GARETH LLOYD EVANS

The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method—Henry IV

In 2 *Henry IV*, Prince Henry stealthily takes the crown of England from his dying father's bedside and addresses it

> The care on thee depending
> Hath 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 honour'd, most renown'd,
> Hast eat thy bearer up. (IV, v, 159)

His words convey a vision of the nature of kingship, and, by implication of the State itself, which is far removed from any other conception of the royal condition in Shakespeare's previous history plays. For Prince Hal the crown does not have the awesome status of a multiple symbol of power, majesty, grief and death. It is for him nearer to being a dangerous bauble, notwithstanding its tacit symbolism. When he discovers that he has too quickly taken it up, he returns it with words which suggest that the greatest offence he has committed is against his father, rather than against the appointed King of England. The simplicity of the gentle "There is your crown" followed by his anguished

> God witness with me, when I here came in,
> And found no course of breath within your majesty,
> How cold it struck my heart!

From *Early Shakespeare*, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 3, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London 1961), 145–163. Reprinted by permission of the author and Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.

with its hint of ceremony, leads to the angry irony of his address to the crown, with its bitter counterpointing of "my father" and "Thee." The crown indeed holds awe, majesty, pain and terror, but Hal's expression of these turns abstraction into personalized grief:

> I put it on my head,
> To try with it, as with an enemy
> That had before my face murder'd my father.

The king's reply also significantly suggests a personal reaction to Hal's grief and regret:

> O my son,
> God put it in thy mind to take it hence,
> That thou mightest win the more thy father's love.

Throughout the scene the father-son relationship swells out, giving an additional dimension to the imperial theme. But, and this is important, we have been conditioned from the beginning of 1 *Henry IV* to see this dimension. We have been familiar with a royal prince, who himself has been a familiar with a world elsewhere, where he has been "educated" to make trial by experience of the abstractions which must later enclose his life.

The two parts of *Henry IV* encompass two worlds—the world of kingship and ceremony, and the natural world. The connecting link is Prince Hal; he has commerce with both, and it is what the one world teaches him that enables him finally to take up his habitation in the other. In each world he is confronted with living example of kingship—his own father, and his "adopted" father, Falstaff, emperor of the natural. Both "kings" have a kingdom to bequeath—the one the realm of England, the other, a realm of knowledge and experience. Both kings perish so that Hal may come into his kingdoms—the one by the natural order of death, the other by rejection.

In 1 *Henry IV* Hal begins his "education." No other prince of England in Shakespeare's histories is shown making himself deliberately a semifugitive from the world of royalty so that he may more certainly and dramatically enter into his heritage with the aura of man and royalty reborn. The process is self-imposed, and in some measure, self-denying, and one ironic result of it is to set up a poignant personal tension between himself and his father. The

conscious purpose of Hal is emphasized time and again. For the present his creed reads "wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it," but there is more than a touch of conceit, a sort of satisfied self-seeing in his private ruminations through the stews of London. There is much in Hal that loves flourish and drama. He looks forward to the great rebirth with youthful relish.

> If all the year were playing holidays,
> To sport would be as tedious as to work;
> But when they seldom come, they wish'd 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, glittering o'er my fault,
> Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes,
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
>
> (I, ii, 177–188)

Boyish conceit perhaps, but there is a calculated reasoning about it and a sense of high purpose. Here is a man assuming a false face, putting on a madcap disposition to ensure a desired result. The "reformation" is a calculated effect—its inevitability is a species of faith for Hal—and this self-conscious responsibility is the keynote of his relationship with Falstaff. Hal has never actually sinned—the early remarks about wenching have the flavour of verbal artifice and nothing else.

When the Gadshill plans are made, the whole tone is that of persuasion. There is a strong impression that this is the first time that Hal has ever considered the possibility of an actual indulgence in the nefarious escapades of Falstaff.

> HAL: Well then, once in my days I'll be a madcap.
> FALSTAFF: Why, that's well said.
> HAL: Well, come what will, I'll tarry at home.
> FALSTAFF: By the Lord, I'll be a traitor then, when thou art king.
> HAL: I care not.

> POINS: Sir John, I prithee, leave the prince and me alone: I will lay him down such reasons for this adventure that he shall go.
> FALSTAFF: Well, God give thee the spirit of persuasion and him the ears of profiting, that what thou speakest may move and what he hears may be believed, that the true prince may, for recreation's sake, prove a false thief. (I, ii, 124–134)

The emphasis here is plain. It is not merely that the prince is having to be persuaded to join in the affair; more pertinently it is the sense that his participation is a kind of formality "for recreaction's sake." There was never a less villainous planning than this for Gadshill. It is no more nor less than tomfoolery. Its "chief virtue" is the unmasking of Falstaff's braggadocio cowardice. The action and the results of Gadshill remain carefully within the atmosphere with which the robbery is planned. In no sense is the prince involved in the actual robbery; in every sense he has a care to be disguised—his first words to Poins before the travellers arrive, are "Ned, where are our disguises?" This prince remains unstained —his committal to the world of Falstaff is academic; he observes and learns. Any doors that might lead us to question the actual propriety of Hal are carefully closed by Shakespeare. Hal lays no hands upon the travellers. Their money is returned, the "jest" is all.

Even so Hal's preoccupation with this world, academic though it may be, when contrasted with the idealized Hotspur, and in the light of the anguish of the King who sees nothing but "riot and dishonour" stain the brow of his son, is sufficient not only to sketch the outlines of the personal tensions which are to well up later between father and son, but also to give an ironic depth to the widening theme of rebellion and the need for strong succession.

Yet, because of his self-conscious responsibility Hal has about him something too good to be true. He dips only his fingertips in mud, and Shakespeare is careful to wipe them clean. He has about him the self-conscious pride of the man whose indulgence is very circumspect.

The first appearance of Hal after Gadshill has, however, a different complexion. He and Poins meet together at the Boar's Head to await Falstaff, and there occurs the puzzling action with Francis the drawer. As Dover Wilson says, in *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, "Critics have solemnly entered it up in their black book of Hal's in-

iquities and accused him on the strength of it of 'heartlessly endangering the poor drawer's means of subsistence.' " Yet it is difficult to find Dover Wilson's cheery explanation that "the main purpose of this trifling episode, apart from giving Falstaff's voice a rest after the roaring and in preparation for the strain of the scene ahead, is to keep the audience waiting agog for him," any more convincing. The actor playing Falstaff has already had a scene—that between Hotspur and Kate—in which to rest his voice. As to keeping the audience "agog" for the fat wonder, surely the Hotspur scene fulfils that purpose, especially since in location and tone it takes our minds sufficiently far away from the fooleries of Gadshill to make a return to that atmosphere seem overdue. And if it were necessary for us to be introduced to the Boar's Head and the Prince in order to set the atmosphere for the arrival of Falstaff, why continue the scene-setting so long with this "trifling episode"? Perhaps the explanation of the scene may lie within the boundaries of the knowledge of the Prince which has so far been vouchsafed to us. He is the pure Prince, the conscious wearer of a mask of very harmless anarchy. Indeed all he has done is to wear a mask—he has not indulged in a dance of anarchy. In this scene, however, it may be suggested that Shakespeare, in order to give some depth of credibility to Hal's sojourn in the kingdom of Falstaff, and to the tension between Henry IV's conception of his wild son and the reality, here shows something more than the academic observer of Falstaff's dominion. Here for a short time the Prince is committed to that dominion in a positive, though still relatively harmless, way. For a short time he relaxes his hold on the conscious curriculum of his "education," and engages with that he had decided to observe. In short, he is drunk.

When Poins asks him where he has been, Hal replies

> With three or four loggerheads amongst three or four score hogsheads. I have sounded the very base-string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers . . . (II, iv, 4–6)

In the interim, since Gadshill, Hal has been pursuing his "education" and, like a naughty boy who steals the dregs at a wedding feast, is as much intoxicated by his sense of sin as by what he has drunk. Hal relishes the "dyeing scarlet" of drinking, and that he can "drink with any tinker in his own language." His language has the flush of

drinking on its face, and the repetitive sibilants of alcohol, and he has entered into the lovely world of hail-fellow-well-met:

> I am no proud Jack, like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy, by the Lord, so they call me, and when I am king of England, I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap.

He has the tipsy man's giggly desire for a game, and Francis is the victim. When he asks Poins to call Francis, and Poins does so, Hal, with that pointless verbal backslapping which is the temporary gift of alcohol, murmurs—"Thou art perfect." And the jest with Francis is pointless, it *is* a "trifling episode" in the manner in which much pub gaming is pointless and trifling, and by its pointlessness mitigates the discomfiture of the victim. Even Poins, who has not been with Hal amongst "three or four score hogsheads" cannot fathom the game. "Come, what's the issue?" The truth is that there is no "issue" that Hal could possibly explain to Poins. But Hal is not so tipsy that he does not dimly remember the issue himself. His answer is:

> I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight.

Now, in his own mind, he can confirm what he had earlier promised.

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyok'd humour of your idleness.
> (I, ii, 168–169)

Drink has taken Hal deeper into the world of Falstaff than he has ever been or ever will be again. In his fuddled state he thinks of Hotspur, but he talks of Hotspur in the language of Falstaff.

> 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. (II, iv, 92–100)

This is the same comic-cynical vision that sees honour in terms of "he that died a Wednesday"; in a few moments when Falstaff arrives we are to hear just such another "parcel of reckoning" in Falstaff's monstrous fantasies of the men he fought at Gadshill. The possibilities of Hall disengaging himself from this definite descent into the world of Falstaff are, to say the least, tenuous. Falstaff at bay is Falstaff at his most dangerous. Hal, in the flush of wanting to rub home the discomfiture of Falstaff, faces an adversary adept, not only in the art of verbal escapology, but one, when cornered, capable of taunting, corrupting, verbal sword-play. The great scene in which Falstaff relates his version of Gadshill moves impeccably on two lines which intertwine and separate and intertwine, enfolding in their pattern a rich and total image of the education of Hal, his relationship with Falstaff, and through both a vision of kingship which, when it is seen in relation to the royal world Hal returns to, creates the most moving and mature comment in the history plays. The developments of I, iv, after the entry of Falstaff, are firstly the comic surface where Falstaff and Hal, indeed the rest of the crew of the Boar's Head, exist, as it were, man to man—it is the comedy which unites them; secondly the relationship between Hal and Falstaff which exists below the surface of their comic union and is constantly tending to disunite Hal from the kingdom of Falstaff. Ironically, it is the very advantage which Falstaff attempts to seize through his comic largesse of wit that gradually pushes Hal further away from his world, and actually helps to redeem Hal from slipping further into a state he had vowed merely to observe. Falstaff's great comic flaw is his inability to know when to stop—or rather it is both his strength and his weakness. It gives him his monumental self-glowing status and takes away from him his ability to "hold" his most illustrious subject, Prince Henry.

When he enters, Falstaff is hot, dishevelled and angry. He rouses Hal to a pitch of anger by equating "coward" with "Prince." Hal is caught on the raw, confronted with a direct image of himself coined in the realm of Falstaff. But the heat of anger passes, and Falstaff's imagination gathers strength. Out of his dangerous rage, the monstrous comedy of his account of Gadshill grows. Under the Prince's swift questioning and frustration Falstaff ascends to the highest peak of his comic dominion. The corner into which he has been pushed cannot hold him, and there comes what Dover Wilson calls his "consummate retort,"

By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye.

There is no doubt that the brilliance of Falstaff's verbal gymnastics during this scene endears him to that part of us which revels in the bright machinations of roguery. Never again was Shakespeare to create such a sustained example of the magnificence of the solitary comic spirit. It rests at the opposite pole of the tragic hero's awareness of self. Where his is self-immolating, self-examining, inward turning, Falstaff's is self-expanding, outward turning, feeding on its own audacity, and gloriously aware of the incredible but magnetic effect it creates. But what is equally plain throughout this scene is that Falstaff is meticulously and unconsciously digging his own grave: his future grows less as he builds himself great. Falstaff's account of Gadshill is a superb essay in the art of cowardice. By the very deviousness of his description he proves the falsity and enormity of his naming Hal a coward. The coward is anatomized here—first his rage at apparent exposure, then his outrageous exaggeration, as if cloud-capped towers of falsehood will hide the earthy truth, and finally the hollow, audacious, magnificent trump-card—the attempt to put himself on the side of the angels.

Hal does not let the meaning of the essay go unmarked, "the argument shall be thy running away."

The relish with which Hal accepts Falstaff's invitation to "stand for" his father the King, and to examine the particulars of his life, is an appetite based less on love of the "game" than on the assurance of his own inviolable, secret purposes.

The mock trial scene is of very great significance since it is the last time that Falstaff is seen "in state" with his chief subject, Hal. His reign over Hal is much shorter than is often admitted, and this scene represents a final audience before a long-drawn-out abdication. Shakespeare allows Falstaff to retain the high comic status he has achieved in his description of Gadshill. Falstaff sits on the throne first. But this overindulgence of his comic craft once again causes a gap to widen between himself and Hal. He takes up his symbols and effects of office: "this chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown" (II, iv, 336–337). And the Prince's repetition. 'Thy state is taken for a joined stool, thy golden sceptre for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown," with its emphasis on "thy," sharply distinguishes comic licence and hard reality. Falstaff plays the game of

King-father to Hal, but turns the occasion once more to his favourite theme, himself. The previous swelling fantasies of Gadshill are forgotten, and the new theme is a mocking catalogue of virtues. Yet there creeps into this feast of fooling a shadow of uncertainty, "If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff; him keep with, the rest banish" (380–382).

There is a cold silence implied between this and the Prince's next words. Hal does not reply to the challenge—his mind has leapt to another world of consideration; "Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father."

Hal forces him on to the defensive—once more the shadow falls, and banishment is uttered. It is as if Falstaff is fatally fascinated by the need for an answer. He dare not question, but uses an appealing imperative:

> No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

But he gets an unequivocal answer: "I do, I will."

There are no more dramatic interruptions than that which suddenly cuts across the stage at this point. Bardolph runs in shouting that the sheriff is at the door. Falstaff has been left in an agony of apprehension by Hal's words—he hardly takes in the fact that the law stands outside his door. He says to Bardolph, "Out, ye rogue! Play out the play; I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff."

Indeed he has much to say, but nothing ever again that can gainsay what Hal has said. Dover Wilson, observing that following Hal's words the Cambridge and other modern editions supply a stage direction, "*A knocking heard, exeunt Hostess, Francis and Bardolph,*" notes that neither quartos nor Folio supply previous exits for these three, and complains that firstly, this would leave the stage silent for several moments ("which is absurd"), and secondly the direction is unnecessary since Bardolph and the Hostess could exit at any time during the scene unnoticed by the audience. But it may be said that the instinct of the editors is correct. Nothing could be less absurd than a silence at this point, with Falstaff and Hal left

alone momentarily until Bardolph runs back with his dread news. Falstaff hardly hears Bardolph, nor the Hostess when she repeats that the sheriff is at the door. He is still alone with Hal. His tone is still pleadingly imperative: "Dost thou hear, Hal? never call a true piece of gold a counterfeit; thou art essentially made without seeming so." Falstaff asks Hal not to mistake his (Falstaff's) counterfeiting (i.e., cowardice) for his real character (a true piece of gold). Hal is one thing while seeming to be another—so, the inference is, why should not he, Falstaff, counterfeit too? This is an interpretation of Falstaff's activities which Hal in the next line completely rejects: "And thou a natural coward, without instinct."

With the intervention of the sheriff, Falstaff leaves and Hal does an office of friendship. He puts the sheriff off the scent. There is, however, an attitude of strong decision about him now. He seems to be slipping away from this world of riot. It is as if he is putting his effects in order before setting out on a journey from which he will not return the same person. He engages his word to the sheriff that Falstaff will answer to the charges; he promises that Falstaff will be answerable if found guilty; he says that all must go to the wars; that the money will be paid back with advantage. As for himself: "I'll go to the court in the morning."

The themes and issues of this great scene irradiate both parts of the play. The magnificence of its comedy, and the meanings which emerge from Hal's verbal encounters with Falstaff make it a scene central to both parts of the play. On the battlefield of Shrewsbury its memory strikes home with a sharp nostalgia, "I fear the shot here; here's no scoring but upon the pate" (V, iii, 30–31). And when Hal meets Falstaff:

> FALSTAFF: Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be alive, thou get'st not my sword; but take my pistol, if thou wilt.
>
> HAL: Give it me: what, is it in the case?
>
> FALSTAFF: Ay, Hal; 'tis hot, 'tis hot; there's that will sack a city.

And Hal finds it to be a bottle of sack. Again in Falstaff's scenes with Shallow and Silence, there is constant backward looking at haunts now deserted. And even in *Henry V* the long aroma of the Boar's Head stretches into the field of Agincourt: "Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety" (III, ii, 12).

But the suffusion of the atmosphere of the tavern throughout the

plays is secondary to the depth of effect the action between Hal and Falstaff, within its walls, imposes upon the flow of the historical action. The comic anatomization of kingship and cowardice in their interplay—the interplay between a world of royalty feigning and a counterfeit world which has the greatness of influence thrust upon it by the shrewd audacity of comic genius, the knowledge we receive of Hal and his purposes—all this colours our acceptance of the historical narrative.

The two scenes following, for example, take on a deep irony. The rebellious leaders Hotspur and Glendower, whom we meet immediately afterwards, have no glow of greatness about them. Shakespeare does not make the mistake of creating too great a contrast with the Hotspur whom Hal has pictured in the exaggerated comedy of his intoxication. This Hotspur is a long way in stature from the man we met in the early scenes arguing with the king about prisoners. There he was coldly determined, arrogant, a champion of rights, now he is petulantly mulish, irritating. Hal has seen below the chivalric generalizations of his own father's picture of Hotspur as:

> A son who is the theme of honour's tongue;
> Amongst a grove, the very straightest plant;
> Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride
> (I, i, 81–83)

And the proof of Hotspur's other self is revealed in this cavilling taunting youth who rows with Glendower about magic and pieces of land. But, to the king, Hotspur remains the perfect son some "night-tripping fairy" exchanged for his own. When Hal goes to him from the tavern, he is treated to a long regretful diatribe on his own iniquities—his "low desires," "mean attempts," "barren pleasures," words which curiously fit the Hotspur we have just seen. Hal, who keeps his intentions always to himself, does not break his silence. Henry ruminates bitterly on the similarity of Hal's and Richard II's behaviour, and draws a picture of himself in isolated regal splendour—a kind of altar at which all genuflect in awe:

> Thus did I keep my person fresh and new;
> My presence, like a robe pontifical,
> Ne'er seen but wondered at; and so my state,

> Seldom but sumptuous, showed like a feast
> And won by rareness such solemnity.
> (III, ii, 55–59)

Hal's reply is tight-lipped:

> I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord,
> Be more myself.

It is only when the king brings up the name of Hotspur that Hal speaks at length. He does not explain away his "iniquity," but formally avows his determination to startle the king and the world, and Hotspur:

> for the time will come,
> That I shall make this northern youth exchange
> His glorious deeds for my indignities.

The tensions which inhabit this interview arise directly out of the commenting, revealing power of the Boar's Head scene. The King remains within the dim shadows of formal royalty. His picture of himself as Prince and King seems utterly and pathetically remote from the sharp realities of the kind of Prince that Hal is showing himself to be, and the kind of king he may become. Henry cannot see beyond the abstractions that surround royalty, and his stricken gaze falls upon the possibility that his usurping reign can only be succeeded by his stained son. Stuck as he is within ideas of kingship, he could never understand the practicalities of Hal's reasons for temporarily forsaking his world, in order to gouge out of experience a wisdom about men and about himself. Henry's tragedy, unlike that of his predecessor Richard, is seen to be less the result of an insufficiency to fit the royal condition, than complete isolation from the new world which is being born in the person of his son. To a king who can only see himself in terms of a cypher, a symbol, fixed and ceremonial, and all this ironically meaningless in the echo-chamber of usurpation, no other world can offer any meaning. And so Hal relieves the King of some of his grief in the only way in which Henry can understand—in a formal promise to change, and to wreak vengeance on Hotspur.

Hal has already set his face clearly in the direction of a return to a royal world—but on his own terms and of his own building.

Throughout the rest of the history of the reign of Henry IV, the character of Hal constantly gains in integration, while the world of Henry and Hotspur—the political world of usurpation and rebellion—and the world of Falstaff, the anarchic comic, constantly gain a momentum towards disintegration. As the history advances towards the Kingship of Hal, he is seen more and more as a rock of unity, a Prince of total experience, around which the rest distintegrates.

The decay of Falstaff begins most cogently in 1 *Henry* IV, III, iii: "Bardolph, am I not fallen away vilely since this last action? do I not bate? do I not dwindle?"

The comic self-sufficiency which made him, in his description of Gadshill, seem inviolable and untouchable for a time, has suffered the calamity of losing its sense of infinity. Falstaff's comic genius needs something equal in magnificence to itself to feed upon. It must have Hal to gorge its pride and joy and exultation. The fact of Hal brings out the greatest in Falstaff. But from now on it has to dive into the deeps of a series of affairs and incidents which are unworthy of his comic wealth. There is in 2 *Henry* IV nothing around Falstaff which by its challenging presence can bring a flight of glory into his monstrous words of misrule. After the first Boar's Head scene he meets Hal on several occasions before his public banishment, but he is never allowed to swell as he did once when the young Prince first entered his kingdom. On Hal's second visit to the haunts of Falstaff, the fat man is defeated again by the Prince, and this time on his own grounds—money grabbing. Almost viciously he tries to cast Hal in the image he so desperately wants to see—the image of a Prince of his own misruling realm: "Rob me the exchequer the first thing thou doest, and do it with unwashed hands too." But he gets a dusty answer: "I have procured thee, Jack, a charge of foot" (III, iii, 165). Again on the way to Coventry he meets Hal and is treated to a sharp comment on the shoddiness of his troop. He meets Hal before Shrewsbury, and is reminded that he owes God a death. When Hal visits the tavern in disguise he treats Falstaff to further words about Gadshill and cowardice. The next time he sees Hal he is publicly banished. All that Hal learns from Falstaff about the way of the world is returned to Falstaff, but weighed by a different scale of values and meanings. The comic success of Falstaff as he swells into the fullness of his illusory rule of Hal is one of diminishing returns. We see him more often in 2 *Henry IV* but he is not the same man, or rather he is a shadow of the same man—his wit and comedy and triumphs are all at ground level. His largeness now is only comparative, and no longer an absolute, for it cannot but appear large faced with such puny adversaries as Shallow, Silence, Pistol and Doll Tearsheet. He is more given to soliloquy, and his conceit now has something of the bitterness of self-knowledge about it:

> Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me: the brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent any thing that tends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me. (I, ii, 6)

His tavern world is rich in action, in bawdry, in the machinations of commodity, but it is as far from the tavern world of the first part of the play as Falstaff is from Hal. Like Falstaff this world now seems merely sharp, shrewd, calculating. Its comedy no longer glows, largely because Falstaff, bereft of the Prince, can no longer be content with, perhaps is no longer capable of, superb comic improvisations whose source lay in a feeling of complete satisfaction. By blow after blow Falstaff has been separated from the Prince, and has no place in the new order to come. He is put in direct antagonism to the law, and less obviously as a counterpointing agent to deepen the comic irony between rule and misrule. His "kingship" is as empty as that of Henry's, partly because it knows that the succession is in doubt. The comi-tragedy of Falstaff is that of complete isolation from the new order, but in his isolation he has little of the inertia of Henry. He remains a true if pathetic king, he has usurped nothing though he has tried, and therefore retains energy and a sense of the validity of his own reign: "I shall be sent for soon at night" (V, i, 96).

As the world of Falstaff disintegrates about him, the rebellious world which surrounds the dying king itself disintegrates. There are occasions when it splutters into life, when it seems on the point of taking fire and engulfing all before it, but it exists largely in an atmosphere of endless bickering, questioning and false hopes. As the usurping King, Henry IV, whose sin has bred rebellion, fades away, so rebellion peters out. In 2 *Henry* IV, the King speculates on

the chaos of the political world; the tone is weary and valedictory:

> 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)

The King's counterpart is the "crafty sick" Northumberland. His part in the rebellious camp is just as wearied and unconvinced; constantly through the course of the rebellion, his "sickness doth infect the very lifeblood of our enterprise." The inertia of this rebel and his king stem from the same source—conscience. Worcester voices the suspicion:

> it will be thought
> By some, that know not why he is away,
> That wisdom, loyalty and mere dislike
> Of our proceedings kept the earl from hence.
> (*1 Henry IV*, IV, i, 62–65)

But the death-blow is delivered at the battle of Shrewsbury, when the triumphant Prince of Wales stands over the dead Hotspur:

> fare thee well, great heart!
> Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!
> When that this body did contain a spirit,
> A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
> But now two paces of the vilest earth
> Is room enough. (V, iv, 86–91)

He has, too, another office to perform,

> What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
> I could have better spared a better man:

> O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,
> If I were much in love with vanity!
> Death hath not struck so fat a deer to-day,
> Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.
> Embowell'd will I see thee by and by;
> Till then in blood by noble Percy lie.
> (101–109)

The tone of this is regretful, but curiously as in hindsight. It is as if the apparently actual death of Falstaff is merely the palpable sign for Hal of a departing that occurred some time before:

> O I should have a heavy miss of thee
> If I were much in love with vanity.

Yet it is Falstaff who does the final symbolic office. He carries Hotspur out of history—the world of comic anarchy, counterfeit to the end, trudges out with the world of misguided chivalry on its back.

At the battle of Shrewsbury Hal emerges as the dominant, dynamic Prince. He has redeemed his promise to his father. He has no rival in courage, his state is established. But there lurks on the edge of his status, his brother John of Lancaster. This cold, professional soldier and prince has no blot or stain on him—he has no wild past to raise a voice of doubt. He is less a threat, than a symbol of solid orthodox political royalty. But even in this sense he is an implied opposite to the free-ranging princeliness of Hal; he must be expunged. Shakespeare waits before wiping out this remnant of an orthodox world, but he prepares the stroke at Shrewsbury. Hal's magnanimity to Douglas is direct and simple—it has about it much of the sense of justice which is seen in Hal's judgment of the traitors before he, as Henry V, embarks for France. In the second climax of rebellion in *2 Henry IV*, John of Lancaster has the initiative to deal with the rebels. He meets them, talks with them, drinks with them, and embraces them in counterfeit amity:

> 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, 61)

He is at his highest peak, but a meanness of spirit, a politic trick, makes him break faith. He has nothing of Hal's correct compassion. He crashes into the wreckage of the world of Henry IV and his rebellious subjects, with his inadequate honour unmasked.

The movement of the two parts of *Henry IV* is implacably towards the raising of the figure of Hal as representative of a different kind of order than either of those which are laid bare and rejected. The dynamic natural, amoral world of Falstaff, and the tired outworn formalistic world of the King and rebels are, both, in a certain sense, chaotic. Neither world knows the other—only we see how the values of both are counterfeit, and how they shed a light one on the other. And only Hal learns the lesson, that the world of the natural, the temporary, and the world of the political and traditional, must both be experienced.

But merely to regard the plays as communicating a vision of life in which the personal natural order and the political order are cynically opposed, with Hal as the emerging champion of the new order, is to ignore the human dramatic warmth which constantly vitalizes them.

Hal has to reject much, and overcome much, to achieve the fullness of kingship. In so far as he does this, he is inevitably a calculating self-conscious "political" manipulator of his own destiny. It has been cogently argued by D. A. Traversi that the kind of success in politics which Hal achieves "implies moral loss, the sacrifice of more attractive qualities in the distinctively personal order." It is certainly arguable that in the rejection of Falstaff there is an acute example of this. But the rejection is clearly laid down from the beginning, and its inevitability must loom larger as Hal grows to the crown. But to sentimentalize the rejection is to falsify the relationship of Hal and Falstaff. On the political level, it is a clear necessity, though on the personal level it seems cold-blooded.

Yet it does less than justice to Hal and it "softens" the presence of Falstaff, to make this distinction too sharp. In the welter of Falstaff's comedy, which endears in its audaciousness, in the working out of the large plan of the prince, it is easy to miss the nature of the essentially personal relationship between the two. The clearly personal ties are not developed—they could not possibly be—and they lie in small corners of the play, but when they are shown, it is almost always through the medium of Hal, and with affection. He covers Falstaff's retreat from the sheriff, he closes the Gadshill affair

by seeing that the money is returned: "O my sweet beef, I must still be good angel to thee." His only reaction to Falstaff's claim to have killed Hotspur is the amiable

> For my part, if a lie may do thee grace
> I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have.

His speech to the "dead" Falstaff, for all its punning and implied hindsight, is close and familiar. There is indeed more direct and implied affection in Hal than in Falstaff. In *1 Henry IV*, he bathes in the glow of Hal's presence, but the fire is used to heat not friendship, but the furnace of Falstaff's own wit. When he hears of the death of Henry IV, his reaction is characteristic:

> 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! (*2 Henry IV*, V, iii, 138)

This is indeed, as D. A. Traversi says, "the voice of appetite." If Hal's appetite is implacably that of a man desiring and shaping a personal destiny and status, it is not unmitigated by an affection for that which supplies its nourishment. Falstaff's appetite consumes without taking a breath of affection. Hal's rejection of Falstaff may seem severe, but it is the end-product of the logic of his advance out of Falstaff's kingdom and out of the empty chaos of the kingdom of Henry IV. The other and final product is the essentially new kingdom of Henry V. This, too, is a formal world, with a ceremonial pattern, but the vital difference is that the pattern now is balanced, rich and all-inclusive. The "education" of Prince Henry has ensured that the new world is one in which the political and the natural are blended, and in which the king actually as well as symbolically is the "father" of all his people, and not a solitary repository of abstractions surrounded by a tight circle of political expediency:

> A largess universal like the sun
> His liberal eye doth give to everyone.

To regard *Henry V* as a disappointing sequel, devoid of the rich variety of characterization, tragic and comic, of *Henry IV* is to ig-

nore the inevitable consequence of that play. Henry V is as aware of the responsibility of the king, as of his subjects; in him justice is implacable but truly just in that it is dispensed without favour; in him honour and chivalry are richer ores, taking their colour and content not from outworn and malleable forms, but from the actualities of the king's faith in his meanest and highest subjects, and his subjects' sense of being involved in the majesty of a kingdom. All this exists because, as Prince Hal, the king breathed the air of the commonalty, and purged royalty of its rootless fever.

In *Henry V* comedy and history dance to the same tune, and there can be little of tragedy in so triumphant a dance. The pattern of movement is all designed to celebrate a "model" kingdom of "inward greatness." Here comic anarchy and political rebellion are mere remnant shreds—Falstaff, Bardolph, Pistol, Cambridge, Scroop and Grey are replaced by a new and joyous orthodoxy—the affirming comedy of Fluellen, and the selfless chivalry of Erpingham, Bedford and Salisbury. The dissenting voices in the new world—Pistol, Bates and the rebellious trio executed at Southampton—are mere irritants which subtly prevent the body of Henry's new kingdom from seeming, dramatically, too hygienically healthy, and thus possessed of the boredom of unremitting perfection. When the king speculates on ceremony on "the sword, the mace, the crown imperial" he utters two words which make his ruminations, otherwise apparently cast in the solitary rhetoric of Henry VI and Richard II, imply a different order of kingship. They are "I know":

> I know
> 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre and the ball,
> The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
> The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,
> The farced title running 'fore the king,
> The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
> That beats upon the high shore of this world,
> No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,
> Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
> Can sleep so soundly, as the wretched slave,
> Who with a body fill'd and vacant mind
> Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread
> (IV, i)

The "I know" is the proof of Henry's awareness of the "wisdom that cries out in the streets," it is the legacy of observing the "unyok'd humour" of his kingdom. It gives all his words and his deeds in *Henry V* the justification of a personal involvement and fills his majesty with meaning.

The political "message" of 1 and 2 *Henry IV* is the responsibility of rulers and subjects. There is no unique concept of political thought; the play rests like all the histories on certain basic assumptions—the paradox of the fact of kingship and the sin of usurpation, the evil of rebellion, the validity of law and strong government. These were some of the assumptions of Shakespeare's time and in his history plays he dispenses them freely. But these assumptions, which stand in the foreground of his early histories, forming and constricting to their own fixed patterns the dramatic and human fluidity of the plays, are in *Henry IV* in the background—against which a much more fluent and varied drama of human relationships is played out. The history and orthodox political conceptions are modulated and deepened by a vision which adds dimensions to the flat panorama of action and idea.

Certain forces are manipulated by Shakespeare in *Henry IV* which are later to be developed with increasing assurance and subtlety. The most important of these is the use of comedy to deepen and underline the "serious" actions of the play. It is not merely that the "serious" action has a comic parallel—that Falstaff is, as it were, the reverse side of the political coin—but that the comic and the "serious" are mixed so that there is a simultaneous communication of two sides of a character, an idea, an action. Falstaff, both in what he is and in what he speaks, exists on two levels, one which is naturalistically involved in the action, the other which is a comment upon the action. It is through Falstaff that we, as much as Hal, are "educated" to take a closer look at the play's issues. He is too involved and too forceful in his individuality to be a true Fool, but he has in him much which Shakespeare later used in the making of his Fools: the sense of comic isolation, the twin functions of his presence in the play. Like the Fool he is a repository of a species of truth, with the vital difference that whereas the true Fool is not called upon to "prove" his truth, Falstaff cannot help doing so—he has not got the isolated neutrality of Touchstone, Feste and Lear's Fool. They can, by their isolation, which is com-

plete, "cleanse the foul body of th' infected world" without being questioned, for they are not involved deeply with the world they cleanse. Falstaff, through his unconscious "education" of Hal, helps to cleanse the foul body of Henry IV's infected world only at the expense of his own destruction.

In the creation of Hal may be seen the seeds of a conception of character whose first obvious flowering is in Hamlet—the secretive inward-looking temperament in opposition to an external world, the clash between a notion of private purpose and that of public destiny. In Hal the conception is in its infancy, the opposition is not so violent because both private and public destinies are consanguineous; it is not, as in Hamlet, a matter of two utterly different orders of belief and reality in violent opposition. Yet the clash is here, and the nature of its communication has similarities. Like Hal, Hamlet puts on a disposition, like Hal his motive is to disguise his purposes, like Hal he tries to learn by observation, like Hal there is a histrionic flavour in the assumption of his chosen role.

In *Henry IV* the interplay of natural and political, of comic and serious, of private and public, not only suggests the emergence of new dimensions in Shakespeare's plays, but makes of history much more than a chronicle tapestry. It implies an attitude towards the dramatic presentation of life that sees things not in terms of one-dimensional historical narrative, varied by dissociated areas of comic and tragic action and character, but strictly as a unity of comical-tragical-historical.

CLEANTH BROOKS and
ROBERT B. HEILMAN

Dramatic Balance in Henry IV, Part I

1. THE PROBLEM OF UNITY

The salient problem in this play must be the problem of unity. To most readers at least, the most important general question which presents itself is this: does the play achieve a real dramatic unity, or is it, after all, merely a not-too-interesting "history" play to which Shakespeare has added, in the interest of amusement, the Falstaff tavern scenes? To state the problem with special reference to Act V, does this last act really succeed in uniting the various threads of interest that run through the play?

The "history" plot is, of course, brought to a conclusion in this act with the decision gained in the Battle of Shrewsbury.[1] But what of the comic underplot? Does it come here into any organic relation with the other elements of the play, or does it remain isolated? What happens to Hotspur when he comes within the orbit of Falstaff? Or what, for that matter, happens to Falstaff when he comes between the "fell incensed points/ Of mighty opposites"? If he affords no more than comic relief, then we are perhaps justified in holding that as a character he is a lucky accident, a character who was, in Shakespeare's original plans, to have

From *Understanding Drama*, by Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, pp. 376–387. Title added by Ed.

[1] To a temporary conclusion at least, for Shakespeare continued the story in *Henry IV, Part 2*, which the student should read. The two-part arrangement in itself raises the problem of unity in a special form. Suffice it to say here that, whatever the total unity which the two parts taken together may have, this first part has its own special unity which it is our immediate problem here to attempt to define.

Falstaff's death is mentioned in *Henry V*, and he is the central figure in *The Merry Wives of Windsor;* but in this latter play, most critics and scholars agree that he comes closer to the mere buffoon—that he lacks the special quality of character shown in the *Henry* plays.

figured as a sort of jester, but who became something richer and more imaginative than intended. As a matter of fact, one might, pushing this line of argument a step further, contend that Falstaff has actually so far outgrown the needs of the play, strictly considered, that he comes close to destroying it.

It is possible, however, to see Falstaff's role as a more positive one than that of merely diverting us *from* the more serious concerns of the play. It is possible that his function is to define—as well as enrich—the theme of the play. But to explore this possibility will involve a rather careful consideration of his relation to the other characters in the play and a further inquiry into the theme—the total "meaning" of the play.

2. THE SYSTEM OF CONTRASTS IN THE PLAY

If *Henry IV, Part I* does have a principle of unity, it is obviously one which allows for, and makes positive use of, an amazing amount of contrast. There is the contrast between the king's hopes for his son and the life which Prince Hal has actually been leading; the contrast between the pomp and state of the councils at court which are called to debate the state of the realm and those other councils at the Boar's Head which take measures for the better lifting of travelers' purses. Moreover, as we have remarked earlier, Prince Hal and Percy Hotspur are obvious foils for each other; they are specifically contrasted again and again throughout the play. But one of the most important contrasts developed in the play is that between Falstaff and Percy Hotspur.

On one level, it ought to be pretty obvious, the play involves a study in the nature of kingship—not an unduly solemn study, to be sure, but a study, nevertheless, of what makes a good king. In this study, of course, Prince Hal is the central figure, and the play becomes, then, the study of his development.

On this level of consideration, Percy Hotspur not only is Hal's rival but also furnishes an ideal of conduct toward which Hal might aspire (and toward which his father, the king, actually wishes him to aspire). Falstaff represents another ideal of conduct—and here, consequently, finds his foil in Hotspur. (If the pairing of Falstaff and Hotspur seems, at first glance, forced, nevertheless we shall presently see that there is abundant evidence that Shakespeare thought the contrast important and relevant to his purpose.)

Indeed, as Mr. R. P. Warren has pointed out, it is almost as if Shakespeare were following, consciously or unconsciously, the theme of Aristotle's Nichomachaean ethics: virtue as the mean between two extremes of conduct. This suggestion can be used to throw a good deal of light on the relationship of the characters of Falstaff, Prince Hal, and Hotspur to each other.

Consider the matter of honor. Hotspur represents one extreme, Falstaff, the other. Hotspur declares characteristically

> By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon, . . .
> (I, iii, 201–202)

Falstaff speaks just as characteristically when he argues in his famous speech on honor: "Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no . . . (V. i)

Falstaff's common sense is devastating; but it is also crippling—or would be to a prince or ruler. If it does not cripple Falstaff, it is because Falstaff frankly refuses to accept the responsibilities of leadership. Perhaps he chooses wisely in so refusing. By refusing he achieves a vantage point from which he can perceive the folly and pretentiousness which, to a degree, always tend to associate themselves with authority of any kind.

But Hotspur's chivalry is crippling too. He wants to fight for honor's sake: he will not wait for reinforcements because it will beget more honor to fight without waiting for them; but, on the other hand, he will not fight at all (Worcester fears) if he hears of the king's mollifying offer, for then his pride will be saved, his honor preserved, and the political aspects of the rebellion can go hang; for Hotspur has little or no interest in them. Indeed, Hotspur can rely on the obvious fact that he is fighting merely for honor to gain the forgiveness of the king, though Worcester fears that the forgiveness extended to himself will be only a nominal forgiveness and that the king will be on the lookout for later excuses to injure him.

If one assumes the necessity for leadership (and there is little doubt that the Elizabethan audience and Shakespeare did), then Hotspur points to an extreme which the truly courageous leader

must avoid quite as clearly as he must avoid the other extreme represented by Falstaff. True courage, we may say, has as one frontier an unthinking impetuousness like that of Hotspur: it has as its other frontier a kind of calculation, which, if not cowardice, at least results in actions which look very much like cowardice. Falstaff is too "practical"; Hotspur, not "practical" enough.

3. THE "IMMATURITY" OF FALSTAFF AND HOTSPUR

Yet Shakespeare does not give us an oversimplified picture of either extreme. Falstaff redeems himself for most of us by his humor, by his good nature, by his love of life, and perhaps, most of all, by a thoroughgoing intellectual honesty. Hotspur also has his attractive side. There is a kind of abandon, a kind of light-hearted gaiety—in his whole-souled commitment to the pursuit of honor, in his teasing of his wife, and in his laughing at the pompous mystery-mongering of Glendower—which puts him, like Falstaff, *above* the plots and counter-plots that fill up the play.

Yet—if we assume the necessity for leadership and authority—both Falstaff and Hotspur are *below* the serious concerns that fill the play. About both of them there is a childlike quality which relieves them of the responsibility of mature life, a frankness which is the opposite of the pretense and hypocrisy so apparent in the adult world.[2]

This suggestion that there is something childlike and immature about Falstaff and Hotspur must, of course, be heavily qualified. There is a sense in which Hotspur is the epitome of manliness and aggressive masculinity, and certainly he thinks of himself as anything but childish. Moreover, Falstaff, in spite of the war cry with which he sets upon the travelers, "They hate us youth: down with them; fleece them," is old in the ways of vice, and indeed possesses a kind of wisdom which makes the solemn concerns of Henry IV's court appear callow and naïve beside it.

And yet, even so, the pair do not stand quite on the level of the adult world where there are jobs to be done and duties to be performed. They are either below it or else they transcend it; and

[2] If the student, remembering, for example, how "damnably" Falstaff has "misused the king's press," feels disposed to challenge this observation, he should be reminded that the matter in question is not Falstaff's goodness but his frankness and irresponsibility. He has the child's honest selfishness and the child's lack of conscience as he frankly goes after his own ends.

Shakespeare is wise enough to let them—particularly Falstaff—do both. That is, they appear sometimes *childish* in their attitudes and sometimes *childlike*, for Shakespeare exploits both aspects of their characters in the play.

The childlike qualities, of course, are found predominantly in Falstaff—in his vitality and in his preservation of a kind of innocence. But Hotspur, too, has a kind of innocence which sets him apart from the more calculating of his fellow-conspirators. He is impulsive where they are Machiavellian; boyish, in his love of adventure, where they are playing coldly for high stakes. But the childlike innocence (or, if one prefers, the boyish impulsiveness) merges into childish foolhardiness when he insists on fighting the king at Shrewsbury before reinforcements can be brought up.

4. FALSTAFF AT THE BATTLE OF SHREWSBURY

Falstaff is, of course, a far more complex character than Hotspur, or, for that matter, than any other character in the play. But an examination of the childish-childlike aspects of his nature may, even if it will not wholly account for the richness of his personality, lead the student into a further knowledge of that richness. Certainly, it may give us one of the most important clues as to how his character is related to the central problems of the play.

Falstaff as Philosopher. Falstaff, we may say, is like the child in the story who alone was able to detect the fact that the emperor's new clothes were entirely imaginary. With a clarity of vision that is unclouded by reverence towards authority of any kind, the child sees that the emperor is naked, and says so. (Falstaff strips Henry IV quite naked in his famous parody of the king's speech in Act II, iv. King Henry's concern for his son's wicked ways, as we see in Act III, is more than half an extension of his own self-conceit. His son's reputation disturbs him because he regards it as a reflection upon himself.)

Falstaff's clarity of vision, however, is not an effect of cynicism. The spectacle of the world in its nakedness, stripped of its pretensions, does not move Falstaff to bitterness. He can laugh in thorough good humor. And Falstaff does laugh continually through the play as he sees through what is glibly called "honor," through self-righteousness, through the pretensions of royalty. In this sense, like the child, he is fundamentally a moral anarchist. But

Falstaff is—again like the child—not a missionary anarchist. He does not for a moment intend to convert others to his views; he is not the moralist, certainly, nor the inverted moralist, the cynic.

In short, in spite of the fact that he speaks merely to amuse himself and others, Falstaff supplies a brilliant and what is—up to a point—a perfectly true commentary upon the world about him. Falstaff is doubtless the last man in the world to set up for a philosopher; yet his humor, because it does have point and does make a rich commentary upon the world about him, does have a philosophical quality.

Falstaff as Man of Action. But in Act V we see Falstaff as man of action, and this action tests him even as the world of action is tested by Falstaff's commentary. On a battlefield the committed man of action must be prepared to die, but Falstaff does not feel the need to die for any man. He frankly sees no point in dying by Douglas's sword for King Henry. King Henry himself, as Falstaff well knows, is scarcely likely to appreciate such a devotion on Falstaff's part. Hal himself will not lose or retain his chances for the crown by Falstaff's death alone; and the issue, when Douglas challenges him, is certainly death; for Falstaff, in spite of his playful boasting, has absolutely no illusions about his own prowess as a warrior.

Falstaff loses no time in resolving his problem: he contents himself with playing 'possum. From one point of view, this is simply cowardice; from another, Falstaff is being perfectly consistent, and, to be so, risking the imputation of cowardice. In the same situation Blunt declares heroically, "I was not born a yielder, thou proud Scot"; he believes in honor, and so he has his reward, even in death. Falstaff is equally consistent because he does not believe in honor; for him, heroics would be a pretense—phony honor.

The Parallelism of Falstaff and Hotspur. If the student has had any difficulty in seeing and accepting the parallelism between Falstaff and Hotspur, he might reflect that in this last act of the play the author himself has taken some pains to point it up, and may be said to have allowed at least Prince Hal, among the characters, to see it. In this connection Hal's speech over the dead body of Hotspur and his remarks over Falstaff's "dead" body, which he discovers a moment later, are worth careful consideration.

William Empson has pointed out (in his *English Pastoral Poetry*) that Hal's remarks here involve a series of puns applying both to largeness of body and to greatness of spirit. Of Hotspur the prince says:

> When that this body did contain a spirit,
> A kingdom for it was too small a bound. . . .
> . . . . . this earth that bears thee dead
> Bears not alive so stout a gentleman.

A few lines later, he is saying of Falstaff:

> What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
> I could have better spared a better man:
> O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,
> If I were much in love with vanity!
> Death hath not struck so fat a deer to-day, . . .

Hotspur has had too much spirit for the flesh; Falstaff has had so much flesh that it is ironical that the spirit has escaped at all. (The irony is increased, of course, by our knowing that Prince Hal little realizes how truly he speaks: the flesh that Falstaff so comfortably hugs about himself has *not*, as a matter of fact, allowed the spirit to escape.)

Moreover, it is significant that the prince, although he thinks that Falstaff has died in battle, refers to him as a "deer," a hunted animal, who would not fight back but would try to escape from the pursuit of death. From the standpoint of the huntsman (death) he is a fine animal ("so fat a deer"), and to the prince a "heavy loss" (another pun) though "better men" have died for his cause that day.

Is the prince mocking and cold-hearted? Hardly; the jesting farewell is the sort which accords with the jesting and affectionate companionship of the two in the past. It conveys a depth of feeling that perhaps would not be conveyed by a more solemn tribute.

At least Falstaff, who of course hears the prince's tribute, suffers no hurt feelings from the nature of the tribute. He has no shame and no qualms. In fact, only the word "Embowelled" runs the shivers up and down his back. The idea of being embalmed

and given a fine burial by the prince stirs no regrets in him that he did not stand his ground and die honorably. Falstaff values his bowels. He is far from done with his gorbelly. Hotspur may have the prince's compliment and the noble burial which, doubtless, the prince intends for him. Falstaff is perfectly satisfied to abide by the choice which he has made.

Falstaff's Failure. Still, from the point of view of the need for responsibility and authority, Falstaff's conduct is childishly frivolous, if not much worse—as is his conduct throughout the battle. On one level, it is very funny when Prince Hal reaches into Falstaff's holster and pulls out a bottle of sack; and the prince himself doubtless smiles as he delivers his reprimand. But the reprimand is deserved: Falstaff won't realize that the battlefield is no place for joking. Indeed, though Shakespeare allows Falstaff his due even here, he has made the case against Falstaff very plain.

Consider the incident in Act V, iv. An Elizabethan audience would not have missed the point when, just after Falstaff has stabbed the dead Hotspur, Prince Hal came on the scene with his younger brother, Prince John, and says to him

> Come, brother John; full bravely hast thou flesh'd
> Thy maiden sword.

The commendation of Prince John applies ironically to "Brother" John Falstaff—here in full view of the audience—whose sword is a "maiden" sword too, which he has just "flesh'd" safely in the dead Percy. The boy prince John has shown himself a man: Sir John Falstaff has shown himself a child.

5. FALSTAFF AND THE WORLD OF HISTORY

The student may possibly object to so heavy an emphasis upon the battlefield scenes: yet our search for the unity of the play demands that we consider carefully this one group of scenes in which all the characters come together. Besides bringing all the characters together, too, the battle scenes subordinate Falstaff, for all his delightfulness, to something larger (somewhat to the resentment of readers to whom Falstaff is a kind of demigod); and this subordination itself is a unifying process.

But the battle scenes do not cancel out the more widely discussed tavern scenes; they qualify the tavern scenes. We may now

return to reconsider the tavern scenes in the light of these qualifications.

It is perhaps significant that Falstaff is introduced to us with the line: "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?"—a question which the prince answers with a jest: ". . . What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the 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 the day." The jesting in the prince's speech may not come quite up to the better efforts of Falstaff himself; but the speech, quite apart from the jesting, is perfectly true. It is true in a deeper sense than even the prince realizes.

It is indeed an absurdity for Falstaff to ask the time of day, for Falstaff has properly nothing to do with the world of time. He transcends the time-ridden world of important affairs—the world of appointments to be kept, of tasks to be performed, of responsibilities to be undertaken. Time does not exist in his world. This is not to say, of course, that Falstaff's world is one in which nothing ever happens. For Falstaff, that world is interesting and even exciting. But in it, one is not dogged by time just as the child is not dogged by time in his world.

Falstaff and the King. For Falstaff, each day is a new day, lived for itself. The future does not cast a cloud over the present. This characteristic Shakespeare has emphasized by pointing up a sharp contrast between Falstaff and the king. The king is bedeviled with insomnia; Falstaff is not. Even with the bailiff at the door looking for a "gross fat man" suspected of robbery, Falstaff behind the arras drops off to sleep as naturally as would an exhausted child. Falstaff has nothing to do with time; but Henry, the king, is obsessed with time. The king not only makes history—his life *is* history. In the great tavern scene (II, iv) in which Falstaff plays the part of the king, Falstaff . . . parodies the sententious Euphuistic style which was popular in the period. But the parody involves more than a mere topical allusion: Falstaff is using the parody of style as an instrument for a deeper parody. He is mocking at the kind of seriousness with which authority has to express—and *take* —itself: the carefully balanced antitheses, the allusions to natural history, the appeal to learned authorities, the labored truisms—

e.g., "There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; . . ." The fun is good-humored; but the criticism which it turns upon the institutions of authority is penetrating, and, as far as it goes, perfectly fair. Falstaff as "king" in the tavern is a delightful comedian *because* he is a recognizable monarch; that is, he does not use the pose of royalty merely for slap-stick effects.

But Shakespeare, whom we see constantly balancing scene against scene, has the king "counterfeited" once more in the play—on the battlefield, where knights and nobles wear the king's armor. Sir Walter Blunt, so dressed, is accosted by Douglas with "some tell me that thou art a king," and replies with the noble lie, "They tell thee true." He fights with Douglas and dies for the king—doubly. Falstaff appears on the scene immediately and, noticing Blunt's dead body, remarks "there's honour for you!" No aping of the king for him! The king's robes in the tavern play are one thing; the king's coat of arms on the battlefield, quite another.[3]

6. SHAKESPEARE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FALSTAFF AND THE PRINCE

Here we come to the crucial problem of unity: what attitude, finally, are we to adopt toward Falstaff and the prince? Which is right? With which of the two are our sympathies finally to rest? Those readers who have felt the charm of Falstaff and who have sensed the fact that Shakespeare is not disposed to defend the duplicities of the king are surely right in refusing to dismiss Falstaff as a coward or buffoon. Furthermore, they may be right in feeling that Shakespeare has even revealed in Prince Hal himself a certain cold-blooded calculation.

[3] There has been of late a tendency to defend Falstaff even here: to say that Falstaff in his debunking of honor is right after all; that Falstaff sees truly through the empty conventions of "honor"; that he refuses to be taken in by the vainglorious pretensions of the usurper, Henry Bolingbroke, to "honor" and to a legitimacy which he does not deserve. Such critics go on to point out that the device of clothing a number of knights so as to counterfeit the king makes rather hollow all the talk about chivalry and honor that goes on with regard to the battle.

But to take this position is to read into the play far more than the play warrants. If the dynastic pretensions of various people in fifteenth-century England seem trivial enough to us, they did not seem so to Shakespeare's audience or to Shakespeare himself. There is nothing in the play to warrant the belief that Shakespeare is bitterly denying the reality of honor and chivalry. Falstaff never rises to a philosophic indictment which will issue in his calling down a "plague on both your houses."

The probability is that we shall miss the play if we assume that Shakespeare is forcing upon us a choice of the *either-or* variety. Is it not possible that Shakespeare is not asking us to choose at all, but rather to contemplate, with understanding and some irony, a world very much like the world that we know, a world in which compromises have to be made, a world in which the virtues of Falstaff become, under changed conditions, vices, and the vices of the Prince Hal become, under certain conditions, necessary, and thus, in a sense, accommodated to virtue? (One might well reverse the form of this statement. From the point of view of an Elizabethan audience, one would almost certainly have to reverse it thus: Falstaff's vices partake of virtue and the virtues of the prince—an easy camaraderie, a genial understanding, an unwillingness to stand on a haughty dignity—are revealed to him ultimately as vices which must be put away.)

The Two Worlds of the Play. Human beings live in a world of time, and a world in which—except at rare heroic moments—compromises have to be made. Falstaff lives, as we have already suggested, in a world of the eternal present, a timeless world which stands apart from the time-harried world of adult concerns. Yet Shakespeare keeps the balance with complete fairness. Each world has its claims. For the prince to be able to retire for awhile into Falstaff's world is worth something to him. It testifies to his humanity, since Falstaff's world is a part of the human world. It probably makes him a better king than he would be if he followed his more calculating and limited father's wishes. Bathed in the light of Falstaff's world, the coldness, the pomposity, the pretentiousness of the world of high concerns is properly exposed. Yet, after all, men must act; responsibilities must be assumed. To remain in Falstaff's world is to deny the reality of the whole world of adult concerns.

It is ironic, of course, that the human being is thus divided between the claims of two aspects of life. It is ironic, from one point of view, that men must grow up at all—must grow away from the innocence of the timeless and amoral world of childhood into the adult world, where except when crises evoke extraordinary devotion and resolution, compromises and scheming are a regular, and

perhaps inevitable, part of human experience. Prince Hal, for example, in entering into the world of affairs, loses something as well as gains something—a matter which the play (particularly in its second part) rather clearly indicates. Falstaff may belong to a world unshadowed by time, but it is not for nothing that Prince Hal appears in a "history" play. He belongs to history—to the world of time—and in the Battle of Shrewsbury he enters into history.

7. HENRY IV AS MATURE COMEDY

The problem of Shakespeare's attitude toward Hal and Falstaff has been argued for a long time, and doubtless will continue to be argued. At the end of *Henry IV, Part Two* the prince, on being crowned, publicly rejects Falstaff, and thus makes formal and explicit what is hinted at at the end of *Part One*. Having arrived at kingship with its serious duties, he can have no more time for such play as the Boar's-Head Tavern afforded. Delightful as Falstaff is, he must now be put by.

The Two Interpretations of Shakespeare's Attitude. With regard to Shakespeare's attitude toward this relationship there have been, in general, two courses taken. The first considers the two plays as constituting a study in the discipline of a young king, a king who was to be celebrated as the ideal king in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. According to this interpretation, the two plays present Falstaff as undergoing a gradual degeneration of character. Thus, it is argued, we lose some of our sympathy for him and are reconciled to the young king's rejection of him.

The second interpretation reverses the first. Here it is argued that Falstaff retains our sympathies to the end. Hal's conduct, on the other hand, is regarded as having, from the beginning, something of Machiavellian policy in it. Hal delights in Falstaff's company during his carefree youth but dashes the old man's hopes rather brutally at the end by publicly disowning him and reading him a rather smug sermon on the subject of good conduct.

Few critics have, of course, accepted either view without some reservations and qualifications, but it may make the issues clearer to state the views in extreme form as is here done. That the matter of our attitude toward the Falstaff-Hal relationship is important comes out clearly if we consult the most recent book on the subject, Dover Wilson's *Falstaff*. Wilson sees the plays as involving basically a study in kingship. Falstaff has to be rejected.

Though, for Wilson, he remains brilliantly witty, even through the whole of *Henry IV, Part Two*, he becomes more boastful, with a correspondent weakening of our sympathy for him. And Wilson defends the terms of the rejection: Hal is not a "cad or a prig." Falstaff, after all, is not visited with a heavy punishment. The king sees to it that he, along with his other "wonted followers," is "very well provided for."

Shakespeare's Balance. To repeat, the present analysis agrees on the need of having the matter both ways. Surely, Wilson is at his soundest when he argues that Shakespeare keeps the balance most impartially between Hal and Falstaff; but perhaps he might, on the whole, have made out a more convincing case had he pressed this argument further still instead of trying to mitigate the terms of Falstaff's rejection or to argue that the later Falstaff becomes less attractive than the earlier Falstaff. Is not the real point this: that in Hal's rejection of Falstaff something is lost as well as gained —that a good king, one grants, must reject Falstaff, but that in the process by which a man becomes a good king, something else —something spontaneous, something in itself good and attractive —must be sacrificed; that growing up is something which man must do and yet that even in growing up he loses, necessarily, something that is valuable?

Shakespeare does not sentimentalize the situation. The rejection is necessary if Hal is to become the king that he ought to be and that England doubtless needs; and yet Falstaff's dashed hopes are presented with due pathos. The sentimentalist will doubtless need to blacken Falstaff's character a little—suppress his sympathy for him—in order to be able to accept his being turned off; or, if he is unable to do this, he will, in order to justify Falstaff's rejection, doubtless have to blacken the prince's character, reading into it more of the "vile politician Bolingbroke" than Shakespeare ever intended. The stern moralist (and he is nearer allied to the sentimentalist than is usually suspected) will do much the same: he will probably applaud the rejection of Falstaff whole-heartedly, or, just possibly and perversely, he will condemn the prince for his acceptance of pomp and power and for his cold heart.

Neither the sentimentalist nor the moralist, then, will be able to accept the play in its fullness. It is possible, of course, that even for the mature reader, the play finally lacks unity—that the balancing of attitudes which has been argued for in this analysis is something which perhaps Shakespeare should have attempted to

accomplish but did not, for one reason or another, actually succeed in accomplishing. This, of course, each reader must decide for himself. For the reader who remains unconvinced of any totality of effect, the play will probably remain a collection of brilliant but ill-assorted fragments—the wonderful tavern scenes juxtaposed oddly with passages of dull and pawky history.

For the reader, however, for whom the play does achieve a significant unity it may well seem that here Shakespeare has given us one of the wisest and fullest commentaries on human action possible to the comic mode—a view which scants nothing, which covers up nothing, and which takes into account in making its affirmations the most searching criticism of that which is affirmed. For such a reader, Shakespeare has no easy moral to draw, no simple generalization to make.

Shakespeare's Irony. Moreover, it will be evident that Shakespeare's final attitude toward his characters (and toward the human predicament, generally) is one of a very complex irony, though it is an irony which will be either missed altogether, or easily misinterpreted as an indifferent relativism—that is, a mere balancing of two realms of conduct and a refusal to make any judgment between them. The world which Shakespeare portrays here is a world of contradictions and of mixtures of good and evil. His vision of that world is ultimately a comic vision—if not gaily comic, and surely not bitterly comic, yet informed with the insights of mature comedy, nonetheless. For the comic writer does not attempt to transcend the world of compromises, even though the more thoughtful writer of comedy, as here, may be fully aware of the seriousness of the issues. Comedy, after all, does not treat the lives of saints or heroes: it does not attempt to portray the absolute commitment to ultimate issues—the total commitment which transcends, tragically and heroically, the everyday world that we know. Shakespeare does not present Prince Hal (as he might conceivably do in a tragic treatment) as a callous man, the scion of the "vile politician Bolingbroke." Hal will make a good ruler, and Falstaff would undoubtedly make a very bad ruler. Nor, on the other hand, is Falstaff portrayed as a villain: Falstaff, too, has his case. Falstaff's wit—most of it at least—is not merely amusing, trifling. It constitutes a criticism of the world of serious affairs, a criticism which, on certain levels, is thoroughly valid. The rulers of the world had better not leave it totally out of account.

If the prince must choose between two courses of action—and,

of course, he must choose—we as readers are not forced to choose: indeed, perhaps the core of Shakespeare's ironic insight comes to this: that man must choose and yet that the choice can never be a wholly satisfactory one. If the play is a comedy in this sense, then the "comic" scenes of the play turn out to be only an aspect of, though an important aspect of, the larger comedy. To repeat, the reader must decide for himself whether he can accept the play as a fully unified organism. But the reader who can so accept it may well feel that it represents Shakespeare's most sophisticated level of comedy, a comedy, indeed, more fine-grained and "serious" than the romantic comedies such as *As You Like It* and written with a surer touch than the "bitter" comedies such as *All's Well That Ends Well.*

M. M. REESE

Father and Son

Of Hal's three tempters (Falstaff, Hotspur, and Hal's father), Henry IV perhaps comes nearest to success. Despite the family reconciliation at the end of the play, Henry equally with Falstaff and Hotspur offers an idea of political behavior that is at odds with Shakespeare's conception of majesty. We already know something of his hopeless situation. As the author of a violent present he was condemned to be the victim of a violent present, bound with the rebels in an endless chain of circumstance. He could not rule as the strong, pacific king that he had hoped to be, and his plan for a crusade, through which he might expiate his sin, would never be more than an ironically distant mirage. His daily problem was simply to find a means of keeping by force what force had won him.

Long before the end the proud and confident Bolingbroke has shrunk into a sleepless neurotic helplessly revolving the theme of "if only we had known." But this was a weakness that he revealed only to his family and the few counselors he could trust. The public Henry is never unimpressive, and Shakespeare lets us feel that here

Reprinted from *The Cease of Majesty* (1961), pp. 312–317, by permission of St. Martin's Press, Inc., and Edward Arnold Ltd.