

25th Anniversary Season
William Shakespeare's
HENRY IV

Written between 1596 and 1598 this production blends Shakespeare's Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2. The plays chronicle the civil strife during King Henry IV's reign and the rise of young Prince Hal, who, under the tutelage of Sir John Falstaff, will become one of England's most beloved rulers, Henry V.

Central Park | June 11 - 30, 2024

Carl Schurz Park | July 2 - 7, 2024

The Battery/Castle Clinton | July 9 - July 14, 2024

nycclassical.org



A ruptured line of succession—can the monarchy survive?



Early seventeenth-century portrait
of King Henry IV

King Henry IV begins the play “shaken and wan with care,” a far cry from the brash and charismatic Henry Bolingbroke he had been in *Richard II*. He faces resistance fighters and factions that had supported Richard, the king whom Henry had deposed and supplanted (and who was assassinated while imprisoned). Equally troubling is Prince Hal, his first-born son and heir to the throne, a misbehaving skallywag who consorts with thieves and drunkards. Even worse, the king’s cousin Mortimer has a valid claim to the throne. The outlook for the king, who fears losing his family's shaky hold on power, rests in the balance. Somehow King Henry IV must find a way to legitimize his reign.



Statue of Prince Hal with the crown in Stratford-Upon-Avon



TIME

February 23, 2023

The *Henriad* experiments with genre, “the history play,” a blend of comedy and tragedy in exquisite equilibrium—that allows Shakespeare to convey the turn from the medieval to the modern where ideals of honor, chivalry, and community yield to colonialism, early capitalism, and individualism. Through the history plays, Shakespeare reconstructs England’s relationship to its past and charts his country’s violent path to global dominance. In *Henry IV*, Shakespeare pits medieval chivalry and honor associated with the valiant Hotspur, against Elizabethan calculation and timing associated with the crafty Prince Hal. King Henry IV is caught between the gallant son he wishes for in Hotspur and the unruly son he sired in Hal.

Likewise is Hal poised between two father figures—the irreverent Sir John Falstaff who leads him oft into temptation, and the king who pushes him to act like a prince and future king. Key words to follow are “honor,” relating to Hotspur and the old traditions, and economic metaphors of “debt,” (a pun on “death”), “payment,” and “redemption” related to Hal and the new order.

PLACE

Shakespeare divided the play’s landscape into four realms, each representing a genre and a language style: the king’s court—history/poetry; the tavern, or Falstaff’s shadow court—comedy/slang; the countryside—rebels/prose; and Wales—romance/Welsh. Hal traverses these physical and verbal landscapes with relative ease, a sign of his adaptability.



Mistress Quickly’s skill at selling “sack” (wine) was inspired by Central Park ice vendors.

We love playing these scenes in New York City parks, which have their own delightful geographic and linguistic variations.

CHARACTERS

One way of differentiating the play's many characters and factions is to sort them into teams (and logos).



TEAM ROYALS

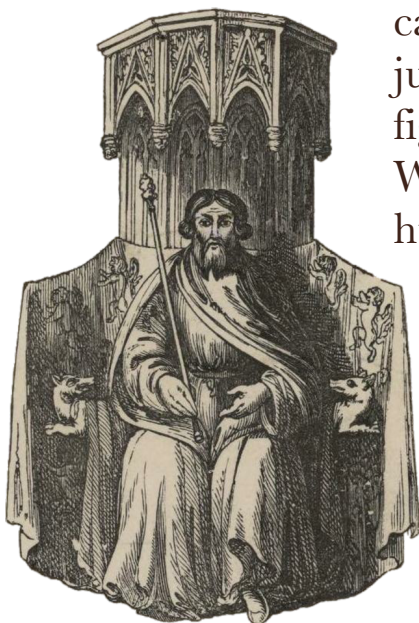
Henry IV: Known in *Richard II* as Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, he rallied a group of allies against King Richard who had barred him from inheriting the Duchy of Lancaster. Uneasy on his throne, the king must find a way to bring his first-born son into line and stabilize his power. At the outset, Henry is surrounded by allies Northumberland, Hotspur, Worcester (all of the Percy family), Westmoreland, Blunt, and his latter-born son John of Lancaster. When the Percys revolt under Worcester's leadership, the king needs Prince Hal's support more than ever.

TEAM REBELS and RESISTERS

Hotspur: "O miracle of men" to his wife; Hotspur is "a wasp-stung impatient fool," to his father, Northumberland. This idealistic medieval hero refuses to meet the changing times in which honor falls to deception. As northern English nobility, Hotspur's family was difficult for the king to control. The Percys continue to be a powerful English family and still inhabit Alnwick Castle in Northumberland.



Mortimer: Named heir to the throne by Richard II, Mortimer directly threatens the king's authority. He, or in our case, *she* would have succeeded Richard had Henry IV not jumped the queue. When the play opens, Mortimer has been fighting on the king's behalf and is taken prisoner by the Welsh forces. The king refuses to ransom her, a grievous humiliation for a royal personage.



Owen Glendower, more properly **Owain Glyndŵr**: The last Welsh-born man to be "Prince of Wales," "the irregular and wild Glendower" remains a hero in Wales for leading a fifteen-year revolt against English rule. He professes to have magical powers but Hotspur has his doubts. In director Stephen Burdman's adapted text, Glendower is merged with Archibald Douglas of Scotland. He represents Celtic resistance to English rule.

An image of Owain Glyndŵr
from his Great Seal



JAMES HACKETT AS FALSTAFF.
Henry Smith, 1870-1871.

**James Hackett as Falstaff
in the 19th century**



TEAM FALSTAFF

Sir John Falstaff: Lord of Misrule, Falstaff is a figure of excess, exaggeration, and deflection, and one of the most memorable characters of Shakespeare's canon. Based on Sir John Oldcastle (1370-1417) and originally named for him, Shakespeare changed the name to Falstaff after Oldcastle's descendants decried the unsavory portrait of their kinsman. On stage, Falstaff was so popular that Shakespeare brought him back for the city comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Prince Henry (Hal): "The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales" consorts with fun-loving thieves and hustlers—including his best pal Falstaff—biding his time as a prodigal son, until the precise moment England most needs him. Bardolph, Poins, Pistol, and Nell Quickly fill out Falstaff's shadow court.

MASCULINITIES

As these teams suggest, the play is a study in masculine types; in Shakespeare's text, very few female characters get much stage time, an insufficiency we have rectified. Worcester is now Hotspur's aunt rather than his uncle, and, crucially, our Mortimer is female, a change that further undermines her claim to the throne in this deeply patriarchal system. However, when Shakespeare wrote the play, England was ruled by a woman.

NAME GAMES

This play presents more characters than names. Indeed, the four most prominent personages are all named Henry! Shakespeare uses the paucity of names to suggest the duplicity of language and how easily one person may be exchanged for another—Harry for Harry. It also evokes ironic parallels and juxtapositions, leaving open the question of who is being real and who is pretending (or "counterfeit").

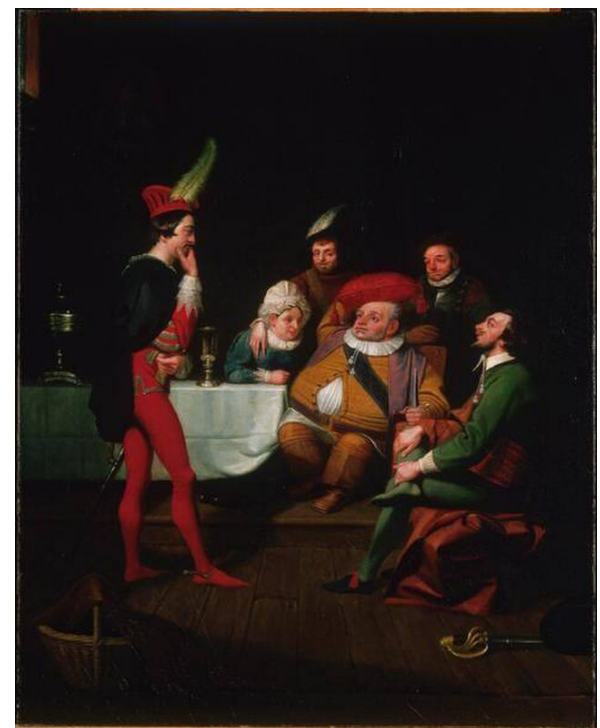


Fun Fact: An ad for the Falstaff Brewing Corp., a St. Louis brewery named in honor of Sir John Falstaff. The beer bottles were featured in the Gus Van Zant film *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), which is loosely based on *The Henriad*.

THEMES TO CONSIDER

Thieving: Henry has stolen the crown from an anointed king, and as he attempts to distance himself from that treachery, his counselors remember how they helped him and plot to steal it back. Concurrently, Sir John Falstaff and his team intend to rob pilgrims carrying gold meant for the royal coffers. Unbeknownst to Sir John, Hal and Pistol hatch a plan to rob the robbers. This meta-robbery is an implied critique of Henry's crown-stealing as well as the rebels' plan to steal it back from the stealer. As Falstaff remarks, chorus-like, "A plague upon it when thieves cannot be true one to another!"

Metatheater: Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *Henry IV* self-consciously refers to playacting and performing. In a "play extempore" Hal and Falstaff anticipate the king's stern lecture to his disobedient son and role play it. Then they swap parts. Hal understands that being king means playing the role of king and, as every great actor knows, success is all in the timing. In this way, Shakespeare hints that monarchy amounts to no more than showmanship, props and costumes. Reinforcing this conceit, on the Shrewsbury battlefield, Glendower struggles to tell who is the king and who is not, suggesting, perhaps, that *anyone* can be king, a point that Henry IV himself ponders when he says, "For all my reign hath been but as a scene."



Falstaff playing the king, 1850s

Exchange: Falstaff and Hal's role-swapping highlights the play's concern with exchanges of all kinds. The king even fantasizes that his biological son and his ideal son were switched at birth. Falstaff brings this theme into his speech when he uses a rhetorical figure called "antimetabole" to deflect accusations. "You have misled the youthful Prince," cries the Lord Chief Justice to Falstaff who responds, "The young Prince hath misled me," an exchange of words that illuminates the unstable political situation in which even a king can be deposed.

Fathers and Sons: Many father and son pairs populate this play—literal and figurative, biological and symbolic. At about the same time Shakespeare wrote this play, Shakespeare's own son Hamnet passed away at the age of 11, and like Henry IV, Shakespeare's own father, John, was aging and atoning for his sins.

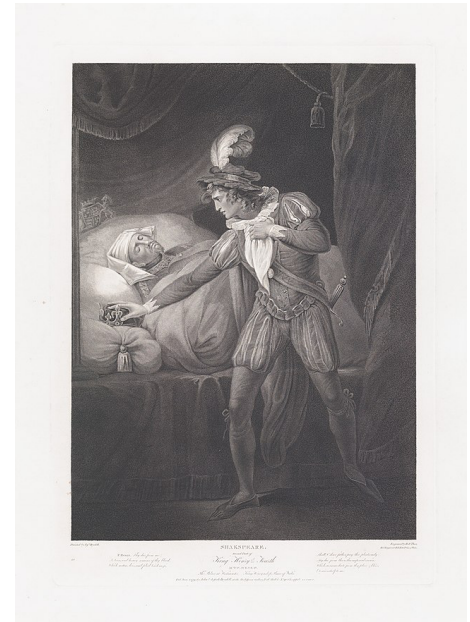
Embattlement: The play presents long-sword battles waged for control of the land, a physical representation of the play's psychic battles such as Hal and Hotspur's vying for the king's approval. Embedded therein are thematic battles: honor vs. craft, idealism vs. cynicism, and virtue vs. vice." Prince Hal has the devil (Falstaff, the tempter) on one shoulder and the angel (Hotspur, the ideal knight) on the other. Which will prevail?

FINAL THOUGHTS

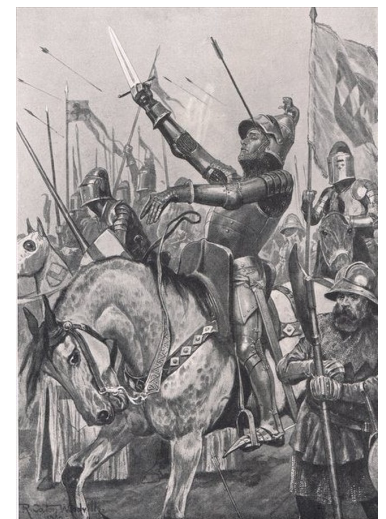
As we follow the escapades of Hotspur and Hal, Falstaff and King Henry, it might be tempting to project the play's themes and the questions they raise onto our own time. Succession has been a fertile theme in art and life in recent years. As usual, Shakespeare reminds us that, *plus ça change, plus c'est le même chose!*

Enjoy the Show!

Dramaturgy by Dr. Sid Ray, Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Pace University, and proud New York Classical Theatre Board Member



Prince Hal with his father, reaching for the crown



Hotspur at the Battle of Shrewsbury

GLOSSARY



Image of King Henry V,
Cassell's History of England

Ague: malarial fever
Apollo: Greek mythology, God of the sun
Belie: slander
Belie him: not tell the truth
Bombast: empty words
Buff Jerkin: leather jacket worn by jailers
Buckram: stiff linen cloth
Bung: pick-pocket also hole-stopper
Capon: chicken
Canker: ulcer (and) wild rose
Cavil: quibble
Cozening: cheating
Corrival: rival
Cutpurse: pick-pocket
Cudgel: a short, thick stick used as a weapon
Cuttle: knife used by pick-pockets for cutting purses
Diana: Greek mythology, goddess of the moon
Discomfited: defeated
Divination: conjecture and prophecy
Dropsied: puffed up, turgid, pretentious
Dropsies: a disease where the body retains fluid
Durance: durable service & prison clothing (dual meaning)
Extempore: improvised
Forsooth: indeed, in truth, truly
Gib: male cat
Iteration: repetition (of scriptures)

Lards: enrich
Liegman: vassal, subject, follower
Lubber-Guts: fat guts
Moiety: portion
Overween: presume too much
Pannier: large basket
Peascod: pea-plant
Popinjay: parrot
Poncet (box): perfume (box)
Prophecy: to predict the future
Quicksilver: liquid mercury
Rogue: vagrant, beggar
Sack or Canary: fortified wine imported from mainland Spain or the Canary Islands
Scurvey: contemptible, wretched
Sepulcher: tomb
Skimble-skamble: nonsensical
Swagger: blusterer, quarreller
Tilly-Fally: nonsense, fiddlesticks
Tripartite: triple or three parts
Unyok'd: undisciplined
Veriest: most exceeding
Visards: masks
Wag: fellow, mischievous lad
Wan: pale
Zounds: by Christ's wounds

Henry IV PLAYLIST:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6kwRiXPrI2vwiUT06uEBXK>

The Boys are Back in Town / Thin Lizzie
Devil or Angel / The Clovers
Superstition / Stevie Wonder
Fight for your Right / Beastie Boys
Shots / LMFAO feat. Lil John
Take the Money and Run / Steve Miller Band
Been Caught Stealing / Jane's Addiction
Father & Son / Cat Stevens
Stop Draggin' My Heart Around / Stevie Nicks & Tom Petty
Old Town Road / Lil Nas X
I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) / Proclaimers
Fat Man in the Bathtub / Little Feat
I'm Still Standing / Elton John
Redemption Song / Bob Marley
It's a Family Affair / Sly and the Family Stone
Love is a Battlefield / Pat Benatar
I Heard it Through the Grapevine / Marvin Gaye
You Should See Me in a Crown / Billie Eilish
Old Man / Neil Young
Take a Bow / Rhianna
Unbreak my Heart / Toni Braxton
Here Comes the Sun / The Beatles

