Rereading Shakespeare's Prince Hal and Falstaff

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By

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For

Riley, Eloise, Georgia and Alexander

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INTRODUCTION

Producers of Shakespeare's plays have often sought to present their relevance to the time at which they are being staged. The theatrical history of the plays in general illustrates this, an extreme example being the staging of *King Lear* with a happy ending. As well as making the play less harrowing, this was largely the result of preserving what was thought at the time to be "poetical justice", when what happened at the end of the play was regarded as a type or mirror of divine justice. Jay L. Halio has aptly commented on this, as well as the liberty producers often take, in his New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *King Lear*:

> Regardless of what we may now think of Tate's redaction, actors and audiences preferred his version of the play, especially its happy ending, for the next century and a half. It is an extreme instance of what Shakespeare's text, like any theatrical script, had been subject to from the beginning: actors, managers, and directors, as well as authors, have always felt free to alter the "book" of a play to suit exigencies, dramatic or otherwise, that they anticipate or experience.

Halio noted that "the Shakespeare ending" was not revived until 1834.[1]

A far less remarkable change of emphasis occurred with regard to the *Henry IV* plays during and after the Second World War. Its effect has continued to influence to a certain degree the perception of Falstaff, whose presentation has often been as too much of a clown. John Dover Wilson, who began editing these plays early in 1939, stated in his book on the plays a few years later: "I have been spending such time as a belligerent world allows on the task, now nearing completion, of editing both parts of *Henry IV*." Dover Wilson conceived of the crown as "the keystone of England's political and social stability", and described Prince Hal, whose wild youth was legendary, as being transformed from "an idle and wayward prince into an excellent governor and soldier". During the war years and afterwards, outright loyalty to king and country was a given, doubtless influencing why Dover Wilson regarded the rejection of Falstaff by Prince Hal as "just and inevitable", as "right and necessary".[2]

In the production by Anthony Quayle of *1 Henry IV* at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1951, Richard Burton appeared as Prince Hal, and Anthony Quayle as Falstaff adopted the look and manner of a somewhat sinister clown. Editors of the New Cambridge Shakespeare "updated" edition noted of this production: "Probably for the first time, the characters of the King and the Prince and the relationship between them became more prominent"; they added that "Quayle himself acted Falstaff, not as a scene-stealing charmer but as a potentially vicious clown".[3] After the war, Kenneth Tynan, on seeing the plays at the Old Vic in 1955, wrote: "I suspected it at Stratford four years ago and now I am sure: for me the two parts of *Henry IV* are the twin summits of Shakespeare's achievement."

Tynan explained rating these plays above Shakespeare's great tragedies as follows: "Lime-hungry actors have led us always to the tragedies, where a single soul is spot-lit and its agony explored; but these private torments dwindle beside the Henries, great public plays in which a whole nation is under scrutiny and on trial".[4] Both at Stratford and the Old Vic the two *Henry IV* plays had been staged as part of the sequence of four plays from *Richard II* to *Henry V*, and Giorgio Melchiori, the New Cambridge Shakespeare editor of *2 Henry IV*, notes that Douglas Searle's production at the Old Vic in 1955 "marks an important turning-point in Shakespearean productions": "The stress moves from individual performances to the total impact of the plays as vehicles of a problematic view of history."[5]

"The new way with Shakespeare's histories", Melchiori points out, "cutting across barriers of time and culture", enabled them to be seen "as permanently valid statements about man's political as well as existential condition".[6] This has allowed criticism of the plays to go in various directions, including embracing the idea of the Carnivalesque,[7] which has meant a greater recognition of the importance of Falstaff and the environment of Eastcheap. Tynan's comments are, however, more concerned with political considerations, as can be seen from what he added about these plays:

> More than anything else in our drama they deserve the name of epic. A way of life is facing dissolution; we are in the death bed of the Middle Ages. . . . The odd, irregular rhythm wherein societies die and are reborn is captured as no playwright before or since has ever captured it. In Hal's return to honour and justice the healing of a national sickness is implied.

Tynan refers back to "the Middle Ages", the time of the two plays' action, but how he views what it accomplishes seems not unrelated to a dark and more recent time when loyalty to the British crown and the nation was all-

important. Tynan's insistence on the importance of Prince Hal's role would not have been unexpected at such a time, when Britain was still recovering from the deleterious effects of the war. He wrote that Hotspur, whose sense of "chivalry" seems more in keeping with the Middle Ages, was "on the wrong side", while Prince John, who represented the crown, despite his downright treachery at Gaultree Forest, was "on the right one".[8]

That the voice of the crown prevails at the end of the *Henry IV* plays would appear to support Tynan's view. Mikhail Bakhtin, for a different reason, had the same view in noting the genre of "drama may be multi-levelled, but it cannot contain *multiple worlds*; it permits only one, and not several, systems of management".[9] Yet to have "Rumour" with its coat of painted tongues introduce *2 Henry IV* suggests that more than one voice can be heard in how things are reported or need to be said. Certainly the voice of Falstaff, a character larger than life, cannot be denied. Despite the king's voice, or the legalistic tones of the Lord Chief Justice, finally prevailing, Falstaff represents much of what it means to be human. To see him as merely a clown tends to denature his role. He is not only among the greatest of literature's comic characters, but his voice, as the voice of Eastcheap, expresses both the seamier side of existence, and important human values such as "good fellowship" and an unwillingness to be "stony-hearted". Shakespeare also develops, in terms of what is good for the realm, the broader aspects of what Prince Hal intended in referring to "redeeming time". Here the scenes between the Prince and his father, including their different aspirations in gaining the crown, are important to how he becomes Henry V. It is, indeed, as if Shakespeare were able to work from different moral centres in creating both Prince Hal and Falstaff, revealing the kind of moral poise that John Keats suggested in noting his ability to create a world "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".[10]

It has been noted by C. L. Barber that through Falstaff "Shakespeare expressed attitudes towards experience which, grounded in a saturnalian reversal of values, went beyond that to include a radical challenge to received ideas".[11] Falstaff certainly flaunts a festive spirit: the audience constantly sees him pursuing the desires of the moment, along with a readiness to be involved in whatever is being suggested or about to happen. He demonstrates his pursuit of present pleasure, as well as a reluctance to be regimented, or submit to authority for its own sake. Though the Prince's wit is often a match for his own, whenever Falstaff is cornered or placed in a tight spot, his ability to fictionalize and seemingly make his escape shows how protean his wit can be. It is not accurate to say, as John Bailey did, that the "ascendency" the Prince maintains over Falstaff is "not merely one of

birth and rank but one of mind and will and character".[12] The Eastcheap scene of Act 2 scene 4 in *1 Henry IV* gives the ascendency and final clinching comment after their mock acting to Prince Hal. But in the corresponding scene of *2 Henry IV,* where the Prince and Poins again intend to make fun of Falstaff as they spy on him, it is Falstaff who finally expresses a justifiable rebuke of the Prince.

To view Falstaff so positively is, however, to run counter to some recent judgments that have been made about his character and his role in these plays, especially by those who wish to stress his faults and his need to make amends. Tom McAlindon has regarded him as "th'offending Adam" or "the unregenerate 'old man' . . . whom St Paul urged his fallen Ephesian converts to cast off, putting on the new man and redeeming the time".[13] Michael Davies, who states that the two *Henry IV* plays are "specifically Reformation drama", goes so far in his moral condemnation of Falstaff to suggest that because of the "sermonic nature" or "homiletic aspect of the rejection speech"–given Falstaff's "fatness" and "all other aspects of his unregenerate, tavern-dwelling existence"–it may be "uttered quite sincerely for Falstaff's benefit".[14] This is certainly not the way Falstaff saw it; and it is not the way we should see it. Indeed, Falstaff's faults can be easily overstated in the context of the world exhibited by each play. Compared with what Henry IV did in usurping the crown from Richard II, whose blood stained Pomfret's "stones", Falstaff's peccadilloes, or the more serious offence of being willing to take a purse, seem far less blameable. Nor, we may assume, would Falstaff have been able to indulge in or assent to the kind of treachery that Prince John exhibited at Gaultree. The perpetual moralist in Samuel Johnson, when estimating Falstaff as a "compound of sense and vice", rightly concluded: "He is stained with no enormous or sanguinary crimes, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive but that it may be borne for his mirth." No one, in fact, has surpassed what Johnson wrote in claiming Falstaff to be both "unimitated" and "unimitable".[15]

Political expedience required the Henry described by the chroniclers to reject the kind of society his father expected and Falstaff hoped for as a result of Hal's wild youth; yet it is misleading to downplay our engagement with the fat knight by emphasizing only his faults. Dover Wilson quoted from the medieval examples that Prince Hal had used in their mock play-acting in *1 Henry IV*. Viewing him in the role of tempter, he wrote: "Hal associates Falstaff in turn with the Devil of the miracle play, the Vice of the morality and the Riot of the interlude", and he goes on to describe him as "that villainous abominable misleader of Youth, that old white-bearded Satan".[16] William Empson, however, regarded Falstaff as "much the most

successful Shakespeare character before Hamlet", and he opposed in a number of ways Dover Wilson's reading of the plays, especially his conception of Falstaff as "a Medieval Vice, with no interior at all".[17] Jonathan Bate, a more recent defender of Falstaff's human qualities, has said of Sir John that "as plain Jack he represents those irrepressible forces of life itself – wit, companionship, thirst – over which governments legislate at their peril". Bate adds: "There is no more tender moment in Shakespeare's history plays than that in *Henry IV Part Two* at which Falstaff parts from the blubbered Doll Tearsheet and the forgiving Mistress Quickly: 'Well, fare thee well: I have known thee these twenty-nine years, come peascod-time, but an honester and truer-hearted man – well, fare thee well'."[18]

Arguably Dover Wilson came to some debatable conclusions about the presentation of Falstaff and Prince Hal, but his work at least acknowledges the dramatic significance of their various roles. Not only does their relationship contribute to the plays' inner fabric and dramatic life, but what occurs between Prince Hal and Falstaff in their close relationship is clearly one of Shakespeare's creative achievements. The editors of the NCS edition of *I Henry IV* express as much in stating: "As if drawn to complicated attachments, Shakespeare represents friendships which are marked by conspicuous disparities of age, rank, and emotional need. Perhaps the most challenging and unlikely of all these friendships is the one between Falstaff and the Prince." The editors add that "without their friendship neither Falstaff nor the Prince would engage our attention so fully".[19] The aim of the present work is to examine this relationship in detail by staying in close touch with what passes between them, and with the dramatic action as this develops. Obviously, the relationship of Prince Hal and Falstaff will change as the Prince moves closer to the throne and becomes most fully involved in his intention of "redeeming time". This, in essence, existed from the beginning, and becomes increasingly necessary because of what is seen as the "diseased" state of the nation.

Throughout the plays a sense is substantiated of something beyond the suggested Machiavellian motivation of the way Henry Bolingbroke conceived and achieved succession to the throne, and this is one point where a different kind of critical emphasis needs to be questioned. Henry IV's musings, as well as his conversations with his eldest son throughout the plays, confirm he feels guilt at how he became king. In his conversation with Hal he wonders whether he has been given him by "the rod of heaven, / To punish my mistreadings". Prince Hal, on the other hand, envisages the crown as what "god shall guard", and imagines receiving it from his father as a "lineal honour" in the due course of succession. Another point any re-

reading of the *Henry IV* plays needs to question is the widely held view that Falstaff's repeated reference to his "womb" in *2 Henry IV* indicates a "mothering" side to his nature. While feminist readings have contributed to Shakespearean criticism during the last half century, the dramatic context of "My womb, my womb, my womb undoes me" does not, for several reasons, support such an interpretation.

Besides the scenes between Falstaff and Prince Hal, a further dynamic which holds the plays together is not only the opposition between Eastcheap and the Court, but the wider and more deep-seated opposition between Henry IV and those who oppose him. In *1 Henry IV* the scenes involving Eastcheap and the Court juxtapose the worlds that Prince Hal moves between; and there is a prospective significance in the way they are brought together in the mock play-acting of Act 2 scene 4, where Prince Hal, acting the role of the king, states he will banish Falstaff. What leads to the battle of Shrewsbury, where Falstaff is placed in a world unlike Eastcheap, is the opposition to the king of the Northumberland family. It had helped him to the throne and then been treated in a way that convinced its members of the king's ingratitude and lack of trustworthiness. Henry Percy or Hotspur, Northumberland's son, is as his soubriquet implies its principal man of action, who seeks "honour" through acts of valour, and sees himself as Prince Hal's rival for the realm. Prince Hal also reckons Hotspur his rival before he meets him in single combat, and significantly in an early scene this can be gleaned from what Prince Hal says as he and Poins wait for their earlier joke against Falstaff–by robbing those who robbed the travellers–to become apparent. When Poins seeks to probe what is in his thoughts, Prince Hal makes reference to Hotspur in a way which, in the context of the scene, suggests he does not see Hotspur's boasting as likely to be effective in any future "action" or "reckoning" between them.

Less interaction between Prince Hal and Falstaff occurs in *2 Henry IV*, though what there is does not always reflect well on Prince Hal. In this second play Falstaff's role as a father-figure is eclipsed; but his thoughts after the intended engagement at Gaultree Forest suggest, in comparing Hal favourably with his father and brother Prince John, that he himself is conscious of his good influence on the character of the developing Prince. This second play has a more elegiac strain, though the opposition to the ailing king is no less committed than before. What Tynan referred to as a "national sickness" is evident in the play's world given the terms in which Henry IV's opponents, including the Archbishop of York, view his rule in usurping the crown. It is also evidently a sick Henry who laments the diseased state of his nation, of which he is both victim and cause. Nor do

Prince John's treacherous actions at Gaultree securing victory for the king promise a more enlightened future. From Prince Hal's promptness in leaving the inn at Eastcheap, after a telling rebuke from Falstaff, one might assume he was intent on hot-footing it to Gaultree Forest. But that he does not appear there, and cannot be associated with his brother's treachery, allows Shakespeare to keep him in reserve for ensuring "formal majesty" returns to the kingdom when he becomes Henry V.

What passes between Prince Hal and Falstaff may well give us an increased sense of the dramatic roles of these two characters, changing for us in some measure the way they have been represented. Jonathan Bate is surely right to say that "even as he uses Hal for his own advancement, Falstaff is always a truer father than the cold and politic King Henry IV can ever be".[20] Yet Prince Hal, even though he expresses regret at what he supposes a dead Falstaff on the field of battle at Shrewsbury, uses his association with the fat knight rather as it suits him. While the love Falstaff expresses for Hal is boundless, William Empson's view that "to love Falstaff was a liberal education" for Hal would appear to be in some need of rephrasing.[21] Hal's tone in addressing Falstaff, or the attitude he can adopt towards him, often reflects a sense of who he was; and, especially when in Poins's company, there is often a latent and not always concealed contempt. The exchanges between Prince Hal and Falstaff become the main focus of what follows, and are analysed in some detail in order to give due weight to the significance of each. Shakespeare, of course, recognised that Henry V was perhaps the most celebrated of English kings. Nor does the kind of afterlife that the Hostess of the Tavern predicts for Falstaff seem consonant with his being dismissed as just a clown.

Notes

1. *The Tragedy of King Lear* (New Cambridge Shakespeare), ed. Jay L. Halio, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 1, 37-38, 41.

2. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, Cambridge, 1944, pp. 24, 80, 126.

3. *The First Part of King Henry IV* (New Cambridge Shakespeare, 'updated' edn), ed. Herbert Weil and Judith Weil, Cambridge, 2007, p. 49. Hereafter cited as *1 Henry IV*. Quotations of Shakespeare's text are taken from the NCS editions.

4. *Curtains: Selections from the Drama, Criticism and Related Writings*, London, 1961, pp. 93-94.

5. *The Second Part of King Henry IV* (New Cambridge Shakespeare), ed. Giorgio Melchiori, Cambridge, 2007, p. 48.

6. Ibid., p. 51.

7. Cf. *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Ronald Knowles, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1998.

8. *Curtains*, pp. 93, 94.

9. *Shakespeare and Carnival*, p. 8.

10. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman, London, 1952, p. 71.

11. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*, Princeton, N.J., 1959, pp. 198-9.

12. *Shakespeare* (English Heritage Series), London, 1929, p. 132.

13. *Shakespeare's Tudor History: A Study of Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, Aldershot, 2001, pp. 164-5.

14. "Falstaff's Lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in 'Henry IV'", *Review of English Studies*, new series 56 (2005), 351, 353, 354, 358.

15. *Johnson on Shakespeare* (The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson), ed. Arthur Sherbo, New Haven and London, VII (1968), 523.

16. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, p. 20.

17. *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. David B. Pirie, Cambridge, 1986, p. 65.

18. *The Genius of Shakespeare*, London, 1997, pp. 204-5.

19. *1 Henry IV*, pp. 32, 33.

20. *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 207.

21. *Essays on Shakespeare*, p. 67.

CHAPTER 1

1 HENRY IV

I

When Falstaff first addresses Hal, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?", the Prince displays his wit in questioning Falstaff's style of living:

> Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day.

"Fat-witted" draws attention to Falstaff's gross obesity. As well as his physical size, the fat knight is distinguished by his great wit, his willingness and ability to argue or dispute any point, especially to find a way to excuse himself when cornered, and deflect criticism of himself. Hal's words question not only Falstaff's overindulgence in pleasures of the flesh but also, because of the irregular habits that mark his freedom from restraint, his flouting of what answers to an accepted routine. Hal displays a hint of contempt, bordering on sarcasm, which as the young heir apparent he would have thought no less than his due.

Falstaff is nevertheless able to show a readiness of mind and wit to match the Prince, and from his response obviously thought Hal's words a trifle graceless:

> FALSTAFF Indeed, you come near me now, Hal, for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not "by Phoebus, he, that wandering knight so fair". And I prithee, sweet wag, when thou art king, as God save thy grace – majesty, I should say, for grace thou wilt have none –
>
> PRINCE What, none?

> FALSTAFF No, by my troth, not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter.

Falstaff, who shows indulgence in taking no offence – an indulgence that accords with their level of intimacy and his love for Hal – is able to turn Hal's words to his own ends, thus downplaying the Prince's criticism by denying him even that measure of "grace" used to introduce a meagre repast.

The end Falstaff has in view is a very different kind of society when Hal becomes king, one more likely to show restraint in judging petty misdemeanours, as well as in making less use of the gallows. Falstaff hints at this by continuing to indulge in punning: "Marry then, sweet wag, when thou art king let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty. Let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon. And let men say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal." But Prince Hal answers the cleverness of Falstaff's puns by using the image of the moon to very different effect:

> Thou sayest well, and it holds well too, for the fortune of us that are the moon's men doth ebb and flow like the sea, being governed as the sea is, by the moon. As for proof now: a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night, and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning, got with swearing "Lay by!", and spent with crying "Bring in!", now in as low an ebb as the foot of the ladder, and by and by in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows.

The NCS editors quote the proverb: "He that is at low ebb at Newgate may soon be afloat at Tyburn".

This is not what Falstaff wanted to hear, who quickly changes the subject: "By the Lord thou sayest true, lad – and is not my Hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?" The Prince agrees, while broadening Falstaff's remark to include the idea of prostitution:

> As the honey of Hybla, my old lad of the castle.
> And is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?

There is "word-play on Sir John Oldcastle, the name given to Falstaff in the first version of the play"; while Ian Donaldson suggested "buff'" might "refer to human skin, initiating a sexual joke continued in 'sweet robe'". Falstaff says in answer to Hal's imputation: "How now, how now, mad wag? . . . What a plague have I to do with a buff jerkin?" The Prince is quick to answer: "Why, what a pox have I to do with my Hostess of the tavern?"

Their pointed exchange continues, to quote the Cambridge editors, with "puns on payment and sexuality":

> FALSTAFF Well, thou hast called her to a reckoning many a time and oft.
>
> PRINCE Did I ever call for thee to pay thy part?
>
> FALSTAFF No, I'll give thee thy due, thou hast paid all there.
>
> PRINCE Yea, and elsewhere, so far as my coin would stretch, and where it would not, I have used my credit.
>
> FALSTAFF Yea, and so used it that were it not here apparent that thou are heir apparent –

but at this point Falstaff goes on to ask whether there shall be "gallows standing in England when thou art king?" This is for him a subject of some concern, as he hopes for what he would regard as a less restrictive kind of society when Hal is crowned, one that might view more kindly the odd taking of a purse.

When Falstaff says, "Do not thou when thou art king hang a thief", the Prince replies, "No. thou shalt." Falstaff misconstrues what the Prince means: "Shall I? O rare! By the Lord, I'll be a brave judge!" This allows Hal to spring the trap he has set: "Thou judgest false already! I mean thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves, and so become a rare hangman." At this Falstaff admits to feeling "melancholy". Hal then says, "What sayest thou to a hare, or the melancholy of Moorditch?" The hare's flesh was thought to cause melancholy, and the filthy ditch of Moorditch was near Bedlam, so that Falstaff replies: "Thou hast the most unsavory similes, and art indeed the most comparative rascalliest sweet young prince", words indicating how positively he values intimacy with Hal. Introducing a wish, which he never took seriously, to amend his life, Falstaff adds:

> I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. An old lord of the Council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not, and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not, and yet he talked wisely – and in the street too.

The Prince brushes this off with, "Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it"; but Falstaff continues:

> O thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little

> better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over. By the Lord, an I do not I am a villain. I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

In referring to Hal's wild youth, Falstaff gives a sense of how he has been affected, but Hal promptly hits back at him by asking: "Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?" Immediately Falstaff, no longer melancholy but ready to respond to whatever is going on, says, "Zounds, where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one; an I do not, call me a villain and baffle me." The Prince imagines he has now caught Falstaff out: "I see a good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking." But Falstaff is never lost for words, cleverly answering the Prince: "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation." This riposte is singularly adept because Falstaff not only echoes the Bible ("Let every man abide in the same vocation wherein he was called") but, as the NCS editors also point out, recalls "a favourite text of Protestant preachers, urging hard work and conformity to the social order".

Through his ready wit Falstaff refuses to be bound by whatever seeks to constrain him. He attempts to make his world answerable to how he would have it, always hoping for a less restrictive world when Prince Hal becomes king. Though Hal had begun this exchange between the two of them by questioning Falstaff's routine, even though it doubtless often suited his own, Falstaff's wit here challenges what the Prince sought to imply. He does this by equating taking a purse with the labour expected within a functioning society. He seeks to uphold what is contrary to the rule of law as a social positive by declaring it constitutes what for him is a characteristic and necessary activity.

The Prince's provocative suggestion about taking a purse gains currency when Poins enters and relates that "tomorrow morning, by four o'clock early at Gad's Hill, there are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings and traders riding to London with fat purses". Poins adds: "We may do it as secure as sleep. If you will go, I will stuff your purses full of crowns. If you will not, tarry at home and be hanged." In line with the Prince's earlier comment, the fat knight says to Poins: "Hear ye, Yedward, if I tarry at home and go not, I'll hang you for going." Falstaff's comment might have been a side-swipe at Poins, whom he appears to have little time for, and who always seeks to make fun of Falstaff and encourages the Prince to do likewise. Poins made his attitude clear in greeting them. To the Prince he said, "Good morrow, sweet Hal", but to Falstaff, "What says Monsieur Remorse? What says Sir John Sack, and Sugar Jack? How agrees the devil

and thee about thy soul, that thou soldest him on Good Friday last, for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg?" In adding to Poins's ridiculing of Falstaff, Prince Hal observes that the knight "stands to his word", and that he "will give the devil his due". In thus joining with Poins, the Prince in effect is consigning Falstaff to hell. This example on Poins's first appearance shows Prince Hal more than ready to gang up or act in concert with him against Falstaff; and this becomes blatant in *2 Henry IV* when they seek to embarrass and laugh at the fat knight, disguising themselves as "drawers" to spy on Falstaff when at supper with the Hostess of the tavern and Doll Tearsheet.

Despite the views of those inclined to laud the Prince over Falstaff, the fat knight's looking to the companionship of others adds to his appeal, serving along with his fatness to set him apart. When he asks whether Hal will take part in robbing the travellers, the Prince, despite his father having appropriated a kingdom, exclaims: "Who, I? Rob? I, a thief? Not I, by my faith." Falstaff, wishing Hal would join them in the venture, expresses frustration: "There's neither honesty, manhood, nor good fellowship in thee, nor thou camest not of the blood royal, if thou darest not stand for ten shillings." So the Prince says, "Well then, once in my days I'll be a madcap." But on Falstaff's commenting, "Why, that's well said", the Prince says he'll "tarry at home". Poins asks Falstaff to leave them, saying he'll persuade the Prince by giving "such reasons for this adventure that he shall go", and when Falstaff leaves, the Prince farewells him with words suggesting that at his age he should know better than to undertake such a venture: "Farewell, the latter spring! Farewell, All-hallown summer!"

Poins proposes to the Prince that after Falstaff and the others have robbed the travellers, they in disguise will rob them. When the Prince says, "but I doubt they will be too hard for us", Poins replies: "Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back, and for the third, if he fight longer than he sees reason, I'll forswear arms. The virtue of this jest will be the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper. How thirty at least he fought with, what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured, and in the reproof of this lives the jest." Hal is persuaded, saying, "Provide us all things necessary and meet me tomorrow night in Eastcheap. There I'll sup. Farewell." When Poins leaves, the Prince gives an insight into his shrewdness and present behaviour as he communes with himself:

> I know you all, and will a while uphold
> The unyoked humour of your idleness.

> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That when he please again to be himself,
> Being wanted, he may be more wondered at
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
> If all the year were playing holidays,
> To sport would be as tedious as to work;
> But when they seldom come, they wished-for come,
> And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
> So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word I am,
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes.
> And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
> My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
> Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
> I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
> Redeeming time when men think least I will.

This shows how calculating Prince Hal is, and he might be seen indulging a Machiavellian bent, even though his later attitude expressed to his father about succeeding to the throne would seem to discount this as uppermost in his thoughts. He is claiming he will reveal another side of himself when he becomes king, though this inevitably implies that his present behaviour is no more than an enjoyable facade, however duped his present friends are by it. The NCS editors suggest the context of this speech, in looking forward to "redeeming time", is "the Morality pattern of spiritual reform that underlies the Prince's soliloquy". Hal is seen as an example of "the prodigal son", indicating that the dissoluteness he is now pursuing will be repaid by the greater worth he will in the future display.[1] He seeks to give this significance by the cosmic imagery he employs; yet in describing as "unyoked" the humour he is now taking part in, he suggests how unrestrained, and consequently enjoyable, is the world of Falstaff and Eastcheap. Above all, however, he shows himself concerned about the significance of his future role by his willingness to throw off his "loose behaviour" in order to "pay the debt I never promised"– words which may include reference to his obligation to assume the crown. His action of "redeeming time" will include not only his re-fashioning of himself by rejecting Falstaff and all his hopes for a different kind of world, but, beyond that, as the *Henry IV* plays illustrate, a need to restore legitimacy to the succession and renewed majesty to the kingdom. This second scene of *1*

Henry IV thus illustrates not only an element of wilful teasing in the Prince's attitude towards Falstaff and his world, even as Hal himself enjoys it, but also a sense of what the future when he is king will ultimately involve. At the appropriate time he will "throw off" more than his "loose behaviour".

II

An account of Henry Percy's warlike exploits, as well as his challenging of the present king, follows Prince Hal's soliloquy. Percy not only refuses to surrender his captured prisoners at Henry IV's command, but blames his father and uncle for setting "the crown / Upon the head of this forgetful man". Echoing the word used by the Prince, Hotspur maintains – ultimately ineffectually – there is yet time

> wherein you may redeem
> Your banished honours, and restore yourselves
> Into the good thoughts of the world again.

Hotspur's exploits in the field, like his recent action against the Scots, prompt Henry's praise by comparison with his own son's conduct in Eastcheap. Though Hotspur's brother-in-law Edmund Mortimer, with "a thousand of his people butchered", has been captured by Owen Glendower of Wales, the Earl of Douglas, with "ten thousand bold Scots" and "two-and-twenty knights", has been overcome by Hotspur, who has taken a number of notable prisoners. Henry IV says:

> And is not this an honourable spoil?
> A gallant prize? Ha, cousin, is it not?

His kinsman by marriage Westmoreland agrees: "In faith, it is a conquest for a prince to boast of." Henry then enviously compares his Harry unfavourably with Henry Percy. Since Northumberland's son "is the theme of honour's tongue" whereas his Harry's behaviour is riotous and dishonorable, the king says:

> O that it could be proved
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
> In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
> And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!
> Then would I have his Harry, and he mine.

Hotspur was more than twenty years older than Prince Hal, but Shakespeare altered history so that the conflict between them could be dramatically

staged. Shakespeare also confused Hotspur's brother-in-law Lord Edmund Mortimer, captured by Glendower, with his nephew Edmund, the fifth Earl of March, whose claim to the throne had descended to him from his father who, according to Holinshed, had been proclaimed heir presumptive in 1385. When therefore Henry IV meets the Northumberland family to demand Hotspur surrender his prisoners, he is adamant in refusing Hotspur's request that Mortimer should be ransomed. Because of how he obtained the throne, Henry IV is always apprehensive of what claims may be made against him.

This confusion of the two Edmund Mortimers makes it to Henry appear more likely that Hotspur is a natural rival for the crown. In a later conversation between Henry IV and Prince Hal, the king reckons Hotspur's claim to the throne is stronger than his son's:

> He hath more worthy interest to the state
> Than thou the shadow of succession.
> For of no right, nor colour like to right,
> He doth fill fields with harness in the realm,
> Turns head against the lion's armed jaws,
> And being no more in debt to years than thou
> Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on
> To bloody battles, and to bruising arms.

Conscious of the threat of rebellion, and particularly fearful of Richard II's prophecy that the Northumberland family, which had helped him to the crown, would turn against him, Henry even wildly envisaged that his own son might fight against him "under Percy's pay". Hal is appalled his father should have been led to such a thought, and one day promises to make "this northern youth exchange / His glorious deeds for my indignities". Hotspur is imagined as naturally a rival, and he indeed looks forward to meeting Prince Hal as his rival, saying concerning their prospective combat:

> Come, let me taste my horse,
> Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt
> Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales.

These lines suggest both how keen Hotspur is to fight, and how ready he is violently to unseat the Prince of Wales.

When the king summons the Northumberland family to demand from Percy his prisoners, he seeks to impose his royal will rather than lose "that title of respect, / Which the proud soul ne'er pays but to the proud". Percy denies him, and the two become further estranged by the king's refusal to ransom

"the foolish Mortimer". Henry accuses Hotspur of lying in saying Mortimer fought against "damned Glendower" for "the best part of an hour". When the king finally dismisses the Northumberland family from his presence, Hotspur's uncle Worcester tells of his plan to raise a revolt against the king. Hearing of this "matter deep and dangerous", Hotspur seizes on it as providing the opportunity for the honour he craves:

> Send danger from the east unto the west,
> So honour cross it from the north to south,
> And let them grapple. O, the blood more stirs
> To rouse a lion than to start a hare!

Northumberland says,

> Imagination of some great exploit
> Drives him beyond the bounds of patience;

and Hotspur's flight of fancy indeed exceeds all bounds:

> By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks,
> So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
> Without corrival all her dignities.

It is Hotspur the action-man who ends this scene by saying:

> Uncle, adieu. O, let the hours be short,
> Till fields, and blows, and groans applaud our sport!

Though Hotspur's words are often impetuous and fulsome, he placed language below the value of action. When a certain lord questioned the wisdom of the intended rebellion –"*the purpose you undertake is dangerous*"– Hotspur, though not much focused on the detail of the plan, looks to the ensuing "action". He claims, "By the Lord, our plot is a good plot. . . . An excellent plot" backed by "good friends . . . very good friends". In formulating his answer to such a "frosty-spirited rogue", he says: "Why, my Lord of York commends the plot, and the general course of the action." It was action Hotspur always looked forward to. When Lady Percy asks, "What is it carries you away?", Hotspur replies, "Why, my horse, my love, my horse." Since she wants to know more, and if he still loves her, he says:

> Come, wilt thou see me ride?
> And when I am a-horseback I will swear
> I love thee infinitely.

A link between language and action is established early in Act 2 scene 4, when the Prince and Poins are in the tavern after having robbed Falstaff and the others who robbed the travellers. When events of the early part of this scene are teased out, they reveal Prince Hal imagines Hotspur as a future rival. After drinking with "a leash of drawers", Prince Hal is able to "call them all by their Christian names". He tells Poins: "thou hast lost much honour that thou wert not with me in this action". This amounted to being "so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour" as to be able to "drink with any tinker in his own language during my life". Prince Hal was praised by "all the good lads in Eastcheap" for quickly mastering their habit of drinking. They called him "a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy", convincing him when he became King of England they would be at his "command". Hal clearly regards the event as giving him some sort of advantage that will ultimately stand him in good stead. In telling Poins he should have been with him "in this action", his sense of what constituted "action" clearly differed from Hotspur's.

Hal then enlists Poins to help him make fun of one "puny drawer", Francis by name, in order "to drive away the time till Falstaff come". Their teasing of Francis, by constantly calling him from different points, has him distractedly answering, "Anon, anon, sir." Hal's drinking had led to this junior tapster or "underskinker"– one who, according to Hal, "never spake other English in his life than 'Eight shillings and sixpence', and 'You are welcome', with this shrill addition, 'Anon, anon, sir! Score a pint of bastard in the Half-moon!',"– pressing into the Prince's hand a "pennyworth of sugar". The Prince then hints he might himself employ Francis if he dared "be so valiant as to play the coward with thy indenture, and show it a fair pair of heels, and run from it". With Poins calling him all the time and Francis distractedly answering, "Anon, sir", the Prince says to Francis he will give him for the sugar "a thousand pound – ask me when thou wilt, and thou shalt have it". But when he is called, Francis answers, "Anon, anon", which allows the Prince to withdraw the offer: "Anon, Francis? No, Francis, but tomorrow, Francis. Or Francis, a-Thursday. Or indeed Francis, when thou wilt. But Francis!" Francis answers, "My lord?', but the Prince reels off language about innkeepers so that Francis does not know who or what he means. Finally, the Prince dismisses him with, "Away, you rogue, dost thou not hear them call?"

Told "old Sir John with half-a-dozen more are at the door'", the Prince says, "Let them alone a while, and then open the door." Meantime he says "he is now of all humours" and on Francis's re-entry asks, "What's o'clock, Francis?" When Francis replies, "Anon, anon, sir", the Prince exclaims:

> That ever this fellow should have fewer words than a parrot, and yet the son of a woman! His industry is up-stairs and down-stairs, his eloquence the parcel of a reckoning. I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the north, he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life, I want work." "O my sweet Harry", says she, "how many hast thou killed today?" "Give my roan horse a drench", says he, and answers, "Some fourteen", an hour after, "a trifle, a trifle". I prithee, call in Falstaff. I'll play Percy, and that damned brawn shall play Dame Mortimer his wife.

Prince Hal brackets Francis and Hotspur for a meaningless use of language, Hotspur's being viewed as ridiculously overblown and a sign of boastfulness. Hal's use of "reckoning" in this speech prompts him to shift from a tavern "reckoning" to another kind of "reckoning" involving "the Percy of the North". Prince Hal is implying Hotspur the action-man's use of language will not take the place of "action"– the sort of action that receives widespread, popularly acknowledged acclaim like that from "all the good lads in Eastcheap". He is implying that all Hotspur's outrageous deeds and boastful language will prove in the end to be meaningless.

The significance, then, of the early part of the scene resides in the importance Hal attaches to language or communication as a measure of one's capacity. Shakespeare's was, after all, an age when the power of the word was weighed, being of importance in both religious and political affairs; also in the drama, significant as a verbal art, where the moral and political possibilities of its use of language were taken seriously. Tom McAlindon has aptly suggested, along with a wealth of supporting authorities, "that Shakespeare implicitly relies on the classical and humanist axiom that language – 'the instrument of society', as Jonson called it – mirrors the political and even moral condition of a nation".[2] Prince Hal saw significance in a different kind of "action" from Hotspur's conception of the term, and welcomed the distance he supposed existed between his own ability to speak to "all the good lads in Eastcheap" and what he imagined the ineffectual bombastic, boastful utterances of Hotspur.

III

When the Prince says, “Call in Ribs, call in Tallow!”, Falstaff and the others enter, and Falstaff immediately exclaims against those who did not join in robbing the travellers: “A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too, marry and amen! Give me a cup of sack, boy. Ere I lead this life long, I’ll sew nether-stocks, and mend them and foot them too. A plague of all cowards! Give me a cup of sack, rogue. Is there no virtue extant?” Falstaff is obviously distressed to have lost the money, but clearly displeased by Hal’s absence from the venture. His former insistence on “good fellowship” shows what he prizes, and his outburst is directed against Prince Hal’s not being there. When the Prince makes a derogatory remark, Falstaff continues complaining: “You rogue, here’s lime in this sack too. There is nothing but roguery to be found in villainous man, yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with lime in it. A villainous coward! Go thy ways, old Jack, die when thou wilt. If manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring. . . . A plague of all cowards, I say still.” Despite having run away when opposed by the Prince and Poins, Falstaff shows his ill-feeling, and when the Prince asks, “How now, woolsack, what mutter you?”, Falstaff reveals what he has been complaining about by exclaiming, “A king’s son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I’ll never wear hair on my face more. You, Prince of Wales!” When the Prince says, “Why you whoreson round man, what’s the matter?”, Falstaff asks: “Are not you a coward? Answer me to that – and Poins there?” Poins and Falstaff sharply exchange words, and after Falstaff drinks he again says, “A plague of all cowards, still say I.”

When the Prince, probing to get Falstaff’s account of events, again asks, “What’s the matter?”, Falstaff responds: “What’s the matter? There be four of us here have taken a thousand pound this morning.” With the Prince asking, “Where is it, Jack, where is it?”, Falstaff in his exasperation grossly exaggerates: “Where is it? Taken from us it is. A hundred upon poor four of us.” Prince Hal, sensing the “jest” will turn, as Poins had said, on “the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us”, inquires, “What, a hundred, man?” Falstaff therefore begins to tell what his heated imagination dreams up: “I am a rogue if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have escaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like a handsaw – *ecce signum*! I never dealt better since I was a man. All would not do. A plague of all cowards!” When the others, invited to speak, differ from him about the

details, Falstaff interrupts to exaggerate further. Since the Prince thinks there's more to come, he encourages Falstaff by asking, "What, fought you with them all?" Falstaff replies: "All? I know not what you call all, but if I fought not with fifty of them I am a bunch of radish. If there were not two or three and fifty upon poor old Jack, then am I no two-legg'd creature." The Prince then leads Falstaff on to expatiate further:

> PRINCE Pray God you have not murdered some of them.
>
> FALSTAFF Nay, that's past praying for, I have peppered two of them. Two I am sure I have paid, two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse. Thou knowest my old ward – here I lay, and thus I bore my point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me –
>
> PRINCE What, four? Thou saidst but two even now.
>
> FALSTAFF Four, Hal, I told thee four.

Poins, who is not going to stop a tall story becoming even taller, or discourage the "fat rogue" from telling even more "incomprehensible lies", interposes: "Ay, ay, he said four." And as Falstaff goes on relating the encounter, "four" becomes "seven", then "nine", and eventually "eleven". The Prince finally says, "O monstrous! Eleven buckram men grown out of two!" Falstaff, however, does not stop there: "But as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me, for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand."

At this point the Prince decides to call a halt to Falstaff's fictionalizing: "These lies are like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou whoreson obscene greasy tallow-catch –" But Falstaff interrupts him with, "What, art thou mad? Art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth?" The Prince now has the evidence from what Falstaff has said to contradict him: "Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand? Come, tell us your reason. What sayest thou to this?" Poins also presses Falstaff: "Come, your reason, Jack, your reason!" But Falstaff refuses to be forced to explain, and he and the Prince engage in personal abuse until the Prince tells him what really happened:

> We two saw you four set on four, and bound them and were masters of their wealth – mark now how a plain tale shall put you down. Then did we two set on you four, and, with a word, out-faced you from your prize, and have it, yea, and can show it you here in the house. And Falstaff, you carried your

> guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still run and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou to hack thy sword as thou hast done, and then say it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

Poins, always ready to rubbish Falstaff, joins in the Prince's effort to embarrass him: "Come, let's hear Jack, what trick hast thou now?" But Falstaff's ready, protean wit does not desert him, since he produces the best lie of all in attempting to vindicate himself: "By the Lord, I knew thee as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules. But beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince." Falstaff then seeks to re-establish the kind of good-natured fellowship he so prizes: "But by the Lord, lads, I am glad you have the money! Hostess, clap to the doors! Watch tonight, pray tomorrow! Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? Shall we have a play extempore?" Despite Falstaff's attempt to make all cordial again by thus appealing to their good fellowship, the Prince does not let him so easily off the hook and therefore answers, "Content, and the argument shall be thy running away." Falstaff, hoping for a change of subject, reveals what he could wish from his young friend: "Ah, no more of that Hal, an thou lovest me."

Falstaff is hoping for too much. Despite his wish for Hal to desist, the Prince's wanting to keep the joke going is indicative of his attitude towards Falstaff. When the Hostess says, "there is a nobleman of the court at door", the Prince, wishing to continue the jest, dismisses his significance until Falstaff asks, "What manner of man is he?" Being told "an old man", Falstaff says, "What doth gravity out of his bed at midnight?", and undertakes with the Prince's consent to send him packing. After Falstaff leaves, the Prince returns the talk to Gad's Hill, seeking from Bardolph and Peto how Falstaff behaved, so he can continue to make fun of him. "Now sirs, by'r lady, you fought fair, so did you, Peto, so did you, Bardolph. You are lions too, you ran away upon instinct, you will not touch the true prince, no, fie!"

> BARDOLPH Faith, I ran when I saw others run.
>
> PRINCE Faith, tell me now in earnest, how came Falstaff's sword so hacked?
>
> PETO Why, he hacked it with his dagger, and said he would swear truth out of England but he would make you believe it was done in fight, and persuaded us to do the like.