

The Player Prince: Hal in *Henry IV Part 1*

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Henry IV Part 1 might reasonably be expected to be the subject of even more intense critical disagreement than other major Shakespearean plays. For one thing, it belongs to a genre, the history play, for which there exists no critical tradition comparable to those devoted to tragedy and comedy. And for another, the world of the play offers so sweeping a prospect of private life and public, high life and low, war and peace, that almost any critical reading seems likely to do an injustice to some part of the panorama and so invite challenge. Curiously, though, the play actually enjoys an unusually strong critical consensus. Differences of opinion concerning particular points of interpretation are plentiful, of course, but the vast majority of commentators are agreed on two major points. First, that the pivotal figure of the play, its title notwithstanding, is Prince Hal. And second, that the thematic pattern of the play is defined in terms of Hal's relationship to King Henry, Hotspur, and Falstaff.

Two general interpretations of the play, agreed on these essential points, have won widespread acceptance. The earlier of the two seems to derive originally from an observation made by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in *Shakespeare's Workmanship*. "The whole of the business," Quiller-Couch suggested, "is built on the old Morality structure, imported through the Interlude. Why, it might almost be labelled, after the style of a Morality title, *Contentio inter Virtutem et Vitium de anima Principis*."¹ Some years later, E.M.W. Tillyard reiterated this view, describing the centre of the play as Hal's choice, "Morality-fashion, between Sloth or Vanity, to which he is drawn by his bad companions, and Chivalry, to which he is drawn by his father and his brothers."² More recently, the medieval model of the *psychomachia* has tended to be displaced by the trendier Hegelian model of a "dialectic" in which Hal mediates between the opposed, and equally unacceptable, ethical extremes of Hotspur and Falstaff (or, possibly, among the three extremes of Hotspur, Falstaff, and Henry).

Most interpretations of *Henry IV Part 1* offer variations on one or other of these views. Both of these favoured accounts of the play, however, are open to serious challenge, and on the same two counts. First, the imposition of the modern emphasis on psychological

1 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (London, 1918), p. 148.

2 E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 265.

development as the necessary basis of dramatic action crucially 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. Shakespeare seizes the earliest opportunity, after all, to reveal to the audience what is concealed from Henry for several acts, and from Falstaff for two plays. However alienating some may find the soliloquy at the end of I.ii, surely it should be enough to subvert the inexplicably popular notion of Hal as a prodigal son. As Peter Alexander says, "Could we imagine the prodigal preface his departure with a statement which would assure us that he was going to enjoy just enough riotous living to make his father glad to see him home again, we should be nearer Prince Hal's case."³ Hal is not, as J. Dover Wilson dubbed him, a "Prodigal Prince,"⁴ but rather a protean prince, and prodigality simply one of a number of guises he assumes and discards at will.

This suggests the second prevalent fallacy concerning *Henry IV Part 1*, the notion that the play involves a commitment on Hal's part to one role, and a consequent rejection of others. This belief imposes an unnecessary choice, not just on Hal, but on the reader, implicitly demanding that he decide which is the "real" Hal, the Hal of the tavern, the court, or the battlefield. But all of these are equally "real," and to suggest otherwise is to miss the essential basis of Hal's heroic stature. There will come a time, of course, when a character named Hal *will* make a choice, will turn to a character named Falstaff and say, "I know thee not, old man." But that is in another play (a lesser one, by general agreement) and part of a very different dramatic structure. The pattern of *Henry IV Part 2* is, indeed, that of a *psichomachia*, with Hal facing an unavoidable and uncompromising choice between the values represented by Falstaff and those represented by the Lord Chief Justice. But the burdens of a king need not be forced prematurely on the prince; the Hal of *Part 1* is a character quite as distinct, in some ways, from the Henry V of *Part 2* as the Henry IV of *Part 1* is distinct from the Bolingbroke of *Richard II*.

That does not mean, of course, that *Henry IV Part 1* can be treated as an autonomous work like any other, no more directly related to *Part 2* than it is, say, to *Hamlet*, another play much concerned with princes and kings, fathers and sons. *Henry IV*, as Harold Jenkins concludes at the end of the most balanced discussion of the structural problem, "is both one play and two," and the relationship between the two parts is, therefore, inherently paradoxical:

3 Peter Alexander, "Wilson on Falstaff," *Modern Language Review*, xxxix (1944), 409.

4 J. Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 22.

Though Part Two frequently recalls and sometimes depends on what happened in Part One, it also denies that Part One exists. Accordingly the ideal spectator of either part must not say with Shakespeare's Lucio, "I know what I know." He must sometimes remember what he knows and sometimes be content to forget it.⁵

No doubt the central thematic concerns of *Part 2* (the burden of kingship; the necessity of choice; the emergence of a man from behind the mask) are clearly foreshadowed at various points in *Part 1*. But these anticipations, however explicit ("I'll so offend to make offense a skill, / Redeeming time when men least think I will"), and however powerful in the context of *Henry IV* as a ten-act play, are nevertheless *not* central to the structural pattern of *Part 1* itself.

In *Part 2*, the measure of the new king is his willingness to make the inevitable choice; in *Part 1*, the measure of the prince is precisely his *refusal* to make those choices which his critics (both inside and outside the play) are so anxious to impose upon him. His breadth and his versatility are what set him apart from lesser men; he is a man for all seasons, a player for all parts, and the former, I wish to suggest, by virtue of the latter. We can best understand Hal's character, that is, by taking the notion of his "role-playing" perfectly literally and approaching the problem, rather obliquely, through a consideration of what might too easily be dismissed as a relatively minor element in the play's design, Shakespeare's use of the theatrical metaphor.

The theatrical metaphor is one of the few organizing images which have proven equally invaluable to the sixteenth century and the twentieth. The notion of the social world as theatre and human behaviour as "role-playing," a conceit so commonplace in the social-sciences, pseudo-sciences, and journalism of our time that it has lost much of its metaphorical force, was just as prominent four hundred years ago. The theatrical metaphor pervaded Elizabethan "sermons and song-books, chronicles and popular pamphlets," as Anne Righter has written, and was "used in a multitude of ways, to describe the nature of deceivers, the splendour of man's life and its transience, the inexorability of Fortune, or the character of individual moments of time."⁶

In Shakespeare's work, this metaphor manifests itself, not only in the form of those explicit *sententiae* with which everyone is tediously familiar ("all the world's a stage...;" "Man's but a poor player..."), but also, and far more importantly, as an organizing principle in the action of the plays themselves, and in plays, interestingly, both tragic

5 Harold Jenkins, *The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth* (London, 1956), reprinted in the Signet edition of *Henry IV Part 2*, ed. Norman Holland (New York, 1965), pp. 231-2.

6 Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 76.

and comic. The most explicit structural expression of the theatrical metaphor, for instance, the play-within-the-play, is equally crucial to *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Not surprisingly, a metaphor adaptable to such different dramatic modes proves particularly useful in a play of mixed mode like *Henry IV Part 1*.

The theatrical metaphor may be more explicit in other plays, but it is nowhere more pervasive nor more profound in its influence than in *Henry IV Part 1*. Scarcely a character in the play is left untouched by it; all are players, all assume roles. The most coveted role of all, of course, is that of kingship. At various times, and in various senses, the "player kings" include Hal, Falstaff, Mortimer, Sir Walter Blount, and Henry himself. The reasons for this association of kingship and theatricality are obvious enough. Not only has the act of usurpation, by its very nature, inevitably redefined kingship as a part to which a player may aspire, rather than an identity with which he is divinely endowed, but "both Hotspur and Henry IV himself evoke, on different occasions, the theatrical qualities of Bolingbroke's conduct in the past, the sense that he was a dissembler who cleverly created for himself a role as king."⁷

Crucial as this political dimension of the theatrical metaphor is, however, it is ultimately only one element in a more complex design. Like everything else in the play, the theatrical metaphor is characterized by its remarkable heterogeneity, and the association of king and actor is only one of a number of avenues by which the metaphor enters the play. A different set of theatrical connotations accrues around the figure of Falstaff. Falstaff's origins, conveniently summarized by James Calderwood, "are theatrical and literary: the Vice of morality and tradition, the *miles gloriosus* and witty parasite of Plautine comedy, the clown-fool-butt-sponger-mocker-glutton of a thousand plays from Aristophanes to the anonymous author of *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*."⁸ So complex a heritage resists easy labelling, but perhaps the dominant element in Falstaff's makeup, the common denominator between the very different traditions of the Plautine parasite and the Morality vice, is the role of the trickster. A third variation on the theatrical metaphor is suggested (rather surprisingly, given his professed hostility to poetry and music) by Hotspur. If less obviously than Henry and Falstaff, however, Hotspur is just as essentially the player of a part. For Hotspur is unmistakably a hero in an archaic mode; for him, quite as much as for any Homeric warrior, heroic honour is *arete*, a quality to be publicly acquired and publicly displayed, a role to be played, in other

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁸ James L. Calderwood, "1 Henry IV: Art's Gilded Lie," *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (1973), 134.

words, and one which he plays with great self-consciousness.

The theatrical metaphor in *Henry IV Part I*, then is an amalgam of three distinct elements, each with its own literary tradition, and each chiefly embodied in a different character; the politician as actor, represented by Henry; the trickster as actor, represented by Falstaff; and the hero as actor, represented by Hotspur. As these three lines develop and inter-relate in the course of the play, they produce a structuring metaphor of considerable complexity and power. Because this metaphor is so pervasive, it may be useful to consider somewhat more closely two scenes in which it becomes particularly explicit: first, II.iv, the scene of the "play extempore" in which Hal and Falstaff take turns at impersonating Henry; and second, the penultimate scene of the play, V.iv, the scene of the long-awaited "showdown" between Hotspur and Hal.

At first glance, these two scenes may seem to have singularly little in common. The later scene is full of physical action of the most violent sort, and clearly constitutes the climax of the entire play. The earlier scene, in contrast, although the longest in the play, is one in which nothing much at all seems to happen. It relates back to the Gadshill robbery in II.ii, and forward to Hal's confrontation with Henry in III.ii, but in terms of narrative development of the more obvious sort it is virtually gratuitous. More than that, it *feels* like an interlude, "somewhat enchanted," as Anne Righter says, "a period of suspended time in which the violence and rebellion abroad in the world outside seem curiously remote."⁹ Both scenes involve "role-playing," of course, but even that takes radically different forms in the two scenes. In the earlier, it may seem, at least initially, a retreat from the more urgent demands of life, whereas in the later it is unmistakably a matter of life and death, for it is "counterfeiting" that saves Falstaff's life and costs Sir Walter Blount his. For all their differences, though, both scenes are thoroughly dominated by the theatrical metaphor, and in both it is handled in surprisingly, and revealingly, similar ways.

In both scenes, for instance, the theatrical metaphor is sufficiently explicit and insistent to provoke in the audience, if nothing approaching a Brechtian "alienation effect," at least a certain consciousness of the innate complexities of the theatrical experience. Like any other play-within-a-play, the "play extempore" in II.iv constructs an elaborate set of concentric circles which inevitably calls into question the simplistic dichotomy between the "illusion" of the stage world and the "reality" of the audience's. In this case, the audience confronts the potentially dizzying spectacle of an actor,

9 Righter, p. 96.

playing Hal, playing the part of the "madcap Prince," first "playing" himself, then his father. In the later scene, Shakespeare juggles with the theatrical illusion even more precariously, particularly when the "resurrected" Falstaff, about to stab Hotspur's corpse, attempts to justify himself by asking, "Why may not he rise as well as I?" (V.iv.125).¹⁰ Sigurd Burckhardt voices the reflection which must surely occur to many members of the audience, if only semi-consciously:

Not only *may* Hotspur rise but he *will*, as soon as the scene has ended and the 'body' been lugged off the stage. Like other leading actors in tragedies and histories, he makes a living by counterfeiting dying, and to do so 'is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed.' Falstaff's rising destroys all kinds of reassuring symmetries, the first being that of stage and world.¹¹

So it does, and certainly Falstaff's subsequent remark that "Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me," addressed directly to the spectators in the audience, could scarcely have been calculated to do otherwise. The problem with "metadramatic" reflections of this sort, however, is that they tend to tempt us away from the specifics of the text to a consideration of the general nature of the theatrical experience *per se*. There are other aspects of the theatrical metaphor in these two scenes, however, which lead us directly back into the particularities of *Henry IV Part 1*.

We might notice, for instance, that the role-playing in these scenes, and in the play generally, tends to be peculiarly improvisational in nature, unrehearsed, extemporaneous, like the play-within-the-play itself. The sort of theatricality we might reasonably expect of a political play, the sort we find in *Richard II*, for instance, is of a different and more formal kind, a kind more common in the drama of the period. No other era of the English stage, as Thomas Stroup says, "has been so rich in ceremony or formalized entrances and exits or *tableaux*, or pageantry in general."¹² *Henry IV Part 1* has its share of this sort of ceremonial theatricality, of course. Characters commonly enter or exit by way of formal procession (or burlesques of such processions, like Hal's entrance in III.iii), and the first action of the play, indeed, is Henry's highly formal announcement of his intention to undertake a crusade to the Holy Land. Significantly, though, nothing ever comes of Henry's declaration, and that is itself characteristic of the play. The successful role-playing in *Henry IV*

10 All quotations from *Henry IV Part 1* are taken from the Signet edition, ed. Maynard Mack (New York, 1965).

11 Sigurd Burckhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, 1968), p. 147.

12 Thomas B. Stroup, *Microcosmos: The Shape of the Elizabethan Play* (Lexington, 1965), p. 95.

Part I takes the form, not of an attempt to impose a pre-determined order on reality, nor to evade that reality, but rather of an improvisational response to the constantly changing order of things. In the final act, Sir Walter Blount's "counterfeiting" of the king is deliberate, premeditated, and fatal, whereas Falstaff's "counterfeiting" of death is spontaneous, "instinctive" (in his own terms), and triumphantly successful.

That unexpected reversal in the fortunes of Falstaff suggests a second feature of the handling of the theatrical metaphor in the play, the characteristic instability of the dramatic situation, the surprising suddenness and apparent ease with which roles are assumed, abandoned, or exchanged. In the middle of the "play extempore," most obviously, Hal and Falstaff reverse their roles, Hal assuming the role of his father, Falstaff that of Hal. When Hal's real confrontation with his father takes place a couple of scenes later, he firmly declares his determination to effect a similar, but more serious, exchange of roles:

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

(III.ii.144-6)

In V.iv, of course, Hal accomplishes precisely that, and then caps that exchange of roles with another, permitting Falstaff to usurp the role of hero, as Falstaff had earlier permitted him to usurp the role of king. Elsewhere in the play, the Percies forsake their earlier role as Henry's stoutest supporters to become his bitterest enemies, while Douglas and Glendower, initially their enemies, become the Percies' allies and even, in the case of Glendower, their kin. Apparently the exchange of roles can be effected as abruptly on the political stage, or on the battlefield, as in the tavern.

Abruptly, but not often by mutual consent. When Hal assumes the role of player-king, Falstaff jokingly accuses him of "deposing" him. Hotspur later makes the same charge perfectly seriously, telling Hal that he has "robbed" him, not only of his life, but of his "proud titles" (v.iv.76-8), that is, of his heroic role. This is the third consistent characteristic of the theatrical metaphor in the play, the competitive, even openly combative, nature of the role-playing. There are simply, as Hal makes perfectly clear to Hotspur before they join combat, more players than parts:

Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
Nor can one England brook a double reign
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales.

(V.iv.64-6)

The whole play is, in fact, an ongoing competition, not merely for the single role of kingship, but for an entire range of roles.

The victor who eventually emerges from each and every one of these contests is, of course, Hal. Hal proves himself the ablest "player" in both senses of the word, theatrical and competitive, challenging and excelling each of his three major rivals in his own chosen role. Significantly, the three characters in the play most openly critical, indeed contemptuous, of Hal are Henry, Hotspur, and Falstaff. To Henry, he is "degenerate" (III.ii.128), to Hotspur, a "sword-and-buckler" prince (I.iii.228), to Falstaff, "a Jack, a sneak-up" (III.iii.88). In the course of the play, each is proven wrong, as Hal plays the politician more successfully than his father, the hero more successfully than Hotspur, and the trickster more successfully than Falstaff.

The victory over Hotspur is the most clearly enacted of the three, of course, unmistakably culminating in Hal's triumph in combat at Shrewsbury. Hal's real victory, however, his *histrionic* victory, begins considerably earlier, with Sir Richard Vernon's two speeches describing, first, the martial appearance of the "gallantly armed" Hal prepared for battle (IV.i.96-109), and second, Hal's display, in challenging Hotspur to single combat (V.ii.51-68), of that "gift of tongues" for which Hotspur professes such scorn. Vernon's evident admiration for Hal, the unimpeachable testimony of a sworn enemy, infuriates Hotspur on both occasions, and understandably so. For Vernon hints that Hal looks the part, and sounds the part, more successfully than Hotspur; and in the theatrical/political world of *Henry IV Part I*, appearances count. So much so, in fact, that the actual combat is almost an anti-climax, the confirmation of a foregone conclusion.

Hal's triumph over Henry is less obvious than that over Hotspur, but just as essential to the play's design. Hal's soliloquy at the end of I.ii. leaves no doubt that he is very much his father's son, as thoroughly a politician, and a politician of much the same kind, one acutely aware of his "image." As the mock-interview scene (II.iv) begins with Hal boasting of his ability to win the hearts and minds of the populace, "the good lads of Eastcheap," so the real interview scene (III.ii) later begins with Henry's boasting of precisely the same talents. Father and son are even drawn irresistibly to the same metaphors: as Henry's presence is a "robe pontifical" (III.ii.56), so Hal's "loose behaviour" is something he can "throw off" (I.ii.212).

In two different ways, however, Hal clearly surpasses his father as royal politician. The first of these is not of Hal's own doing, the fact that he is destined to inherit the benefits of Henry's usurpation of the

throne, but not the guilt associated with that act. When Douglas mistakes Henry at Shrewsbury for another "That counterfeit't the person of a king" (V.iv.27), the ironic implication is unmistakable: Henry IV *is* a "counterfeit," a "player king," in a way that Henry V will never be. The same point is unwittingly made by Henry himself when he tells Hal:

For all the world,
As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh;
And even as I was then is Percy now.

(III.ii.93-6)

In terms of orthodox Tudor political theory, the comparisons are less flattering to Henry than he apparently realizes: Henry was, as Percy is, a rebel; and Hal will be, as Richard was, a legitimate king.

All this is generally recognized. What is less often appreciated, though, is that Hal triumphs over Henry even on his own terms. The essential point about the reconciliation scene that is almost invariably overlooked is that Henry's general theory of political image-making, and his political estimate of Hal, are both demonstrably wrong. Hal is, indeed, quite as "lavish of his presence" as Henry charges, but far from being "sick and blunted with community" (III.ii.77), he proves to be far more "like a comet...wond'ring at" (III.ii.47) than Henry ever was. For Henry's success as self-publicist, we have his own testimony; for Hal's, we have the rather more persuasive testimony of Vernon.

Hal need attempt no rebuttal to his father's charges on this occasion, partly because time will vindicate him, but partly because an implicit defence has already been offered. As the real interview scene begins with Henry's charge that Hal's taste for "barren pleasures, rude society" (III.ii.14) has lowered him below the level of a prince, so the mock-interview scene begins with Hal's boast that it has actually promoted him to a higher level. The boast is heavily ironic, but the irony serves to qualify, rather than cancel, the seriousness of the essential point:

I have sounded the very bass-string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers and can call them all by their christen names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis. They take it already upon their salvation that, though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy, and tell me flatly 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.

(II.iv.5-15)

In *Henry V*, of course, he does precisely that, and the later play might be regarded, at least in part, as a triumphant celebration of the

politics of "community." If the ultimate vindication of Hal's behaviour awaits *Henry V*, however, *Henry IV Part 1* sufficiently indicates his ability to "pluck allegiance from men's hearts" (III.ii.52), and admiration even from an enemy's. In *Richard II*, it is Bolingbroke who emerges as the prototypical politician, but in *Henry IV Part 1* his son is clearly his superior.

If Hal's victory over Henry as politician is unexpected, his victory over Falstaff as trickster is surely even more so. For Falstaff's essential nature, whether we trace his literary genealogy to the Morality vice or to the Plautine parasite, is that of the trickster and dissembler. Hal proves even more a dissembler, however, and a considerably more successful one. He does succeed in fooling Falstaff, after all, not only at Gadshill, but also in his continuing role as "madcap prince," whereas Falstaff fools neither Hal nor anyone else. His deceptions are transparent, his "lies are like their father that begets them," as Hal says, "gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (II.iv.224-5). The only role in which Falstaff ever succeeds in deceiving Hal, in fact, is the one he least desires — a corpse. Both in the aftermath of Gadshill and at Shrewsbury, Falstaff is ultimately forced to take refuge in the lie direct; and in both cases, his "deceptions," such as they are, succeed as far as they do solely at Hal's sufferance.

As Hal's showdown with Hotspur comes at Shrewsbury, and with his father in the confrontation in II.ii, his showdown with Falstaff comes in the "play extempore." Indeed, the whole of II.iv can best be understood as an ongoing theatrical competition between Falstaff and Hal, a contest of players. Hal immediately establishes himself as an actor with his first speech in the scene, and Falstaff with his first appearance, in his hastily improvised "costume" of hacked sword and blood-smeared clothing. Hal's "playing" starts even before Falstaff enters, however, with the practical joke on Francis, and it continues after Falstaff has disappeared behind the arras, with Hal's assurance to the sheriff, with "a true face and good conscience" (II.iv.502-3), that Falstaff is not there.

The notion of a "play extempore," furthermore, originates not with Falstaff, but with Hal, who offers, in fact, an entire series of subjects for the play: first, "I'll play Percy and that damn'd brawn shall play Dame Mortimer his wife" (II.iv.110-11); then later, he proposes the "argument" of the play be Falstaff's "running away" at Gadshill; and finally, "Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the particulars of my life" (II.iv.375-6). It is in the contest that develops from this last proposal that Hal most decisively asserts his supremacy, ultimately countering Falstaff at his most rhetorically expansive with four short and shattering words:

Falstaff: ... 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 plump Jack, and banish all the world!

Prince. I do, I will.

(II.iv.474-81)

The basis of Hal's victory here is not merely the fact that he knows, as Falstaff does not, his own character and intent, but that he understands the real nature of the dramatic situation. The doubleness of Hal's reply reminds us that this is not really an interlude, but rather a rehearsal, and to both Falstaff's discomfiture and the audience's, abruptly transforms the parody into prophecy.¹³

The prophecy of a rejection, however, is *not* the performance. Like the soliloquy at the end of I.ii, those four words are the declaration of an intent, not the achievement of that intent. Anne Righter's claim that "the words are spoken by Hal in the pretended character of his father, by the prince Falstaff himself knows, and by the future Henry V concealed behind two masks,"¹⁴ is very slightly, but crucially, off the mark. Hal speaks with two voices, and in two tenses, not three: as Henry IV, he does banish Falstaff; as Henry V, he will; but as Prince Hal, he does not.

Hal's ultimate rejection of Falstaff is unmistakably referred to here, of course, as it is in the earlier soliloquy, and as it had to be, since it was part of the pre-existing narrative material to which the play was bound, a prominent part of the folk legend of Henry V. But while Shakespeare acknowledges the coming rejection of Falstaff, he can scarcely be said to stress it, certainly not sufficiently to make it serve as a major element in the play's essential design. We might say, borrowing a bit of jargon from linguistics, that the rejection figures as part of the surface grammar of the play, but not its deep structure. Claims like that of Richard L. McGuire that "we never again see Falstaff and Hal together as they were before the play-within-the-play,"¹⁵ are simply without foundation. The next scene in which the two meet, III.iii, begins with Falstaff immediately picking up on the joke of Hal's military entrance by "playing upon his truncheon like a fife," and ends with Hal assuring Falstaff, his "sweet beef," that he will continue to be his "good angel," and that he has repaid the money stolen at Gadshill, and that he has secured Falstaff "a charge

13 See Paul A. Gottschalk, "Hal and the 'Play Extempore' in *Henry IV*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, xx (1973-4), 605-14. The problems of interpreting "I do, I will" on stage are illuminatingly discussed by John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 55-6.

14 Righter, p. 116.

15 Richard L. McGuire, "The Play-within-the Play in *Henry IV*" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, xviii (1967), 50.

of horse" (III.iii.183-92). This is scarcely the sort of language and behaviour we might expect towards a "rejected" friend. And since all this takes place in the scene immediately following Hal's interview with his father, Shakespeare hardly seems to be encouraging the conclusion that Hal's reconciliation with Henry involves a break with Falstaff. Nor is there any more evidence of an estrangement in the conclusion of the play, which ends, in stark contrast to the rejection at the end of *Henry IV Part 2* ("I know thee not, old man"), with Hal's assuring Falstaff, "For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have" (V.iv.155-6).

If there is little evidence of Hal's alleged "rejection" of Falstaff, there is even less of any such rejection of his other rivals, or of their values. As a politician, Hal may disagree with Henry regarding ways and means, but not ends. And as a chivalric hero, his values are substantially the same as Hotspur's. The one longs "To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon" (I.iii.200), the other vows to "tear the reckoning from his [rival's] heart" (III.iv.152), but the object of their desires is much the same. It can be argued, and has been, that Hal's offer to engage Hotspur in single combat "to save the blood on either side" (V.i.99) indicates a significantly different sense of honour from Hotspur's, less egoistic and more socially responsible. If so, it seems strange that Vernon, in reporting the challenge, makes no mention at all of Hal's social conscience, but emphasizes instead his playing of the part, the "modesty" and "grace" which "become him like a prince indeed" (V.ii.60). The challenge serves as evidence, not that Hal has renounced Hotspur's role, but simply of how much more successfully he can play it.

Despite the prevailing critical orthodoxy, then, Hal never does choose among the various roles open to him. Instead, he proves himself a man who "in his time plays many parts" and plays all of them equally well. This versatility is the first and most obvious way in which the "playing" of the prince differs from that of those around him. Hal is by no means the only character we see in a variety of roles, of course. We see Hotspur as a husband, as well as a soldier, Henry as a soldier, as well as a politician, Falstaff as everything from a king to a corpse. None of the others, however, displays anything approaching Hal's range and flexibility; on the contrary, each is trapped in a single role. Hotspur remains a warrior even in his bedchamber, his dreams of "all the currents of a heady fight" (II.iii.56), his domestic conversation of "bloody noses and cracked crowns" (II.iii.93). Henry, similarly, remains a politician even on the battlefield; his behaviour at Shrewsbury might charitably be characterized as prudent, but, given the similarity between his use of "counterfeiting" and

Falstaff's, he can hardly be thought to cut as heroic a figure as his son. As for Falstaff, it is difficult to decide in which of his myriad roles (highwayman, soldier, king, penitent sinner) he is most thoroughly implausible. As a soldier however, his impersonation is so hopelessly inept that it finally tries even Hal's patience past the breaking point, driving him to ask angrily, "What, is it a time to jest and dally now?" (V.iii.55).

That question is altogether typical of Hal, for the prince is much possessed by time, and particularly by the drama of time, the constantly shifting demands of the moment, demands to which he alone, of all the characters in the play, has the breadth and versatility to respond. Hal's own sense of this aspect of his own personality is the point of a much-debated passage that occurs shortly before the "play extempore." Poins, unable to see any point in Hal's practical joke on Francis, asks "what cunning match have you made with this jest of the drawer? Come, what's the issue?" The "issue", as Hal explains it, is in some ways the essential key to his character. "I am now," he says, "of all humors that have showed themselves humors since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight" (II.iv.90-96). In contrast to Francis, who, offered the opportunity to escape from his role as drawer, finds himself helpless to escape the habits of that role ("Anon, anon, sir"), and in contrast to Hotspur, who is subsequently associated with Francis by Hal because of his similar narrowness and inflexibility (II.iv.102-9), Hal proudly proclaims himself a man "of all humors," and subsequently proves himself, literally, a man of parts.

If range and versatility are the most pronounced features of the prince as player, there are two further characteristics which distinguish Hal from his theatrical rivals. The first is that magnanimity which he displays in the last two scenes of the play, the generosity which he extends, as warrior to Hotspur, as trickster to Falstaff, and as politician to Douglas. This is a quality equally alien to Hotspur, to Falstaff, and to Henry (who orders the execution of Worcester and Vernon), and the magnanimity of the man is closely related to the magnitude of the player.

Finally, Hal differs from his rivals not merely in the range of roles he plays, nor even in the skill with which he plays them, but in the very nature of his playing. He not only rises above the various roles of Henry, Hotspur, and Falstaff, but also rises above their variously inadequate *modes* of role-playing. Hotspur's role-playing is so inward-turning that it proves solipsistic, insulating him from the realities around him; he "apprehends a world of figures," as Worcester says, "But not the form of what he should attend"

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(I.iii.207-8). Henry's role-playing, in direct contrast, is so cynically and single-mindedly directed to the external world that it is emotionally sterile. And Falstaff's role-playing simply admits of no serious and lasting commitment to any role whatsoever; his impersonations are as transparent and laughable, as "open" and "palpable", as his lies.

Hal's role-playing is of an entirely different order from any of these, less a means to an end, political *or* emotional, than a basic way of being in the world. The "real" Hal is to be found, if found at all, not hidden behind the masks, but rather displayed in them. Those words, "I do, I will," take us to the very heart of Hal's theatricality, his ability to inhabit a role fully and meaningfully, with neither cynicism nor self-deception, and yet be neither limited or defined by that role. Among a great many other things, *Henry IV Part 1* is a celebration of the sheer plenitude, the multiplicity, of human life. The only character who responds successfully to that multiplicity, moving effortlessly among the various worlds of the play, from tavern to court to battlefield, is Hal. And he does so by becoming a player. Not a "poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage," not a player like Henry or Hotspur or Falstaff (or you or me), but a prince of players.