"I know thee not, old man": An Esoteric View of Prince Hal's Rejection of Falstaff, and the Monarchy of Individual Evolution

Richard J. Nierenberg

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the rejection of Falstaff by Prince Hal in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part II* in part through an esoteric lens, and to offer the view that this external action, political as it is on one level, can also be seen as pointing out a path toward the internal; if you will, the spiritual evolution and transformation of a man.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Prince Hal, Falstaff, Gurdjieff, esotericism, transformation

Introduction

Harold Bloom argues that if Shakespeare were represented by one play, it would be the complete *Henry IV*.[1] The two parts together have been called "one of the most marvelous things ever done by man."[2] The work portrays the change in Prince Hal, heir to the throne, from what appears at first to be a mischievous 'madcap', fond of low haunts and company, into his full and complete manhood. At play's end we see the majestic King Henry V, called the "Star of England," arguably her greatest king.[3]

King Henry V's first public action, the rejection of Sir John Falstaff, has claimed an "unusually large share of critical interest."[4] The moment has for centuries drawn comment, inquiry, criticism, even outrage.[5] Kenji Yoshino observes that, "A battle as fierce as Agincourt has raged in the critical literature between the followers of Falstaff and the followers of Henry V."[6] Tim Spiekerman calls the rejection "heartrendingly cold."[7] Masefield goes so far as to state that Prince Henry "is not a hero, he is not a thinker, he is not even a friend … he is careless and callous, remote and common, selfish and quite without feeling."[8] At the very least, to a modern sensibility, it seems less than regal to discard one's previous friends when, upon coming into new and improved circumstances, their presence becomes inconvenient, a

---

Richard J. Nierenberg is by profession a physician. He has had a very long interest both in Shakespeare and in the work of Gurdjieff and his circle. He is grateful to been guided in this teaching by many within the Gurdjieff Foundation, and by so many that he could not name. Email: drricknierenberg@gmail.com

[1] Harold Bloom, *Falstaff, Give Me Life* (New York: Scribner, 2017), p. 1.

[2] John Masefield, *William Shakespeare* (London: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), p. 120.

[3] E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, Inc., 1964), p. 291.

[4] David P. Young (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Henry IV, Part Two* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 8.

[5] David Bevington (ed.), *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays* (London and New York, Routledge: 1986).

[6] Kenji Yoshino, 'The Choice of Four Fathers; Henry IV, Falstaff, The Lord Chief Justice and the King of France in the Henriad', *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2010), pp. 417-439.

[7] Tim Spiekerman, 'The Education of Hal: Henry IV, Parts One and Two', in *Shakespeare's Political Pageant, Essays in Literature and* Politics, eds Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 120.

[8] Masefield, *William Shakespeare*, pp. 112-113.

liability.[9] From the standpoint of those who have loved Falstaff, says William Hazlitt, "We could never forgive the Prince's treatment of Hal … Falstaff is the better man of the two."[10]

On the external level, the action has been seen primarily as a shrewd and necessary political move, in which, by separating himself from previous bad influences, the newly crowned King Henry V establishes himself as a more serious leader than had been expected. Derek Traversi states, "As Hal assumes his royal responsibilities, he inevitably turns away from his companion in dissolution."[11] Perhaps, though, the action is not meant to be understood as political; at least not purely so. After all, there was no actual historical Sir John Falstaff.[12] Instead, Shakespeare presents us, on a more internal level, with a hieroglyph for a critical act of individual evolution; a symbol in action of a moment of personal transformation. Martin Lings,[13] a Sufi and Shakespearean scholar known for authoring *Sacred Art of Shakespeare*, argues that "Henry IV can be considered a morality play in which the final perfection remains at a *level above the spectator's* … it can be considered an esoteric or mystical drama."[14]

Others have similar stances toward Shakespeare. Beryl Pogson, writing from the perspective of a student of the teachings of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff,[15] also viewed Shakespeare's works as sacred and esoteric. Pogson proposes seeking an inner meaning to the plays of Shakespeare.[16] She suggests such a context for drama, saying, "Tradition tells us that the Drama was originally conceived to reawaken in Man the memory of the Purpose for which he was created … The legendary form in which our own English History has come down to us can be studied for its inner meaning."[17] Pogson reflects to some extent her own esoteric teacher, Maurice Nicoll, who observes in his *The New Man*, "The idea behind all sacred writing is to convey a higher meaning than the literal words contain … a concealed, inner or esoteric meaning … to fall first on the ordinary level of the mind, and yet to work in the direction … of another level of meaning."[18] More recent articles have also asserted Shakespeare to be aware of an esoteric tradition, and even to apply specific esoteric ideas.[19] In comparing Shakespeare to a "Lay Bible," one Rosicrucian source, also, part of the Western Esoteric tradition, states, "These plays deal with man's outer and inner nature; with worlds visible and invisible. The two sides of life, the material and spiritual, are treated with equal certainty and consistency …" Peter Dodd, in his review of a concordance between Shakespeare and Gurdjieff [20] traces multiple suggestions regarding Shakespeare's awareness of esoteric thought, and no one

[9] Yoshino, 'The Choice of Four Fathers', p. 424.
[10] William Hazlitt, 'Henry IV in Two Parts', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986).
[11] Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: From Richard II to Henry V* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 9.
[12] John Dover Wilson, 'The Fortunes of Falstaff', in *Shakespeare: The History of Henry IV, Part One*, ed. Maynard Mack (New York and Scarborough: Signet, 1965).
[13] Martin Lings, *The Sacred Art of Shakespeare* (Northhamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1984).
[14] Lings, *The Sacred Art of Shakespeare*, p. 21.
[15] Beryl Pogson, *In the East My Pleasure Lies, and Other Esoteric Interpretations of Plays by William Shakespeare* (London: Quack Books, 1994).
[16] Pogson, *In the East My Pleasure Lies*, p. 94.
[17] Pogson, *In the East My Pleasure Lies*, p. 238.
[18] Maurice Nicoll, *The New Man: An interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ* (Boston and London: Shambala Publications, 1950), pp. 2-3.
[19] Michael White, 'The Esoteric Shakespeare', *Parabola Magazine*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2019).
[20] Peter Dodd, 'Concordances between George Ivanovich Gurdjeff and William Shakespeare: A Personal View', *Literature and Aesthetics,* vol. 34, no. 3 (2024), pp. 268-284.

familiar with esoteric doctrines can have any question as to Shakespeare's familiarity with (esoteric) wisdom."[21]

Not everyone finds such a lens on Shakespeare to be palatable. David Boyd, for instance, argues that "The imposition of the modern emphasis on psychological development as the necessary basis of dramatic action critically distorts the nature of a play devoted to displaying, rather than developing, the dimensions of a character fully formed and firmly established from the very beginning."[22] Shakespeare's universe, however, is vast enough to invite many scopes to be trained upon it. Catherine Belsey has suggested that "all we see of Shakespeare is our own image of him,"[23] pointing out that Shakespeare has been "enlisted or appropriated in support" of multiple causes.[24] Belsey asserts that Shakespeare does more than "give us back our own values." "We can recognize," she says,[25] "the range of possible interpretations without giving up on the plays."

For anyone, even a king, to reject Falstaff is no trivial task. Seen from the beginning by some as a "notorious liar, swaggering coward, vainglorious, arbitrary, knavish, crafty, voracious of plunder, lavish of his gains, without credit, honor or honesty, and in debt to everyone around him,"[26] he is also said to possess "generosity, cheerfulness, alacrity, invention, frolic and fancy superior to other men;"[27] "for the sake of his wit you forgive his cowardice, or rather are fond of his cowardice for the occasions it gives to his wit."[28] Bloom calls Falstaff the "veritable monarch of language, unmatched whether elsewhere in Shakespeare or in all of Western literature";[29] the "Socrates of Eastcheap,"[30] whose words constitute "still the best and most vital prose in the English language."[31]

The audience likewise adores Falstaff. W. H. Auden states that in performance, "no producer can prevent his stealing the show."[32] The role of Falstaff garners the largest name stars to play it, and "whenever Falstaff is on stage, we have no eyes for Hal."[33] While Asimov knows that Falstaff is a "…fat, dissolute, white-haired old villain, who, without a single saving grace but his wit," still he "manages to be so entirely lovable as to win his way not only into the Prince's heart, but into the audience's as well…more real to the reader in his gross humanity than anyone else in the play."[34] Bloom, who confessed to being "in love with Falstaff" for

[21] Rosicrucian Fellowship, 'Shakespeare: The Lay Bible', *The Rosicrucian Fellowship*. At https://www.rosicrucian.com/zineen/pamen041.htm, accessed 7 April 2025. See also Josie Alwyn and Brien Masters, *Educating the Soul: On the Esoteric in Shakespeare* (London: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2016).
[22] David Boyd, 'The Player Prince: Hal in *Henry IV Part I*', *Sydney Studies in English* 6 (1980), pp. 3-4.
[23] Catherine Belsey, *Why Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2007), p. 4.
[24] Belsey, *Why Shakespeare*, p. 7.
[25] Belsey, *Why Shakespeare*, p. 7.
[26] Richard Cumberland, 'Remarks on the Character of Falstaff and His Group (1786)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), p. 50.
[27] Corbyn Morris, 'An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humor, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule (1744)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986, p. 4.
[28] Morris, 'An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humor, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule', p. 3.
[29] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 294.
[30] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 275.
[31] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 275.
[32] W.H. Auden, 'The Prince's Dog', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986, p. 160.
[33] Auden, 'The Prince's Dog', p. 171.
[34] Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* (New York: Avenel Books, 1978), pp. 326-327.

nearly his entire life,[35] goes so far as to argue that "Falstaff is a person, while Hal is a fiction."[36] He maintains that we should all love Falstaff, and argues that those who do not care for Falstaff are "in love with time, death, the state and the censor," as the "rejection of Falstaff is a rejection of our own will to live."[37] He controversially concludes that "to reject Falstaff is to reject Shakespeare."[38]

Yet, Henry does reject him. As the two-part play draws to its close, with Henry V newly crowned, Falstaff, rides "day and night" to greet the young king. As Henry approaches Falstaff calls out to him. Henry rejects him in a manner called "never more brilliant or cruel."[39]

> Falstaff: My King! My Jove. I speak to thee, my heart.
> King: I know the not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
> How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
> I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
> So surfeit swelled, so old and so profane,
> But, being awaked, I do despise my dream…
> …I banish thee on pain of death
> As I have done the rest of my misleaders
> Not to come near our person by ten mile.[40]

The King banishes, and briefly imprisons, his once close companion. Henry never relents, and banished on pain of death, Falstaff later dies, as "The King hath killed his heart" (*Henry V*, II.i.88).[41]

The affection of the audience and some critics aside, however, the play is not really about Falstaff. David Scott Kastan introduces his Arden edition of *Henry IV, Part I* by observing that in today's analysis the play is more likely to be Hal's than Falstaff's, a tale of "the seemingly prodigal prince proving himself a worth heir with his relationship with Falstaff as the *crucial measure of his growth*."[42] Hal's qualities as an ideal monarch have long been trumpeted. Edward Dowden adds, "He has done his part by God and Man. Henry's freedom from egoism, his modesty, integrity – all these are various developments of the central element of his character. His *noble* rejection of Falstaff … becomes one of the world's most glorious and beneficent forces."[43]

Many commentators have viewed the change in demeanor of Hal, now Henry V, as strictly a political necessity. Political scientist and modern Shakespeare scholar Tim Spiekerman, for example, says that, "Hal knows that banishing Falstaff is the easiest and most symbolic way to acquire a good reputation."[44] Shakespeare scholar Derek Traversi reasons,

---

[35] Bloom, *Falstaff*, p. 1.
[36] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 279.
[37] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 149.
[38] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 278.
[39] Bloom, *Falstaff*, p. 145.
[40] William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two* (New York: Signet, 1965 [1598]), pp. 47-53, 63-66.
[41] William Shakespeare, *King Henry V* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 1995 [1599]).
[42] David Scott Kasten, 'Introduction', in *King Henry IV, Part One* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2002), p. 3.
[43] Edward Dowden, 'The English Historical Plays (1875)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), p. 69.
[44] Spiekerman, 'The Education of Hal', p. 121.

"As Hal assumes his royal responsibilities he inevitably turns away from his companion in dissolution, and the break is consummated in the final rejection. That negation is, from the point of view of his growth as a public figure, the necessary external consequence of his acceptance of his royal vocation; this requires a visible turning away from the misrule which is the supreme enemy of true Kingship."[45]

Spiekerman sees the rejection as Henry V's inevitable acceptance of rule over misrule, an affirmation of the legal authority of the crown. Falstaff is, after all, "an unruly presence, … inspired by pleasure, not virtue… challenging the fundamental assumptions that motivate the political world."[46] In his new role, the now King Henry seems to have grown to appreciate the fundamental nature of his role of chief upholder of the rule of law. His willingness to keep the services of his father's chief justice, who had rebuked him when he had been a miscreant youth, demonstrates this. The Chief Justice's reasoning earns him not only Hal's support, but even now, four hundred years on, has garnered a description of him as "The most unqualifiedly, unmistakably complimentary portrait of a sober, solid, fair-minded lawyer figured in all the canon."[47] Thus, political arguments for Henry's action are compelling. Yet there is something more here than political or judicial wisdom at play here, and something to be learned from an esoteric view.

In Hal's words, as he describes the history of his long association with Falstaff:

> I have long dreamt of such a kind of man, …
> But, being *awaked*, I do despise my dream (*Henry IV, Part 2*, V.v.30-32. – italics mine).

The image of the dream, and especially of *awakening*, is key. Nutall views Henry's use of the term "dream" when referring to his time with Falstaff as one of "contempt, consigning Falstaff to the realm of unreality."[48] Barber implies that Hal must try to forget something in himself—calls the use of this term a "drastic narrowing of awareness," an "occasion in life when people close off parts of their mind."[49] One wonders, though: does awareness really contract when we awaken from our dreams?

Gurdjieff teaches that, "A modern man lives in sleep."[50] "All that men say, all that they do, they say and do in sleep. Only *awakening* (italics mine) and what leads to awakening have any real value. There is nothing new in the idea of sleep," He continues. Further, he claims, "We imagine we are fully conscious and that everything we do and feel and think is a conscious process. However … Man is asleep … our level of Being is characterized by this state of sleep."[51]

The idea of levels of consciousness is not new. In his introduction to *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley describes, "the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality

[45] Traversi, *Shakespeare*, p. 9.
[46] Kastan, 'Introduction', p. 49.
[47] Daniel J. Kornstein, *Kill all the Lawyers? Shakespeare's Legal Appeal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 135.
[48] A. D. Nutall. *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 169.
[49] Barber, 'Rule and Misrule', p. 249.
[50] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 66.
[51] Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 896.

substantial to the world of things and lives and minds."[52] He defines knowledge as a function of Being.[53] If Hal says now that he *had been dreaming*, then perhaps he must be saying that he was, in some sense *asleep*. If he has *now awakened*, he is at a new level of Being, and can therefore possess that awakened knowledge that, in his new role, a *new man* is needed.

Through an esoteric lens, then, Hal's actions can be seen not only as a political expediency, but more deeply as a real transformation in substance. He says, "I know thee not, Old Man." Perhaps the "Old Man"[54] whom Henry banishes is not Falstaff, or not just Falstaff: it is the *Old Man Hal*. In banishing the old self, he, *the new man* is risen. As Henry V goes on to say,

> Presume not that I am the thing I was,
> For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
> That I have turned away my former self.
> So will I those that kept me company. (Henry IV, Pt. 2, V. v. 56-60)

The "madcap" boy has not been merely educated and taught statecraft. He has been literally transformed: his very materiality has altered and before us stands another being entirely. Henry IV is not a simple coming of age tale; rather it tells of a total metamorphosis, an expression of an internal evolution, a complete transformation in substance, form and being.

The symbol of the "old man/new man" does not, of course, originate in Shakespeare. As D. J. Palmer has articulated in his specific focus on the idea,[55] the image is Biblical. Palmer notices it as "no accident that the Eastcheap community is described to Hal as "Ephesians, my lord, of the old church" (Henry IV, Part 2, II.2.143). As stated by Paul in Ephesians 4:22-5,

> That is that ye cast off, concerning the conversation in times past, the olde man, which is corrupt through the deceivable lustes, and be renewed in the spirit of your minde, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

While the symbol has been used from the standpoint of relatively orthodox Christian doctrine,[56] esoteric meanings in Christ's parables have been extensively investigated.[57] Such a lens allows for greater clarity on who is being referred to the line, "I know thee not, *Old Man*."

The totality of Hal's transformation is evident in text from the very beginning of his reign as Henry V. After all, he speaks of his very blood as having been changed:

> The tide of blood in me
> Hath proudly flowed in vanity till now.
> Now it doth turn and ebb back to the sea
> Where it shall mingle with the state of floods

[52] Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).
[53] Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. vii.
[54] D. J. Palmer, 'Casting off the Old Man: History and St. Paul in *Henry IV*', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), p. 315.
[55] Palmer, 'Casting off the Old Man', p. 315.
[56] Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961).
[57] Merton, *The New Man*.

> And flow henceforth in formal majesty (*Henry IV, Part 2*. V. ii.129-133).

The depth, magnitude and totality of the transformation from Madcap Hal to the dread and sovereign majesty of Henry V appears to be complete.

In those younger days, those days of "riot and dishonor," a motley and rowdy crowd of thieves, whores and revelers led by Sir John Falstaff surround Hal in almost every scene. Despite this, it is evident very early on that the true Sovereign lives within this young wag. Hal knows what he really is, where he really comes from: that his very materiality is something of a higher level. We must now turn our investigation to whether there is a true transformation in Hal's being, or whether the prince just takes off one mask and puts on another when expedient.

Transformation of Being Versus Doffing the Mask

An esoteric interpretation frames the play as an allegory for a man's individual development. In this reading of the drama, Hal undergoes an essential transformation, a material evolution. The final rejection of Falstaff could be seen as the rejection of an "olde man," and the becoming of an entirely new one. But what if Hal does not change at all? What if Hal has been from the outset the sovereign he is ultimately seen to be, and that he merely removes, when appropriate, when it suits his purpose, a mask to reveal the already existing Henry V? If there is no transformation, there is no basis for an esoteric interpretation of the play.

Traversi has insisted that there is no "real conversion, no fundamental change of attitude."[58] Drouin has also specifically argued that Hal does not really evolve over the course of the play but rather knows himself in his true majesty from the beginning, and merely reveals himself in the end.[59] In particular, she cites his "justly celebrated"[60] soliloquy from Act I. In this moment, the prince has pretended to agree to participate with Falstaff and others in a highway robbery of a group of pilgrims, but this pretense s actually meant as a trick on Falstaff. Left alone on stage after preparations for this ruse have been made, the prince reveals,

> Prince: I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyoked humor 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 seem to strangle him (*Henry IV, Part One*. I.11.185-193).

This soliloquy indicates that even as he goes out to sport in such an unseemly manner, Hal remains aware of his true regal nature. Jennifer Drouin argues that the soliloquy gives us Hal's

[58] Traversi, *Shakespeare*, p. 55
[59] Jennifer Drouin, 'Prince Hal: Reformation or Calculated Education?', *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of Englis*h 2 (2000).
[60] Yoshino, 'Four Fathers', p. 423.

"real" thoughts and that we should not accept Hal's appearance of a riotous disposition. The act, she argues, is a conscious one. He "seeks to master the art of deception," which he does as skillfully as an actor who portrays naturally a character unlike himself."[61]

Auden also found no surprise in Hal's ultimate rejection of Falstaff, saying "we have long known that… when the right moment comes to reject Falstaff, that is to say when such an action will have a maximum political effect, he will do so without hesitation."[62] Auden finds in the soliloquy a person who "always sees several steps ahead and has the patience to wait, even though waiting means temporary misunderstanding and popularity." In this he harkens back to John Upton, who in his 1746 volume "Critical Observations on Shakespeare" frames it thus:

> Having thus prepared the spectators for a change of manners, you plainly perceive how awkwardly this new assumed character fits upon the *old man*; his civility was all forced. 'Tis when sinners turn saints all is over-acted. Who does not all along see, that when prince Henry becomes king, he will assume a character suitable to his dignity? And this change the audience expect (Italics added).[63]

For many, how one feels about Hal depends on a resolution of this dilemma. Yoshino, for example, would prefer to see Hal as less Machiavellian: "I can tolerate a Hal who, faced with the obligations of leadership, makes the hard decision to relinquish the friends of his youth. I cannot accept a Hal who planned from the outset to use is friends to rise to power."[64]

George Bernard Shaw, while allowing that Falstaff is a "besotted and disgusting old wretch," condemns Hal's relationship with him as "consciously and deliberately treacherous."[65] Stephen Greenblatt argues that "Shakespeare's plays are centrally and repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder."[66] Criticizing those who condemn the prince as brutal, Tillyard believes that "those who cannot stomach the rejection of Falstaff assume that in some ways the Prince acted dishonestly. They are wrong. The Prince is aloof and Olympian from the start. It is not the Prince who deceives; it is Falstaff who deceives himself by wishful thinking."[67] He argues that what some might find distasteful is really evidence of Hal's already developed character. He offers the view that "the Prince... far from being a mere dissolute lout awaiting a miraculous transformation… is from the very first a commanding character, deliberate in act and in judgment, versed in every phase of human nature."[68]

Finally, as far as the religious or philosophical notion of redemption, Boyd insists quite implacably that the famed soliloquy "should be enough to subvert the inexplicably popular

[61] Drouin, 'Prince Hal', p. 5.
[62] Auden, 'The Prince's Dog', p. 163.
[63] John Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (London: G. Hawkins, 1746), p. 89.
[64] Yoshino, 'Four Fathers', p. 424.
[65] George Bernard Shaw, 'Dramatic Opinions and Essays (1907)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986).
[66] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 53.
[67] Tillyard, *History Plays*, p. 277.
[68] Tillyard, *History Plays*, p. 277.

notion of Hal as the Prodigal Son."[69] Even on an external level, a clear answer to this quandary has evaded Shakespeare commentators. Spiekerman writes, "It is difficult to reconcile Hal's cold plan with his evident joy in the presence of Falstaff. It all sounds a bit abstract . . . not a wholly satisfying explanation . . . a bit like the condescending private words of a populist politician."[70]

How may we reconcile these arguments with the esoteric notion that Hal, in fact, evolves? Isaac Asimov suggests that this key soliloquy was probably meant as an aside to the Elizabethan audience, arguing that the speech need not be taken as a diegetic part of the play itself. He asserts that if taken on its face value the soliloquy "rings completely false to us," and that it would cause us distaste for the prince. "To play the fool out of high spirits and youthful zest can be enduring; to do so out of deep political calculation is repellent."[71]

The notion of setting aside a portion of a speech as not a real part of the play itself could be seen as unusual, bordering on heretical; however, it is not completely without precedent. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's Centenary production of *Henry V*, large swaths of material were removed, and in one instance the following argument was made by the director: "One might argue that the speech is deliberately ironical, or elaborately over-stated… Furthermore, it is not well written. It is over written. Shakespeare could write badly, especially for special occasions. This may be one of them. Accordingly, we *treated it as a later insertion* and cut it."[72]

From an esoteric viewpoint one does not need to reject the notion of transformation from the mere fact that Hal sees his true nature and possibilities early on. That is, in fact, the whole point. While he may see his possibilities as the true royal son of England, he does not fully realize them until, in the end, he rejects Falstaff. One key element of the esoteric study of internal development is that a person may well see their real possibilities early on, and that still the process of attaining such possibilities is a long and demanding, arduous task. Ouspensky, after all, teaches that awakening is not an easy task, and that it requires considerable effort and sacrifice.[73]

Such an assertion relates to three key ideas posited by both Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. The first key idea proposed in this view of human evolution is that humans are not single, unified and complete beings until they undergo transformation. We are rather internally split, divided and segmented into numerous sub-personalities. Gurdjieff labels these split entities as "i's" to differentiate such parts of the developing being from the ultimate aim of development, to evolve into one "Real I."[74] Such little i's do not always work in the same directions, nor always even know each other. Any of us might be able with some introspection to find times in our own lives when we are certain and straight in a particular resolve or direction, a particular view of ourselves, and then find moments not long after when we could see ourselves behaving, thinking, feeling in a completely different, unfamiliar or even opposite direction. It is possible,

[69] Boyd, 'Player Prince', p. 3.
[70] Spiekerman, 'The Education of Hal', p. 114.
[71] Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*, p. 334.
[72] Sally Bauman (ed.), *The Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of Henry V for the Centenary Season at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976), p. 103.
[73] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 156.
[74] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 59.

and esoterically speaking almost axiomatic, that Hal could see himself as a unified being with the regal ability to play the fool, but not yet *be* one. Esoteric tradition would insist that he still has no small distance to traverse before he actually *is* what he earlier saw himself destined to become.

Secondly, in drawing this picture of our beings as being populated thus with multiple sub-personalities or i's, Gurdjieff argues that there is a long and demanding journey of bringing such discordant little i's under the governance of increasingly elevated, larger *I*'s. As one evolves from being able to see our possibilities—as we could assert did Hal in his soliloquy—to the one who can actualize—as did King Henry V in his rejection of Falstaff—those parts of oneself, little rebellious i's, are brought to heel under the tutelage and command of more central and evolving governance.[75]

To shed light on the conundrum of Hal's development versus unveiling, critics have focused some attention on the "Play Extempore," which Hal and Falstaff undertake in the tavern scene that constitutes the second act of Henry IV, Part I. "Do thou stand for my father," suggests Hal to Falstaff, "and examine me on the particulars of my life" (*Henry IV, Part One*. II. iv. 375-376). Falstaff takes on the role of Hal's father the King, Henry IV, and chides Hal for his un-prince-like behavior. Soon Hal "deposes" Falstaff in their charade, and himself takes over the role of King. This reversal, according to Kastan, shows that already Hal "is immediately capable of the language and gestures of sovereignty, and, more, immediately aware that rule depends upon the exclusion of those anarchic energies that resist the strategies of incorporation, of subjectification that are necessary to construct and maintain the unitary state."[76]

Richard L. McGuire argues that this play within the play is the moment of critical development in Hal,[77] wherein comes the moment which presages Hal's rejection of Falstaff.

> Falstaff: Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's
> Company ... Banish
> Plump Jack and banish all the world.
> Prince: I do; I will (*Henry IV, Part I.* II. Iv. 465-468).

The prince does not at that moment really banish Falstaff. As both Boyd and Paul A. Gottschalk note,[7879] Hal articulates a reality which *will* come to be, but which *is not* already. Bord elaborates, "The prophecy of rejection is *not* the performance."[80] Further, "Like the soliloquy at the end of *Henry IV, Part One*, those famous four words are the declaration of an intent, not the achievement of that intent."[81] Hal has assured us in Part One that he aims to "pay the debt he never promised." However, as Dickenson states, "In drama, intention is not enough for us,"[82]

---

[75] G. I. Gurdjieff. *Views from the Real World* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), p. 75.
[76] Kastan, 'Introduction', p. 39.
[77] Richard L. McGuire, 'The Play-Within-the Play in 1 Henry IV', *Shakespeare* Quarterly, vol. 18, no. 1 (1967), p. 47-52.
[78] Boyd, 'Player Prince', p. 13.
[79] Paul A. Gottschalk. 'Hal and the "Play Extempore" in 1 Henry IV (1974)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), p. 338.
[80] Boyd, 'Player Prince', p. 13.
[81] Boyd, 'Player Prince', p. 13.
[82] Hugh Dickenson, 'The Reformation of Prince Hal', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 12 (1961), p. 34.

"we demand that a character ratify his decision by acting upon his word…only then his reformation becomes a reality in the dramatic experience."[83] Thus we wonder if Hal is at the beginning of the play who he must be at the end.

One further piece of evidence to bring to bear on this question of whether Hal has evolved through the play or is merely taking off his mask can be found in the rejection itself. After his initial declaration, "I know thee not old man," and his statement of having "long dreamt" of such a man, he cautions Falstaff not to reply with "a foolish jest."

> Presume not that I *am* the thing I *was (italics mine),*
> For God knows, so shall the world perceive,
> That I have turned away *my former self. (italics mine)*
> (Henry IV, Part 2. V.v.59-61)

Hal does not say that he is no longer pretending: he says explicitly he no longer is "the thing *I was*." Hal is transformed.

The distance between the intention and the action is the entire point. Esoteric thought recognizes that there exist levels within any person. We do not always reside in the same place within ourselves. As Ouspensky notes, "People understand what 'knowledge' means. And they understand the possibility of different levels of knowledge…But they do not understand this in relation to 'being'… They do not understand that being or existence may be of very different levels and categories."[84] We can see that such levels live within Hal, and that he can see them early on in the play. However, it is truly only when it ultimately falls upon him to wear the mantle of Majesty that he must rise within himself to that level.

As discussed, Gurdjieff teaches that people are not single unified beings. Palmer expresses this notion with regards to Hal's return to the action in the beginning of Part Two: "The 'weary' Prince who makes his entrance in Part Two, II.2 is a very different figure from the buoyant, confident youth who promised to redeem the time in Part One, and who seemed about to "witch the world with noble horsemanship."[85] That Hal is changeable is not a new observation. As David Boyd expresses, "Hal is not, as J. Dover Wilson dubbed him, a 'Prodigal Prince', but rather a protean prince, and prodigality simply one of the number of guises he assumes and discards at will."[86] The question is whether these multiple characters are assumed and discarded at will. Boyd believes the affirmative, and that "at some point, a character named Hal will make a choice, will turn to a character named Falstaff and say, 'I know thee not, old man.'"[87]

Who makes the choice? Boyd asserts that if the measure of the prince of Part II is his willingness to make the choice, his measure in Part I had been his refusal to do so. His "breadth and versatility" is in his ability to play the role, the "ablest player."[88] This would imply, from the argument above, that he possesses an overarching royal consciousness from the beginning. However, the esoteric lens contradicts this.

---

[83] Dickenson, "The Reformation of Prince Hal", p. 36.
[84] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 65.
[85] Palmer, "Casting off the Olde Man", p. 331.
[86] Boyd, "Player Prince", p. 4.
[87] Boyd, "Player Prince", p. 4.
[88] Boyd, "Player Prince", p. 10.

Ananda Coomaraswamy's analysis reflects the spiritual unity (or lack thereof) asserted by Gurdjieff: "The whole force of this science (esoteric psychology) is directed towards a destructive analysis of the animistic delusion that this man, So-and-so, who speaks of himself as 'I', is an entity at all."[89] Further, "Our existence is not a being, but a becoming."[90] Gurdjieff elaborates, "Man has no individual I. But there are, instead, hundreds and thousands of separate small I's, very often entirely unknown to one another."[91] The course of human development involves to some extent unifying these disparate internal "I"s, bringing them under the dominion of a unified, "real" I.

Role-playing and disguise are central to much of Shakespeare's dramatic lexicon. It includes characters who completely conceal their true interests and intents, as well as those who merely harbor secrets. In one sense, Shakespeare asks whether, and to what extent, every person dons masks throughout their life. This is, in many ways, the same sentiment as Gurdjieff's different "I's".

It is worth noting that this requires a certain overarching awareness of who we essentially are. It also demands us to be aware of what would be required to alter ourselves and present as other than what we are habitually, mechanically. To play a role requires at least the seeds of self-awareness positioned at a higher level than the ordinary. As Gurdjieff puts it, "He who works becomes an actor, a real actor in life. To be an actor is to play a role… He only is a good actor who is able to remember himself and consciously play his role, no matter what it may be."[92] To truly play the miscreant, one must have knowledge of the miscreant within oneself.

This is all the more important when one reaches toward the level of a king. To rise to such a level within oneself to be able to convincingly "play" a king requires some evolution of the materiality of one's very being towards the regal. In some respects, any man who really is a king must both *be* a king and *play* one. When Hal plays his father in the tavern of Eastcheap, he shows in light a regal character; his threat to banish poor Jack is very real. This dual nature of monarchy was widely known in the world of medieval England. As reviewed extensively by Kantorowicz, "It was the live essence of Shakespeare's art to reveal the numerous planes active in any human being. The king is simultaneously a person and an embodiment of the community of the realm."[93] In the public/private nature of the sovereign, there is always a pull between the outer and inner aspects. This could not be otherwise, for the role of sovereign is necessarily accompanied by the human aspect, with its failings and foibles. For the king, paradoxically, to be oneself is, as Greenblatt views it, to "perform one's part in the scheme of power as opposed to one's natural disposition, or what would normality designate as the very core of the self."[94]

---

[89] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers: Metaphysics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 373.
[90] Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers*, p. 410.
[91] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 59.
[92] G. I. Gurdjieff, *Transcripts of Gurdjieff's wartime meetings 1941-1946* (London: Book Studio, 2008), p. 16.
[93] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 25.
[94] Greenblatt, *Invisible Bullets*.

Dodd emphasizes further[95] that role playing is an integral part of the entire Shakespearian body, citing Hamlet, Othello, As You Like It, as well as King Henry IV as examples where the intelligent and self-aware playing of a role is of key import. He also reviews in his article showing a concordance between Shakespeare and Gurdjeff that many of those who knew him were keenly aware of Gurdjieff's uncanny ability to play convincingly and outer role while remaining something other internally.

"Man is a plural being," said Gurdjieff.[96] "When we speak of ourselves ordinarily, we speak of 'I.' We say, 'I did this', 'I think this', 'I want to do this'- but this is a mistake. There is no such 'I', or rather there are hundreds, thousands of little 'I's in every one of us." Who one really "is" versus the role one plays is alluded to in several places in these plays. We have cited above Hals' soliloquy. Additionally, when Henry IV first condemns Hotspur, Henry Percy, soon to be the "valiant rebel of the name" for not releasing to the King his prisoners:

> King: I will from henceforth rather *be myself*
> Mighty and to be feared than my condition
> Which has been smooth as oil (Henry IV, Part I. I. iii. 5-8. Italic mine).

In a later seen, when Prince Hal is rebuked by his father for his behavior, responds,

> Hal: I shall hereafter my thrice gracious Lord
> *Be more myself* (Henry IV, Part. I. III. ii. 92-93. Italics mine).

On the battlefield, when many wear the colors of the king,

> Douglas: … *What art thou*
> That *counterfeits* the person of the King?
>
> King: The King *himself* … (Henry IV, Part I. V.iv.26-28. Italics mine).

The question to be asked from the standpoint of esoteric philosophy, however, is not about what roles we consciously play. It is about the roles that, unconsciously, play *us*.

Framing Hal's ultimate rejection of Falstaff as a hieroglyph of spiritual evolution requires two fundamental assertions. The first is to assert that concepts of such human spiritual ascension, articulated and disseminated in the early twentieth century, might find some resonance in ideas current in Shakespeare's time, and to which he would have had access. To assert that Shakespeare believed in a specific, internal framework for individual transformation is difficult. Josie Alwyn and Brien Masters, in their introduction to a recent volume on the subject, state, "The power of Shakespeare lies in his evidently conscious knowledge, skill and understanding of how to work with the alchemical potential in the human soul in the crafting of his plays. Each play is made as an exquisitely unique transformative device for the education of the soul."[97] Of course, those who argue for an esoteric view of Shakespeare must be in some

[95] Dodd, 'Concordances between George Ivanovitch Gurdjeff and William Shakespeare'.
[96] G . I. Gurdjieff, *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: EP Dutton, 1973), p. 75.
[97] Alwyn and Masters, *Educating the Soul*, passim.

way familiar with esoteric ideas themselves. The biographies of both co-authors of that volume place them within Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy.[98] A connection between love of Shakespeare and interest in individual evolution is not uncommon, and it is not unreasonable to assert that some of those principles that have always been part of the perennial philosophy were known to Shakespeare.

Finally, in considering Hal's evolution, there remains the issue of quantifying this transformation, and how the rejection of Falstaff may fit within it. Esoteric thought asserts that there is a law that describes the process governing development. This is a multi-step process requiring significant sacrifice. Not every step is of the same magnitude; Gurdjieff likened the steps of individual development to the notes of a musical octave.[99]

To transform from one realm of being requires that one take a step from the last point of the lower level of being to the first step of the next realm.[100] The distance from one realm of being to a new one is the most difficult step in the transition to cross. A Being cannot simply take a step in isolation: something must be transformed, sacrifices must be made. For Hal to take this last step in becoming the true king, he must sacrifice that part of himself which has room for this "feeder and tutor of his riots." Dickenson has noted, "It is Hal who demonstrates the supreme attribute of kingship to be, not honor, but self-sacrifice."[101] For a unification of Being from the lower, "olde" Man to a new Being, something must be sacrificed.

Bloom, however, asserts that for Hal, the banishment of Falstaff is no sacrifice. He tells us that "Henry V is no man's teacher and loves no one… and destroying Falstaff causes him not an iota of regret."[102] However, Nutall feels that, "When Hal thinks that Falstaff is dead on the field of Shrewsbury he says, 'I could have better spar'd a better man' (*1 Henry IV, V.iv.104*). This is to confess ethical division. He loves Falstaff better than he should."[103] After all, for a leader with purely political intentions, why would he prefer to lose a better man? Hal's speech goes on to say, enigmatically, "O, I should have a heavy miss of thee if I were much in love with vanity." (*1 Henry IV, V. iv.104-105*). Finally, it is hard to miss a hint of tenderness in his "What, old acquaintance! Could not all this flesh keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell" (*1 Henry IV. V.iv.101-102*.)

Why is it Falstaff Who Must be Banished? The Question of Conscience

Why, then, is it Falstaff who must be sacrificed? Certainly, one could find Falstaff's gluttony or his drunkenness cause for distaste. His physical weight is also often pointed to as a motivation, as it is mocked constantly throughout the play. However, "If to be fat is to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved" (*Henry IV, Part I, various*). While Hal seems to revel in this body shaming, it does not ring true, after all their years together, that upon assuming the throne he suddenly finds Falstaff's weight an embarrassment.

[98] Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1997).
[99] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 124.
[100] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 124.
[101] Dickenson, 'The Reformation of Prince Hal', p. 33.
[102] Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 294.
[103] Nutall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, p. 154.

Falstaff's drunkenness could itself be cause for rejection. As Auden points out, "The drunk is unlovely to look at, intolerable to listen to, and his self-pity is contemptible – a worldly failure, a willful failure, he is a disturbing image for a sober citizen."[104] However, we never see Falstaff really impaired by alcohol, and his defense of Sack and Sherrie (*Henry IV, Part Two.* IV.iii.91-129) is far too articulate to earn him condemnation, even if it were not true that Hal spends much of his time in the tavern. It seems unlikely that Shakespeare would invent such a complex character as Falstaff to merely condemn hedonism. While Falstaff's girth and appetite for wine have been cause for humor and ridicule, it seems unlikely that the indulgent Hal, as Henry V, suddenly sees fit to campaign for physical fitness, sobriety and temperance.

Then there is the matter of Falstaff's cowardice. It has been argued that Falstaff is not, in truth, a coward at all, but merely one who knows how and when to pick his fights. In one of the very first serious examinations of the underlying content of this play, Maurice Morgann challenges the commonly held view of the time that Falstaff is a coward and rejected as such.[105] His 1777 essay reads even today as comprehensive, compassionate toward his subject, and compelling. These arguments are so well expressed in the original and so well reviewed by Bradley[106] that it is worth only the shortest summary here.

Morgan acknowledges that, at first blush, appearances of Falstaff as a coward are "strong and striking."[107] However, he also points out two officers are required to arrest Falstaff, one of whom cautions that this action may cost a life. He is sought after by dozens of Captains in preparation for the battle, and, when actually in battle, he has *led,* not *sent*, 150 men to "where they have been peppered." He admittedly counterfeits dying to avoid a real death at the hands of "The Douglas", but as Bradley observes, "there was no equality of force, not the least chance of victory or life."[108]

Morgann then examines in detail the episode at Gadshill. The prince himself points out Falstaff and his motley crew, stating, "I doubt they will be too hard for us." Poins answers, "Well, for two of them I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back, and for the third, if he fights *longer than he sees cause,* I will foreswear arms." Morgan states, "I have considered his conduct and… find it free of cowardice or fear, and infer that those lees are to be derived not from cowardice, but from some other part of his character…"[109]

If not courage or continence, perhaps it is Falstaff's disdain for honor that leads to his rejection. We know from a later view of Henry that "If it be a sin to covet honor, I am the most offending soul alive" (*Henry V.* IV.iii. 28-29). Perhaps he must reject a man who rejects honor. Falstaff's relationship with the concept of honor is complex, at times accepting, at other questioning, rejecting and disdainful. Hesitating before the battle of Shrewsbury, he starts forward:

[104] Auden, *Prince's Dog*, p. 170.
[105] Maurice Morgann, 'An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff (1777)', in *Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II: Critical Essays*, ed. David Bevington (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986).
[106] A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: MacMillian and Co., 1920), pp. 247-273.
[107] Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 15.
[108] Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 23.
[109] Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 34.

> No matter, Honor pricks me on.
> Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? (*Henry IV, Part I. V.i.129-131.)*

Perhaps the most celebrated of the Falstaff speeches, this could not be as moving or intriguing if it did not express an essential dilemma of chivalry, and indeed of personhood. On the one hand, no monarch can rule and no state survive if there are not a critical mass of its citizenry ready and willing to sacrifice themselves to protect the state. At the same time, any head of state will hope to have citizens about who will, if necessary, lay down their lives for that state. Still, it is not clear that Hal's distaste at Falstaff's lack of embrace of the concept of honor would grow more intense and more pressing between his first having expressed it in Part I, and the final rejection in Part II. Notably, Hal does not seem to have diegetic means to hear Falstaff's disparagement of honor.

There is controversy regarding Hal's rejection of Falstaff being justified by the man having "misused the King's press," and leading 150 soldiers into certain death. Bloom, again at Falstaff's defense, asserts Falstaff has harmed no man, and that if we are to condemn a man for putting other men in harm's way to die, we would as easily have to reject both Henry IV and Hotspur as the progenitors of the battle and blame Henry IV and Hal for their "authentic brutality."[110] Certainly, one can find it odious that Falstaff picks the weakest, cheapest men to fill out his battalion. Again, though, Hal knew all about this long before his final rejection. He allows his friend to garner recognition for deeds that belonged to himself, not Falstaff, even "gilding it with the happiest terms I have" (*Henry IV, Part I.* V. iv. 168-9). Although Hal does not say that he pines for the recognition which would have accrued him had his father known it was he who killed Percy, it is evidently true.

To better understand what might be a quality so much in need of rejection by a king,, let us look a little further at this series of actions on Falstaff's part. Falstaff *knows,* intellectually, that he has "misused the Kings Press damnably." He has allowed capable men of buying their way out of service, fielding, instead, "dead bodies… scarecrows…. pitiful rascals, exceedingly poor and bare, too beggarly," with "not a shirt and a half in his company." (*Henry IV, Part I.* IV.iii.33 - 71.) He must know that he will soon lead his "ragamuffins where they are peppered; there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end to beg during life" (*Henry IV, Part One,* V.3.35-38.) If he feels remorse, it is well-hidden when a moment later he takes the moment to "jest and dally" as he tosses his wine flask to Hal in place of a pistol, "There's that will sack a city" (*Henry IV, Part I.* V.iii.55.)

"Conscience" in the esoteric sense—specifically the aim to awaken and develop—does not mean the same as morality. In the framework of an individual consisting of multiple i's, "conscience" is a state in which a person feels at once everything there is to feel.[111] To feel all one's contradictions simultaneously is a necessarily painful but illuminating process. Without the experience of conscience, evolution is not possible. Conscience and its role in evolution is a core component of esoteric thought. Nicoll writes, "Conscience is the fire which alone can

[110] Bloom, *Falstaff*, p. 47.
[111] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous,* p. 155.

begin to change us."[112] He elaborates, "It is necessary to feel remorse of conscience, a *feeling that illuminates,* that brings vision … it is only with this feeling of remorse that we begin to see clearly."[113]

How is it that Falstaff, or any man, can know that he has led men to certain death, and feel nothing about it? Gurdjieff taught that we protect ourselves from the pain of feeling deep inner contradictions together by separating those contradictions within ourselves. We build inside of ourselves what he calls "buffers."[114] "If a man were to feel all the contradictions within him … he would have constant friction, constant unrest … he must cease to see them, or feel them." Buffers are appliances by means of which a man can always be in the right. Buffers help a man not to feel his conscience."[115]

Conscience requires a certain willingness to see ourselves. As De Salzman asserts, "Faults will turn to good, provided we use them to our own humiliation, without slackening in the effort to correct ourselves. The real way of profiting by the humiliation of one's faults is to face them in their true hideousness."[116] The essence of any possible transformation, then, the quality which we absolutely must have in order to develop or ascend into our own sovereign selves has to do with the degree to which we can locate the source of one's own shortcomings within oneself, and impartially observe ourselves,[117] to stay, as it were, "in front of ourselves."[118] Only after ultimately seeing impartially and knowing our mechanical nature can we ever even hope to come to transcend ourselves. On an even deeper level, to evolve one cannot be satisfied with oneself.[119] One must be willing to know one's flaws and endeavor to overcome them.

Conclusion

Falstaff embodies a particular approach to one's own shortcomings which justifies, celebrates, and "buffers" them, veritably ensuring that they will not and cannot be transformed or transcended. In Auden's words, Falstaff is "perfectly willing to tell the world, 'I am that I am, a drunken old failure'."[120] Falstaff embodies a man who is not only satisfied to remain who he is, but who wishes not to really see who he is. His cowardice is "instinct." As Bradley puts it, Falstaff "is the enemy of everything that would interfere with his ease, and therefore of anything serious, and especially everything respectable and moral."[121] From an esoteric viewpoint, comfort is the enemy of evolution. As Nicoll states, "As long as we live comfortably in the thick and nauseating atmosphere of ourselves, taking everything for granted, including ourselves, we cannot awaken…we simply eat and sleep, fight and quarrel, talk and hear, see and touch, move and feel … we move about on the surface of things … we are asleep."[122]

[112] Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 759.
[113] Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2010), p. 282.
[114] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 154.
[115] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 154-155.
[116] Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p. 256.
[117] Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p. 145.
[118] De Salzman, *The Reality of Being*, p. 94.
[119] Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 242-243.
[120] Auden, *Princes' Dog*, p. 178.
[121] Bradley, *The Rejection of Falstaff*, p. 262.
[122] Nicoll, *Commentaries*, pp. 454-455.

"Lying kills essence,"[123] Nicoll further adds. At some point, the person who would be "sovereign in oneself" must make a choice. The wish not to recognize and ultimately overcome one's "lower" self must be rejected for the royal self to become a new man. There are some parts of oneself that can be turned into a wish to work to evolve, and others which must be eliminated. Falstaff, with his self-justifying, deceiving, consistent affection for the lower in himself [124] cannot evolve with the King. For Hal to become his royal self, "Falstaff" must be banished. When Hal, now Henry V, the new king and, in effect, a new man, banishes the old man, he establishes anew the right order of the monarchy.

[123] Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 1158.
[124] Pogson, *In the East*, p. 259.