over some trivial matter (we are told only that it was “about Bardolph” [I.ii.54]). The Lord Chief Justice is called in to restore order, and before Hal can regain control over himself, the fateful blow has been struck. Is this not a plausible scenario?¹

Thus when Hal enters for the first time in the play and proclaims, “Before God, I am exceeding weary” [II.ii.1], there is good reason to believe him. He had fancied himself the sun, but the sun sets as well as rises, and so when *Part II* begins he is right back where he started—in the shadow of his father, only now with less power to raise himself, for there are no more worthy rivals to kill.

His weariness may be genuine, but he soon slips into a parody of it—for Hal is rarely sincere for long; unsurprisingly, he is less accomplished in this mode than Falstaff.

Though he strains to carve up Poins, his wit is too full of self-pity to cut:

Poins: I had thought weariness durst not have attached one of so high blood.

¹ I may be assuming a more leisurely interval than, strictly speaking, Shakespeare provides; the end of *Part I* and the beginning of *Part II* seem to be separated by no more than a few weeks. Yet in play after play Shakespeare makes historical time the servant of drama, compressing entire years into the span of a few lines. (Indeed, the “real life” interval between Hotspur’s death and York’s rebellion was just under two years.) I therefore feel justified in applying a similarly flexible standard to Shakespearean time, at least when it helps me better understand his characters.

Prince: Faith, it does me, though it discolors the complexion of my greatness to acknowledge it. Doth it not show vilely in me to desire small beer?

Poins: Why, a prince should not be so loosely studied as to remember so weak a composition.

Prince: Belike, then, my appetite was not princely got, for, by my troth, I do now remember the poor creature, small beer. But indeed these humble considerations make me out of love with my greatness. What a disgrace is it to me to remember thy name! Or to know thy face tomorrow! Or to take note how many pair of silk stockings thou hast, viz. these, and those that were thy peach-colored ones! Or to bear the inventory of thy shirts, as, one for superfluity, and another for use! But that the tennis-court-keeper knows better than I; for it is a low ebb of linen with thee when thou keepest not racket there ...

[II.ii.2–20]

Hal goes on about Poins's linens for nearly seven more lines, and succeeds only in making a very ordinary wit seem pithy by comparison. "How ill it follows," Poins retorts, "after you have labored so hard, you should talk so idly!" [II.ii.2–8]. That word *idly* is the crux for Hal, as for so many Shakespearean heroes who trade action for idleness and thereby court disaster—we saw it in *Titus Andronicus* and, to a lesser extent, the scholars of Navarre, and we shall see it in *Lear* and *Marc Antony*. Hal spent most of *Part I* playing at idleness; when finally called to action his timing was impeccable. There is no playing for Hal in *Part II*, a condition that manifests itself in his separation from Falstaff.

The Falstaffian spirit cannot be banished entirely, however, and Hal's brooding is interrupted by Bardolph, who hands the prince a letter from the great knight. I say "great" simply to echo Falstaff, who even from afar gives his former pupil a lesson in style. Falstaff's letter is as masterful a piece of parody as Hal's earlier speech was a flop, though Hal makes little effort to extend the jest:

Prince: [*Reads.*] "Sir John Falstaff, knight, to the son of the king, nearest his father, Harry Prince of Wales, greeting."

Poins: Why, this is a certificate.

Prince: Peace! [*Reads.*] “I will imitate the honorable Romans in brevity.”

Poins: He sure means brevity in breath, short-winded.

Prince: [*Reads.*] “I commend me to thee, I commend thee, and I leave thee. Be not too familiar with Poins, for he misuses thy favors so much that he swears thou art to marry his sister Nell. Repent at idle times as thou mayest, and so farewell.

“Thine, by yea and no, which is as much as to say, as thou usest him, JACK FALSTAFF with my familiars, JOHN with my brothers and sisters, and SIR JOHN with all Europe.”

[II.ii.111–26]

Whether Poins has really proposed a royal match for his sister, it is worth noting the apparent twinge of jealousy that prompted Falstaff to issue this “warning”—it has surely not escaped the knight’s attention that Hal has not completely severed himself from the tavern scene. Of greater consequence is the reappearance of that word, *idle*. Falstaff, of course, never repents, for he is never idle—whatever his physical condition, his mind is forever at play (his true vocation)—and thus he has safeguarded himself, as best a man can, from the scourges of time. But such a life is not for the crown prince, and even less for Hal, who bragged in *Part I* of his power to “redeem” time [*IHIV*, I.ii.210], only to stand helplessly now as that power diminishes. “Well, thus we play the fools with the time, and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us,” he concludes, before turning to Bardolph to inquire after Falstaff’s location [II.ii.133–5]. The way Hal slides from one clause to the next is no accident, for set against the foolishness of so many aristocrats, Falstaffian humor seems wise indeed.

Still, if Hal must be mocked by time, at least Falstaff can still be mocked by Hal. Partly for this reason, partly for lack of something better to do, Hal decides to spy on the fat knight as he sups with Mistress Doll Tearsheet, “some road” [II.ii.157], or whore. As he did before Gad’s Hill, Hal leaves it to Poins to hash out the details, which again

involve disguises—this time, the pair shall “[p]ut on two leathern jerkins and aprons, and wait upon [Falstaff] at his table as drawers” [II.ii.162–3]—though if he were reluctant to be a robber, Hal seems equally ambivalent about this latest transformation:

From a God to a bull? A heavy descension! It was Jove’s case.
From a prince to a prentice? A low transformation! That shall be
mine, for in everything the purpose must weigh with the folly.
[II.ii.164–7]

Thus, with another parodic burst of self-pity, he leaves to reunite with his old companion. Let us follow, to see how the interval has treated the great wit,

Falstaff

Falstaff’s first line in the play, like Hal’s, is revealing. “Sirrah, you giant,” he bellows at his miniature page, “what says the doctor to my water?” [I.ii.1–2]. We have seen how time’s revenge on the strapping young prince is to weary his spirit; for Falstaff, time must settle for ravaging his bloated body. Though the page assures Falstaff his urine is clean (“but, for the party that owed it, he might have moe diseases than he knew for” [I.ii.3–5]), it is the first of many allusions to the aging knight’s declining health. Soon enough, he is feigning deafness [I.ii.64], and why not, when the alternative is to hear the Lord Chief Justice catalogue his infirmities:

Have you not a moist eye? A dry hand? A yellow cheek? A white
beard? A decreasing leg? An increasing belly? Is not your voice
broken? Your wind short? Your chin double? Your wit single?
And every part about you blasted with antiquity?
[I.ii.176–80]

And when Falstaff finally escapes, it is with a noticeable limp and a curse: “A pox of this gout! Or a gout of this pox! For the one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe” [I.ii.237–9].

For all that, in the first few scenes, at least, his ailments seem merely nuisances. He is witty as ever—indeed, no sooner does he stride onstage than he utters perhaps the quintessential expression of his genius:

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish compounded clay-man is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.

[I.ii.6–10]

As the self-proclaimed slayer of the fearsome Hotspur—and thus one of the most important men in the kingdom—Sir John is appropriately indignant toward all who fail to cater to his every whim or who interrupt his sublime contemplation of himself. Toward Master Dumbledon the tailor, an absurd little man who refuses to hand over some twenty yards of satin, gratis, Falstaff is uncompromising in his contempt:

Let him be damned, like the glutton! Pray God his tongue be hotter! A whoreson Achitophel! A rascally yea-forsooth knave! To bear a gentleman in hand, and then stand upon security! The whoreson smooth-pates do now wear nothing but high shoes, and bunches of keys at their girdles; and if a man is through with them in honest taking up, then they must stand upon security. I had as lief they would put ratsbane in my mouth as offer to stop it with security!

[I.ii.33–41]

Equally outrageous is the lackey who dares “pluck him by the elbow” on behalf of the Lord Chief Justice:

Servant: Sir John!

Falstaff: What! A young knave, and begging! Is there not wars? Is there not employment? Doth not the king lack subjects? Do not the rebels need soldiers? Though it be a shame to be on any side but one, it is worse shame to beg than to be on the worst side, were it worse than the name of rebellion can tell how to make it.

[I.ii.67–75]

As usual, Falstaff's irreverence lumps together all sides "but one"—namely one's own—until they are indistinguishable. Whether one is a loyal subject or a rebel matters not a whit—the important question is whether a man can fend for himself in this crazy world. In this Falstaff is unrivaled, and his refutation of the Lord Chief Justice's seemingly irrefutable charges is the scene's high point:

My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head and something a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with halloing and singing of anthems. To approve my youth further, I will not. The truth is, I am only old in judgment and understanding; and he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him!

[I.ii.182–9]

That the Lord Chief Justice does not fall in love on the spot speaks infinitely more to his own character, honorable man though he be; Falstaff's power to charm seduces all but the humorless. Thus the softhearted Mistress Quickly begins a scene [II.i] by demanding Falstaff be thrown in debtor's jail, and ends by agreeing to pawn her plate, tapestry, and gown on his behalf. Thus the joyless King Henry IV never once speaks Falstaff's name, not in either play. And thus Sir John says of Prince John—in many respects Falstaff's antithesis, for in his speech there is no truth—"Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me, nor a man cannot make him laugh" [IV.iii.86–8].

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The truth is that in the absence of Prince Hal, Falstaff's admirers form a much shabbier crew, and he must content himself with blasting away at easy targets such as Doll Tearsheet and ancient Pistol. Neither appeared in *Part I*, but of the new characters, they are perhaps the most vividly sketched, and both play crucial roles in the tavern scene at the center of the play.

Doll enters first. She is drunk and impatient with Falstaff's vulgar puns, and he does nothing to accommodate her:

Falstaff: How now, Mistress Doll!

Hostess: Sick of a calm, yea, good faith.

Falstaff: So is all her sect. An they be once in a calm, they are sick.

Doll: A pox damn you, you muddy rascal, is that all the comfort you give me?

Falstaff: You make fat rascals, Mistress Doll.

Doll: I make them! Gluttony and diseases make them; I make them not.

Falstaff: If the cook help to make the gluttony, you help to make the diseases, Doll. We catch of you, Doll, we catch of you. Grant that, my poor virtue, grant that.

Doll: Yea, joy, our chains and our jewels.

Falstaff: "Your brooches, pearls, and ouches." For to serve bravely is to come halting off, you know. To come off the breach with his pike bent bravely, and to surgery bravely; to venture upon the charged chambers bravely—

Doll: Hang yourself, you muddy conger, hang yourself!

[II.iv.33–51]

Inevitably, though, her affection for the grotesque lothario slips out, try as she might to qualify it—and despite Mistress Quickly's insistence that "[y]ou are both, i' good truth, as rheumatic as two dry toasts; you cannot one bear with another's confirmities ...":

Hostess: [To Doll] One must bear, and that must be you. You are the weaker vessel, as they say, the emptier vessel.

Doll: Can a weak empty vessel bear such a huge full hogshead? There's a whole merchant's venture of Bordeaux stuff in him; you have not seen a hulk better stuffed in the hold. Come, I'll be friends with thee, Jack. Thou art going to the wars, and whether I shall ever see thee again or no, there is nobody cares.

[II.iv.53–63]

No doubt this last bit rings uncomfortably in Falstaff's ears; still, it has a different quality than the invective that greets Pistol. Falstaff's ancient is, according to Doll, "the foul-mouthed'st rogue in England," and a "swaggering rascal" to boot [II.iv.66–7]. This word in particular unhinges something in Mistress Quickly—the very thought of swaggering seems to trigger in her an allergic reaction:

If he swagger, let him not come here. No, by my faith. I must live among my neighbors, I'll no swaggerers. I am in good name and fame with the very best. Shut the door, there comes no swaggerers here. I have not lived all this while to have swaggering now. Shut the door, I pray you.

[II.iv.68–73]

Listening to her, it is clear that this tavern keeper's widow (and sometime mistress of a brothel) has no idea what *swaggering* means. A few lines later, she reveals the source of her objection:

I was before Master Tisick, the deputy, t' other day, and, as he said to me, 'twas no longer ago than Wednesday last, "I' good faith, neighbor Quickly," says he—Master Dumbe, our minister, was by then—"neighbor Quickly," says he, "receive those that are civil, for," said he, "you are in an ill name." Now a said so, I can tell whereupon. "For," says he, "you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed what guests you receive. Receive," says he, "no swaggering companions." There comes none here. You would bless you to hear what he said. No, I'll no swaggerers.

[II.iv.79–90]

The well-meaning deputy surely had a different "swaggerer" in mind! We have heard such a warning from countless people throughout both plays, and always in reference to the same old sinner. Indeed, Falstaff shall utter a similar warning, though of course he does not intend it to apply to himself. Observing the country justice Robert Shallow agree to pardon his servant's knavish friend, Falstaff is quick to satirize:

It is a wonderful thing to see the semblable coherence of his men's spirits and his. They, by observing him, do bear themselves like foolish justices; he, by conversing with them, is turned into a justice-like serving-man. Their spirits are so married in conjunction with the participation of society that they flock together in consent, like so many wild geese. . . . It is certain that either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught, as men take diseases, one of another. Therefore let men take heed of their company.

[V.i.60–73]

It is one of those rare moments when Falstaff misses the irony, for he too is susceptible to the degrading influence of bad company.

Falstaff dismisses Pistol as “a tame cheater. . . . He’ll not swagger with a Barbary hen, if her feathers turn back in any show of resistance.” The appraisal proves just, yet still Falstaff chooses this “puppy greyhound” [II.iv.91–4] to be his ensign, to bear his standard into battle. For a man such as Falstaff, whose purpose is to parody war and the warrior ethos, the cowardly Pistol would seem a perfect standard-bearer. But Falstaff’s parodies are intentional; Pistol—oblivious to the absurdity of his poses—is forever the butt of the joke.

It is unclear exactly how well Pistol and Doll know each other—intimately, he seems to imply, and judging from her palpable distaste for him, the experience was unpleasant:

Falstaff: Here, Pistol, I charge you with a cup of sack. Do you discharge upon mine hostess?

Pistol: I will discharge upon her, Sir John, with two bullets.

Falstaff: She is pistol-proof, sir; you shall hardly offend her.

Hostess: Come, I’ll drink no proofs nor no bullets. I’ll drink no more than will do me good, for no man’s pleasure, I.

Pistol: Then to you, Mistress Dorothy; I will charge you.

Doll: Charge me! I scorn you, scurvy companion. What! You poor, base, rascally, cheating, lack-linen mate! Away, you moldy rogue, away! I am meat for your master.

Pistol: I know you, Mistress Dorothy.

Doll: Away, you cut-purse rascal! You filthy bung, away! By this wine, I’ll thrust my knife in your moldy chaps, an you play the saucy cuttle with me. Away, you bottle-ale rascal! You basket-hilt stale juggler, you! Since when, I pray you, sir? God’s light, with two points on your shoulder? Much!

Pistol: God let me not live but I will murder your ruff for this.

[II.iv.105–29]

They put on quite a show, these two. Still, witless combatants make for a poor battle of wits. Listening to Doll and Pistol go to war over a ruff, we yearn all the more for Hal to drop his royal pretensions and help Falstaff pick up the slack.

Meanwhile Doll, smelling blood, goes in for the kill. Chaos erupts onstage—even Falstaff, that lord of misrule, seems powerless to control it—as Pistol creeps ever closer to madness:

Falstaff: No more, Pistol; I would not have you go off here. Discharge yourself of our company, Pistol.

Hostess: No, good Captain Pistol, not here, sweet captain.

Doll: Captain! Thou abominable damned cheater, art thou not ashamed to be called captain? An captains were of my mind, they would truncheon you out for taking their names upon you before you have earned them. You a captain! You slave, for what? For tearing a poor whore's ruff in a bawdy-house? He a captain! Hang him, rogue! He lives upon moldy stewed prunes and dried cakes. . . .

Bardolph: Pray thee, go down, good ancient.

Falstaff: Hark thee hither, Mistress Doll.

Pistol: Not I. I tell thee what, Corporal Bardolph, I could tear her. I'll be revenged of her.

Page: Pray thee, go down.

Pistol: I'll see her damned first, to Pluto's damned lake, by this hand, to the infernal deep, with Erebus and tortures vile also. Hold hook and line, say I. Down, down, dogs! Down, faitors! Have we not Hiren here?

[II.iv.130–53]

“Hiren” sounds a bit like “iron,” and Pistol likely reaches for his sword (if he has not drawn it already). It also resembles the name “Irene,” a classical goddess who personified peace. It *also* alludes to the title of a lost play by George Peele,² a contemporary of Shakespeare's who was himself a well-regarded dramatist and translator of Euripides. Whatever his meaning, Pistol finally snaps; in his rage he loses all conception of time and place, with every line of doggerel plundering grander sources:

² *The Turkish Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek*

Pistol: These be good humors, indeed! Shall packhorses
 And hollow pampered jades of Asia,
 Which cannot go but thirty mile a day,
 Compare with Caesars, and with Cannibals,
 And Trojan Greeks? Nay, rather damn them with
 King Cerberus, and let the welkin roar.
 Shall we fall foul for toys?

Hostess: By my troth, captain, these are very bitter words.

Bardolph: Be gone, good ancient. This will grow to a brawl anon.

Pistol: Die men like dogs! Give crowns like pins! Have we not Hiren
 here?

Hostess: O' my word, captain, there's none such here. What the good-
 year! Do you think I would deny her? For God's sake, be quiet.

Pistol: Then feed, and be fat, my fair Calipolis.

Come give's some sack.

“Si fortune me tormente, sperato me contento.”

Fear we broadsides? No, let the fiend give fire.

Give me some sack. . . .

Falstaff: Pistol, I would be quiet.

Pistol: Sweet knight, I kiss thy neif. What! We have seen the seven stars.

[II.iv.156–80]

“Hollow pampered jades of Asia” mocks Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great*. “My fair Calipolis” is another send-up of Peele. “Si fortune me tormente . . .” butchers two languages, Italian and Spanish. The conquering Caesar (and possibly Hannibal) is just another devourer of humanity; Trojans and Greeks are lumped into a single confused race; the monster Cerberus rules in Hell. Nor does Shakespeare spare his own glories. “Give crowns like pins” conjures Richard’s bitter apostrophe to his own wasted kingship; “Die men like dogs” is Hotspur’s “Die all, die merrily” stripped of its lofty sentiment, Falstaff’s “food for powder” stripped of its wit.³

Falstaff suffers the worst from Pistol’s corrupting influence—practically every time he opens his mouth, the ancient proves his master’s thesis that “either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught, as men take diseases.” Has Pistol learned to call for sack

³ See, respectively, *Richard II* [III.ii.169–70] and *I Henry IV* [IV.i.134; IV.ii.64–5].

under the tutelage of “Sir John Sack and Sugar”? More troubling are the times we recognize a bit of Pistol in the great wit. I don’t recall Falstaff quoting snatches of old songs in *Part I*, yet in *Part II* he seems to have acquired the habit, singing of King Arthur as he enters the tavern, and later, as we have heard, of “brooches, pearls, and ouches” [II.iv.31–3 & 46]. Pistol’s influence even taints my own favorite line in the play—when Falstaff declares to Justice Shallow, “We have heard the chimes at midnight” [III.ii.212], we hear echoes of Pistol’s earlier declaration, “We have seen the seven stars.”

Falstaff finally manages to drive his ancient from the tavern, but the effort seems to exhaust and bewilder him in a way we have not seen before, and he barely notices the effect of his valor on Doll’s sex drive:

Falstaff: Have you turned him out o’ doors?

Bardolph: Yea, sir. The rascal’s drunk. You have hurt him, sir, i’ the shoulder.

Falstaff: A rascal! to brave me!

Doll: Ah, you sweet little rogue, you! Alas, poor ape, how thou sweatest! Come, let me wipe thy face; come on, you whoreson chops. Ah, rogue! i’ faith, I love thee. Thou art as valorous as Hector of Troy, worth five of Agamemnon, and ten times better than the Nine Worthies. Ah, villain!

Falstaff: A rascally slave! I will toss the rogue in a blanket.

[II.iv.205–16]

When he finally turns his attention to Doll, his reward is a lecture on the need to “leave fighting o’ days and foining o’ nights, and begin to patch up thine old body for heaven.” He begs her, “Do not speak like a death’s-head. Do not bid me remember mine end” [II.iv.224–9], but it is too late, and for the rest of the scene the death’s-head is before him:

Falstaff: Thou dost give me flattering busses.

Doll: By my troth, I kiss thee with a most constant heart.

Falstaff: I am old, I am old.

Doll: I love thee better than I love e’er a scurvy young boy of them all.

Falstaff: What stuff wilt have a kirtle of? I shall receive money o'
 Thursday. Shalt have a cap tomorrow. A merry song, come. It
 grows late; we'll to bed. Thou'lt forget me when I am gone.
 [II.iv.262–71]

This is not more parody—the fear is genuine, and so is the pain. Quite simply, this lover of life cannot bear to think on its end. “Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance?” wonders Poins [II.iv.254–5], who with Hal has witnessed, disguised, this sad courtship. Again the common Poins seems to understand Jack Falstaff more than does the callous prince, whose contributions to the scene consist of easy wisecracks about “Saturn and Venus this year in conjunction” [II.iv.257].

Nevertheless, this is the moment we have been waiting for, when Hal throws off his disguise and greets his old friend. What then to make of the anticlimax that follows?

Falstaff: Some sack, Francis.
Prince, Poins: Anon, anon, sir.
 [Come forward]
Falstaff: Ha! a bastard son of the king's? And art not thou Poins his
 brother?
Prince: Why, thou globe of sinful continents, what a life dost thou lead!
Falstaff: A better than thou. I am a gentleman, thou art a drawer.
 [II.iv.275–82]

Poins warns Hal not to jest with Falstaff, lest he “drive you out of your revenge and turn all to a merriment” [II.iv.291–2]. (This “revenge” is for various insults that Falstaff had lobbed at Hal whilst wooing Doll.) The trouble is that Hal gives Falstaff ample opportunity to be merry—to reprise his performance following the robbery at Gad's Hill—and Falstaff cannot (or will not) deliver:

Prince: You whoreson candle-mine you, how vilely did you speak of me
 even now before this honest, virtuous, civil gentlewoman!
Hostess: God's blessing of your good heart! And so she is, by my troth.
Falstaff: Didst thou hear me?
Prince: Yea, and you knew me, as you did when you ran away by Gad's

Hill. You knew I was at your back, and spoke it on purpose to try my patience.

Falstaff: No, no, no; not so. I did not think thou wast within hearing.

Prince: I shall drive you then to confess the willful abuse, and then I know how to handle you.

Falstaff: No abuse, Hal, o' mine honor, no abuse.

Prince: Not to dispraise me and call me pantler and bread-chipper and I know not what?

Falstaff: No abuse, Hal.

Poins: No abuse?

Falstaff: No abuse, Ned, i' the world. Honest Ned, none.

[II.iv.293–312]

How passive the great wit has become—how dependent on Hal for his cues! Elsewhere when Falstaff repeats himself, the words seem to emanate from the absolute pleasure he takes in language, as though he is so tickled by his speech he cannot help but speak again. Here he seems impotent, helpless—there is nothing in *Part I* like “No, no, no; not so” or the unconvincing refrain “No abuse. . . .”

Falstaff does finally hit upon a reason for having “abused” Hal that has real comic potential. “I dispraised him before the wicked,” he ventures, “that the wicked might not fall in love with him. In which doing, I have done the part of a careful friend and a true subject, and thy father is to give me thanks for it.” He follows this with the now familiar protest, “No abuse, Hal. None, Ned, none. No, faith, boys, none,” but the tone seems different, almost glib, as though to mock his earlier performance and regain control of the scene [II.iv.312–6]. Alas, time will not allow it; just as knocking cut short *Part I*'s marvelous play-within-the-play, it now breaks up the reunion. This knocking belongs to Peto, who enters to announce King Henry “is at Westminster, / And there are twenty weak and wearied posts / Come from the north” [II.iv.346–8]. Only it is no longer the prince whose presence is required at court, but the knight. Falstaff must march with Hal's brother John against the northern rebels. And Hal must sink back into idleness and wait.

Fortunately for us, Falstaff's march takes him through Gloucestershire, where he reunites with a truly old companion, a man who achieves what in *Part I* would have seemed impossible—steal a scene from Sir John:

Justice Robert Shallow

Justice Shallow is a funhouse mirror, distorting the themes of the *Henry IV* plays until they are nearly unrecognizable. His first lines re-establish the motif of thwarted expectation, though the significance of the expectation has been greatly diminished:

Shallow: Come on, come on, come on, sir. Give me your hand, sir, give me your hand, sir; an early stirrer, by the rood! And how doth my good cousin Silence?

Silence: Good morrow, good cousin Shallow.

Shallow: And how doth my cousin, your bedfellow? And your fairest daughter and mine, my god-daughter Ellen?

Silence: Alas, a black ousel,⁴ cousin Shallow!

Shallow: By yea and no, sir, I dare say my cousin William is become a good scholar. He is at Oxford still, is he not?

Silence: Indeed, sir, to my cost.

[III.ii.1–12]

Shallow manages to be even more repetitious than Falstaff, though in his memory he better resembles Hal—a reformed hell-raiser, turned respectable:

Shallow: I was once of Clement's Inn, where I think they will talk of mad Shallow yet.

Silence: You were called "lusty Shallow" then, cousin.

Shallow: By the mass, I was called anything. And I would have done anything indeed too, and roundly too. There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barnes, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cotswold man; you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the Inns o' Court again. And I may say to you we knew where the bona-robas were and had the best of them all at commandment.

[III.ii.13–24]

⁴ An *ousel* is a blackbird; in other words, Ellen is not fair.

Of course, Shallow miscounts the swinge-bucklers at court—one envisions little John, black George, Francis Pickbone, and Cotswold Will commanding the bona-robas (or girls), and “lusty Shallow” trying desperately to keep up. Certainly this is how Falstaff remembers it:

Lord, Lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying! This same starved justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of his youth and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street, and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer than the Turk’s tribute. I do remember him at Clement’s Inn like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring. . . . A came ever in the rearward of the fashion, and sung those tunes to the overscutched huswives that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his fancies or his good-nights. And now is this vice’s dagger become a squire. . . . And now has he land and beefs.

[III.ii.296–321]

This last point is crucial, for Justice Shallow, however absurd or ill-deserving, has indeed done well for himself. He has achieved respectability, at least, though apparently he prefers the rose-colored past to the drab present:

Shallow: Jesu, Jesu, the mad days that I have spent! And to see how many of my old acquaintance are dead!

Silence: We shall all follow, cousin.

Shallow: Certain, ’tis certain, very sure, very sure. Death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all, all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Silence: By my troth, I was not there.

Shallow: Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?

Silence: Dead, sir.

Shallow: Jesu, Jesu, dead! A drew a good bow, and dead! A shot a fine shoot. John a Gaunt loved him well and betted much money on his head. Dead! A would have clapped i’ the clout at twelve score, and carried you a forehand shaft a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man’s heart good to see. How a score of ewes now?

Silence: Thereafter as they be. A score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow: And is old Double dead?

[III.ii.33–52]

How these lines *ache*! Is this the life the Lord Chief Justice would wish on Falstaff? What King Henry V, newly crowned, has in mind when he urges Falstaff to “reform” himself [V.v.68]? Appraising cattle and counting the dead?

Falstaff has nothing but contempt for the senile justice, yet his need to cultivate Shallow’s favor (so that he might take liberal advantage of it) forces him to wear a strained grin. The business of impressing ragged soldiers for the king’s army (and accepting bribes from abler recruits) has become tedious, and the result is a cooler, more acerbic Falstaff:

Falstaff: Fie! This is hot weather, gentlemen. Have you provided me here half a dozen sufficient men?

Shallow: Marry, have we, sir. Will you sit?

Falstaff: Let me see them, I beseech you.

Shallow: Where’s the roll? Where’s the roll? Where’s the roll? Let me see, let me see, let me see. So, so, so, so, so, so, so, so. Yea, marry, sir. Ralph Mouldy! Let them appear as I call, let them do so, let them do so. Let me see, where is Mouldy?

Mouldy: Here, an’t please you.

Shallow: What think you, Sir John? A good-limbed fellow, young, strong, and of good friends.

Falstaff: Is thy name Mouldy?

Mouldy: Yea, an’t please you.

Falstaff: ’Tis the more time thou wert used.

Shallow: Ha, ha, ha! most excellent, i’ faith! Things that are moldy lack use. Very singular good! In faith, well said, Sir John, very well said.

Falstaff: Prick him.

Mouldy: I was pricked well enough before, an you could have let me alone. My old dame will be undone now for one to do her husbandry and her drudgery. You need not to have pricked me. There are other men fitter to go out than I.

Falstaff: Go to. Peace, Mouldy, you shall go. Mouldy, it is time you were spent.

[III.ii.92–117]

A similar scene plays out for each recruit. Marching to war with such hollow men as Simon Shadow, Thomas Wart, and Francis Feeble brings the prospect of death

unnervingly close—one can imagine the screams Falstaff must be suppressing with each reminder from Shallow:

Shallow: O, Sir John, do you remember since we lay all night in the
Windmill in Saint George's Field?
Falstaff: No more of that, good Master Shallow, no more of that.
Shallow: Ha! 'Twas a merry night. And is Jane Nightwork alive?
Falstaff: She lives, Master Shallow.
Shallow: She never could away with me.
Falstaff: Never, never, she would always say she could not abide Master
Shallow.
Shallow: By the mass, I could anger her to the heart. She was then a bona-
roba. Doth she hold her own well?
Falstaff: Old, old, Master Shallow.
Shallow: Nay, she must be old. She cannot choose but be old. Certain
she's old, and had Robin Nightwork by old Nightwork before I
came to Clement's Inn.
Silence: That's fifty-five year ago.
Shallow: Ha, cousin Silence, that thou hadst seen that that this knight and I
have seen! Ha, Sir John, said I well?
Falstaff: We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.
[III.ii.192–213]

There is something beguiling about this line, Pistol's influence or no. Still, Falstaff has no desire to reprise those midnight chimes, not here, and especially not when he returns to Gloucestershire following Prince John's defeat of the rebels. Never has he seemed less interested in entertaining his fellows (though in these pitiful surroundings, he truly hath no fellow). He leaves it to the foolish justices to be merry, contributing only as much as their satisfaction requires. Even the justly named Silence displays more spirit:

Shallow: Marry, good air. Spread, Davy, spread, Davy. Well said, Davy.
Falstaff: This Davy serves you for good uses. He is your serving-man and
your husband.
Shallow: A good varlet, a good varlet, a very good varlet, Sir John. By the
mass, I have drunk too much sack at supper. A good varlet. Now
sit down, now sit down. Come, cousin.
Silence: Ah, sirrah! quoth-a, we shall
[Sings.]

Do nothing but eat, and make good cheer,
And praise God for the merry year,

When flesh is cheap and females dear,
 And lusty lads roam here and there
 So merrily,
 And ever among so merrily.

Falstaff: There's a merry heart! Good Master Silence, I'll give you a health for that anon.

Shallow: Give Master Bardolph some wine, Davy. . . . Be merry, Master Bardolph, and, my little soldier there, be merry.

Silence: [*Sings.*]

Be merry, be merry, my wife has all,
 For women are shrews, both short and tall.
 'Tis merry in hall when beards wag all,
 And welcome merry Shrovetide.
 Be merry, be merry.

Falstaff: I did not think Master Silence had been a man of this mettle.

Silence: Who, I? I have been merry twice and once ere now.

[V.iii.8–40]

Note that Silence, lest we accuse him of understatement, does not say he has been merry “once or twice.” No, Silence has been merry three times previously and three times precisely. How many wonderful things might one say in response! Only Falstaff does not say any of them—his next four lines, spread over nearly fifty, consist of “Well said, Master Silence,” “Health and long life to you, Master Silence,” “Why, now you have done me right,” and the immortal “’Tis so” [V.iii.49, 52, 71–2 & 77]. Perhaps he is saving up for when next he sees Hal, for he has privately vowed to “devise matter enough out of this Shallow [and Silence too, no doubt] to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter the wearing out of six fashions” [V.i.73–5].

The entrance of Pistol, “come from the court with news,” perks up Falstaff considerably [V.iii.80–2]. Pistol takes his usual roundabout way to the point, prompting Falstaff to meet him in his own halting time: “O base Assyrian knight, what is thy news? / Let King Cophetua know the truth thereof.” (To which Silence drunkenly replies, before

passing out, “And Robin Hood, Scarlet, and John” [V.iii.101–3].)⁵ But the news at last comes out, and when it does, Falstaff rises as though the years and pounds were so much dead skin to be sloughed:

Pistol: Sir John, thy tender lambkin now is king.
Harry the Fifth’s the man. I speak the truth.
When Pistol lies, do this, and fig me, like
The bragging Spaniard.

Falstaff: What, is the old king dead?

Pistol: As nail in door. The things I speak are just.

Falstaff: Away, Bardolph! Saddle my horse. Master Robert Shallow,
choose what office thou wilt in the land, ’tis thine. Pistol, I will
double-charge thee with dignities.

[V.iii.116–25]

The generous spirit has returned, with but one woeful exception to remind us—if we’ve let ourselves be charmed into forgetting—just how dangerous Falstaff is, not only to a young king in need of authority but to all who fear anarchy:

Master Shallow, my Lord Shallow—be what thou wilt, I am
fortune’s steward—get on thy boots. We’ll ride all night. O sweet
Pistol! Away, Bardolph! . . . Come, Pistol, utter more to me, and
withal devise something to do thyself good. Boot, boot, Master
Shallow. I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any
man’s horses; the laws of England are at my commandment.
Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my lord
chief justice!

[V.iii.129–38]

Thus Falstaff rides blindly to his own day of judgment, the scaffold toward which the great arc of these two plays has been building. Falstaff’s path is clear—to us, if not to

⁵ According to legend, King Cophetua fell in love with and married a beggar maid. If, as the lines suggest, Falstaff identifies with the king, who is the beggar maid? It cannot be Pistol—though impoverished of wit, he is already the “Assyrian knight” in the allusion. As I remarked in my previous essay on *Part I*, the only person not named Falstaff whom Falstaff loves is Hal. How many would agree that Hal—like the beggar maid would have seemed to Cophetua’s people—is unworthy of such love? Would Falstaff?

him—but to fully appreciate Hal’s, we must reverse course a bit. It is time to revisit the old king and father,

Henry IV

One can make the case that no one suffers more between *Parts I* and *II* than King Henry himself. The soldier who so confidently disposed of the rebels at Shrewsbury stumbles through *Part II* in his nightgown, reduced by sickness and sleepless nights to a mere spectator in his kingdom:

How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep! O sleep, O gentle sleep,
Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee
And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lulled with sound of sweetest melody?
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile
In loathsome beds, and leavest the kingly couch
A watch-case or a common ’larum-bell?

[III.i.4–17]

We have heard this theme already from Henry’s grandson, as he sits atop a molehill watching his kingdom slip away, and we shall hear it again from his son on the eve of Agincourt.⁶ Of the three, Henry VI is easily the most sympathetic, if for no other reason than he truly does not desire the crown. Henry V just as clearly does, but at least he has some credibility from having sojourned amongst those “poorest subjects” both he and his father claim to envy. Listening to Henry Bolingbroke bemoan the life he stole from his murdered cousin, I am reminded of Lear’s “I have ta’en too little care of this.”

⁶ See, respectively, 3 *Henry VI* [II.v.1–54] and *Henry V* [IV.i.223–77].

Who are these “vile in loathsome beds” to Henry, and why should he suppose they sleep any better under his watch? What actions has he taken as king to improve their lot, so that his conscience might perhaps sleep more soundly than now, when its only “hope” for atonement is a fanciful crusade?

His calculated few public appearances aside, Henry’s interest in his subjects seems to extend no further than whether they are traitors. Indeed, his perspective has turned so gloomy, one wonders if he has not left his palace since he returned beaten from Wales:

O God! that one might read the book of fate,
 And see the revolution of the times
 Make mountains level, and the continent,
 Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
 Into the sea! And other times to see
 The beachy girdle of the ocean
 Too wide for Neptune’s hips, how chances mock,
 And changes fill the cup of alteration
 With divers liquors! O, if this were seen,
 The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
 What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
 Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.

[III.i.45–56]

Whether primarily a cause or an effect of his insomnia, Henry’s brooding casts a shadow over every scene in *Part II* in which he appears, and stretches as far north as York, where—political differences aside—the rebellious archbishop and the king are united in their view of fickle human nature. Compare:

King: ’Tis not ten years gone
 Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,
 Did feast together, and in two years after
 Were they at wars. It is but eight years since
 This Percy was the man nearest my soul,
 Who like a brother toiled in my affairs
 And laid his love and life under my foot,
 Yea, for my sake, even to the eyes of Richard

Gave him defiance.

[III.i.57–65]

Archbishop: The commonwealth is sick of their own choice;
 Their overgreedy love hath surfeited.
 An habitation giddy and unsure
 Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
 O thou fond many, with what loud applause
 Didst thou beat heaven with blessing Bolingbroke,
 Before he was what thou wouldst have him be!
 And being now trimmed in thine own desires,
 Thou, beastly feeder, art so full of him
 That thou provok'st thyself to cast him up.
 So, so, thou common dog, didst thou disgorge
 Thy glutton bosom of the royal Richard;
 And now thou wouldst eat thy dead vomit up,
 And howl'st to find it.

[I.iii.87–100]

If anything, the archbishop is harsher, making him a curious choice to lead a popular uprising. (Is anyone surprised when, the moment it is discharged, his army scatters “[I]like youthful steers unyoked” [IV.ii.103]?)

Still, if the health of a kingdom reflects its king, it is no wonder that Henry's subjects have, in the words of the archbishop, “brought ourselves into a burning fever, / And we must bleed for it” [IV.i.56–7]. Henry in his sickbed becomes yet another victim of Richard's prophetic “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,” and we can understand why Hal—who, as we have seen, has regressed from playing at idleness to idleness itself—prefers to avoid him. Henry rationalizes the prince's absence by suspecting him of further dissipation—even as John of Lancaster girds himself to battle the archbishop, the eldest son is foremost in Henry's mind:

King: Now, lords, if God doth give successful end
 To this debate that bleedeth at our doors,
 We will our youth lead on to higher fields
 And draw no swords but what are sanctified. . . .
 Only, we want a little personal strength,

And pause us, till these rebels, now afoot,
 Come underneath the yoke of government.
Warwick: Both which we doubt not but your majesty
 Shall soon enjoy.
King: Humphrey, my son of Gloucester,
 Where is the prince your brother?
Gloucester: I think he's gone to hunt, my lord, at Windsor.
King: And how accompanied?
Gloucester: I do not know, my lord.
King: Is not his brother, Thomas of Clarence, with him?
Gloucester: No, my good lord, he is in presence here.
Clarence: What would my lord and father?
King: Nothing but well to thee, Thomas of Clarence.
 How chance thou art not with the prince thy brother?
 He loves thee, and thou dost neglect him, Thomas;
 Thou hast a better place in his affection
 Than all thy brothers. Cherish it, my boy,
 And noble offices thou mayst effect
 Of mediation, after I am dead,
 Between his greatness and thy other brethren.

[IV.iv.1–26]

Thus begins an extraordinary speech in which Henry lectures his sons, and chiefly Clarence—whose name, until now, has not been spoken onstage by anyone, least of all by Hal⁷—on the complex virtues of the Prince of Wales:

For he is gracious, if he be observed.
 He hath a tear for pity and a hand
 Open as day for meting charity.
 Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he's flint,
 As humorous as winter and as sudden
 As flaws congealed in the spring of day.
 His temper, therefore, must be well observed.
 Chide him for faults, and do it reverently,
 When you perceive his blood inclined to mirth,
 But, being moody, give him time and scope,
 Till that his passions, like a whale on ground,

⁷ Though Clarence appears briefly in *Henry V*, he neither speaks a word nor accompanies his brothers into battle. Indeed, his father's protests notwithstanding, I cannot find a single instance when Hal/Henry V displays *any* special affection toward young Thomas. In this respect, he is merely one of several characters whom we are led to believe will figure prominently in Hal's reign, yet who are absent from *Henry V*. Falstaff is one. The Lord Chief Justice, as we shall see, is another.

Confound themselves with working.

[IV.iv.30–41]

It is probably safe to assume we have spent more time with Hal recently than his father has—do we recognize King Henry’s portrait of his son? Can we imagine the cold, calculating prince so confounded by passion he resembles “a whale on ground,” or so moved by pity he cries? Have we seen him do *anything* suddenly?

In truth, the king’s description resembles less the young man who shall inherit the crown and more the dead man whose crown Henry took, and whom he still fears his son resembles. “For all the world,” Henry once warned Hal, “As thou art to this hour was Richard then / When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh” [*IHIV*, III.ii.93–5]. Yet Hal has proved himself valorous—even if everyone has forgotten Hotspur’s death, surely Henry remembers the event that preceded it, when Hal beat back the ferocious Douglas and saved the king’s life. So Henry clings to the hope that his eldest son, in being “[m]ost subject . . . to weeds,” is like the “fattest,” or richest, soil and may be properly cultivated by wise brothers who understand his nature. Yet in his next breath he dismisses that same hope. “Therefore my grief / Stretches itself beyond the hour of death,” he tells Clarence, whom moments before he had entrusted to “prove a shelter to thy friends, / A hoop of gold to bind thy brothers in” [IV.iv.41–57].

Henry’s vision of the future is so harrowing, it obliterates any thought of present-day comfort:

The blood weeps from my heart when I do shape
 In forms imaginary the unguided days
 And rotten times that you shall look upon
 When I am sleeping with my ancestors.
 For when his headstrong riot hath no curb,
 When rage and hot blood are his counselors,
 When means and lavish manners meet together,

O, with what wings shall his affections fly
Towards fronting peril and opposed decay!

[IV.iv.58–66]

News of the rebels' defeat at Yorkshire follows, sending Henry into an apoplectic fit that his sons fear "will certain be his end" [IV.iv.130]. Their language slips into the tragic, as they speak of "[u]nfathered heirs and loathly births of nature" [IV.iv.122], of overflowing rivers and other portents, as though it were another Caesar who lay dying. Henry is carried into a quiet chamber, and his final words before losing consciousness are fitting: "Set me the crown upon my pillow here" [IV.v.5].

Hal enters at this moment. His irreverence seems a deliberate attempt to distance himself from a meeting he has long been dreading, though he quickly recognizes he can no longer avoid it:

Prince: Who saw the Duke of Clarence?
Clarence: I am here, brother, full of heaviness.
Prince: How now! Rain within doors, and none abroad!
How doth the king?
Gloucester: Exceeding ill.
Prince: Heard he the good news yet?
Tell it him.
Gloucester: He altered much upon the hearing it.
Prince: If he be sick with joy, he'll recover without physic.
Warwick: Not so much noise, my lords. Sweet prince, speak low.
The king your father is disposed to sleep.
Clarence: Let us withdraw into the other room.
Warwick: Will't please your grace to go along with us?
Prince: No, I will sit and watch here by the king.

[IV.v.7–19]

Then they are alone, for the first and final time in the play. And Hal's eyes go instantly to a familiar object:

Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow,
Being so troublesome a bedfellow?
O polished perturbation! Golden care!
That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide

To many a watchful night! Sleep with it now!
 Yet not so sound and half so deeply sweet
 As he whose brow with homely biggen bound
 Snores out the watch of night. O majesty!
 When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
 Like a rich armor worn in heat of day,
 That scald'st with safety.

[IV.v.20–30]

At last—eleven lines into the speech—he turns his attention to the man beside the crown.

Even then, his tone is a strange mix of the filial and the philosophical, and his catalogue of “dues” seems less an expression of grief than a rehearsal:

By his gates of breath
 There lies a downy feather which stirs not.
 Did he suspire, that light and weightless down
 Perforce must move. My gracious lord! my father!
 This sleep is sound indeed. This is a sleep
 That from this golden rigol hath divorced
 So many English kings. Thy due from me
 Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
 Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
 Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously.

[IV.v.30–9]

That vow made, he returns to more immediate concerns; his conclusion is possibly the least ambivalent, least ironic thing we ever hear him say:

My due from thee is this imperial crown,
 Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
 Derives itself to me. Lo, where it sits,
 Which God shall guard. And put the world's whole strength
 Into one giant arm, it shall not force
 This lineal honor from me. This from thee
 Will I to mine leave, as 'tis left to me.

[IV.v.40–6]

Here he exits with the crown—for what reason we can only guess. Perhaps a part of him is ashamed to covet so openly what (he believes) his father has only just left him. For let us no more question whether Hal would rather be a private man than a king,

whatever he may say later about the “infinite heart’s ease . . . that private men enjoy” [*HV*, IV.i.229–30]. The lure of the crown is too powerful—is it merely coincidence that, following Hal’s exit, Henry reawakens with a shout, as though he senses his “golden rigol” in another’s hands? His younger sons come running—Hal does not seem to hear, though he cannot have gone very far offstage—and Henry soon realizes what has happened. His eyes seek out the crown almost as quickly as Hal’s did:

King: Why did you leave me here alone, my lords?

Clarence: We left the prince my brother here, my liege,
Who undertook to sit and watch by you.

King: The Prince of Wales! Where is he? Let me see him.
He is not here.

Warwick: The door is open; he is gone this way.

Gloucester: He came not through the chamber where we stayed.

King: Where is the crown? Who took it from my pillow?

Warwick: When we withdrew, my liege, we left it here.

King: The prince hath ta’en it hence. Go, seek him out.
Is he so hasty that he doth suppose
My sleep my death?

[IV.v.50–61]

Whether justified or not, this bitter conclusion sparks Henry’s diseased imagination—his strength floods back, only to torment him in broken verse:

See, sons, what things you are!
How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object!
For this the foolish overcareful fathers
Have broke their sleep with thoughts, their brains with care,
Their bones with industry.
For this they have engrossed and piled up
The cankered heaps of strange-achieved gold;
For this they have been thoughtful to invest
Their sons with arts and martial exercises.
When, like the bee, tolling from every flower
The virtuous sweets,
Our thighs packed with wax, our mouths with honey,
We bring it to the hive, and, like the bees,
Are murdered for our pains.

[IV.v.64–78]

Henry's violent rejection of nature seems to anticipate Lear's, but his tone is petty; those trollish "heaps of strange-achieved gold" do not suit his tragic pretensions. The greatest irony is that Henry Bolingbroke, so different from Richard when he ascended the throne, has become in the end nearly indistinguishable from Richard. His long speech to Hal, when the prince finally re-enters, is as self-pitying, and builds to as hysterical a pitch, as anything in *Richard II*:

Prince: I never thought to hear you speak again.

King: Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought.

I stay too long by thee, I weary thee. . . .

Thy life did manifest thou lovedst me not,
And thou wilt have me die assured of it.

Thou hidest a thousand daggers in thy thoughts,
Which thou hast whetted on thy stony heart,
To stab at half an hour of my life.

What! Canst thou not forbear me half an hour?

Then get thee gone and dig my grave thyself,
And bid the merry bells ring to thine ear
That thou art crowned, not that I am dead.

Let all the tears that should bedew my hearse
Be drops of balm to sanctify thy head.

Only compound me with forgotten dust;
Give that which gave thee life unto the worms.

Pluck down my officers, break my decrees,
For now a time is come to mock at form.

Harry the Fifth is crowned. Up, vanity!

Down, royal state! All you sage counselors, hence!

And to the English court assemble now,
From every region, apes of idleness! . . .

For the fifth Harry from curbed license plucks
The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog
Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent.

O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!

When that my care could not withhold thy riots,
What wilt thou do when riot is thy care?

O, thou wilt be a wilderness again,
Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants.

[IV.v.91–137]

I skipped over whole chunks of this, not because they are inconsistent with my point but because they repeat it. The man who once criticized Richard for his extravagance—“whereof a little / More than a little is by much too much” [*IHIV*, III.ii.72-3]—has, for the second time in as many plays, hurled doomsday words and accusations before Hal even has a chance to defend himself.

And what of Hal throughout this rant? Warwick reports, “I found the prince in the next room, / Washing with kindly tears his gentle cheeks” [IV.v.82–3], but whether you believe him is another matter—Warwick may well have decided to tell a dying man what he longs to hear. The actor playing Hal can answer some of our questions by the manner in which he re-enters. But even if the tears are genuine, the explanation Hal offers for his behavior is an utter fiction. Recall what has already been quoted of Hal’s speech over what he thinks is his father’s corpse: to begin, a lengthy apostrophe to the crown; to conclude, a vow to keep the crown against “the whole world’s strength”; and in between, an impassioned, brief digression on his intent to grieve.

Now consider what Hal *claims* to have said:

O, pardon me, my liege! But for my tears,
 The moist impediments unto my speech,
 I had forestalled this dear and deep rebuke
 Ere you with grief had spoke and I had heard
 The course of it so far. There is your crown,
 And He that wears the crown immortally
 Long guard it yours. . . .

[IV.v.138–44]

So far, so good—though we should ask (as of all such displays) whether humility and penitence really may be couched in such glittering terms?⁸ If Hal really were “too choked up” to speak for forty-seven of his father’s most condemning lines, what changed for him at line forty-eight? (Perhaps his father finally paused for breath.) But redder flags follow:

God witness with me, when I here came in,
And found no course of breath within your majesty,
How cold it struck my heart. If I do feign,
O, let me in my present wildness die
And never live to show the incredulous world
The nobler change that I have purposed.⁹
Coming to look on you, thinking you dead,
And dead almost, my liege, to think you were,
I spake unto this crown as having sense,
And thus upbraided it: “The care on thee depending
Have fed upon the body of my father.
Therefore, thou best of gold art worst of gold.
Other, less fine in carat, is more precious,
Preserving life in medicine potable,
But thou, most fine, most honored, most renowned,
Hast eat thy bearer up.”

[IV.v.149–64]

We need hardly note that Hal did not in fact say this. Still (if we’re inclined toward charity), it is not an unreasonable paraphrase of what he did say, though the focus has shifted subtly from the crown’s effect on majesty in general to its particular effect on King Henry, “my father.” The conclusion warrants no such charity:

Thus, my most royal liege,
Accusing it, I put it on my head,
To try with it, as with an enemy
That had before my face murdered my father,
The quarrel of a true inheritor.
But if it did infect my blood with joy,
Or swell my thoughts to any strain of pride,

⁸ Once more I am reminded of Lear, who mistook the shadow of his false daughters’ loving words for substance, or of *Hamlet*’s “The lady doth protest too much, methinks,” or Juliet’s “O, swear not by the moon, th’ inconstant moon . . .”

⁹ Again, it is as though Hotspur never lived and Shrewsbury never happened.

If any rebel or vain spirit of mine
 Did with the least affection of a welcome
 Give entertainment to the might of it,
 Let God for ever keep it from my head
 And make me as the poorest vassal is
 That doth with awe and terror kneel to it.

[IV.v.164–76]

Rather than dissect each line, I shall instead pick out a single phrase: Hal’s “quarrel of a true inheritor.” Though Hal never used that specific word, “inheritor,” in his actual speech over the king’s (sleeping) body, its meaning is implicit in everything he did say. Then, he called the crown a “lineal honor,” his “due” from father to son. Now he speaks as though it were a curse. The private meaning is undoubtedly the genuine one, while the revised meaning is just that—a revision intended for public ears.

So what? we might ask. What harm is there in Hal reassuring his dying father of his love and loyalty? No harm, I suppose, but a great deal of art—and thus one more piece of evidence that Hal has learned more of political stagecraft than of truth. In their final scene together, father and son instinctively fall back on the same old lies. After Shrewsbury, Henry has no cause to dredge up Hal’s lousy reputation—that he does so is a sign, not that he lacks confidence in Hal’s fitness to govern, but that he regrets having raised a son who can treat him so coldly. Of this Hal is certainly guilty, and his hyperbolic claims to the contrary suggest he both knows it and has no real intention to change.

Perhaps Henry knows it too. This time he offers no hyperbole, as in *Part I*’s “A hundred thousand rebels die in this!” [*IHIV*, III.ii.160], only a subtle acknowledgement that everything Hal does has an ulterior (and shrewd) purpose—not least of all returning the crown:

O my son,
 God put it in thy mind to take it hence,
 That thou mightst win the more thy father's love,
 Pleading so wisely in excuse of it!

[IV.v.177–80]

A strange word with which to praise an excuse, *wise*—the implication being that the excuse came from the head rather than heart. But whether ironic or willfully naïve, the word seems to free Henry from pretense. Inviting Hal to “sit thou by my bed” [IV.v.181], he ceases to be a father lecturing a wayward son, and for the first time speaks frankly, as one king to another. In so doing, he relinquishes to Hal what Hal had tried to take for himself:

God knows, my son,
 By what bypaths and indirect crooked ways
 I met this crown, and I myself know well
 How troublesome it sat upon my head.
 To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
 Better opinion, better confirmation,
 For all the soil of the achievement goes
 With me into the earth. . . .
 And now my death
 Changes the mode, for what in me was purchased
 Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort,
 So thou the garland wear'st successively.

[IV.v.183–201]

By speaking frankly, Henry IV is able to give the crucial piece of advice that shall define both the reign and the play of Henry V—to point the way to the reputation Hal had once hoped to wrest from Hotspur:

Yet, though thou stand'st more sure than I could do,
 Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green.
 And all my friends, which thou must make thy friends,
 Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out,
 By whose fell working I was first advanced
 And by whose power I well might lodge a fear
 To be again displaced. Which to avoid,
 I cut them off, and had a purpose now

To lead out many to the Holy Land,
 Lest rest and lying still might make them look
 Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
 Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
 With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out,
 May waste the memory of the former days.

[IV.v.202–15]

What should one say about these lines? They are cynical, distasteful, Machiavellian . . . but they are also practical and—as *Henry V* shall demonstrate—totally effective. It does no good here to scold Hal for taking his father’s advice—Hal’s purpose is to hold on to his kingdom, and Henry offers him a way to do it *and* win glory. There is no more talk of the crown as something deadly or undesirable, for these men understand each other now; consequently, Hal is free to reveal another glimpse into that small part of himself that is neither ambivalent nor ironic:

My gracious liege,
 You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me.
 Then plain and right must my possession be,
 Which I with more than with a common pain
 ’Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain.

[IV.v.220–24]

We may object to the logic—can one “rightfully” inherit what was not rightfully the giver’s to bequeath?—but who remains to press the argument? For a brief moment, the world belongs to Henry V.

What comes next? Harold Goddard, for one, does not miss it: “And immediately the stage direction reads: ‘*Enter John of Lancaster.*’ ‘*Enter the Prince of Liars,*’ it might as well have been, ‘*fresh from the blackest act of treachery on record.*’ It is one of those symbolic entrances that are better than pages of criticism” [197].¹⁰ In deference to

¹⁰ My reading of this entire scene owes much to Goddard’s analysis.

Goddard, this final section shall be brief. Still, we cannot fully understand Hal without some consideration of two additional, antithetical influences:

Prince John of Lancaster and the Lord Chief Justice

John enters his father's sick chamber having marched straight from Yorkshire, where the rebels lost not through any valor on John's part, but because they made the tactical error of taking the prince at his word. Here is what John said upon receiving from the archbishop a list of grievances against King Henry:

I like them all, and do allow them well,
 And swear here, by the honor of my blood,
 My father's purposes have been mistook,
 And some about him have too lavishly
 Wrested his meaning and authority.
 My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redressed,
 Upon my soul, they shall. If this may please you,
 Discharge your powers unto their several counties,
 As we will ours. And here between the armies
 Let's drink together friendly and embrace,
 That all their eyes may bear those tokens home
 Of our restored love and amity.

[IV.ii.54–65]

One wouldn't expect to find in these lines much room for misinterpretation, but one would be wrong, for the moment the rebel leaders discharge their army, Westmoreland arrests them on charges of high treason. John's excuse can't even be praised as disingenuous—it is so bald-faced a lie, one wonders why he bothers with it:

Mowbray: Is this proceeding just and honorable?
Westmoreland: Is your assembly so?
Archbishop: Will you thus break your faith?
Lancaster: I pawned thee none.
 I promised you redress of these same grievances
 Whereof you did complain, which, by mine honor,
 I will perform with a most Christian care.

[IV.ii.110–5]

John's "Christian care" is to send his prisoners to their maker, in whose presence earthly grievances shall seem inconsequential. Then for good measure he praises God and sends his army—still intact—after the rebel stragglers.

One line stands out from this exchange: *Is this proceeding just and honorable?* Of course it isn't, but Shakespeare's purpose is not simply for us to share Mowbray's outrage. We cannot hear the word "just" in this play without thinking of the Lord Chief Justice, a man of genuine integrity who shares King Henry's fears that Hal shall be a lord of misrule. Surely Hal's first act as king will be to exact vengeance on the man who once had him imprisoned, as the other lords—equally miserable at the prospect of ceding power to rogues such as Falstaff—seem all too eager to point out:

Gloucester: O, good my lord, you have lost a friend indeed,
And I dare swear you borrow not that face
Of seeming sorrow, it is sure your own.

Lancaster: Though no man be assured what grace to find,
You stand in coldest expectation.
I am the sorrier. Would 'twere otherwise.

Clarence: Well, you must now speak Sir John Falstaff fair,
Which swims against your stream of quality.

Chief Justice: Sweet princes, what I did, I did in honor,
Led by the impartial conduct of my soul,
And never shall you see that I will beg
A ragged and forestalled remission.
If truth and upright innocency fail me,
I'll to the king my master that is dead,
And tell him who hath sent me after him.

[V.ii.27–41]

It is here that Hal enters, for the first time, as king.¹¹ He goads his presumed enemy, and the Lord Chief Justice defends himself eloquently and with dignity:

King: You are, I think, assured I love you not.

Chief Justice: I am assured, if I be measured rightly,
Your majesty hath no just cause to hate me.

¹¹ From this point, all my references to "King Henry" are to Henry V.

King: No?

How might a prince of my great hopes forget
 So great indignities you laid upon me?
 What! Rate, rebuke, and roughly send to prison
 The immediate heir of England! Was this easy?
 May this be washed in Lethe, and forgotten?

Chief Justice: I then did use the person of your father.
 The image of his power lay then in me.
 And, in the administration of his law,
 Whiles I was busy for the commonwealth,
 Your highness pleased to forget my place,
 The majesty and power of law and justice,
 The image of the king whom I presented,
 And struck me in my very seat of judgment. . . .
 After this cold considerance, sentence me,
 And, as you are a king, speak in your state
 What I have done that misbecame my place,
 My person, or my liege's sovereignty.

[V.ii.64–101]

The king's rhetorical tone is familiar—he might have asked whether sending his younger self to prison was “just and honorable.” Of course, the Lord Chief Justice's defense is more impressive than Prince John's, and his example stands in direct contrast to those unnamed lords whom John described as having “mistook” his father's purposes and “wrested” his authority.

By all appearances King Henry is also impressed—his indignance seems to have been an act, another performance designed to test the Lord Chief Justice and further “mock the expectation of the world, / To frustrate prophecies and to raze out / Rotten opinion, who hath writ me down / After my seeming” [V.ii.126–9]. It remains to be seen whether these are good goals for a king. How does it benefit Henry's subjects to know their king is hard at work “frustrating prophecies” and “razing rotten opinion”? Or shall Henry one day discover—worse, leave it to his son to discover—“I have ta'en too little care of this”?

Henry would have us believe he has found the wiser course—his long speech to close the scene is mainly concerned with reassuring the Lord Chief Justice of his commitment to law:

You are right, justice, and you weigh this well.
 Therefore still bear the balance and the sword.
 And I do wish your honors may increase,
 Till you do live to see a son of mine
 Offend you and obey you, as I did.
 So shall I live to speak my father's words:
 "Happy am I, that have a man so bold
 That dares do justice on my proper son,
 And not less happy, having such a son
 That would deliver up his greatness so
 Into the hands of justice."

[V.ii.102–12]

There are interesting streaks of pride in these lines, as Henry returns to the business of rewriting his life as though it were a morality play. The conclusion, which emphasizes not the boldness of the Lord Chief Justice but Henry's own "greatness" for delivering himself up to justice, would no doubt impress his father—all that is missing is for Henry to insist, "God put it in my mind to strike thee, that I might win the more thy approval ..."

What remains is no less murky, for all its polished gloss. Henry proclaims to the Lord Chief Justice, "You shall be as a father to my youth. / My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear, / And I will stoop and humble my intents / To your well-practiced wise directions" [V.ii.118–21]. In light of this, the total absence of the Lord Chief Justice from *Henry V* seems perfectly clear—Shakespeare forgot to include him! How else to explain the fact that, from the build-up to war with France, through the Battle of Agincourt and its aftermath, to his aggressive pursuit of Princess Katherine, Henry solicits advice from two corrupt churchmen, his brothers John and Humphrey (though not

young Thomas of Clarence, whom Hal once loved so dearly), his uncle Exeter (who is not even present for this fine speech), numerous captains and common soldiers—everyone, it seems, but the very man explicitly named to the office of counselor.

Unless ... Henry is speaking here solely for public effect and does not mean a word. Yet there is a subtler way in which he does speak truth, though not to the Lord Chief Justice. “Now call we our high court of parliament,” he announces,

And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel
That the great body of our state may go
In equal rank with the best-governed nation;
That war, or peace, or both at once, may be
As things acquainted and familiar to us,
In which you, father, shall have foremost hand.

[V.ii.134–40]

Only the son of a man who could steal a crown while protesting how little he desired it would attempt to conflate war and peace, “both at once.” As the father planted in Hal’s mind the seeds of foreign wars for peace at home, so the father’s spirit shall have “foremost hand” in shaping Henry’s reign.

All that is left is for Henry publicly to reject Falstaff, which he does in words that retain their sting no matter how often we hear them:

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane,
But, being awaked, I do despise my dream.
Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace.
Leave gormandizing. Know the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men.
Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.
Presume not that I am the thing I was,
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
That I have turned away my former self.
So will I those that kept me company.
When thou dost hear I am as I have been,

Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,
 The tutor and the feeder of my riots.
 Till then, I banish thee, on pain of death,
 As I have done the rest of my misleaders,
 Not to come near our person by ten mile.
 For competence of life I will allow you,
 That lack of means enforce you not to evils.
 And, as we hear you do reform yourselves,
 We will, according to your strengths and qualities,
 Give you advancement.

[V.v.47–70]

Whatever you think of this speech—whether it proves Henry virtuous or cruel or something between—it is as much a performance as his earlier pledge to the Lord Chief Justice. As he pillages his way through France, Henry shall repeatedly decline to take the moral high road he claims here for himself—far more important that he *appear* to take it. It is fair to note that Falstaff puts Henry in an impossible position—that if Henry wishes to maintain his credibility before the public (and especially his kinsmen), he has no choice but to make this speech. But to those who believe it pains Henry as much to speak it as it pains Falstaff to hear it, I would suggest they have another listen. Line by line, I hear nothing in Henry’s words that is inconsistent with all we have learned of his character throughout these plays—including, crucially, that he cares far less for Falstaff than Falstaff cares for him, and that his opening shot, “I know thee not, old man,” is rather more than rhetorical. If Henry thinks a modest pension and the promise of honest advancement will “reform” Falstaff—if he thinks his words will have *any* effect on the old man than to rip out his heart on the spot—he knows nothing of Sir John.

The likelier alternative is that Henry is perfectly content to bury his former “misleader” (a ridiculous word, given Hal’s confessional soliloquy in *Part I*—if anyone did any misleading, it was Hal misleading Falstaff as to the true purpose of their

friendship); we caught the prince contemplating Falstaff's death—whether swinging from a rope or marching into battle—too many times to conclude otherwise. No, Henry has been rehearsing this speech for as long as we have known him, and the practice pays off in the end—it is a masterful performance, and it shakes Falstaff to the core.

That this is so may be seen in Falstaff's immediate reaction, once Henry has exited, which is to acknowledge something he'd absolutely refused to concede earlier in the play, when confronted by Mistress Quickly, though the sum he owes her is far less:

Falstaff: Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound.

Shallow: Yea, marry, Sir John, which I beseech you to let me have home with me.

Falstaff: That can hardly be, Master Shallow. Do not you grieve at this. I shall be sent for in private to him. Look you, he must seem thus to the world. Fear not your advancements; I will be the man yet that shall make you great.

[V.v.73–80]

The power to rationalize is unmatched—the old bluster begins to return, and Falstaff cheers himself with thoughts of dinner, when the Lord Chief Justice re-enters with his officers:

Chief Justice: Go, carry Sir John Falstaff to the Fleet.

Take all his company along with him.

Falstaff: My lord, my lord—

Chief Justice: I cannot now speak. I will hear you soon.

Take them away.

Pistol: “Si fortuna me tormenta, spero contenta.”

[V.v.91–6]

The roles have completely reversed—Falstaff is silenced by the Lord Chief Justice, and poor, pitiful Pistol gets the last word.

* * * * *

With the exit of Falstaff, *The Second Part of King Henry IV* comes to an end. The final few lines point to *Henry V*, and they could hardly be less encouraging. Two men

remain onstage: Prince John of Lancaster and the Lord Chief Justice. The first we shall hear from again; the second shall disappear, his influence, like Falstaff's, already fading:

Lancaster: I like this fair proceeding of the king's.
 He hath intent his wonted followers
 Shall all be very well provided for,
 But all are banished till their conversations
 Appear more wise and modest to the world.

Chief Justice: And so they are.

Lancaster: The king hath called his parliament, my lord.

Chief Justice: He hath.

Lancaster: I will lay odds that, ere this year expire,
 We bear our civil swords and native fire
 As far as France. I heard a bird so sing,
 Whose music, to my thinking, pleased the king.
 Come, will you hence?

[V.v.97–109]

To which the Lord Chief Justice makes no reply.

The contrast could not be clearer. The villain approves of the king's "proceeding" (the very word Mowbray used to describe this same shameless villain's *unfair* behavior at Yorkshire), and the emblem of justice is all but silent. That is, at one of the most crucial moments in this or any play—the concluding lines—Shakespeare gives the final word on Henry's policies, not to the man whose word we trust, but to the man willing to gild the most dishonorable action with false, flattering words, so long as the result aligns with his self-interest. In an earlier play about self-serving politicians, *King John*, Shakespeare names this motive *Commodity*, and likens it to "that same purpose-changer, that sly devil, / That broker, that still breaks the pate of faith, / That daily break-vow"; Commodity is "[t]hat smooth-faced gentleman,

. . . the bias of this world;
 The world, who of itself is peised well,
 Made to run even upon even ground,
 Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
 This sway of motion, this commodity,

Makes it take head from all indifferency,
From all direction, purpose, course, intent.

[*KJ*, II.i.567–80]

These words are spoken by Faulconbridge, as honorable a man as the Lord Chief Justice and a whole lot wittier—Falstaff would surely have appreciated the Bastard’s opinion of Commodity. Faulconbridge is a problematic role model for several reasons, including his devotion to an unworthy king; still, of all the men in Shakespeare’s histories, he comes closest to balancing great intelligence and valor with honor—he manages to be witty without turning cynical, powerful without turning corrupt, and virtuous without turning moralistic. He is the hero who never shall be king, and his memorable words on the subject of Commodity, no less than the Lord Chief Justice’s silence, are an implicit condemnation of all that Prince John and his opportunistic father stand for. As he stands on the brink of the play that bears his name, young Henry V finds himself poised between these irreconcilable poles. Which side he shall choose is as obvious now as the first time we met him, when he revealed his plan to “make offense a skill.” For all its superficial pomp and patriotism, the final play in Henry’s story shall dramatize the unsettling consequences of his fateful choice.

Works Cited

- Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare, Volume 1*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Henry IV, Part I*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.

- Shakespeare, William. *Henry IV, Part II*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Henry VI, Part III*. Ed. William Montgomery. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *King John*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Richard II*. Ed. Frances E. Dolan. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.