Shakespeare's *Henry IV: The Shadow of Succession*

April 2007

These study materials are produced for use with the Classic Players production of *Henry IV: The Shadow of Succession*.

smart
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AN EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH OF BOB JONES UNIVERSITY

An Introduction to **The Shadow of Succession**

Like the plays from which it was adapted, **The Shadow of Succession** offers audiences a rich theatrical experience based on Shakespeare's broad vision of characters, events and language. The play incorporates a masterful blend of history and comedy, of heroism and horseplay, of the serious and the farcical.

The historical period **The Shadow of Succession** takes into account is 1402 to 1413. The plot focuses on the Prince of Wales' preparation to assume the solemn responsibilities of kingship even while Henry IV regards his unruly son's prospects for succession as disastrous.

When the action of the play begins, the prince, also known as Hal, finds himself straddling two worlds: the cold, aristocratic world of his father's court, which he prefers to avoid, and the disreputable world of Falstaff, which offers him amusement and camaraderie.

While Henry IV regards Falstaff with his circle of common laborers and petty criminals as worthless, Hal observes as much human failure in the palace, where politics reign supreme, as in the Boar's Head Tavern.

Introduction, *from page 1*

Grieved over his son's absence from court at a time of political turmoil, the king laments that his Harry is not more like Harry Percy, a youth nicknamed Hotspur who has won great honor in battle. The king also observes that Hotspur's gallantry puts Hal's cavorting with Falstaff and the Eastcheap riffraff in an even worse light.

But as the drama unfolds, Henry IV's admiration of Hotspur is revealed to be ironic, for it is the fiery youth's selfish pursuit of glory that reunites the king and his son. Hotspur's lack of self-control becomes evident in his stubborn refusal to release his prisoners to the king, his insistence on dividing the realm prematurely, and his refusal to postpone battle even though his forces are depleted. When Hotspur leads a revolt against the king, Henry IV and Hal unite to defend the kingdom.

Ultimately Hal proves to be a young man who can learn from every example set before him, whether positive or negative. Concerning war, for example, he observes two extreme viewpoints. On the one hand, Hotspur regards war as an opportunity to gain renown. The leader of an illegal rebellion, he is willing to purchase victory at the cost of his own life. "Die all, die merrily," is his battle cry.

Falstaff, by contrast, professes to look upon war as the cause of much harm and destruction, and his witty jests indeed contain a measure of truth worthy of consideration by a king-in-training. Yet Falstaff uses war for his own selfish gain by dismissing recruits in exchange for cash. Ever resourceful, he is a survivor who purchases victory at the price of others' lives. His battle cry is "Give me life!"

It is Hal's conduct that reflects a balanced view of war. Realizing the true worth of chivalry in the service of the state, Hal ventures his own life to preserve the lives of others. At the battle of Shrewsbury he saves his father's life and slays Hotspur in single combat. Hotspur's death represents a tragic waste resulting from the young rebel's inability to distinguish heroism from foolhardiness or anarchy from intrepidity.

Like Hotspur, Falstaff lacks the self-control necessary to be a productive member of society. After surviving at Shrewsbury, he continues to squander his time in childish pleasures. He becomes more arrogant and seems less witty than before, and the prince is not as frequently in his company.

Falstaff also degenerates in his parasitic existence from stealing travelers' purses for fun to cheating Mrs. Quickly and fleecing Shallow in earnest. In the end, however, Falstaff's misdemeanors in the pursuit of pleasure may seem less destructive than the actions of those aristocrats who pursue power at all costs.

After Hal convincingly assumes the full weight of a warrior at Shrewsbury, he begins to dissociate himself from Eastcheap, returning to the Boar's Head only once—and then in disguise. But he also remains largely separated from his father's court as well, even as the old king's health fails. At last, following an emotional reconciliation with the dying Henry IV, Hal purposes a "noble change" shortly before becoming Henry V.

In his first official act, the new king displays mature judgment by selecting the Lord Chief Justice to be his surrogate father and most respected counselor in war and in peace. Thus Henry V allies himself with the highest echelon of law and order in the realm.

If as prince, Hal saw no compelling reason to remove himself from Falstaff's company, as king, he has no choice. The inescapable burdens of the monarchy dictate his turning away from the recklessness of his youth. When the old knight calls out from the coronation crowd in the streets of London to his "royal Hal," his "sweet boy," the king responds, "I know thee not, old man," and banishes the incredulous Falstaff.

Henry V's rejection of Falstaff is one of the most controversial scenes in all of Shakespeare's plays and also one of the most famous in all literature. While we may have to accept Hal's action as morally necessary to his position and responsibilities as king, we do not have to like it.

Classic Players, 1999

The Shadow of Succession: Shakespeare's History Plays & History

Shakespeare has been credited with inventing the type of drama known as history plays. A history play is simply a play that at least superficially draws its plot and characters from historical sources. Its emphasis on a series of historical events rather than the experiences of one heroic figure distinguish it from plays like **Julius Caesar**, **Coriolanus** and **Macbeth**.

Shakespeare devoted most of the first decade of his writing career—which began around the time of the English navy's 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada—to creating plays about English history. In these very popular stage works, dramatic values take precedence over historical accuracy.

Every history play is technically either a comedy or a tragedy, but the editors of the first edition of Shakespeare's collected works (1623) emphasized the distinct subject matter of the history plays by creating a separate category for them, probably because of their patriotic and moral appeal to Englishmen. At a time when anarchy or civil war was greatly feared, these plays brought stern warnings against disunity and disobedience in the state.

Shakespeare's first six history plays are all "tragical histories." But the last three—the Henry IV and Henry V plays—are all "comical histories," although each achieves a degree of tragic insight.

All except one of Shakespeare's nine history plays deal with the rise and fall of the Lancasters, a family that ruled England for over 60 years in the persons of Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI. The Lancaster kings descended from John of Gaunt, fourth and eldest surviving son of King Edward III (1312–1377) and holder of the title Duke of Lancaster.

Henry IV, Part 1 (1596–97), a play about the first Lancastrian king and his son the Prince of Wales, is Shakespeare's sequel to a very different play, **Richard II** (1595). The earlier play is written entirely in verse, and its depiction of historical material is, on the whole, accurate. By contrast, in **Henry IV, Part 1** the playwright mixes poetry and prose, writing the scenes based on historical subject matter in poetry and the Falstaff scenes in prose; employs characters from lower social stations as well as aristocrats; and deals largely in fiction rather than fact.

Within two years of the composition of **Henry IV, Part 1**, Shakespeare continued the story of the Percy rebellion in a new play entitled **Henry IV, Part 2** (1598). Scholars cannot determine whether the playwright intended all along to split a large volume of historical material into two full-length plays or whether the first play's popularity with theater audiences prompted him to write a sequel. Part 2 is longer than Part 1 and has almost twice as many characters.

The two plays are tightly interlocked in plot, theme, and characterization, yet each is dramatically complete without the other. Both depict the woes of the latter years of Henry IV's reign and the Prince of Wales' gradual maturity from a youthful prankster to a courageous, responsible king. The predominance of sickness and disease in the plot, character portrayal, and imagery of Part 2 make it darker in tone. Its depiction of politics, war and human nature is also less optimistic.

The second play encompasses a broader portrayal of English life, with scenes in the countryside as well as in the court and tavern. Both the rebels against the king's authority and the social outcasts in the comic scenes appear more debased than in Part 1.

In the happy ending, however, rebellion is fully suppressed, Henry IV repents on his deathbed and is reconciled with Hal, and the Prince of Wales willingly takes the crown and all the responsibilities that go along with it. Thus an entire nation is at last restored to health.

Although Shakespeare used Holinshed's **Chronicles of England Scotland, and Ireland** (1587) as his major source for the Henry IV plays, he was also influenced by other historians, by Samuel Daniel's epic poem entitled **The Civil Wars between the Two Houses of York and Lancaster** (1595), and by two anonymous comedies, **Thomas of Woodstock** (c. 1593) and **The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth** (c. 1586).

From his fictional sources Shakespeare derived both the unhistorical pairing of Hal and Hotspur as young men of the same age (Hotspur was actually two years older than Hal's father) and Hal's relationship to a disreputable old knight whom Shakespeare names Falstaff.

In fact, at the age of fourteen the prince proved a responsible patriot by leading English troops in Wales. But the chronicles also report on his madcap adventures both before and after his Shrewsbury triumphs at the age of sixteen. Among the most interesting accounts of his misdeeds, one which Shakespeare only alludes to, are reports of Hal's being sent to prison for cuffing the Lord Chief Justice.

Although it is historically accurate that tensions existed between Henry IV and the Prince of Wales, Shakespeare chooses to omit two of the real reasons: Hal's resentment of the manner in which his father had taken the throne and a political rivalry between father and son after Hal's courageous Shrewsbury exploits. Shakespeare found precedent for Hal's saving the king's life on the battlefield in Daniel's poem rather than in history.

Henry IV (formerly Bolingbroke) had come to the throne after the forced abdication of his cousin Richard II, a weak but legitimate king. Richard was thereafter imprisoned and murdered, presumably at the instigation of Henry.

Whether or not Henry's actions may be justified is a complex question and one for which Shakespeare would not have found agreement in the historical writings available to him. Under traditional

continued on page 6

Once upon a Time

there was a king of England,

EDWARD III, who had seven sons. When he died, he left his throne

to his ten-year-old grandson RICHARD rather than to one of his living sons.

The old king's decision caused great conflict among his family members for generations to come.

The rivalry for the throne became so serious

that when young RICHARD II

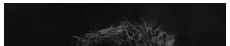
grew to manhood, he devised some vengeful

political acts against his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke. In turn, Bolingbroke

played a role in forcing Richard II to give up the throne and go to prison.

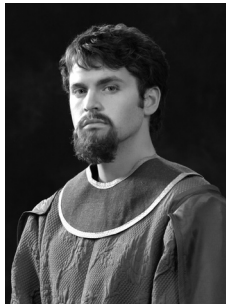
While Richard II was in prison, he was killed, and

Bolingbroke was crowned KING HENRY IV.



PRINCE HAL, *King Henry IV's eldest son, led a riotous life with the irresponsible old knight* **SIR JOHN FALSTAFF**.

He stayed away from his father's palace, even when the king's former allies, Northumberland and Worcester, challenged Henry IV's right to the throne.



When Northumberland's son, Harry Percy (called **HOTSPUR***) led a rebellion against King Henry IV, Hal fought to save his father's life and kingdom. At the battle of Shrewsbury, Hal killed Hotspur in single combat.*

At the end of Henry IV's troubled reign, he was reconciled with Prince Hal. The king died, leaving his crown to his son, who became **HENRY V**.

History, *from page 3*

English law Bolingbroke's father, John of Gaunt, would have succeeded his own father, Edward III, and made Henry his legal heir.

Edward III, however, instituted a new law for succession known as primogeniture. Under this system if the eldest son dies before his father, the line of succession passes to the eldest son's eldest son, and so forth, rather than to surviving children of the former monarch.

Of Edward III's seven sons, only three survived their father. Rather than passing his crown on to John of Gaunt, his fourth but eldest surviving son, he gave it to his grandson Richard II, the only child of his deceased eldest son, Edward the Black Prince.

When Richard II died childless in 1400, by the new law of primogeniture the throne should have passed to his cousin's son, the young Edmund Mortimer, the fifth Earl of March and great grandson of Edward III's third son, Lionel, Duke of Clarence. (Edward III's second son, William of Hatfield, died heirless before his father.) The claim by the young Earl of March was controversial, however, since it came through his grandmother, Clarence's only child.

All of this is so confusing that it is little wonder that Holinshed, Daniel, and Shakespeare mistakenly identify the legal heir to Richard II as Clarence's grandson, Sir Edmund Mortimer, who married the daughter of Owen Glendower.

Because the means by which Henry IV came to the throne were at best questionable, England's civil turmoil during his reign was commonly regarded in Shakespeare's day as illustrative of the principle of sowing and reaping: Since Henry IV was a usurper, his reign could not be peaceful and prosperous.

Shakespeare does not offer a definitive view of of Henry IV's claims to the crown. Whether or not they were valid, the playwright portrays the first Lancastrian king as a man plagued personally and politically by strife and grief.

In **Henry IV, Part 1** the king suspects that his son's dissolute life is the consequence of his own wrongdoing. In **Henry IV, Part 2** he acknowledges that his actions have engendered envy and hate in the men who helped him to the throne. They rebel because he has failed to "pay his debt" to them.

Yet Henry IV is the established power in England when the action of **Henry IV, Part 1** begins, and the rebellion Hotspur and the other Percies forge against him is clearly a greater evil than his own misdeeds. If Henry IV is guilty, according to Tudor orthodox thought, the rebels against his authority are doubly so. Hotspur's father, Northumberland, is marked as an anarchist by his dishonesty, cowardice and rage.

Northumberland's brother Worcester is suspicious, jealous and crafty. He clearly sees the nobles' revolt as an act of treason and bears much of the blame for the human loss his side suffers because he does not report the king's offer of amnesty.

The tragic end of the rebels' misguided enterprise confirms the treachery of its devices. Shakespeare creates Hal's slaying of Hotspur at Shrewsbury to bring the two youths' rivalry to a superb dramatic culmination.

Henry V (1599) is the final play in the tetralogy that begins with **Richard II**. It is also Shakespeare's last chronicle play and the crowning achievement among all his history plays. It depicts the heroic exploits and personal triumphs of Hal as Henry V, no longer a reckless youth but a king who is at once wise and witty, merciful and just.

The first four history plays Shakespeare wrote (c. 1589–93)—and likely the first of all his plays chronologically—treat the events following those depicted in the Henry IV and V plays: **Henry VI, Part 1, Henry VI, Part 2, Henry VI, Part 3** and **Richard III**. From 1455 to 1485 the Lancasters were involved in a prolonged struggle for the throne with the Yorks, descendants of Edward III's fifth son, Edmund of Langley, Duke of York. Known as the Wars of the Roses, the conflict ended when the Lancaster king Henry VII married Elizabeth of York in 1486. Their offspring became the first Tudor monarch, Henry VIII.

How Does a Play Mean?
Script, Production Style, and Design

King Henry IV: The Shadow of Succession is an adaptation by Charles Newell and David Bevington of Shakespeare's two Henry IV plays. It preserves the ideas of the plays individually but has a greater degree of dramatic balance and more suspense. The script also incorporates lines from **Richard II**, **King John**, and **Henry V**.

In condensing Shakespeare's works about Henry IV and his son, the Prince of Wales, the adapters focused on the theme "a young man's coming of age." Rather than the plays' pageantry and politics, their selection highlights Hal's relationship to the rival father figures Henry IV and Falstaff.

In addition to condensing the two Henry plays, the adapters have rearranged some lines, reassigned others, and combined or eliminated some characters. After the mock interview between Hal and Falstaff, for example, it is the Lord Chief Justice, not a sheriff, who finds Hal in the Boar's Head, and he is accompanied by the king himself.

In keeping with the unique qualities of the script, Classic Players has chosen a look and production style (or manner in which the play will be presented) that break with traditional stage realism. Rather than presenting an image of everyday life in all its exact details, the staging invites playgoers to consider what might be going on in the minds of the characters as well as what they say and do.

In addition to the Shakespearean soliloquy (a non-realistic device which features characters who speak aloud while they are alone), the script includes the repetition of key passages.

Both King Henry IV and Falstaff, for example, repeat their opening lines in later scenes. This repetition gives the audience insight into two paternal figures who vie for Hal's affections: Henry IV is engrossed with his son's behavior and whereabouts during a time of national crisis: "Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?" But Falstaff is preoccupied with revelry, not responsibility: "If I had a thousand sons, I would teach them . . . to addict themselves to sack."

Another interesting feature of the production style is that in some scenes action occurs simultaneously in more than one playing area. For example, while Hotspur and his fellow conspirators plot their rebellion against Henry IV, Hal can be seen on another part of the stage arming himself for battle.

Later in the same scene Henry IV appears upstage and repeats lines from his earlier confrontation with Hal in a vignette that suggests Hal's memory of the encounter. Thus as the tension between clashing parties builds toward armed conflict, the audience enjoys the illusion of being in more than one place at the same time.

Stage techniques such as these which do not aim at producing a mirror image of real life are called nonrealistic. Both realistic and nonrealistic staging techniques have been instrumental in successful performances of Shakespeare's history plays over the centuries. During the 19th century producers were especially fond of using period costumes and elaborate sets for the history plays. Their aim was to produce verisimilitude, or lifelikeness, on stage.

Shakespeare's own company, however, employed neither strict stage realism nor spectacular sets and scenery. Costumes consisted of used clothing from the playwright's own day, and it was often mixed with styles from various other periods with no regard for historical consistency. There were no stage lights and no actresses—all the roles were played by men and boys. The major medium for creating pictures in the minds of playgoers was the words of the script.

By contrast, today's acting companies coordinate their efforts with a production designer, who creates the entire visual universe of a play. Unlike Shakespeare's audiences, modern playgoers expect a different look for each production they see.

Jeffrey Stegall's production design for **The Shadow of Succession** relies on suggestion rather than pictorial representation. It is especially appropriate for a play whose characters initially lack a clear vision of life. The script focuses on Hal's encounters with various men who are governed by their illusions. Hotspur's illusion is that life consists of honor and heroic deeds; Henry IV's, that Hal is unequal to the awful burden of the crown; and Falstaff's, that he will acquire position and wealth when Hal becomes king.

The set facilitates the flow of action from scene to scene as well as simultaneous action in two or more locales. It also highlights the opposite worlds Prince Hal finds himself caught between on the road to kingship. One side of the stage represents locales within the residences of Henry IV, and the other side is reserved for scenes in the Boar's Head Tavern and scenes depicting the Percies' rebellion against the king.

The multiple levels of the set offer a key to the script's meaning by suggesting the multiple and shifting layers of perception of the main characters. If Hotspur, who has prized honor above life, dies without gaining insight into the error of his way, his death at least warns Hal of the end of "ill-weaved ambition." Although the aging Falstaff confesses to Doll Tearsheet his fears of being forgotten when he is gone, he approaches death still grasping his shallow illusions. As Henry IV nears death, however, his understanding of life deepens, and he confesses a deep sense of guilt for his political wrongdoing. The king's death in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey suggests that his conscience is at last appeased.

But it is Hal whose perception of himself and life in general deepens most notably. He wisely chooses the middle ground of honor, somewhere between Hotspur's obsession with valor and Falstaff's contempt for it. In ultimately aligning himself with the Lord Chief Justice and rejecting Falstaff, the new king reveals that he has also been enlightened with regard to law and order. In this sphere neither the usurper Henry IV, with his politics of deception, nor Falstaff, whose crimes seem relatively harmless by comparison, has been a sterling example to Hal. At the end of the play Henry V is fully qualified to govern the state he envisions, one "in equal rank with the best govern'd nation."

Finally, the production design for **The Shadow of Succession** places the action in all of history rather than in one actual historical period or place. Although the events that inspired Shakespeare's plays about Henry IV spanned only a single historical decade, the opposition they portray between parents and children, war and peace, order and chaos, duty and pleasure, reason and passion are universal. Shakespeare invites each playgoer to find his own world within the vast universe of **Henry IV**.

Classic Players, 1999

What the Critics Have Said about Falstaff

"Falstaff is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented." (William Hazlitt)

"Falstaff is the greatest creation of the yet undivided being of Shakespeare. He is the creature of Shakespeare's golden prime, of his first maturity." (J. M. Murry)

"Sir John Falstaff represents the top of Shakespeare's achievement in the creation of an immortal comic type." (E. K. Chambers)

"Falstaff is Shakespeare's fullest creation and a prodigious coiner of phrases."

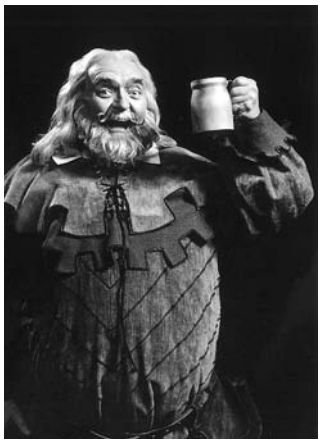
(J. C. Trewin)

Dwight Gustafson as Falstaff, 1956

"Falstaff is Shakespeare's most gifted speaker of comic prose, as Hamlet is his most gifted speaker of a prose which defies categories. But why does Falstaff speak prose? This may seem an idle question: Falstaff is a clown, although a nobleman, and must therefore speak prose; he must, furthermore, represent 'the whole world' that Hal has to banish before he can become England's Harry." (Milton Crane)

"[W]hile recognizing that Falstaff is a 'reverend vice,' 'grey iniquity' and 'vanity in years,' we cover any moral reproof with delights in his irrepressible zest." (Geoffrey Bullough)

"Falstaff is a decided rascal, cowardly and deceitful, but his common sense and tolerance counter the values of Hotspur and King Henry." (Charles Boyce)



William McCauley as Falstaff, 1999

"It is Falstaff . . . who sticks pins in the big balloons of heroism and patriotism, expressing the common man's view of war when he points out that honor and death come together. It is Falstaff who can lie and laugh his way out of any difficulty, and Falstaff who enjoys life so much and makes us enjoy it with him so thoroughly that, like Prince Hal, we cheerfully forgive him all his sins." (Ace G. Pilkington)

"If the new king were to embrace Falstaff and his companions as his friends and advisers, it could hardly be healthy for his reign, but Hal's rejection is public and cruel. It could be seen as turning him into a younger version of his father, so that one might legitimately wonder if he can ever fully emerge from the shadow of his father's misdeeds." (David Brailow)

"Hal is seen as a prig for his treatment of Falstaff, but Falstaff represents the anarchy and vice that have to be rejected in favour of the rule of law under a good king. When he banishes Falstaff, Hal is the perfect king, if not the perfect man." (Peter Quennell)

"Falstaff Examining Prince Hal" by the English painter Robert Smirke (1752-1845) hangs in Rodebeaver Auditorium, courtesy of the Bob Jones University Collection. This large oil painting depicts Falstaff and Hal's mock trial at the Boar's Head. As Falstaff plays the role of the king, a sober portrait of Henry IV can be seen on the wall behind Hal's head. Smirke was one of the earliest and most influential interpreters of Shakespeare in art. Falstaff, who appears in three Shakespearean plays, is one of the playwright's most popular characters, both on the stage and in art.

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