Henry IV Part 1

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

King Henry IV was born into the House of Plantagenet (on his father John of Gaunt's side) and the House of Lancaster (on his mother's side). Born Henry of Bolingbroke, he later became the tenth king of England (and the first Lancastrian to hold the throne) after deposing King Richard II. Like his character in the play *Henry IV Part I*, the historical King Henry IV spent much of his reign stamping out rebellions and defending himself against treasonous plots cooked up by the historical figures of Owen Glendower and Henry Percy.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Henry IV Part I is the second play in the tetralogy of Shakespeare plays known as the Henriad, which includes *Henry IV Part 2* and *Henry V* Together, the plays enact the historic rise of the House of Lancaster to England's throne. *Richard II* tracks Henry Bolingbroke's defeat of King Richard II to become King Henry IV; *Henry IV Part 1* and *Henry IV Part 2* track King Henry IV's reign, struggle to keep his throne, and eventual death; and *Henry V* follows the reign of King Henry V, who is still Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part 1*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Henry IV Part I*
- **When Written:** 1596-1597
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1598
- **Literary Period:** Elizabethan England
- **Genre:** History play
- **Setting:** England, 1402-1403
- **Climax:** The Battle of Shrewsbury
- **Antagonist:** Hotspur

EXTRA CREDIT

Fan of Falstaff. Sir John Falstaff was Queen Elizabeth I's favorite Shakespearean character and the queen's wish to see Falstaff in love eventually inspired Shakespeare to write *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

Real-life Falstaff. There's strong evidence that Shakespeare based the character of Falstaff on the historical Protestant martyr John Oldcastle and that 'Falstaff' was originally named 'Oldcastle' in the play. It's believed that the character name was changed under pressure from John Oldcastle's descendants, who didn't want their ancestor associated with a drunken buffoon.

PLOT SUMMARY

In 1402 England, King Henry IV is forced to postpone his plans for crusades to the Holy Land in order to tend to unrest in England: Hotspur, Glendower, Mortimer, and Douglas have been fighting and the **bloodthirsty** warrior Hotspur refuses to turn over his war prisoners to the king, an ominous sign of disloyalty. Meanwhile, Prince Hal is drunkenly frolicking his youth away with Falstaff and Poins, even though King Henry wishes Hal could be the honorable soldier Hotspur is. In private, Hal reflects that his frivolous corruption is just an act and he will soon emerge into his true, honorable self, all the more impressive for being such a stark contrast. Hotspur argues at court with King Henry over the prisoners and over ransoming the captured Mortimer (whom the king insists is a good-for-nothing traitor). Hotspur emerges infuriated that his family is being disserved by the very man it helped raise to the throne back in the days of King Richard II. Behind Henry's back, Worcester lets Hotspur and Northumberland in on a rebel plot he has strategized against the king. Hotspur eagerly embraces the plot and has no patience for Richard Scroop's letters advising him to be cautious. He hurries to take action and bickers with Lady Percy on his way out.

As the rebels craft their plot, Prince Hal unfolds a plot of his own as he and Poins disguise themselves so that, after Falstaff, Bardolph, Gadshill, and Peto rob travelers carrying riches to the king, Hal and Poins can then easily rob their cowardly friends of the robbed loot. Later at the tavern, Prince Hal and Poins egg Falstaff on in outrageous lies about his bravery facing his robbers. When Hal reveals his ruse, he declares Falstaff's cowardice exposed, but Falstaff insists he has been valiant as ever, he simply knew he shouldn't wound a prince. Prince Hal

receives a message from his father, summoning him to court and recounting the mounting treason plot. Hal and Falstaff take turns play-acting King Henry. When the sheriff arrives in search of Falstaff's stolen loot, Hal covers for his friend.

In Wales, Hotspur, Mortimer, Glendower, and Worcester meet to pursue their plot and Hotspur argues heatedly with Glendower about **celestial signs** and with everyone about his prospective portion of the land they will win from the king. Lady Mortimer serenades her beloved husband in Welsh, a language he feels miserable not understanding. Hotspur bickers with Lady Percy. At London castle, Hal apologizes to King Henry for his irresponsible behavior and promises to redeem himself to honor in his father's eyes. Back at the tavern, Falstaff insists to Hostess Quickly that he's been pickpocketed, a claim she and Hal both call nonsense.

At Shrewsbury, Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas prepare for battle and receive the bad news that Northumberland and Glendower won't be able to join them. As an army captain (a position secured for him by Hal), Falstaff drafts cowardly men who pay him to fill their spots with pathetic lowlifes, leaving Falstaff rich and his troops helpless. Hotspur and the rest of the rebels sneer at King Henry's efforts to negotiate peace. Back at York, Richard Scroop tries to drum up more allies for the rebels by writing to friends.

On the morning of the battle, King Henry attempts once more to negotiate peace but Worcester self-servingly misrepresents the king's peace offering to the rebels as a battle cry (he fears a peace treaty will make him pay for Hotspur's sins against the throne). The Battle of Shrewsbury commences and Douglas first slays the loyal Sir Walter Blunt, who is pretending to be King Henry to protect the king. Prince John surprises everyone by being an immensely brave soldier. Douglas fights King Henry himself, whose life is narrowly rescued by Prince Hal's intervention. Hal then fights and kills Hotspur. Falstaff fakes his own death to escape being killed by Douglas, then claims to have killed Hotspur himself. King Henry's side wins the battle. The king executes Worcester and Vernon while Hal spares Douglas' life. The play ends with King Henry laying out his strategy for peace in England.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales) – As comfortable in the Boarshead Tavern as he is in the court or on the battlefield, Prince Hal is as fun-loving and mischievous as he is noble and authoritative. Though King Henry and Hotspur initially dismiss Prince Hal as a good-for-nothing party boy, Prince Hal reveals himself to be the most powerful character in the play. As he brags to Poins, Hal can talk with and befriend any sort of person and this amiable adaptability empowers him in ways that the stodgy King Henry and rash Hotspur can never compete with.

Sir John Falstaff – Falstaff is Prince Hal's best friend and a merrily obese clown who loves drinking and eating and shamelessly avoids work, war, and responsible adulthood. Unafraid to lie about being more noble than he really is, Falstaff's seemingly mocking musings on the nature of honor and war turn out to contain some of the most profound thinking in the play.

Hotspur (Henry Percy) – As the son of Northumberland and nephew to Worcester, Hotspur is a rebel and a Percy. He is a hotheaded, **bloodthirsty** warrior who can't control his speech or restrain his own rages. Hotspur furiously resents King Henry's power and proudly looks down on Prince Hal, whom he believes to be a lowlife, dishonorable sissy compared to himself.

Sir Walter Blunt – A loyal noblemen and messenger for King Henry who dresses up as the king during the Battle of Shrewsbury in order to confuse the rebels and protect the king. Sir Walter Blunt is slain by Douglas but never gives up his duty, claiming to be the king right up to the end.

MINOR CHARACTERS

King Henry IV – The ruler of England and father to Prince Hal and Prince John, King Henry is a considerate and peace-loving monarch who works very hard to spare his subjects **bloodshed** by doing everything he can to negotiate peace with the rebels before the Battle of Shrewsbury.

Northumberland – A rebel and a Percy. Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland is brother to Worcester and father to Hotspur. Along with Worcester, he helped King Henry depose Richard II in the past and feels he has been subsequently under-rewarded by King Henry.

Earl of Worcester – A rebel and a Percy, Thomas Percy, the Earl of Worcester is brother to Northumberland and uncle to Hotspur. He strategizes and sets the treason plot in motion. He also tries to prevent his hotheaded nephew from acting too impetuously.

Earl of Douglas – A rebel and a Scotsman. Though he fights with Hotspur at the play's start, they are soon united in their treason plot against King Henry. Like Hotspur, Douglas is an eager, **bloodthirsty** warrior.

Owen Glendower – A rebel and Welshman who believes in **celestial signs** and is father to Lady Mortimer and father-in-law to Mortimer. Though he is on the side of the rebels, he doesn't manage to get his forces together in time for the Battle of Shrewsbury.

Edmund Mortimer – An English nobleman, the Earl of March. Hotspur tries to convince King Henry to ransom Mortimer when he is captured by Glendower at play's start, but the king believes that Mortimer is traitorous. Mortimer's later

friendliness with the rebels proves the king was right.

Earl of Westmoreland – A loyal nobleman and advisor to King Henry who the king pairs with Prince John in battle.

Lady Kate Percy – Hotspur's neglected wife. Lady Percy and Hotspur are constantly bickering in each other's presence.

Lady Mortimer – Mortimer's devoted wife and Glendower's daughter. Unable to speak English, Lady Mortimer can only speak to her husband in Welsh, which he can't understand.

Ned Poins – A friend of Prince Hal's whom Falstaff loathes. Poins plots the practical joke he and the prince play on Falstaff.

Bardolph – A friend ofFalstaff and regular at Boarshead Tavern who helps rob the travelers.

Peto – A friend ofFalstaff who helps rob the travelers.

Gadshill – A friend of Falstaff who helps coordinate their robbery of the travelers.

Prince John of Lancaster – King Henry's young son who surprises everyone by being a brave warrior at the Battle of Shrewsbury.

Richard Scroop – The Archbishop of York, he is a rebel and friend of the Percy family who worries from a distance about their treason plot. He supports the rebels not with military might but with strategic advice and letters to potential allies.

Sir Richard Vernon – A rebel and close friend of Worcester who goes along with Worcester's plan to misrepresent King Henry's peace offering to the rebels.

Sir Michael – A rebel and friend of Richard Scroop's who delivers his letters.

Hostess Quickly – The hostess who runs Boarshead Tavern.

Carriers – Two carriers at the inn who suspect Gadshill of shady business.

The chamberlain – The chamberlain at the inn who helps Gadshill plot his theft.

The sheriff – The sheriff comes to Boarshead Tavern in search of Falstaff and the stolen loot.

Francis – A dim-witted tavern-boy at Boarshead Tavern.

Vintner – The host of Boarshead Tavern.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

APPEARANCES

By playing constantly with characters' appearances, *Henry IV Part 1* asks questions about the difference between appearance and essence—about the difference between what a character seems to be and what that characters is—and about the possibility (or impossibility) of concealing one's true character. The play opens with King Henry's lament that his son Prince Hal does not seem to be princely material at all, which leads the king to wonder whether his Harry (Prince Hal) was mistakenly born as the Earl of Northumberland's son Harry (Hotspur), a young man whose honor and ferocity seem much more princely. Although King Henry's wondering is more hope than actual suspicion, it raises a very real question: must one *seem* royal to *be* royal? Prince Hal's trajectory through the play demonstrates that the answer is both Yes and No. Though he begins the play as a party boy who seems a misfit prince and an embarrassment to his father the king, by play's end Prince Hal has become the man King Henry always hoped he would become and fulfills the role his birthright has prescribed for him: he is a serious, brave, honorable prince who appears just as noble and authoritative as a monarch is expected to appear. Yet even before he undergoes his outward transformation in appearance, Prince Hal alerts the audience to the power of his essential character to transform his outward semblance. In his aside in Act I, Hal explains that he will begin acting like a dignified prince soon and that his errant behavior will in fact end up enhancing the honorability and nobility of that new (true) appearance by providing a dramatic contrast.

In addition to the major transformation of Prince Hal's appearance, the play is full of smaller demonstrations of the power of true vs. false appearances. Poins and Prince Hal's ruse of robbing their friends after their friends had themselves robbed some travelers presents a virtuosic play on appearances: they conceal their identities to rob Falstaff and his cronies in order first to enjoy Falstaff's attempts to appear courageous as he concocts his story of being robbed and, second, to reveal their ruse, demonstrating that the robbery was not what it appeared to be and laughing at Falstaff's extreme cowardice, exposed for all his friends to see. Falstaff and Prince Hal also constantly reference one another's appearances, making relentless fun of each other's respective corpulence and skinniness as if their looks were inextricably connected to their essential characters. At play's end, appearances play a crucial role in the Battle of Shrewsbury as King Henry's side dresses up numerous soldiers in the king's robes to deceive their opponents. Douglas cannot even discern who the real King Henry is and thinks that he's killed the king when he's actually slain Sir Walter Blunt. Still, Blunt's commitment to his false appearance (he maintains that he's King Henry until his dying breath) reveals his true loyalty to the king. At the same time, Falstaff acts out the appearance of a

corpse in order to save his life and reasons to himself that playing dead makes no false appearance at all, since only a real corpse is a real "counterfeit." Ultimately, the play suggests that, no matter how contradictory appearances might seem, they can also provide fairly faithful mirrors for essences.

HONOR

Throughout the play, characters pursue honor even while they also ask questions about the nature of honor and wonder about its value. Prince Hal's trajectory through the play transforms him from a fun-loving teenager into a mature prince and is described in terms of honor: he goes from a position of dishonor at play's start (where King Henry laments his recklessness and wishes he could embody the honor of young Hotspur) to a position of high honor at play's end (where his father, along with everyone around him, praises his courage and nobility). Just as crucial to the play is Hotspur's quest for (further) honor, which, insofar as it leads him to wage the Battle of Shrewsbury against King Henry, drives the entire plot action of the play. For Hotspur, this battle is the only honorable thing to do. In his mind, he has to wage war to protect his family's honor and restore the esteemed position he feels the Percy clan deserves.

As to how one goes about acquiring honor, the play avoids committing to a single answer and provides different possible methods. One path to honor is by birth. Hotspur believes he deserves others' respect because he was born a Percy, and Prince Hal secretly trusts his princely blood will protect him from the dishonor he immerses himself in at Boarshead Tavern. Another path to honor is by courageous acts, as Prince Hal describes wiping away his dishonor with **bloodshed** in battle, as Sir Walter Blunt dies bravely and nobly for the King, and as Prince John proves himself (to everyone's surprise) to be a bold, honored warrior at the Battle of Shrewsbury. The play suggests that honor can also be won by noble speech when Prince Hal regains honor in his father's eyes via articulate apologies and promises and when King Henry seems honorable to the audience as he mercifully seeks out peace with the rebels to spare his subjects' bloodshed.

Yet Falstaff's meditations on the nature of honor are so powerful, they call everyone else's understanding into question. Reflecting on the prevailing belief that honor is a valuable quality worth risking one's life to attain, Falstaff asks some serious questions about honor's usefulness: "Can honor set a leg? no. Or an arm? no. Or take away the grief of a wound? No…What is honor? A word? What is in that word 'honor'?…Air." Indeed, his conclusions are hard to argue with and hauntingly imply that all the other characters' earnest quests for honor may be nothing but a hollow enterprise.

THE RIGHT TO BE KING

As a history play, *Henry IV Part 1*'s plot covers a specific historical struggle for the English throne. In this sense, it asks a limited question about the right to be king: do King Henry and Prince Hal or do Hotspur and the rebels have the most legitimate right to rule England? Over the course of the play, each side lays out its case as a complicated series of historical claims, victories, and inheritances: King Henry explains his case to Prince Hal at great length in Act 3 scene 2 when Hal makes peace with his father. Hotspur, in turn, explains *his* case often, ranting about "this canker, Bolingbroke" (King Henry's name before he took the throne) to Worcester and Northumberland and elaborating his own family's right to King Henry's glory.

Yet, as a piece of literature, Shakespeare's play also asks deep, universal questions about the right to the throne and about what makes a good king. Although it was historically accurate that King Henry, Prince Hal (Henry Prince of Wales), and Hotspur (Henry Percy) shared a name, Shakespeare uses this fact to the play's literary advantage: the three Henrys each illustrate a different way of being king and the contrast between them prompts the audience to consider what qualities are best embodied by a monarch. King Henry is sober, wise, and deeply aware of the cost of warfare. He tries hard to temper Hotspur's warmongering ferocity with attempts to negotiate peace. Hotspur is impressively courageous, but the negative parts of his character end up cancelling out the positive ones: he is so proud it makes him foolhardy, and he rages into battle, underestimates Prince Hal, and winds up killed by play's end. Of the three Henrys, Prince Hal ultimately seems the most agile ruler. Even when he acts like a light-hearted teenager, Hal remains a keen reader of human character, an unpretentious friend to Englishmen of every class, and a persuasive orator. Later, when he abandons his partying antics before the Battle of Shrewsbury, his mature intelligence shines even brighter. He ultimately shows himself to be every inch the brilliant, eloquent king that will be featured in *Henry V*.

LANGUAGE

Like every one of Shakespeare's plays, *Henry IV Part 1* explores language: its power to inspire action, to transform attitude, to reveal a character, and to conceal one. Prince Hal's character transformation is initially expressed not by actions but by words: he confides to the audience in an aside that his essential nobility will cancel out his wild appearance. Soon after, he describes his remorse for the past and ambition for the future to King Henry and the king is fully convinced by (and overjoyed to hear) his son's articulate confession. The words that describe his son's wish for transformation are, the King feels, as valid as the actions that will prove that transformation complete.

As much as it is a play about the English throne, *Henry IV Part 1* is thus also a play about the English language and about the ways in which a person's language is connected to that person's destiny and social position. The scenes of the play skip between the high language of the court scenes in verse and the low language of the tavern scenes in prose. Prince Hal is compelling (and powerful) in part because he can hop so adroitly between these realms and can speak comfortably in each. He is, crucially, the only character capable of such acrobatic feats of eloquence. While it intertwines high and low speech, the play also mashes together different kinds of English, featuring Welsh and Irish alongside British English. And, if Prince Hal illustrates how to effectively use language to consolidate power, the play also illustrates misuses of language and the disempowering consequences of such mistakes. Unlike the savvy and adaptable Prince Hal, Hotspur is unable to control his language and often lets his prideful anger run away with his rhetoric, speaking furiously and acting rashly until his eventual demise at Hal's hand. The entire Battle of Shrewsbury, in fact, is fought because of mangled, misrepresented language: instead of conveying King Henry's true, peaceful message to Hotspur, Worcester recounts that message as a crass, disrespectful goad to war, prompting Hotspur and the rebels to charge onto the battlefield. Had King Henry's language been conveyed faithfully, the play implies, it's possible that the **bloody** Battle of Shrewsbury might have been avoided.

WARFARE

Like many of Shakespeare's history plays, *Henry IV Part 1* builds towards a critical, throne-determining battle at play's end. Knowing the historical facts of the story, the audience already knows how this battle is going to turn out. Still, Shakespeare uses the circumstances leading up to the fighting and the conditions of the battlefield itself to offer deeper meditations on warfare, applicable to any battle at any point in history. Many of these meditations intertwine the theme of warfare with the theme of honor, and contemplate violence's participation in each. Prince Hal describes the way he'll go about accruing honor through war imagery: "When I will wear a garment all of **blood** / And stain my favour in a bloody mask, / Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it." Yet the grotesque savagery of these images calls into question whether honor won by violent acts should really be considered noble. Indeed, Hal seems most noble when he mercifully releases the war prisoner Douglas at the end of the play out of respect for Douglas' bravery. King Henry, by contrast, is admirably reluctant to go to war and keenly aware of what a horrific toll battle takes on human life. He continually attempts to persuade Hotspur and the rebels to negotiate peace. Yet, even as King Henry is trying to avoid war in England, he starts out the play with no qualms about fully supporting violent crusades in the Middle East. This hypocrisy suggests that King Henry's compassion for human life may not extend beyond the borders of his own nation. Although, for the most part, characters appreciate and hope to preserve a peaceful England, the play also refers to the evils bred by long peacetime: widespread complacency and weak, cowardly men.

As in the theme of honor, Falstaff proves the most penetrating thinker in the play. His reflections on drafting soldiers are, as often with Falstaff, both superficially funny and devastatingly resonant: by drafting rich, fearful men, he amasses a wealth of pay-offs and ends up conscripting only the poor, beggarly Englishmen least fit to be soldiers. Brushing off Prince Hal's appalled reaction to the quality of his troops, Falstaff reminds the prince that they're just "food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better:...mortal men, mortal men." Indeed, his description of what it means to be a soldier is painfully apt—most soldiers' only role is to add one more faceless body to a human wall of defense. Though select individuals end up honored warriors, the majority of men die on the field. Indeed, as Falstaff notes later, only three of the men he conscripts survive the Battle of Shrewsbury.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CELESTIAL EVENTS

In *Henry IV Part 1*, **celestial events** are controversial symbols. Some characters, such as Glendower and Bardolph, believe in their symbolic power and read the future in the skies, trusting the motions of the sun, moon, stars, and meteors to foretell events in the human world. Yet for other characters, such as Prince Hal and Hotspur, celestial events are totally devoid of symbolic power and are just ordinary natural processes that have nothing to do with human history. Throughout the play, celestial events play a dual role: they function both as an affirmation of symbolic significance in the natural world and as a refutation of that significance, depending on who's looking at them.

BLOOD

Like **celestial events**, **blood** functions as a complex symbol in *Henry IV Part I*. Everyone believes that it represents courage and power, but different characters understand this representation to work in different ways. For the violent-minded warriors Hotspur and Douglas, power comes from shedding the blood of others. They calculate their own power (and evaluate the power of those around them) based on how many enemies they have killed in battle. Yet, for King Henry and Prince Hal, power comes from sparing others'

blood and avoiding violence in favor of treaty-making and effective strategy. Both characters are conspicuously merciful, as King Henry tries multiple times to negotiate peace with Hotspur and Prince Hal frees the war prisoner Douglas at play's end. It is ultimately King Henry's and Prince Hal's understanding of power—power as the intelligent avoidance of bloodshed rather than as muscle-flexing bloodbath—that triumphs in the play.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Henry IV Part 1* published in 2005.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood;
No more shall trenching war channel her fields,
Nor bruise her flowerets with the armed hoofs
Of hostile places...
The edge of war, like an ill-sheathed knife,
No more shall cut his master.

Related Characters: King Henry IV (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.5-16

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the play, England has just finished a great civil war. Out of the civil war, Henry IV has emerged victorious, cementing his status as the unquestioned monarch of England. Henry IV's victory in the civil war is crucial, because it establishes him as the *strongest* force in the land, and therefore, presumably, the man most *deserving* of the title of monarch.

But Henry IV does more than simply boast of his own military might. Rather, he frames his victory in the civil war as a victory for England as a whole. Cleverly, Henry presents himself as reinforcing the natural order of life, preventing his country's "children" from killing one another. In such a way, Henry plays the part of a kindly, loving father, implicitly accusing all his rivals to the throne of upsetting the natural order and causing undue bloodshed. (Henry's rhetorical maneuvers are crucial, because his *own* status as a monarch is rather questionable, since he began his career by overthrowing Richard II.)

...thou mak'st me sad and mak'st me sin
In envy that my Lord Northumberland
Should be the father to so blest a son—
A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,
Amongst a grove the very straightest plant,
Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride—
Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him
See riot and dishnor stain the brow
Of my young Harry. O, that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle clothes our children where they lay,
And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!

Related Characters: King Henry IV (speaker), Northumberland, Hotspur (Henry Percy), Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.77-88

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, King Henry IV criticizes his own child, who shares a first name with the child of Lord Northumberland: Henry. Half-seriously, half-jokingly, Henry IV wishes that his and Northumberland's children had been switched at birth: his own child is a disobedient youth, while Northumberland's child is proud and honorable.

Little does Henry IV that his child, Prince Hal, will grow up to be arguably the greatest of all English monarchs, Henry V. For now, though, Hal *appears*to be a disgrace to his family--he spends all his time goofing around and getting drunk. Henry IV is understandably upset that his child isn't a more accomplished leader, because he's thinking about his own legacy as a monarch; he needs a suitable male heir to ensure that his "line" will endure.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

So, when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

Related Characters: Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales)

(speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.2.215-224

Explanation and Analysis

Here Prince Hal first demonstrates his status as a devious, skillful politician. Contrary to his father's beliefs, Hal is fully aware of his dishonorable behavior. Hal chooses to behave so badly, he claims, because ultimately his bad behavior will make his future honor and ascendancy to the throne of England more impressive. Basically, Hal wants to tell the best "story." An obedient, loyal child is no fun. But a disobedient child who *becomes* a great king--now that's a good story.

It's possible to interpret Hal's words ironically, of course. Like so many spoiled rich kids who never amount to anything, Hal might just be *telling* himself that he'll turn a new leaf somewhere down the line, despite the fact that he has no real ability to do so--what he thinks is just an act may have become his real character.

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

With many holiday and lady terms
He questioned me; amongst the rest demanded
My prisoners in your majesty's behalf.
I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold—
To be so pestered with a popinjay!—
Out of my grief and my impatience
Answered neglectingly, I know not what—
He should, or should not—for he made me mad
To see him shine so brisk, and smell so sweet,
And talk so like a waiting gentlewoman
...
So cowardly, and but for these vile guns
He would himself have been a soldier.

Related Characters: Hotspur (Henry Percy) (speaker), King Henry IV

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.3.47-66

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry IV tries to resolve a dispute with Hotspur, the young warrior for whom he has great respect. Hotspur has refused to turn over some prisoners of war to Henry IV. He explains that he's refused to turn them over because the messenger whom Henry IV sent to demand the prisoners was overly effeminate in his manner. Hotspur goes off, criticizing everything about the messenger.

The passage suggests that Hotspur isn't as great and honorable a leader as Henry IV has imagined: on the contrary, Hotspur is easily angered, and he allows his anger to cloud his judgment. Hotspur can't stand being around men who seem effeminate or cowardly--in other words, he's a great soldier but a pretty horrible diplomat. Hotspur is, as his name suggests, too hot-tempered to ever be much of a leader, except perhaps on the battlefield.

But shall it be that you, that set the crown
Upon the head of this forgetful man
And for his sake wear the detested blot
Of murderous subornation, shall it be,
That you a world of curses undergo,
Being the agents, or base second means,
The cords, the ladder, or the hangman rather?

Related Characters: Hotspur (Henry Percy) (speaker), Northumberland, King Henry IV

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.3.164-170

Explanation and Analysis

Hotspur confirms his status as an uncontrollable "loose cannon." Hotspur has just had a tense argument with Henry IV, the king. Now alone with his father, Northumberland, Hotspur continues to criticize the king, faulting him for being "forgetful" (forgetting how Hotspur's family helped him gain the crown) and traitorous. Hotspur is old enough to know that Henry IV has risen to power by killing the former king, Richard II. Hotspur even faults his own father for allowing himself to be humiliatingly "subordinate" to such a monarch.

In short, Hotspur isn't much of a politician, let alone a rhetorician. His speech is full of elaborate mixed metaphors and angry declarations. Hotspur's behavior illustrates what Henry IV is up against: a nation of unruly citizens who don't trust their new king.

Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war,
And thus hath so bestirr'd thee in thy sleep,
That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow,
Like bubbles in a late-disturbed stream;
And in thy face strange motions have appear'd
Such as we see when men restrain their breath
On some great sudden hest. O, what portents are these?
Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not.

Related Characters: Lady Kate Percy (speaker), Hotspur (Henry Percy)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.3.58-67

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hotspur is preparing to instigate an all-out rebellion against King Henry IV. Hotspur's wife, Lady Kate Percy, notices that Hotspur is preparing for war of some kind, but doesn't understand what Hotspur is planning. Kate is perceptive enough to notice that Hotspur hasn't been himself lately: he's been sweating at all times, and making strange noises in his sleep.

Kate's observations are interesting because they paint a picture of what Hotspur is like when he's not on the battlefield. Hotspur, as we might have guessed, can't turn off his warlike instincts, even when he's around the people he loves. Lady Kate has no problem telling that Hotspur is planning something; a clear sign that Hotspur has no gift for lying or deception. The success of Hotspur's plan depends on his ability to mask his feelings--thus, the passage suggests that Hotspur's plans won't amount to much.

Act 2, Scene 4 Quotes

I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour, that I can drink with any tinker in his own language during my life. I tell thee, Ned, thou hast lost much honor, that thou wert not with me in this sweet action.

Related Characters: Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.4.17-21

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a great example of how Prince Hal's experiences as a drinker and "party animal" actually prepare him well for the monarchy. Hal spends a lot of time in taverns, but he uses this time as an opportunity to hone his skills as a politician, a negotiator, and a communicator. Hal has become so adept at making friends with strangers that he can bond with anyone over a beer in just 15 minutes.

From the perspective of Hal's father, Henry IV, Hal's behavior is disgraceful, a mark of how far from the monarchy he really is. And yet we can already tell that Hal is a better politician than his father--he knows how to get along with his subjects and use words and rhetoric to get what he wants. Another important aspect of this is that he's hanging out with commoners--the kind of people the king actually rules, and who make up the majority of the country, but who in a typical monarchy have little to no contact with the royal court. Thus Hal seems surprisingly egalitarian and openminded in his ruling strategy, however "dishonorable" it might seem to the nobility.

Why, hear ye, my masters: Was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? should I turn upon the true Prince? why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true Prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was now a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince.

Related Characters: Sir John Falstaff (speaker), Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.4.279-286

Explanation and Analysis

Here we meet Falstaff, who has just come from a skirmish with masked attackers--whom we know to be Prince Hal and his friends. Falstaff boasts about winning his encounter with the attackers, and offers various details about the skirmish. After Falstaff has bragged enough, Hal coolly reveals to Falstaff that he knows the truth: he was the one who attacked Falstaff. Surprisingly, Falstaff has no trouble recovering from his rhetorical setback: he backpedals and boasts about being perceptive enough to recognize Hal in disguise, and showing mercy to him because he recognized that he couldn't hurt the "true Prince."

Falstaff, is one of the most interesting characters in the play,

famous for both his boorish comedy and his perceptive cynicism. Here he skillfully (if comically) "spins" his cowardice to look like discretion and intelligence, arguing that he's too honorable to touch Prince Hal. While some have interpreted Falstaff as a dishonorable, amoral character, it's difficult to deny Falstaff's charm--even when he's being a coward, Falstaff's gift for language entertains us. Moreover, Falstaff's deftness with language suggests that he's an important mentor for Prince Hal.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

❝ ...at my nativity
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets; ay, and at my birth
The frame and huge foundation of the Earth
Shaked like a coward.

Related Characters: Owen Glendower (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.13-17

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Glendower has joined forces with Hotspur to conspire against Henry IV. Glendower insists that Henry has always had it out for him because he was born under a series of unusual signs: on the day Glendower was born the sky was full of fire, and the earth shook.

Glendower doesn't just say that Henry IV treats him as dangerous because of celestial events; Glendower implies that he really *is* special because of the manner of his birth. Unlike Hotspur (or, we'll see, Hal), Glendower is highly superstitious, and believes that natural signs can be prophesies of the future. Glendower has been brought up to believe that he is special; that his birth was somehow divinely ordained, and he is capable of shifting the natural order of the country. In a way, Glendower's confidence in his own special powers is a self-fulfilling prophecy: because Glendower believes that he's special, he has the courage and the ingenuity to attempt to overthrow Henry IV.

❝ ...you are too willful-blame;
And since your coming hither have done enough
To put him quite beside his patience.
You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault:
Though sometimes it shows greatness, courage, blood—
And that's the dearest grace it renders you,--
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion and disdain...

Related Characters: Earl of Worcester (speaker), Hotspur (Henry Percy)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.182-191

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Earl of Worcester confirms what we already knew about Hotspur: his hot-headedness is getting in the way of the group's plan to start a rebellion. Hotspur finds it nearly impossible to control his own warlike instincts. While such instincts may be useful on the battlefield, the Earl acknowledges, they need to be controlled during peacetime. As a result of his hot-headedness, Hotspur has already alerted Henry IV to the possibility of another rebellion--something that Henry wouldn't have been aware of had Hotspur just controlled his temper.

In short, Worcester is trying to act as an informal mentor to Hotspur. Worcester wants Hotspur to be a great politician as well as a great warrior. If the rebellion is to be a success, then Hotspur will have to do a better job of masking his real ambitions and controlling his language.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

❝ ...I will wear a garment all of blood
And stain my favour in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it.

Related Characters: Prince Hal (Henry, Prince of Wales) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.2.140-142

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hal meets with his long-suffering father, Henry IV. Henry angrily chastises his son for being reckless and drunken in public. He urges Hal to act more honorably, like a proper monarch.

Prince Hal, who's far smarter and more politically-minded than his father imagines, knows exactly what to tell the king. He promises to become a great warrior and defeat Hotspur, who is now leading a rebellion against the monarchy. Hal's speech, which emphasizes blood and carnage, is tailor-made to appeal to society's general idea of "honor" as being closely tied to success in battle. Just as he's planned all along, Hal is preparing to switch from lout to king overnight, pleasing his father and redeeming his reputation.

Act 4, Scene 2 Quotes

Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better: tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.

Related Characters: Sir John Falstaff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.2.66-68

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Falstaff has assembled a ragtag group of soldiers to fight on behalf of Hal in the war with Hotspur. Falstaff introduces his troops to Hal, who immediately criticizes them for their meagerness and cowardice. Indeed, most of the troops Falstaff has recruited have paid off other people to fight in their place--with the result that Falstaff's troops are skinny, weak, and generally bad soldiers, but Falstaff himself has gotten richer. Falstaff defends his troops on the grounds that they're just as good as any other soldiers--all soldiers are mortal, after all.

Falstaff's words have been interpreted in many different ways. Falstaff is making the argument that a man is a man, at the end of the day--in other words, a good soldier is basically the same as a bad soldier, because in the harsh reality of war, death comes to most, and it comes at random. Falstaff's phrase, "food for powder" implies that his troops are doomed to be nothing more than "food"--i.e., they're just pawns in a vast war. It's nobles like Henry and Hotspur who make all the decisions and win all the glory, while thousands of nameless soldiers just fight and die for their rulers' cause. In general, Falstaff shows himself to be cynically perceptive of the harsh realities of combat, even as he's also being incredibly callous.

Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

...the King hath sent to know
The nature of your griefs; and whereupon
You conjure them from the breast of civil peace
Such bold hostility, teaching his duteous land
Audacious cruelty. If that the King
Have any way your good deserts forgot,
Which he confesseth to be manifold,
He bids you name your griefs; and with all speed
You shall have your desires with interest,
And pardon absolute for yourself and these
Herein misled by your suggestion.

Related Characters: Sir Walter Blunt (speaker), King Henry IV, Hotspur (Henry Percy), Earl of Douglas, Earl of Worcester, Sir Richard Vernon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.47-57

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry IV sends a messenger to Hotspur and his followers, who by this point in the text have instigated a full-out rebellion against the king. Henry asks Hotspur to reconsider his actions--he promises to forgive Hotspur for his act of rebellion and pay Hotspur's peers well if they declare their loyalty to him. In short, Henry IV is trying to avoid a bloody war--but too late.

Henry IV's actions show that he's generally a good king, and prefers peace to bloodshed, even if it's "honorable" bloodshed. If he were as volatile as Hotspur, he certainly never would have offered any kind of apology or reparations, but would have immediately launched into battle. At the same time, were he as agile as Prince Hal, Henry might have been able to use rhetorical skill and timing in a better way, to actually prevent war.

Disgraced me in my happy victories,
Sought to entrap me by intelligence,
Rated mine uncle from the council board,
In rage dismissed my father from the court,
Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong,
And in conclusion drove us to seek out
This head of safety, and withal to pry
Into his title, the which we find
Too indirect for long continuance.

Related Characters: Hotspur (Henry Percy) (speaker), King Henry IV

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.104-112

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hotspur responds to Henry IV's peace offerings. Instead of submitting to Henry IV's authority, as Henry had hoped, Hotspur reiterates his hatred for the king: he explains that Henry IV has always mistreated Hotspur and Hotspur's family, sneakily breaking his promises to them in order to ascend to the throne. Now, Hotspur aims to defeat Henry and claim the throne of England for himself.

Hotspur's response proves that it was perhaps a bad idea for Henry IV to offer Hotspur peace so late in the game. By this point in the text, Hotspur's mind is made up: he thinks he has to follow through with his plan to fight Henry to the death. Therefore, sending a messenger to offer truce accomplishes nothing. Furthermore, the peace messenger only makes Hotspur angrier, and sends the message that Henry IV is frightened and desperate. Hotspur takes an obvious pleasure in listing his "beefs" with Henry IV, and in fact puffs up his own courage and confidence in the very act of rejecting Henry's offer.

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

These things, indeed, you have articulate,
Proclaim'd at market-crosses, read in churches,
To face the garment of rebellion
With some fine colour that may please the eye
Of fickle changelings and poor discontents,
Which gape and rub the elbow at the news
Of hurly-burly innovation:
And never yet did insurrection want
Such water-colours to impaint his cause

Related Characters: King Henry IV (speaker), Earl of Worcester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.1.73-81

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry IV comes to negotiate with the Earl of Worcester, one of the rebellious aristocrats who have allied with Hotspur. Henry IV asks Worcester why he's rebelling, and Worcester "paints a picture" of Henry IV's traitorous behavior: as Worcester sees it Henry has caused the rebellion by provoking Hotspur's family for so many years. Henry's response to Worcester is interesting: instead of acknowledging that Worcester has a point, he just dismisses Worcester's points as a sob story. He essentially says that Hotspur is just greedy to be king, and so has concocted this story of grievances and declared it all over the country in order to make his grab for the throne seem sympathetic and legitimate.

The passage reinforces the fact that Henry IV has seriously underestimated his own actions. Even now, he refuses to believe that he's mistreated his aristocrats in rising to the throne, suggesting that Henry believes in his own inherent right to rule--a serious flaw for a monarch, particularly one who himself only became king by overthrowing the previous ruler. Furthermore, Henry IV doesn't use his conversation with Worcester as an opportunity to negotiate at all--he just makes Worcester madder by refusing to accept Worcester's point of view. Henry IV is, in short, out of touch with his own followers--and that's why some of these followers have banded together against him.

Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word "honour"? What is that "honour"? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism.

Related Characters: Sir John Falstaff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.1.131-142

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Falstaff--who's about to go into battle on behalf of Prince Hal--criticizes the concept of honor. Falstaff has been pressured to fight because of the principle of honor (i.e., Falstaff's loyalty to Hal, and his confidence in his own abilities). And yet Falstaff doesn't see the point of honor at all. Honor is a meaningless concept because it compels men to go to battle, causes them to be injured, and then doesn't act as a "surgeon." In short, honor demands a

lot of people, and doesn't give anything back. Furthermore, Falstaff sees honor as a mere "scutcheon"--an ornamented shield--essentially, a fancy word to cover up the harsh realities of greed, ambition, and violence.

Falstaff's speech seems pretty reasonable by modern standards: the old English code of honor (which compelled thousands of men to fight in silly wars and brutally lose their lives) doesn't hold much currency anymore. Of course, it's also important to note that Falstaff is really only criticizing the concept of honor because he's frightened of fighting. Falstaff is "wrong but right"--honor may be a sham, but Falstaff is still a hypocrite for boasting of his bravery and then fearing to fight.

Act 5, Scene 2 Quotes

It is not possible, it cannot be,
The King should keep his word in loving us;
He will suspect us still, and find a time
To punish this offence in other faults:
Suspicion all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes...
Look how we can, or sad or merrily,
Interpretation will misquote our looks...
Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know,
In any case, the offer of the King.

Related Characters: Earl of Worcester (speaker), King Henry IV

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.5-27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Earl of Worcester has returned to his fellow rebels, including Hotspur. Worcester has just learned that Henry IV will pardon the rebels if they surrender to him right away. Worcester doesn't quite trust that Henry will keep his word--he's sure that even if Henry doesn't kill the rebels, he'll still find ways to punish them and their families. Therefore, the rebels' only chance is to go through with their fighting. Nevertheless, Worcester is worried that if Hotspur finds out about Henry's offer of a truce, Hotspur will accept it. (Crucially, Worcester knows that he, Worcester, will be punished more harshly than Hotspur.) Therefore, he decides to keep Henry's offer of truce a secret, and instead to relay the message the Henry was crass and argumentative.

Even at this late point in the play, war could be avoided if Worcester had just told Hotspur the truth about Henry IV. Worcester's decision to keep his information secret underscores the power of language and communication--a few sentences perhaps could have prevented battle altogether.

Arm, arm with speed: and, fellows, soldiers, friends,
Better consider what you have to do
Than I, that have not well the gift of tongue,
Can lift your blood up with persuasion.

Related Characters: Hotspur (Henry Percy) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.2.78-82

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hotspur tries halfheartedly to rally his troops with language. Hotspur is a hot-headed youth, and loves a good fight, but he knows that he has no talent for words. Instead of trying to "pump up" his troops with rhetorical flourishes, Hotspur just orders them to go out and fight the enemy.

The passage is another confirmation of Hotspur's weaknesses as a leader. Hotspur is a good warrior, but he doesn't know how to lead other warriors--doing so takes a talent for communication that Hotspur lacks altogether. In *Henry V,* the sequel to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, we'll see a masterly example of how to whip a group of soldiers (a "band of brothers") into a frenzy with Hal's "Saint Crispin's Day" speech.

Act 5, Scene 4 Quotes

I fear thou art another counterfeit;
And yet, in faith, thou bear'st thee like a king:
But mine I'm sure thou art, whoe'er thou be,
And thus I win thee.

Related Characters: Earl of Douglas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.4.35-38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry IV faces off against the Earl of Douglas, one of the rebels. On the battlefield that day, at

least one man (Sir Walter Blunt) has already pretended to be the real king, thus protecting Henry's life. (The warriors are so covered with armor that it's easy to disguise one's identity.) Douglas here worries that Henry IV is another impostor--someone pretending to be the monarch in order to protect the "real" Henry IV.

The passage is an important encapsulation of the ambiguities of kingship in the play. In one sense, it suggests that the only thing that really makes a king are appearances and external trappings--a crown, royal armor, etc. Thus any king at all could be a "counterfeit," and Henry's only right to the throne is the fact that he was strong enough to take it by force. But Douglas also admits that Henry bears himself "like a king," suggesting that there is something inherently royal about true monarchs. This connects to the idea of "divine right," or the belief that kings are naturally chosen by God to rule, and something in their very blood makes them royal and different from other men.

Act 5, Scene 5 Quotes

Ill-spirited Worcester, did not we send grace,
Pardon, and terms of love to all of you?
And wouldst thou turn our offers contrary,
Misuse the tenor of thy kinsman's trust?
Three knights upon our party slain today,
A noble earl, and many a creature else
Had been alive this hour,
If like a Christian thou hadst truly borne
Betwixt our armies true intelligence.

Related Characters: King Henry IV (speaker), Earl of Worcester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.5.2-10

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the battle, Henry IV and his troops have won, and the Earl of Worcester has been captured. Henry IV is surprised to learn that Worcester hasn't passed on his offer of peace to the other rebels--Worcester deliberately concealed the opportunity for a truce from Hotspur and the others. Henry IV points out that Worcester could have prevented mass slaughter if he'd just told the truth "like a Christian" instead of thinking only of himself.

Henry IV's observation is right, but wrong. Henry is smart enough to respect the power of language and communication--because Worcester refused to pass along the message, many innocent people died. And yet Henry can't see that he *himself* also could have avoided a rebellion. If he'd been more attentive to his people and his followers, he could have nipped it in the bud.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The play opens on a room in the palace in London where King Henry, the Earl of Westmoreland, and Sir Walter Blunt gather with attendants. King Henry announces that, though England has been recently embroiled in **bloody** civil wars, such battles are, to his great relief, over. England can now focus its energies on the Christian crusades in the Middle East that Henry has been planning for the past year. He asks Westmoreland whether the royal Council has approved his proposed crusades.

The opening of the play immediately connects the themes of appearances, the right to be king, and warfare: King Henry seems at first to be a staunch pacifist, committed to a peaceful England safe for his subjects. Yet his eagerness to launch (inevitably violent) crusades contradicts his apparent pacifism.

Westmoreland tells King Henry that, in the midst of the Council's discussions, they received a message from Wales that Edmund Mortimer (the Earl of March), has been captured by the "wild" Welshman Owen Glendower in battle. Glendower has brutally butchered Mortimer's English troops and rendered unspeakable mutilations upon the corpses. King Henry replies that he supposes his crusades must be delayed.

Although upcoming speeches and incidents in this play will equate bloody, violent battle with masculine nobility and honor, the bloodshed here is not seen that way: Glendower's violence is understood as "wild," brutal, overly extreme and, by implication, dishonorable.

Westmoreland explains that there's more bad news to top off the Mortimer tragedy. Hotspur (Henry Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland), and Archibald (Earl of Douglas) fought **bloodily** at Holmedon. King Henry replies that he's heard the outcome of this battle from his trusted friend Sir Walter Blunt, who has sped down from Holmedon to deliver the welcome message that Douglas has been defeated, that ten thousand Scots and twenty-two Scottish knights have been killed, and that Hotspur has captured Douglas' eldest son and other noblemen prisoners. King Henry proudly declares the battle's outcome "a gallant prize." Westmoreland acknowledges that it's "a conquest for a prince to boast of."

Like the battle between Mortimer and Glendower in Wales, the fight between Hotspur and Douglas occurs at England's edges (in this case the border between Scotland and England), where questions of power and the right to the throne are always in hot dispute. Whereas Glendower's bloody acts were described as ignoble brutality, Hotspur's are celebrated as honorable achievements and described as "gallant" and princely.

Hearing Westmoreland's words, King Henry says he suddenly grows sad and jealous of Lord Northumberland whose honorable, upright son Henry Percy (Hotspur) puts the King's own son Prince Henry (Prince Hal) to shame. The king wishes he could prove that the two sons had somehow been switched at birth by a fairy: "Then would I have his Harry, and he mine."

The king, the prince, and Hotspur all share the same name—Henry—but, as the play will soon demonstrate, the three men appear vastly different and embody distinct strengths and weaknesses. King Henry wishes his son appeared more like Hotspur, who seems much more honorable than Hal.

Making himself change the subject, King Henry asks Westmoreland what he thinks of Hotspur's pride, since Percy has sent word that he will keep all his war prisoners for himself and will only give the king one. Westmoreland replies that Percy's behavior is influenced by his uncle Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, who hates King Henry. King Henry explains that he has already summoned Hotspur to a meeting to discuss the issue and declares that he'll hold his Council next Wednesday at Windsor castle. He acknowledges that he must delay his crusades for the present. He tells Westmoreland to return for more discussion soon, since King Henry can't talk everything through now since he is so angry.

The same bold assertiveness that makes Hotspur honorable (by fueling courageous and noble acts on the battlefield) can also make him too proud by leading him to act entitled and cocky (rather than humble and loyal to his superiors, like the king). King Henry sees through Hotspur's appearance to the influence of his uncle Worcester, whom Henry believes to be inspiring and controlling Hotspur's behavior.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Elsewhere in the London palace, Prince Hal and Falstaff banter in one of the prince's rooms. Falstaff asks the time and the prince protests that "fat-witted" Falstaff, who spends all his time drinking "sack" (fortified wine) and sleeping, has no business asking after the time of day. Indeed, Falstaff agrees, he and Hal are men of night and "gentlemen of the shade" who thieve under the moon. He tells Hal not to let "squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty" when Hal is king. "Do not thou," Falstaff urges, "when thou art king, hang a thief." The prince jokes that he'll put Falstaff in charge of all hangings. Falstaff is delighted.

From their first introduction on stage, Prince Hal and Falstaff prove themselves to be dazzlingly virtuosic speakers, using language with a dexterous agility unlike any other characters in the play. Much of this dexterity comes from their prodigious knack for metaphor and simile, describing and re-describing appearances until they appear to turn into their opposites. Still, despite his powers of speech, Hal's jokiness seems incompatible with conventional royal dignity and grandeur.

Falstaff calls Prince Hal "the most comparative, rascalliest, sweet young prince." Then he declares he wishes he and Hal knew where to buy "good names," because a Council lord stopped Falstaff in the street the other day to berate Prince Hal and, though the lord spoke "very wisely," Falstaff ignored his words. Prince Hal compliments Falstaff's behavior, "for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it." Falstaff laments (jokingly) that Hal has corrupted him.

Falstaff's anecdote confirms the tension between Hal's appearance and his position in the royal family: onlookers are unimpressed by Prince Hal's appearance and think he acts despicably. Falstaff's quip about buying "good names" implies (somewhat jokingly) that honor can be procured without having to perform difficult, courageous acts.

Prince Hal and Falstaff discuss stealing a purse the next day. Ned Poins enters and he and Falstaff berate each other. Poins proposes that they plan to steal the offerings and money from a group of Canterbury-bound pilgrims and London-bound traders the next morning at 4 a.m. Prince Hal pretends to be baffled by the suggestion "Who, I rob? I a thief?" he asks. Falstaff says Prince Hal lacks "honesty, manhood, [and] good fellowship" unless he agrees to steal. Poins tells Falstaff he'll convince the prince himself and sends Falstaff off. Falstaff leaves for Eastcheap.

As will often happen in the conversations at Boarshead Tavern, conventional truths and values are inverted by Hal and Falstaff's language: Falstaff's pretend bafflement adopts the appearance of an honest man (when he is really a thief) and his criticism of Hal absurdly implies that honorable qualities (like 'honesty' and 'manhood') are earned by thieving.

As soon as Falstaff exits, Points lets Prince Hal in on his real plan: he and Prince Hal will put on disguises and, after Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill commit the robbery, he and Prince Hal will rob their friends. Poins is sure that their friends, "true-bred cowards," will immediately surrender. Later, when Falstaff inevitably lies about his own courage in recounting the incident to Poins and Prince Hal, they can catch him in his lies and make fun of him. Prince Hal agrees to the plot and plans to meet Poins in Eastcheap later. Poins exits.

Poins' plot proposes an elaborate play on appearances: he and Prince Hal will disguise their own appearances in order to make Falstaff's dishonorable cowardice apparent and expose the falseness of their friend's efforts to project an honorably courageous appearance at the same time.

Alone on stage, Prince Hal delivers a speech explaining that, though he acts corrupt, his behavior has nothing to do with his true nature. He compares himself to a personified **sun** who may "permit the base contagious clouds" to dull "his beauty" but who, "when he please again to be himself," can burn those clouds away and shine as bright as ever. Likewise, Prince Hal says he will eventually abandon his mischievous ways and, when he does, his old bad behavior will provide the contrast to make his new good behavior seem even better and more admirable. Hal explains, "my reformation....shall show more goodly and attract more eyes than that which hath no foil to set it off."

Prince Hal's speech presents another complex play on appearances: his irresponsible and dishonorable appearance is, he confides, just a tool to emphasize his true honorable appearance, which he will eventually reveal and will seem all the more impressive for being so opposed to the ignoble appearance he's shown the world thus far.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

In another room of the London palace, King Henry, Northumberland, Worcester, Hotspur, and Sir Walter Blunt gather with attendants. King Henry announces that he's been acting too soft lately but that from now he will "be myself, mighty and to be fear'd," and will therefore reclaim "that title of respect which the proud soul ne'er pays but to the proud."

Although King Henry has declared himself a pacifist, his lines here demonstrate that he also understands and wants to participate in the honor and power won by fearsomeness and the threat of physical force.

Worcester replies that his family (the Percys) doesn't deserve any harsh treatment since they helped King Henry assume his throne in the first place. King Henry orders Worcester out of the room, accusing him of being dangerously prideful and disobediently presumptuous. Worcester exits.

Worcester's claim introduces one of the central conflicts of the play: does King Henry have the right to sit on the throne? Or has he lost that right by failing to reward the Percys who helped him to overthrow the previous king (Richard II) and thereby ascend to the throne?

Northumberland explains that there's been a misunderstanding and that Hotspur never actually refused to turn over prisoners to King Henry. Hotspur himself chimes in, affirming that he's never denied King Henry any prisoners and attributing the misunderstanding to a momentary fit of anger on the battlefield. Apparently, Hotspur had been told to turn over his prisoners by a particularly effeminate, prissy royal messenger who sneered at the soldiers' crude lack of manners and called the corpses "slovenly" and "unhandsome." Insulted, Hotspur had replied angrily and, though he can't remember exactly what he says, insists he didn't mean it. Sir Walter Blunt chimes in, insisting that whatever Hotspur may have said under such circumstances is dead speech and that he shouldn't be punished for it as long as he "unsay it now."

Northumberland's and Hotspur's assurances try to reverse the appearance of disloyalty that Hotspur projected when he refused to turn over prisoners. Hotspur's disdainful description of the royal messenger illuminates his personal value system: he accords honor to physical force and courage, and is disgusted by men who aren't at home on a battlefield. This marks the first of many times that Hotspur's rash speech will get him in trouble. Both Hotspur and Blunt try to diminish the truth and power of words by brushing them aside, insisting that one can "unsay" what has been said.

King Henry protests that in fact Hotspur still denies the crown his prisoners, since he has only agreed to turn them over on the condition that King Henry pay ransom to free his brother-in-law Mortimer from Glendower (who captured Mortimer in battle). Yet Mortimer, King Henry insists, is a traitor and no friend of Mortimer is a friend of his.

King Henry is unconvinced by the loyal appearance Northumberland and Hotspur (with Blunt's help) have attempted to create through polite, loyal language. He sees right through their words, he claims, to a traitorous spirit.

Hotspur protests that Mortimer has always been completely loyal to King Henry and that he has battle wounds—"those mouthed wounds"—to prove it. Mortimer, Hotspur claims, fought Glendower one-on-one for nearly an hour and took far too many wounds for the king's sake to be "slander'd with revolt." King Henry calls Hotspur's story of the fight a lie. He forbids Hotspur from speaking any more of Mortimer and demands to be given the prisoners right away, telling Hotspur he'll face grim consequences if he doesn't comply. King Henry and Sir Walter Blunt exit with attendants.

Hotspur's protests insist that physical acts—and the bodily scars that those physical acts might incur—are a kind of language of their own. This thinking suggests that aspects of a person's appearance (such as their battle wounds) can communicate just as effectively as one's mouth can. Indeed, Hotspur explicitly compares Mortimer's wounds to a mouth: "those mouthed wounds."

Worcester returns. To Worcester, Hotspur angrily declares his loyalty to "the down-trod Mortimer" and vows to raise him higher than the "unthankful" King Henry, whom he calls "this ingrate and canker'd Bolingbroke." Hotspur explains what's just transpired, saying that King Henry "look'd pale" and "trembling" at the mention of Mortimer's name. Worcester says this makes sense, since (the now dead) King Richard proclaimed Mortimer next in line to the throne. Northumberland affirms this, remembering that King Richard was shortly afterwards deposed from the throne and murdered by Bolingbroke (a.k.a. King Henry).

Worcester and Hotspur's exchange elaborates the Percy family's perspective on King Henry's right to be king. To their eyes, Henry is an undeserving monarch, cowardly, disrespectful and ungrateful to the Percy family he owes his throne to. King Richard II was the previous king (whom King Henry deposed) and Worcester's account of his proclamation lays out further evidence for the Percy family case against Henry.

King Richard's proclamation is news to Hotspur, who says that King Henry's animosity towards Mortimer makes total sense to him now. He delivers a long speech describing how unfair it is that the Percys are so mistreated by King Henry, since Worcester and Northumberland helped him rise to the throne in the first place. He urges Worcester and Northumberland to "redeem your banish'd honours, and restore yourselves into the good thoughts of the world again" by seeking revenge against King Henry.

For Hotspur, King Henry's position on the throne is inextricably connected to his own (and the Percy family's) honor. As long as King Henry remains king, the Percys will be, he believes, deprived of the honor they deserve. Only by deposing him can they regain that honor.

Worcester interrupts Hotspur's speech, telling him to "say no more" for Worcester wants to tell him a secret. Hotspur waxes poetic about pursuing danger and adventure. Northumberland comments that Hotspur's "imagination of some great exploit" has made him too impatient. Hotspur exclaims that it's easy "to pluck bright honour" to redeem those who deserve it. Worcester comments that Hotspur only understands metaphors and figures "but not the form of what he should attend."

Once again, Hotspur's language runs away with him and gets him in trouble. His father and uncle both try to shut him up, and Northumberland points out a major flaw in his son's speech: it doesn't correspond to the actual situation at hand ("the form…he should attend") but rambles out into grandiose metaphors, hollow appearances.

Worcester tries to explain a plan but keeps getting interrupted by Hotspur's excited outbursts about his loyalty to Mortimer, his refusal to give up his prisoners, and his vow to get revenge on King Henry. Worcester finally refuses to talk until Hotspur has calmed down enough to listen. Northumberland calls his son "a wasp-stung and impatient fool" who can't listen to anyone but himself. Hotspur protests that he is driven crazy with anger by the thought of a conniving King Henry stealing Richard's throne. Then he finally agrees to listen to Worcester.

Hotspur continues to demonstrate just how powerless he is to control his own language: even his blood relations can't stand his rhetorical rashness and excess.

Worcester lays out his plot: Hotspur will release his prisoners without ransom, keeping only Douglas' son as a bargaining chip against Scotland. Meanwhile, Northumberland will forge an allegiance with the Archbishop of York (Richard Scroop), who resents King Henry for killing his brother. They'll then unite the forces of Scotland, York, and Mortimer against King Henry. Hotspur praises the plan.

By uniting all the parties that don't think King Henry deserves his throne, Worcester will raise a formidable army against the king.

Worcester says they'll carry out their plan soon, since King Henry has always been suspicious of them and is now starting to punish them. He tells Hotspur to wait to act until he receives Worcester's OK by letter. Hotspur exclaims excitedly that he hopes they'll be taking action as soon as possible. All exit.

Worcester knows that the Percys won't be able to uphold their appearance of loyalty to King Henry much longer—it's already starting to fray. Hotspur is, as always, eager to jump onto the battlefield.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

At an inn-yard in Rochester, Carrier 1 and Carrier 2 gripe about packing up and caring for horses and about getting flea-bitten. They discuss the goods they're packing up for their masters journeys: bacon, ginger, turkeys.

As with the scenes at Boarshead Tavern, Shakespeare's choice to give lines to the two carriers introduces another type of speech—the English of servants—into the play.

Gadshill enters and asks the two carriers to lend him a lantern to check on his horse, but the carriers are suspicious of Gadshill and refuse. They exit to go wake up their masters, who will want to travel together for safety since they are carrying riches.

The carriers rightly see through Gadshill's appearance of innocence and don't trust his claims to be harmless.

Gadshill calls for the chamberlain and they joke about being thieves. The chamberlain repeats the message he told Gadshill the night before: one of the men staying at the inn will be traveling this morning with 300 gold marks. Gadshill swears to rob the man and he and the chamberlain joke about being hung. Gadshill pretends to be a noble man, one with those who "pray continually to…the Commonwealth; or, rather,…prey on her, for they ride up and down on her, and make her their boots." The two part genially, Gadshill promising to give the chamberlain a share of the loot he plans to steal.

As with Falstaff and Prince Hal's conversation, Gadshill's banter with the chamberlain uses witty, punning language to upend conventional values and invert an image of honorability: by punning on the word "pray," Gadshill's sentence turns a description of honorable upright citizens into corrupt criminals.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Prince Hal and Poins enter on a road at Gads Hill with Bardolph and Peto following a bit behind. Poins tells Prince Hal that he's hidden Falstaff's horse and thrown Falstaff into a rage. Prince Hal and Poins conceal themselves. Falstaff enters shouting angrily at Poins for his horse. He declares that Poins must have drugged him to bewitch him into keeping his company since Falstaff has hated Poins for twenty-two years. Falstaff curses all his friends, lamenting that "thieves cannot be true one to another!" Prince Hal emerges and refuses to help Falstaff find his horse. Falstaff tells Hal to "hang thyself in thine own heir-apparent garters."

This act's virtuosic play on appearances springs into action: first, Poins conceals Falstaff's horse, then he and Hal conceal themselves, then Falstaff claims that Poins has drugged him because he doesn't have any of the friendly feelings for Poins that he sometimes appears to have. Falstaff's lament ironizes the theme of honor by proposing an honor code between (dishonorable) thieves.

Gadshill enters and Poins, Bardolph, and Peto come forward. Gadshill alerts everyone that there's royal money being delivered down this hill towards the royal exchequer. Prince Hal orders the men into position to ambush travelers. When Falstaff worries that they might themselves get robbed, Prince Hal calls him a coward. Falstaff replies that he is no coward, but Prince Hal says that remains to be seen. Poins points Falstaff to his horse and exits with Hal.

Prince Hal affects the appearance of allying himself with his friends (when he is secretly planning to rob them with Poins). Falstaff claims that he is honorable just because he says he is, but Hal insists that honor can only be acquired through actions, that Falstaff must prove himself honorable through his behavior.

The travellers enter and Falstaff, Gadshill, Bardolph, and Peto stop them, demanding money. They drive the travellers offstage. Prince Hal and Poins enter in disguises, prepared, as Prince Hal says, to "rob the thieves" for a good joke. They hide. Falstaff, Gadshill, Bardolph, and Peto re-enter, with Falstaff declaring Prince Hal and Poins "arrant cowards." As they're dividing the loot, Prince Hal and Poins ambush and rob them easily. Falstaff and the others run off, surrendering with hardly a fight. Prince Hal and Poins exit, pleased with themselves.

As they predicted, Prince Hal and Poins are easily able to rob their friends, whose claims to honorable bravery are revealed by their cowardly actions to be nothing but hollow language.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

At Warkworth Castle, Hotspur enters reading a letter from Richard Scroop, the Archbishop of York, that expresses wariness about the dangerousness of Hotspur and the other rebels' treason plot. The Archbishop says he loves the Percy family and supports their cause but thinks the plot is too risky. As Hotspur reads on, he grows more and more infuriated. He first berates the Archbishop for being cowardly, then accuses him of being traitorous and works himself up into believing that the Archbishop will reveal the rebels' plot to King Henry himself. Hotspur, impassioned, resolves to leave immediately to set the plot in motion.

Hotspur, with his typical hotheadedness, has no patience for caution and understands everything in brute terms: either one is honorable and eager to fight, or one is wary of fighting and therefore dishonorable. His own black-and-white understanding of honor twists Scroop's language from friendly advice into traitorous insult.

Lady Kate Percy enters and Hotspur announces he'll be leaving her within two hours. Lady Percy, distressed, begs Hotspur to tell her what's wrong, for he's been neglecting her for two weeks and has been cheerless, sleepless, and without appetite, muttering in his sleep about war. She demands to know what he's up to and says that if he loves her, he'll tell her.

Lady Percy can tell from the appearance of Hotspur's behavior that something is wrong, but she's angry because he hasn't taken the time to deliberately communicate that fact to her in words.

Hotspur calls a servant to prepare his horse. He hasn't been listening to Lady Percy at all, and she repeats her question for him: "What is it carries you away?" she asks. "Why, my horse," Hotspur replies. Infuriated, Lady Percy threatens to break Hotspur's finger if he doesn't tell her the truth. Hotspur angers and says he doesn't love her. Lady Percy, now anxious, asks if he really means that. "When I am o'horseback," Hotspur replies, "I will swear I love thee infinitely." He refuses to confide his plans, tells Lady Percy that she'll be travelling soon too, and exits.

Further evidence that Hotspur is a man of action with no command or sensitivity to language: he at first doesn't hear his wife's speech at all and then, when he does hear it, interprets her words in the shallowest possible way. He next throws around deeply hurtful language (telling his wife he doesn't love her) as if it were nothing but an offhand comment.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Prince Hal and Poins meet in a room in the Boarshead Tavern in Eastcheap. Poins asks where Hal has been and the prince merrily explains that he's been having a good time drinking with some commoners who he's gotten to know on a first-name basis and befriended. They think him "no proud Jack, like Falstaff….but a lad of mettle." Prince Hal boasts that he's such a good, perceptive observer of character that he can "drink with any tinker in his own language" within fifteen minutes of meeting him. He tells Poins that Poins has "lost much honor" in missing out on the experience he just had.

King Henry would surely think it was dishonorable for his son the prince to be associating with common men at the tavern. But Prince Hal sees his behavior as a demonstration of power and a point of honor: he is such a skilled speaker that he can use language to relate to every kind of person, regardless of social position. Indeed, King Henry would be incapable of such adaptability and verbal skill.

Prince Hal sends Poins to the next room so they can play a trick on the slow-witted tavern boy, Francis, by demanding his presence in both rooms and confusing him to the point that he answers every question Hal asks with "Anon" (when he really only means to say 'anon' as an assurance that he'll soon go to the other room from which Poins is calling for him).

Mere moments after bragging about his honorable use of language, Hal uses his verbal dexterity for far less honorable ends. Here he makes fun of poor Francis, who is no match for Prince Hal's eloquence and wit.

Vintner enters and announces that Falstaff and others are at the door. Prince Hal and Poins are giddy in anticipation. Falstaff, Gadshill, Bardolph, and Peto enter with Francis, pouring more wine. Falstaff blusters on about Prince Hal and Poins being cowards for not watching out for their friends—instead of "backing" them, they have shown their "backs" by running away. Prince Hal feigns ignorance and urges Falstaff to elaborate.

Falstaff accuses Poins and Prince Hal of dishonorable cowardice, but he has yet to realize just how dishonorable they have actually been. Falstaff's language continues to be rich in wordplay, punning cleverly on the word "back."

Falstaff describes being ambushed by thieves and robbed of the loot they'd stolen from the travelers that morning. As Falstaff recounts the tale, he keeps embellishing it, multiplying the number of ambushing thieves from two all the way up to eleven. He recounts how he fought them long and bravely on his own. Prince Hal and Poins let him go on for a long time before Hal interrupts and explains that it was all part of his and Poins' trick.

As predicted, Falstaff affects an appearance of honor courage (when he has actually behaved cowardly) and cannot resist exaggerating that appearance with increasingly expansive language.

Prince Hal gleefully declares Falstaff a shameful coward, but Falstaff immediately retorts that the truth of the story only further proves his bravery. He is, he insists, "as valiant as Hercules," but his instinct guided him not to harm "the true prince."

Prince Hal exposes Falstaff's dishonorable cowardice, but Falstaff still manages to have the last word. His quick thinking and well-worded argument rescues his pride.

Hostess Quickly enters and tells Prince Hal that a nobleman sent by King Henry has arrived to speak with him. Falstaff volunteers to get rid of the man and exits.

By sending his drunken friend off to speak with the royal messenger, Hal shows just how little respect he has for the king.

Prince Hal gets Bardolph and Peto to detail the elaborate fakery Falstaff coordinated to make them all look as if they bravely fought thieves: they've hacked up their swords, given themselves nosebleeds, and sullied their clothes. When Hal asks what excuse they have for such cowardice, Bardolph points to the portentous **meteors** which, he says, foreshadow angry times.

Hal is amused to hear about the elaborate lengths Falstaff has gone to in order to put on an appearance of courage. Bardolph's belief in the prophetic power of meteors introduces the symbol of celestial signs.

Falstaff reenters and tells Prince Hal that King Henry has requested his presence at court next morning because a plot by Hotspur, Glendower, Mortimer, Northumberland, and Douglas is afoot. Worcester has run off and King Henry is terrified. Falstaff thinks Hal must be afraid too, but Hal insists he isn't.

Prince Hal may not have pursued honor on the battlefield the way Hotspur has, but his cool reaction to his father's news suggests he would be just as brave a warrior.

Falstaff suggests they practice Prince Hal's impending meeting with King Henry. Falstaff pretends to be the king, taking a chair for a throne, a dagger for scepter, and a cushion for his crown. He delivers a long prose speech as King Henry, chastising Hal for wasting his youth and defiling himself with disgraceful company, of which Falstaff is the only "virtuous" exception.

Act II's second virtuosic play on appearances. Falstaff's props make him seem a ridiculous King Henry. Yet this scene's poignancy derives from the truth that Falstaff is much closer to Prince Hal at this point than the prince is to his biological father. Falstaff can't resist according himself honor.

Prince Hal demands they change places on the grounds that Falstaff doesn't sound like King Henry. Playing the king, the prince sternly berates Falstaff. Playing Prince Hal, Falstaff defends Falstaff, trying to turn Hal's insults into compliments.

Prince Hal is right: Falstaff's speech as the king was spoken in prose, rather than in the royal verse King Henry actually speaks in.

Vintner enters with the news that the Sheriff is at the door demanding to search the tavern. Prince Hal sends everyone into hiding. The Sheriff comes in looking for Falstaff in association with the theft of the 300 gold marks that morning. Prince Hal explains that he's just sent Falstaff off on an errand but, acting cooperative, says that he'll turn him over to the Sheriff the next day. The Sheriff is cordial and defers to Prince Hal without suspicion.

Prince Hal is, as he's boasted, able to adapt his language to suit his situation. Talking with the sheriff, he sounds perfectly mature and responsible. The sheriff's trust proves that Hal's speech is convincing.

As son as the Sheriff leaves, Prince Hal calls out for his friends. Falstaff has fallen asleep in his hiding place and snores loudly. Hal and Peto go through Falstaff's pockets and find numerous receipts for food and (mostly) wine. Hal tells Peto that they'll have to go to war soon but that he'll make sure to secure his friends good positions in the army.

Prince Hal seems to feel warfare is just another frolicsome adventure, and plans to take his friends along for the ride without worrying about whether or not they'll be assets to the army.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Hotspur, Worcester, Mortimer, and Glendower gather in a room of the Archdeacon's house in Bangor, Wales. Hotspur attempts to take charge but can't find his map. Glendower has his map and takes over, telling Hotspur to sit down. He says the fearful King Henry wishes Hotspur were dead, and Hotspur says the king wishes Glendower were dead as well.

Prideful Hotspur wants to be in charge but Glendower takes speaking authority. By telling each other how much King Henry loathes them, Glendower and Hotspur are complimenting one another for being honorably fearsome.

Glendower says it makes sense that King Henry fears him for his birth was marked by fiery celestial portents and a great earthquake, signifying Glendower's power. Hotspur retorts that such "signs" aren't signs at all, but just common, natural phenomena that would have occurred whether or not Glendower was born. Glendower insists that **the sky** was in flames and "the Earth did tremble" in specific announcement of his birth. He elaborates, detailing other portents (such as animals and birds behaving strangely), claiming "these signs have mark'd me extraordinary." Hotspur continues to scoff at Glendower's claims and laughs off his uncle's claims to be able to summon spirits and the Devil, enjoining Glendower to "tell truth, and shame the Devil."

Glendower's speech reintroduces the symbol of celestial signs. For Glendower, appearances in nature are significantly connected to the human world and can foreshadow, prophesy, and react to human events. For Hotspur, by contrast, appearances in nature are nothing but appearances: they lack any inner significance and remain unconnected to human history. This first with Hotspur's belief in honor as an expression of what a man can achieve through action. Nature, for him, doesn't come into it.

Mortimer breaks up Glendower and Hotspur's bickering by calling the men to the map. He shows them the three equal portions the archdeacon has divided the land into: one for Mortimer, one for Glendower, and one for Hotspur. He and Glendower proceed to discuss the next step in their plan: meeting up with troops. Hotspur interrupts to complain that his portion of the land is inferior to Glendower's and Mortimer's because of a river cutting his territory off from fertile land. He threatens to damn the river and Glendower forbids him from doing so.

Appearances are, of course, subjective and, what appeared a fair division to Glendower, Mortimer, and the archdeacon does not appear fair to Hotspur. Once again, Hotspur proves himself unable to listen to anyone's words but his own and interjects in other peoples' conversations.

Hotspur and Glendower argue, and Hotspur insults Glendower's English (Glendower is Welsh). Insulted, Glendower insists he has spoken perfectly refined English since his upbringing in the English court and that his English is far more elegant than Hotspur's. Hotspur says he's glad his English isn't elegant and that he wants nothing to do with sissified, "mincing poetry." Hotspur insists again that he won't back down from his position on the land, then asks whether they should get going. Glendower, who's going to stay behind to finish preparing his forces, says he'll go tell Hotspur and Mortimer's wives that they're leaving. He fears his daughter, Lady Mortimer, will go crazy, since she loves Mortimer so much. Glendower exits.

Glendower and Hotspur's argument connects the themes of language and honor. Glendower is offended by Hotspur's attack on his English since, for him, his language is a point of honor and he takes pride in his refined speech. That said, it's very possible Glendower speaks English with a Welsh accent, rather than the British accent spoken by the Percys. Hotspur is, predictably, unable to equate honor with anything other than courage and war victories: he thinks refined language is dishonorably effeminate.

Mortimer chastises Hotspur for fighting so much with Glendower. Hotspur says he can't help it, he gets so angry listening to "tedious" Glendower's mysticism and faith in portents (what Hotspur calls "skimble-skamble stuff.") Mortimer protests that Glendower is in fact well-read, brave, kind, and rich, and that, though he's thus far restrained himself from blowing up at Hotspur, Hotspur should be careful not to try his patience in the future. Worcester chimes in, calling Hotspur "too willful-blunt" and urging him to "amend this fault" for, though it occasionally lends him "greatness" and "courage," it more often leads him into "harsh rage," rudeness, poor judgment, "pride, haughtiness….and disdain." Hotspur pronounces himself "school'd" and announces that they should bid their wives farewell and leave.

Even Hotspur admits that he can't control his speech. Mortimer tries to make Hotspur see past his narrow-minded value system to appreciate Glendower's refinement. Worcester's diagnosis of his nephew is apt: indeed, the very boldness that spurs Hotspur towards brave war victories ends up handicapping him in peacetime. It makes him, as Worcester says, too proud, haughty, and disdainful.

Glendower reenters with Lady Mortimer (crying at the prospect of Mortimer's departure) and Lady Percy. Mortimer laments that he can't talk with his wife, since he can't speak Welsh and his wife can't speak English. Glendower (Lady Mortimer's father) translates for them and reiterates his daughter's adoration for Mortimer and reluctance to see him leave. Mortimer says he understands "that pretty Welsh" of his wife's looks and that they can understand each other's kisses, and that her voice makes Welsh sound sweet as music to him. Still, he is frustrated that he can't understand her words. Glendower translates: Lady Mortimer wants to take Mortimer's head in her lap and sing him to sleep and Mortimer happily agrees..

Mortimer and Lady Mortimer's relationship adds an interesting dimension to the theme of language: since they don't speak the same language, they can't communicate in words. Yet, even though Mortimer laments his inability to speak with his wife, their behavior around one another shows that their lack of a shared language has not limited their love. They are deeply affectionate and attached to one another and can communicate meaningfully through touch and gestures.

Hotspur remarks that Welsh music is played by the devil and that he'd rather listen to his dog howl. Lady Percy tells him to shut up and listen. Lady Mortimer sings a Welsh song. Hotspur jokes that Lady Percy should sing a song too and, when she refuses, makes fun of her. He announces he'll be leaving soon and exits. Glendower urges Mortimer to hurry up since he must leave soon too.

Hotspur and Lady Percy's marriage provides an ironic contrast to the Mortimers': though they can communicate in a shared language, their relationship is much more tenuous and Hotspur remains hopelessly unable to listen to or understand his wife.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

King Henry and Prince Hal enter a room in the palace in London accompanied by lords. King Henry dismisses the lords so he and his son can speak privately. King Henry says he wonders whether Prince Hal is God's way of cursing him by giving him a son whose "barren pleasures" and "rude society" are an affront to "the greatness of thy **blood**." Prince Hal apologizes and seeks pardon, promising to "purge" himself of his youthful ways.

For King Henry, honor is strictly defined by birth and maintained by conventional behavior: Hal was born a prince and thus King Henry expects him to behave in a stereotypically princely way and spurn all lower-born company.

King Henry launches into a long speech detailing all of Prince Hal's shortcomings: he has lost his Council seat to his younger brother (Prince John), he has alienated the nobles and royalty of the court, he has failed to live up to the expectations for him, and has convinced everyone around him that he will only continue to debase himself.

King Henry continues to point out how dishonorable Hal seems in his eyes. Indeed, Prince Hal has contradicted every conventional expectation for a prince.

King Henry's speech continues, comparing Prince Hal to his own young self. If he had been as "common-hackney'd in the eyes of men, so stale and cheap to vulgar company" as Prince Hal, King Henry explains, he would never have risen to the throne, for his ascent depended at first on people's wonder and awe at him and admiration for his humility in comparison to the foolish, lavish, petty King Richard, who vainly curried public opinion and didn't cultivate the grave, mysterious persona Henry did. Prince Hal, King Henry worries, is like Richard, for Hal has "lost…princely privilege with vile participation."

King Henry's explanation of his own youthful behavior reveals an understanding of power that is very different from Hal's: for King Henry, kingly power comes from building a mysterious persona, limiting one's public appearances, and steering clear of associations with "vulgar" common people.

Prince Hal promises to "be more myself." King Henry continues his long speech, comparing Prince Hal to King Richard and Hotspur to himself. He declares Hotspur a worthier heir to the throne than Hal and lists Hotspur's many honorable victories on the battlefield. King Henry starts telling Hal about Hotspur and his allies' plot to take the throne, then checks himself, asking himself why he would tell such news to Hal, his "near'st and dearest enemy," since Hal would probably take Hotspur's side against him.

When Hal says he'll be "more myself," he means that he'll try to appear more like his father wants him to appear, more like the true essence of princeliness his father believes he should naturally display as the son of a king. For King Henry, Hotspur appears far more honorable and royal than Hal does. The king appreciates Hotspur's pursuit of honor on the battlefield and wishes his own son would follow suit.

Prince Hal denies this and launches into his own long speech asking forgiveness for past behavior and vowing to redeem himself by defeating Hotspur, and affirming he is King Henry's son by achieving glory. Hal says he "will wear a garment all of **blood**" and "a bloody mask, which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it." He will, he swears to God, personally defeat Hotspur and make him "exchange his glorious deeds for my indignities." All Hotspur's honors, Hal promises, will pass to Hal. King Henry professes his faith in Hal's plan and gives his son his blessing.

Hal promises to redeem his nobility and live up to his royal position by winning honor on a (very bloody) battlefield. The prince is, as usual, a canny speaker—he knows just what his father wants to hear and has said it. For his part, King Henry seems satisfied by Hal's language alone and believes that his son's actions will carry out his promises.

Sir Walter Blunt enters and tells them Mortimer has just sent word that Douglas and the English rebels have met and joined forces. King Henry immediately starts planning a schedule for assembling their counter defense. Westmoreland and Prince John will march forth first, followed by Prince Hal, followed by the king himself.

Unlike Hotspur, who seems ever bloodthirsty and eager to rage into fighting without a second's thought, King Henry shows himself to be a more strategic, considerate warrior.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

At a room in the Boarshead Tavern in Eastcheap, Falstaff and Bardolph banter. Falstaff insists he is getting thin, and Bardolph insists he has stayed just as fat. Falstaff tells Bardolph his nose is the fieriest red, and Bardolph insists there is nothing wrong with his face.

As usual at the Boarshead Tavern, Falstaff and his friends poke relentless fun at one another's physical appearances.

Hostess Quickly enters and Falstaff asks whether she's found out yet who picked his pockets. Hostess Quickly replies that there are no thieves in her tavern and accuses Falstaff of claiming to be pickpocketed in order to get out of having to pay her back his debts (Falstaff owes her for clothes she bought him and twenty-four pounds worth of food and drink). Falstaff insists he has been robbed of his grandfather's valuable ring, but Hostess Quickly scoffs, saying she's heard Prince Hal say that ring was only copper. Falstaff berates Prince Hal.

Hostess Quickly insists (with Prince Hal's word to back her up) that Falstaff is simply putting on an appearance of being robbed. In fact, she points out, he has lost nothing of value and is simply trying to distract her from collecting his debts. She thinks he is pretending to have been robbed in order, essentially, to rob her of what he owes her.

Prince Hal and Poins enter. Hostess Quickly and Falstaff fight for the prince's attention, Falstaff complaining about being pick-pocketed and Hostess Quickly insisting that Falstaff has lost nothing of value (which Hal agrees with). Hostess Quickly swears on her "faith, truth, [and] womanhood" that Falstaff has just been berating Prince Hal. Falstaff retorts that Hostess Quickly possesses none of the qualities she swears on. They argue and Hal pipes in with insults for both of them.

Though Prince Hal supports Hostess Quickly's attempt to expose Falstaff's lie, he doesn't resist exposing Hostess Quickly as well, wittily insulting the honorable qualities she attempts to swear her claims on.

Prince Hal asks Falstaff if he was really berating him and Falstaff replies, "Hal, thou know'st, as thou art but man, I dare; but as thou art prince, I fear thee as I fear the roaring of the lion's whelp." When Hal asks, "why not as the lion?" Falstaff explains he would only fear King Henry himself as the lion. Prince Hal berates Falstaff, insisting his pockets were always worthless, and confessing he himself picked Falstaff's pockets. Falstaff declares himself content, sends Hostess Quickly away and she exits.

Falstaff's response to Prince Hal illustrates the two-part nature of Hal's appearance: though Hal is, in one sense, just another tavern regular and a friend on equal footing with Falstaff, he is at the same time a royal so far above the social standing of his tavern peers that Falstaff should revere his power nearly as much as he reveres King Henry himself.

Falstaff asks Prince Hal about the robbery and is dismayed to hear that Hal has returned the gold to the royal exchequer. Prince Hal explains that he is "good friends with my father, and may do any thing." Falstaff tells Prince Hal to rob the royal coffers for him. Prince Hal responds that he's secured Falstaff a position as a captain in the army and bids him meet him next day to receive his orders. Prince Hal sends Bardolph off to deliver letters and Poins off to prepare his horse. Prince Hal exits to ride off to war. Falstaff exits, calling out to Hostess Quickly for his breakfast.

Indeed, by returning the robbed gold and refusing to share it with Falstaff, Prince Hal exercises both his princely authority and nobility. His actions suggest that while he enjoys Falstaff's behavior, ultimately Hal knows what is required of him as the father of a king. Though not obvious, there is a split here between Hal and Falstaff that will eventually come to the surface in Henry IV Part 2. Meanwhile, Prince Hal continues to treat warfare like a light-hearted adventure by giving the very unqualified Falstaff a powerful position, just because they're friends.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas converse at the rebel camp near Shrewsbury. Hotspur and Douglas flatter one another for being brave, honorable warriors. A messenger enters delivering letters from Northumberland that say he has gotten very sick and can't join forces with Hotspur and the rest of the rebels as planned. Still, he cheers on their cause and reminds them there's no backing out now because King Henry has gotten wind of the treason plot. Worcester is worried about fighting without Northumberland's help and forces and fears King Henry's side will suspect Northumberland defected because the rebels are disorganized and fractious.

The treason plot Worcester so carefully strategized is falling apart. Without Northumberland's forces, the rebels' army is much weaker than it would have been and will have a harder time facing the King's troops on the battlefield. Further, the failure of Northumberland to come makes the rebels also look bad, effective morale and their ability to attract allies. Appearance is important to armies, too, not just to individuals.

Hotspur dismisses Worcester's fears, insisting that fighting without Northumberland gives them a chance to win even greater honor and glory for themselves, since their victory will be that much more impressive. Douglas affirms Hotspur's point, saying "there is not such a word spoke in Scotland as this term of fear."

Hotspur is, as usual, unwilling to think of war in practical terms of strategy and safety and can only focus on further opportunities to enhance his honor in battle.

Sir Richard Vernon enters and informs them that Westmoreland and Prince John's are marching towards them with seven thousand troops, and that King Henry and Prince Hal will come with even more. Vernon describes Prince Hal as "feather'd Mercury," magnificently outfitted for battle. Hotspur balks at Vernon's praise of Hal and declares that all King Henry's troops "come like sacrifices in their trim." He is eager to fight Prince Hal and calls for his horse to "bear me, like a thunderbolt, against the bosom of the Prince of Wales." He hotly anticipates the fight of "Harry and Harry," and is confident he'll emerge victorious.

Vernon's metaphor for Prince Hal compares him to a god—the Roman god "Mercury." Hotspur, unwilling to entertain the image of Prince Hal as godly, retorts that the prince and his troops are nothing but sacrifices and implies a comparison between himself and the Roman god Jupiter, whose weapon was a thunderbolt. Hotspur is competitive even in being compared to gods, choosing one even more powerful than the one compared to Hal.

Vernon explains that Glendower, who has been due to arrive shortly, will not to be able to organize his troops in time. Douglas and Worcester are dismayed by this news. The rebels will now have to take on King Henry's thirty thousand troops at a great numerical disadvantage. Hotspur, though, remains optimistic and keen to charge into battle, calling the others to ride into the fighting with him. All exit.

Without Glendower, Worcester's battle strategy frays even further. Yet Hotspur remains unperturbed by the grim facts and focuses exclusively on his dreams of glory and self-confidence in his physical abilities.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

On a public road near Coventry, Falstaff nags Bardolph to go buy him some wine. Bardolph exits. Falstaff reflects that he should be "ashamed of [his] soldiers," for he has abused his role as army captain for his own gain: he has deliberately enlisted ("pressed") wealthy, cowardly men he knew would never want to fight in the war, and those men have paid-off Falstaff to let other men to take their places. Falstaff's troops are now full of "the cankers of a calm world and a long peace": pitiful, old and/or impoverished men, ex-slaves, ex-convicts, young boys, etc. A passerby told Falstaff his troops looked like a bunch of corpses.

Falstaff has, unsurprisingly, proved an ineffective military captain. Instead of acting for the good of his army and cause, he has acted for the good of his wallet. Yet, rather than owning up to his selfishness, Falstaff places much of the blame for his weak troops on the consequences of peacetime. A peaceful England has, he claims, softened its population and rendered them inept warriors.

Prince Hal and Westmoreland enter and Falstaff is surprised to see them, since he thought they'd already ridden off to the battlefield. They explain that they are on their way, and that Falstaff had better prepare to start fighting soon as well. Falstaff tells them not to worry about him. Prince Hal and Westmoreland express dismay at the "pitiful rascals" making up Falstaff's troops. "Tut, tut," Falstaff replies, "food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better….mortal men, mortal men." Prince Hal and Westmoreland exit, hurrying towards the battlefield. Falstaff exits after them, remarking that "a dull fighter" always enters a war towards the war's end.

Falstaff's description of his troops is uttered lightheartedly, but it reveals a grimly profound truth about war: indeed, most soldiers are nothing but "food for powder," mere cogs in the bloody work of battle where the number of soldiers matters far more than any one soldier's individual identity or worth. Hal's dismay again suggests an underlying philosophical difference between him and Falstaff, and that he ultimately is closer in his beliefs to his father than he is to Falstaff, even if he enjoys Falstaff's company and antics.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

Back at the rebel camp near Shrewsbury, Hotspur and Douglas want to charge straight into battle that night, hoping to defeat King Henry's troops before they are all assembled and prepared. Worcester and Vernon try to talk sense into them, reminding them that their own troops aren't fully assembled either and that it would be rash to jump into fighting now.

Hotspur and Douglas are kindred spirits when it comes to warfare: both chomp at the bit to start fighting, regardless of how doomed or poorly planned such a start may be.

Sir Walter Blunt enters delivering a message from King Henry: the king, hoping to preserve peace, has invited the rebels to share their grievances and promises to appease them as fairly as possible and to pardon them for their uprising.

Again, King Henry demonstrates his own pacifism: as a king, he hopes to preserve peace in his country and spare his subjects' bloodshed. He'd rather resolve matters through spoken negotiation than battle.

Hotspur replies that King Henry "knows at what time to promise, when to pay" and launches into a long speech recounting King Henry's past mistreatment of the Percy family. According to Hotspur, King Henry took advantage of Northumberland in the past to steal King Richard's throne and has "disgraced" and conspired against Hotspur himself. Thus the Percy family and their allies are committed to deposing King Henry.

Hotspur has no patience for King Henry's language and declares his promises nothing but empty words. He is obsessed by the Percy family honor and the king's perceived disrespect and will be satisfied by nothing but bloodshed.

Sir Walter Blunt asks whether he should convey their commitment to King Henry, but Hotspur says not to and tells Blunt that he'll send his uncle with their reply in the morning. Blunt says he hopes that the rebels will accept the king's peace offering. All exit.

Showing uncharacteristic restraint, Hotspur manages to reign in his rhetoric and keeps himself from conveying his first rash response to the king.

ACT 4, SCENE 4

In a room in Richard Scroop, Archbishop of York's palace, the Archbishop gives Sir Michael letters to deliver to his brother and others. The Archbishop is wracked with anxiety about the next day's battle, fearing that King Henry's numerous strong troops will defeat the rebels, who are much weaker without Northumberland and Glendower to fight with them. King Henry has heard about the Archbishop's allegiance with the rebels so the Archbishop fears that, if the king defeats Hotspur at Shrewsbury, he'll attack the Archbishop next. He sends Sir Michael off with the letters and prepares to write more to rally additional rebel allies.

This scene is omitted from some editions of the play. As in his earlier letter to Hotspur, the Archbishop shows himself to be Hotspur's opposite: Richard Scroop is an anxious rebel, wary of warfare and fearful that King Henry's troops will prove too strong for the Percys. As a man of the Church and not a warrior, he uses language alone to try to support the rebellion and protect himself.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

At King Henry's camp near Shrewsbury, King Henry, Prince Hal, Prince John, Sir Walter Blunt, and Falstaff observe the dawn. The king says the **blood**-red **sun** looks angry at the day. Prince Hal says the whistling of the southern wind "foretells a tempest and a blustering day." The king says the wind can sympathize with the losers, for the day will look bright to victors, no matter the weather.

King Henry and Prince Hal's exchange links the symbols of celestial signs and blood. Though the king initially supposes that the blood-red sun signifies human emotion (and is thus connected to human events), he then admits that there's no significance to the sun's appearance, that such symbolism is simply human projection.

Worcester and Vernon enter. King Henry says it's a pity that Worcester and the rebels have forced him into "all-abhorred war" and asks Worcester whether he really wants to start a battle. Worcester says he doesn't want war either, that in fact the impending battle was started by King Henry himself, whose past mistreatment and neglect of the Percy family forced the rebels into an uprising against their wills. Worcester's speech describes once again the Percy family's past loyalty to King Henry and their help in his rise to the throne, all of which they feel has gone unfairly unrewarded.

Like his nephew Hotspur, Worcester can't shake the feeling that King Henry has committed unforgivable wrongs against the Percy clan. For him, the impending battle is not something the Percys have cooked up on their own but is instead the inevitable consequence of King Henry's own unfair actions.

King Henry replies that he's quite familiar with Worcester's story, since the Percy family has proclaimed it far and wide in order to disguise their rebellion "with some fine color that may please the eye" of fickle and discontented observers. Never before, the king says, did "insurrection want such water-colours to impaint his cause."

From King Henry's perspective, the Percy family's story is just empty language, used to lend a righteous appearance to a traitorous rebellion.

Prince Hal chimes in to praise Hotspur's famous honor and courage and says that, though he has none of Hotspur's noble deeds to his name, he offers to fight Hotspur one on one "to save the **blood** on either side" of the rest of the troops.

Even as Prince Hal is praising Hotspur's honor, his own actions—attempting to spare his troops unnecessary bloodshed—proves him honorable in a way that the bloodthirsty Hotspur never is.

King Henry reiterates that "we love our people well" and tells Worcester to tell the rebels they have one last chance to accept the king's peace offering. If they do, he will forgive them all and accept them back as friends. Worcester and Vernon exit to convey the message to the rebels.

By repeating his peace offering, King Henry shows just how committed he is to protecting his subjects and to negotiation through speech as opposed to violence.

Prince Hal doubts the rebels will accept peace because Douglas and Hotspur are so hot to fight. King Henry, Sir Walter Blunt, and Prince John exit to prepare the troops in case the rebels insist on fighting.

Prince Hal is, as usual, a perceptive reader of human nature: he knows that Douglas and Hotspur are eager to fight and will ignore his father's words.

Falstaff asks Prince Hal to protect him in battle, but Hal tells Falstaff to "say thy prayers" and "thou owest God a death." Hal exits.

Prince Hal's response may be said jokingly, but it shows that he no longer treats war like a game: he acknowledges the real life-and-death stakes at hand.

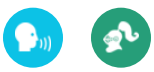
Alone on stage, Falstaff muses on the nature of honor: what, he wonders, is the good of the honor they are all supposedly fighting for? Honor, after all, cannot heal broken bones or wounds. "What is honor? a word. What is that word, honor? air." The dead do not "feel" the honor they have and the living don't have it. "Therefore I'll none of it," Falstaff concludes.

Falstaff once again delivers a deeply insightful meditation. His reasoning undercuts the notion of honor that so many of the play's characters operate under: honor is not worth fighting for because it can do nothing to alleviate the injuries suffered for it.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

Riding back to the rebel camp, Worcester tells Vernon that he's not going to deliver King Henry's message honestly because he doesn't believe that King Henry would really pardon the rebels as he says he will. Worcester thinks that, if they accept the king's peace offering, King Henry would forever after remain suspicious of the rebels as "interpretation will misquote our looks." Because Hotspur is just a hot-headed youth, his father Northumberland and Worcester himself would end up paying for his offenses, a risk Worcester doesn't want to take. Vernon says he'll go along with whatever version of King Henry's message Worcester delivers to Hotspur.

A crucial turning point in the play that intertwines the themes of language and warfare. Worcester's decision to change King Henry's language and misrepresent his message makes the Battle of Shrewsbury inevitable. Had he been true to King Henry's words, the violence might have been avoided.



Hotspur and Douglas enter with officers and soldiers and Worcester tells Hotspur that, despite his own attempts at peace-making, King Henry mercilessly summons the rebels to immediate battle. Worcester also recounts Prince Hal's invitation to Hotspur to fight one-on-one and describes Hal as a sweet, modest, self-deprecating young man in awe of Hotspur's praiseworthy honor. Hotspur accuses Worcester of being wrongly enamored with Hal, who is not sweet at all but wild and foolish.

Not only does Worcester misquote King Henry, he also uses his own language to spin the truth about Prince Hal in a way he knows will be particularly riling to Hotspur.

Hotspur calls his troops to arms, telling them to put themselves in the mood for battle since he lacks "the gift of tongue" to "lift your **blood** up with persuasion." A messenger enters with letters for Hotspur but Hotspur pushes them away, saying he's in too much of a rush to waste time reading. When another messenger enters to announce that King Henry has charged, Hotspur says he's glad to be interrupted since "I profess not talking." He draws his sword, excited to win glory or die an honorable death. All exit.

Hotspur has time for neither spoken nor written language and expects his men to charge into battle spurred by the same bloodthirstiness that drives him.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

On the battlefield, Douglas meets Sir Walter Blunt and, mistaking him for King Henry, challenges him to fight. Blunt goes along with Douglas' delusion, claiming to be the king and fighting Douglas. Blunt is killed, never admitting that he isn't the king. Hotspur enters and, recognizing Blunt, explains to Douglas that he has not killed King Henry as he thinks he has. "The King hath many marching in his coats," Hotspur says. Douglas vows to "murder all his wardrobe piece by piece until I meet the king." He and Hotspur charge off.

Though the practice of dressing up several soldiers as decoys for the king was a common battle strategy of the time, it is particularly resonant in this play, which is already so invested in appearances. Though Blunt puts on the false appearance of King Henry, his commitment to that appearance reveals the truly deep extent of his loyalty.

Falstaff enters and stumbles on Sir Walter Blunt's corpse and says "there's honor for you!" He hopes not to get killed himself. He says all but three of his hundred and fifty soldiers have been killed.

Falstaff continues to scoff at "honor" won in battle, understanding the promise of honor as a trick to get men to charge into their own deaths.

Prince Hal enters and, disgusted that Falstaff is still waddling around in safety when many noblemen have been killed in battle, tells Falstaff to hand over his sword. Falstaff protests that he has been acting bravely all day and says he needs to keep his sword to protect himself from Hotspur. When Hal reaches into Falstaff's sword sheath to take his sword, he finds a bottle of wine instead. Hal tosses the bottle at Falstaff and rides off. Alone on stage, Falstaff reflects that he wants no part of the honor Sir Walter Blunt has: "give me life," Falstaff says, "if not, honor comes unlooked for, and there's an end."

Falstaff may not be winning the battle glories that honorable noblemen warriors are earning in the field, but he is certainly keeping himself alive—which, to his mind, is a much more desirable goal. Even as Falstaff reflects profoundly on honor, war, and death, he never stops being a clown, stowing a wine bottle where his sword should be.

ACT 5, SCENE 4

In another part of the battlefield, King Henry, Prince Hal, Prince John, and Westmoreland discuss battle strategy. Hal is wounded and King Henry wants him to take a break from fighting, but Hal refuses. Prince John leads Westmoreland out into the fray again and, alone on stage, Hal and his father marvel at how surprisingly brave and honorable Prince John has proved himself to be. Hal exits.

King Henry continues to demonstrate his intelligent, strategic approach to the battlefield. Prince John, a minor and totally absent character until now, gets attention by proving himself to be an honorably courageous warrior.

Douglas enters and asks King Henry whether he is yet another fake king. King Henry says he's sorry that his loyal decoys have been killed. Swearing he is the real king, King Henry prepares to fight Douglas, who still believes the king is just another decoy, albeit one whose posture is particularly kingly.

Even though Douglas suspects King Henry is another decoy, something in the king's physical carriage suggests his royalty, linking his appearance to his essence.

King Henry is wounded fighting Douglas and Prince Hal re-enters to help defend his father, driving Douglas offstage. Alone on stage, King Henry tells Hal he has redeemed himself in his father's eyes by proving that he loves his father after all. Prince Hal laments that King Henry ever believed otherwise. King Henry exits.

Prince Hal's actions on the battlefield have fulfilled the promises he spoke to his father and won honor and respect in the king's eyes.

Hotspur enters and confronts Prince Hal, who tells Hotspur that England isn't big enough for the two Harrys and prepares to fight. Hotspur sarcastically exclaims that he wishes Hal's "name in arms were now as great as mine!" Hal promises that all of Hotspur's "budding honors" will soon belong to him. They fight. Falstaff enters and cheers Hal on. Douglas enters and fights Falstaff until Falstaff falls. Douglas exits.

Prince Hal and Hotspur's fight marks the climax of the play. Hotspur remains cocky and proud as ever, certain of his own honor and victory at Hal's expense.

Hotspur falls, wounded, and declares to Prince Hal that his loss of noble honor "wound[s] my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh." He dies. Prince Hal muses over Hotspur's corpse, thinking how small it looks compared to the huge ambitions of Hotspur's life. He praises Hotspur and treats his corpse respectfully, thinking that "even in [Hotspur's] behalf, I'll thank myself for doing these fair rites of tenderness."

Hotspur's dying words demonstrate his life's dilemma: his obsession with glory blinded him to practical matters and, caring only about honor, his disregard for physical safety led him to his death. Prince Hal shows himself to be an admirably humane warrior, treating Hotspur's corpse with respect.

Prince Hal notices Falstaff's corpse and laments his friend's death, saying that he "could have better spared a better man" and that he will miss Falstaff deeply. Hal exits.

Falstaff is indeed not the "better" man many of the noble, honorable soldiers are, but Prince Hal loves him dearly.

Alone on stage, Falstaff rises and declares that he faked his death in order to escape being killed by Douglas. But the real fakers, he reflects, are those who don't play dead for "to die, is to be a counterfeit; for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed." As for courage, he concludes that "the better part of valor is discretion; in the which better part I have saved my life."

In another prodigious play on appearances, Falstaff reveals that he was only pretending to be dead. As always, his agile language is able to twist conventional truth into something else entirely: he is, his argument proves, neither a faker nor a coward, for he would only be "counterfeit" if dead and only cowardly if he hadn't saved his own life.

Noticing Hotspur on the ground, Falstaff is frightened, and stabs the body to make sure Hotspur is really dead. Satisfied, Falstaff slings Hotspur's corpse over his shoulder, preparing to tell everyone that he killed Hotspur himself.

Ever the opportunist, Falstaff sees another chance to affect an impressive appearance of courage and doesn't hesitate to do so.

Prince Hal and Prince John enter. At first they're shocked to see Falstaff standing and think he might be a ghost. But, hearing Falstaff speak, the princes realize it is truly him. Falstaff brandishes the corpse on his shoulder, telling the princes he has killed Hotspur. When Hal balks at the story, Falstaff swears on his life that he himself delivered Hotspur's fatal blow. Hal warmly tells Falstaff to bear the corpse "nobly" and says he's happy to go along with his friend's story "if a lie may do thee grace."

Falstaff's false appearance of death was convincing enough that the princes worry he is still dead. Falstaff identifies his true, live self through his unmistakable speech. Hal's merry willingness to go along with Falstaff's absurd ploy is touching because it indicates that he cares more about friendship than about personal honor and glory, though it is important to note that Hal will make a different choice at the end of Henry IV Part Two.

Trumpets sound the rebels retreat and Prince Hal and Prince John exit to go see how many of their soldiers are still living. Falstaff follows them, saying that, if he is rewarded for Hotspur's corpse, he'll lose weight, give up drinking, and "live cleanly as a nobleman should do."

Falstaff's promise links appearances and essences—his rotund drunkenness, he suggests, corresponds to his corruption and, were he to become a morally upright person, he would also become thin and sober.

ACT 5, SCENE 5

In another part of the battlefield, King Henry, Prince Hal, Prince John, Westmoreland and attendants enter with Worcester and Vernon as prisoners. King Henry asks Worcester why he so misrepresented the king's peace offering and points out that, had he told the truth, he could have spared the lives of many. Worcester admits he lied for self-serving motives and says he accepts his now inevitable execution. The king sends Worcester and Vernon off to be executed.

King Henry's accusation articulates a truth only implicated before: that the Battle of Shrewsbury might have been prevented had Worcester conveyed the king's words to the rebels faithfully.

Prince Hal tells King Henry that Douglas tried to escape when he saw his side was losing the battle, but that he fell, got captured, and is now imprisoned in the prince's tent. King Henry gives Hal permission to do whatever he wants with Douglas. Hearing this, Hal tells Prince John to go free Douglas since Douglas has proven himself a brave man, even if he was fighting for the rebels.

Prince Hal's decision to set Douglas free is admirable and merciful, and further distinguishes him from the violent-minded Hotspur. It also implies that Prince Hal will one day be a fair-minded and generous monarch.

King Henry strategizes the path to peace: Prince John and Westmoreland will go defeat Northumberland and Richard Scroop at York while he and Prince Hal will head to Wales to fight down Glendower and Mortimer. "Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway," the king declares, "Let us not leave till all our own be won."

King Henry began the play praising peace in England, and he ends the play strategizing a means of restoring that peace. As king, he aims to use his power to prevent conflict among his peoples.

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