THE HENRY IV PLAYS

SHAKESPEARE'S Henry IV plays explore the theme of political order with a new depth and subtlety. Not only does the state pass through civil war to harmony, but Prince Hal develops into a king fit to lead his newly united state in war against France. Although political order is central to the plays, Shakespeare uses a more personal order, that of the family, to illuminate his theme. In the early history plays harmony and strife in family relationships become symbols of order and disorder in the kingdom. This device expresses political ideas by analogy with another realm of experience. But in the two Henry IV plays the symbol merges with its referent; Shakespeare displays the quest for political order as fundamentally like the quest for personal order within the family. The values are the same, the problems the same; only the scale is different.

In Hal and his father the historical given of Shakespeare's plot combines the two levels: prince and king, son and father. While Henry IV struggles to keep his throne and the rebels to replace him, England is hungry for renewed order. Though he is in many ways
a good ruler, he cannot be the hero-king who compels loyalty as well as submission. Prince Hal is to be such a king, but before he can assume his destined role, he must attain personal maturity. He must find a viable order for his own life, one centered on his duty to become England's king. Only thus will he be saved from self-destruction or personal insignificance, and only thus will England be saved (for a time) from civil war.

Finding in his sources the legend of Hal the wild prince, Shakespeare turns it into an expression of this theme. Like any young man reaching maturity, Hal must emulate his father's role, but at the same time he must escape his father in order to establish his autonomy. Even in the ideal family this task is difficult. In *Henry VI* young Talbot must defy his father's command to flee the battlefield so that he may be like his father and hence show a family loyalty deeper than explicit obedience. But Hal's father is a guilty man, one whose piety is tainted by Richard II's blood on his hands. In his personal inheritance from his father, Hal faces the same problem as the realm, how to generate an ordered future out of a disordered present. He must transcend his inheritance without denying it. It is part of the extraordinary scope of the Henry IV plays to study this spiritual process. An abstractly conceived Providence can bring peace to the England of *Richard III* because the process is external to Richard, but only a newly personal and psychological drama can show Hal's development into the king who will lead England to unity and glory.

The portrayal of Hal's growth follows a popular
motif in Elizabethan drama, the Prodigal Son story. Hal leaves his responsibilities and his father for a life of tavern brawls, behavior typical of the prodigal, though Hal avoids contamination with the worst evils around him, reckless gambling, wenching, and such. Falstaff, "that villainous abominable misleader of youth" (II.iv.456), parallels a Vice-figure like Cacurgus in Misogonus. Henry IV has much in common with the typical father, noble and sententious but somewhat ineffectual toward his son. The virtuous elder brother of the parable turns up in Misogonus as a long-lost heir; there may be a hint of this motif in the contrast between Hal and Prince John as well as in Henry IV's wish that Hotspur, Hal's rival, were his son. Appropriately enough, the parable of the Prodigal Son occurs among Falstaff's frequent allusions to scripture. This theme extends through both plays, since Hal is not completely reconciled to his father until the end of 2 Henry IV.

In one sense Shakespeare is burlesquing an old dramatic form as John Marston does in Histrio-Mastix. After all, it is the prodigal who mischievously denounces his tempter as "that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years" (1 Henry IV, II.iv.447-49). And Falstaff himself delights in acting the prodigal, corrupted by his evil companions: "Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked" (1 Henry IV, I.ii.90-92). This light-heartedness suggests even more clearly than Hal's soliloquy at the end of I.ii that he will not be significantly corrupted. Yet at the same time Falstaff is a
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serious threat to Hal's maturity, and the reconciliation with his father is a necessary step in his growth.

Thus Shakespeare exploits the human validity of the pattern even while smiling at its dramatic absurdities. There is a perilous solemnity in the moralizing of a form that adapts Plautine and Terentian comedy to Renaissance ethical education, and Shakespeare punctures that solemnity. At the same time, the dramatized parable offers a pattern for using the wild-prince legends. For all Shakespeare's modifications to burlesque the pattern and to make it psychologically plausible, he uses the religious theme embodied in it. In the parable the Prodigal Son restored to his father is man restored to God, and in the Elizabethan system of correspondences the king is to his kingdom as God is to the universe. Hal's reconciliation with his father symbolizes a larger commitment to all that is good and orderly in the world.

1 Henry IV

The first of the two plays has an obvious division into two levels, the public story of the rebellion of the Percies and the private story of Hal's dissipations with Falstaff. Part of what raises this play above the typical Elizabethan two-plot drama is the ingenuity with which the two are interwoven, so that the Falstaff scenes parody many of the episodes and characters of the serious scenes. However, there is a third plot, less extended than the other two, that helps to mediate between them. It is the story of Hal's estrange-
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ment from his father and their reconciliation. Only in this plot is Hal clearly the central figure, though all three contribute to the most important theme of this and the next play, Hal's preparation for kingship over a united England. The rebellion of the Percies provides the battlefield on which he can prove his chivalric merit; and Hotspur, the dominant figure of the Percy camp, gives a dramatic contrast that illuminates Hal's growth. The scenes with Falstaff show Hal avoiding his duty, but they also help to educate him in the whole order (and disorder) of his future kingdom. Although Shakespeare allows us to glimpse the domestic life of the Percies, they live primarily in a public world, a world of treaties and defiances and battles, of blank verse. Although Falstaff appears, ludicrously out of place, at Shrewsbury, his is essentially a private world without clocks, a world of sack and tavern jests and highway robbery, of prose.

What gives the relationship of Henry IV and Hal special complexity is that in it the public and private worlds merge. As king and prince they embody all the political ideas implied in that relationship throughout the history plays. Hal must inherit the heroic and regal virtues of his father so that he may be a king worthy of his Lancastrian forebears. To teach Hal this lesson, Henry points to the ominous example of Richard II, who betrayed the heritage of the Black Prince with a frivolity that Henry sees in Hal too. Also the public theme of inherited guilt is an important one. Henry fears that his crime in deposing Richard will infect the kingdom even after his death (and Hal in Henry V shares that fear). As a public figure Henry IV
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has a double significance. He is the king, the center of order and virtue in the realm and hence the prime object of Hal's duty. But at the same time he is guilty; all the conscious piety of his life cannot entirely justify him, even to himself.

If Henry were simply a public figure, an emblem like John of Gaunt in Richard II, this ambiguity of meaning would destroy him as a dramatic character. What saves him is that he is given a private identity, an individual nature that expresses itself apart from his public stance. A public symbol cannot be ambiguous, but a man can be so various as to evoke two different symbolisms. In the same way Hal can both laugh at and be the Prodigal Son because he has a private identity that transcends both burlesque and symbolism. Henry IV and Hal are not only king and prince; they are also a very concrete father and son, going through all the painful misunderstanding that fathers and sons have always faced.

Henry appears first of all as king. As John Dover Wilson points out, he speaks for himself and the kingdom in his opening words:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
Find we a time for frighted peace to pant,
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
To be commenc'd in stronds afar remote:
No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood.

(I.i.1-6)

The sense of powers declining under strain, the des-
perate longing for peace, and the vague hope for glory in foreign wars—all these Henry shares with his land. It is a sign of his worthiness as a king that he expresses so accurately the spirit of his realm. The stark family image of lines 5-6, with its biblical echo, is typical of the severe formality of the speech. Henry's language shows the tightly linked world of Elizabethan correspondences, in which the state is a family and civil war opposes those "of one substance bred," so that they war "Against acquaintance, kindred, and allies" (11, 16).

Since most of the audience must have known that this was to be a play about civil war, they would notice the self-deception in Henry's prediction of peace; and it soon emerges that he is willfully deceiving himself, because he knows that England is still wracked with strife and even that the Percies show ominous signs of disloyalty. Henry represents a generation of Englishmen who have fought each other and will go on fighting until they can hardly remember the purpose of the battles and can only say:

We are all diseas'd,
And with our surfeiting, and wanton hours,
Have brought ourselves into a burning fever,
And we must bleed for it.

(2 Henry IV, IV.i.54-57)

After his description of civil war in terms of violence within the family, there is irony in Henry's turning to speak with pain of his son's degeneracy. At the moment he seems unconscious of any connection be-
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twixt public and familial disorder. It may seem like a heartless repudiation of family bonds when he wishes:

O that it could be prov'd
That some night-tripping fairy had exchang'd
In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet!

(85-88)

But the suffering is clear enough behind the petulant rejection. It is "my young Harry" (85) whose dishonor he feels; the repeated "mine" of the passage shows the grief of an estranged father, not unfeeling repudiation. If the audience perceived the irony of his wish to go to the Holy Land, they must also have seen the happier irony of his despair at the character of the future hero-king, the legendary example of wildness reformed. This speech establishes a contrast between the two young men that runs through the play and reaches its climax in their confrontation at Shrewsbury.

If in the first scene Henry IV seems like an old man, tired and sick from the strains of rule, it soon becomes apparent that he has not lost the strength of will and imposing presence that won him the crown. He sends for the Percies to explain their holding back the Scottish prisoners, and when Worcester shows signs of more pride than is fitting in a subject, Henry abruptly banishes him from the court. Questionable though his accession is, he is a royal king, and Hal can learn only from him the dignity that a king must have. The curious episode of the men in Henry's coats whom Doug-
las slays at Shrewsbury raises the issue of who is really king when Douglas challenges Henry:

What art thou
That counterfeit'st the person of a king?
(V.iv.26-27)

But Douglas himself gives a worthy answer:

I fear thou art another counterfeit,
And yet, in faith, thou bearest thee like a king.
(34-35)

By a great act of will Henry is able to bear himself like a king. If the effort gradually saps his strength, there is little external evidence of his decline until his sickness in 2 Henry IV. Only in one scene of this play does he fully reveal the private man behind the king, when he is alone with his son in III.ii. The sense of tension, of a will kept forcibly taut in his public appearances, suggests the terrible penalty of being king.

In contrast with his father in the opening scene, Hal in the second appears young, full of vitality, and gaily irresponsible. While his father wrestles with the problems of state, Falstaff and Hal can jest about how he will behave as king. "I prithee sweet wag, when thou art king, as God save thy Grace—Majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have none" (I.ii.16-18). The fact that the major theme of Hal's development toward the ideal king can be suggested in a pun shows the characteristic tone of the scene. When he comes to this world where time is irrelevant and chivalry no more
than the code of the highwayman, he is escaping from
the court, from his father, and from his own place as
heir apparent.

One can take too solemnly his assertion of virtue in
the much-discussed soliloquy that closes the scene.
The speech may seem priggish, as though Hal were
condescending to sport with Falstaff even while main­
taining a severe inner virtue. He says, “I know you
all” (I.ii.190), implying that Falstaff’s sinfulness is no
threat to his self-confident virtue. However, direct ex­
position of one’s moral state is characteristic of Eliza­
bethan soliloquies. It is dangerous to read too much
self-consciousness into Hal’s proclamation of his own
worth. Many critics note that this soliloquy is pri­
marily a device to assure the audience of Hal’s final
reformation, an assurance especially needed just after
he has agreed to join in a highway robbery. And his
treatment of Falstaff is not really condescending; he
too obviously rejoices in the battle of wits that keeps
them on equal terms.

On the other hand, the fact that the soliloquy is a
conventional device need not compel one to take it as
absolutely true. Only someone determined to believe
in Hal’s spotless virtue (or his priggishness) could ac­
cept at face value the argument that a king gains his
people’s loyalty from having been a youthful sinner.
No doubt Hal plans to reform, but he has not under­
taken his sins in order to abandon them with a spec­
tacular public gesture. There is an undertone to his
argument that suggests his main reason for avoiding
the court:
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If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wish'd-for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.

Explicitly he is arguing that the contrast between a dissolute youth and a reformed king heightens the latter, just as the contrast with working days makes holidays pleasant. Yet at the same time he half-admits to snatching a few last bits of pleasure before assuming the heavy duties of kingship. Just right is Dr. Johnson's description of the soliloquy as "a natural picture of a great mind offering excuses to itself and palliating those follies which it can neither justify nor forsake."

Hal's sport with Falstaff is not only a young man's escape from responsibility, however. The public world of the play is one of disorder and treachery. Hotspur is caught in the political schemes of his father and uncle and manipulated by them. Henry IV is a nobler man than his former allies (except for Hotspur), but even he is trapped by his dubious past into suspicion and cold scheming. His projected crusade to the Holy Land is never more than a dream of expiation. Thus Hal escapes a tainted atmosphere by leaving the court. The evils of the tavern to which he turns are "like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (II.iv.220-221). Even though Falstaff's company sometimes parodies the public world, it is not corrupted by the pervasive disorder of the kingdom. "A plague upon it when thieves cannot be true one to another!" (II.ii.27-28). Falstaff's complaint

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foreshadows the disintegration among the rebels, but in fact the disloyalty in his band of "thieves" is harmless and even illusory.

In general the vices of Falstaff's group are timeless; the characters themselves are an anachronism brought into the play from Elizabethan life. This habit is not unusual among low-comedy scenes in Tudor drama, but here it is significant in that it provides an escape from the political disorder of the public scenes. In the three parts of Henry VI disorder spreads out from the court to infect the whole kingdom, but in 1 Henry IV the life of England goes on in spite of treachery and rebellion among the governors. Hostlers worry about the price of oats, and Falstaff about the purity of sack. Leaving the court, Hal finds England with all its vices and jests, but also its abiding strength. What Faulconbridge brings to the court of King John, Hal reaches by going out into London.

Yet if Hal can gain strength from contact with English life, there is also the threat of forgetting his special role as England's future king. Just as he must escape from the court and his father to grow beyond them, so he must escape the unreasonable claims on him of his London companions. "O for a fine thief of the age of two and twenty or thereabouts: I am heinously unprovided," says Falstaff (III.iii.187-89). He is unprovided because Hal has kept himself a king's son on a lark. His characteristic defense against Falstaff is his irony, an amused detachment from whatever he is doing. Curiously enough, it is the same quality that allows him to show no concern for the deed when he proves his chivalric merit by killing Hotspur, the key
symbolic act of the play. His nature is not “sub­
dued / To what it works in” (Sonnet 111), whether
he rubs elbows with Falstaff or fights against Hotspur.

Critics find this ironic detachment offensive in Hal,
not when it shows itself as sprezzatura, the noncha­
lance of Castiglione’s courtier, but when it rebuffs
Falstaff’s claims to intimacy. There is unconscious hu­
mor in the fugitive and cloistered vice of literary
scholars who condemn Hal for repudiating the free
life of a tavern roisterer and highway robber; one ex­
planation of such a view is the absence in our day of
much feeling for the importance of calling. Hal is
called to be the next king of England, and so he can­
not be an ordinary man. He is not denying his hu­
manity in accepting his duty to prepare for royalty,
because a man’s vocation is the center of his manhood.
In this play his calling is defined by his rivalry with
Hotspur. He must demonstrate to his father and all
the land that he is the true prince, not only in title but
in worth. Thus he can turn from the boyish jest of
giving Falstaff a company of foot soldiers to a vigor­
ous assertion of his family’s destiny:

The land is burning, Percy stands on high,
And either we or they must lower lie.
(III.iii.202-3)

Henry IV and his son come together for the first
time at III.ii. Ironically, Shakespeare has just shown
the charming domesticity of the rebel camp when he
turns to the estrangement of the king and crown prince.
Henry’s speeches to his son are curiously poised be-
tween his typical stiff formality and a father's anxious sincerity. His opening words are full of the traditional doctrines of the family. Thus for the first time he acknowledges that Hal's wildness may be punishment for "my mistreadings" (11). He measures Hal against the ideal of aristocratic inheritance, asking how he can reconcile "the greatness of thy blood" (16) with such low pursuits. He misunderstands his son, since he assumes that Hal is "match'd withal, and grafted to" these pleasures (15), the imagery suggesting that their corruption has entered the fibers of his being. But this speech is so formal that it suggests only abstract parenthood, and Hal's reply is in the same vein. They have expressed their abstract relationship, but little of the personal feeling in it.

Up to this point Henry has hidden the intensity of his emotions behind a mask of formality, but in his next speech his grief precariously warps the formality. After an affectionate "Harry" in line 29, he quickly pulls back into the commonplaces of aristocratic inheritance. He again charges Hal with betraying the tradition of his ancestors and losing the affection of his kinsmen. The king's hurt ego swings around to brood on his own past successes as he compares Hal with Richard II. He asserts that Hal has repudiated the moral heritage of the Lancastrians for Richard's corrupted "line" (85). (Primarily the word means "category" here, but it suggests the whole idea of a station in life established by birth.) His emotion gradually rises during the speech until he suddenly finds himself weeping as he complains of his son's neglect.
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in what is no longer a king's reproof but the complaint of a lonely father.

Hal's reply to this display of emotion is embarrassed and terse, though it may reveal a deeper contrition than did his first speech. But the tide of Henry's grief cannot stop, and so he returns to comparing Hal with Richard. Now he raises the most irritating comparison, that with Hotspur. He contrasts Hal's dynastic inheritance with Hotspur's supposed moral superiority:

Now by my sceptre, and my soul to boot,
He hath more worthy interest to the state
Than thou the shadow of succession.

(97-99)

This pragmatic king has learned that even a title as unstained as Richard II's is only a shadow without virtù, the quality that he thinks he sees in Hotspur. The way that he associates Hotspur with himself hints that he wishes Hotspur were his heir. But that wish is no more than a desperate evasion of his parental grief, as the petulance of his next few lines indicates. He even charges that Hal will fight under Percy against his own family.

This final turn allows Hal to feel a cleansing anger. His characteristic irony overcome by hurt love and pride, he makes his most complete and open declaration of aims. The abrupt, almost non-metrical beginning suggests his anger: "Do not think so, you shall not find it so" (129). And the next few lines illuminate its cause; if Hotspur is the barrier between Hal and Henry's love, then Hotspur must die. By Henry's
own standard the warrior ideal is the measure of moral worth, and Hal means to establish himself before his father and the kingdom. Already the duel of Act V is foreshadowed and weighted with public and private meaning. Conquering Hotspur will cleanse Hal’s name and make him a hero worthy of royalty, but at the same time it will complete the reconciliation of this father and son. Hence the angry reproach of Hal’s contrast between “This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight, / And your unthought-of Harry” (140-41).

Like most fathers Henry is only too eager to be reconciled. Delighted by his son’s heroic zeal and by the affection implied in Hal’s hurt feelings, he regains his kingly dignity and his confidence together:

A hundred thousand rebels die in this—
Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein.

(160-61)

Now that he knows the cleavage in his own house to be healed, he can face the challenge of the Percy rebellion with poise. When Blunt reports the gathering of the enemy, Henry gives orders with brisk efficiency and assigns Hal an important place in the plans. This father and son standing together are a symbol of unity in the realm, just as in *Henry VI* Talbot and his son fighting together stand for the unity that will die with them. But because Shakespeare has shown their reconciliation in an intensely personal scene, Henry and Hal are more than just symbols of order. Above all, the scene is a step in Hal’s growth toward full readiness for kingship, but it also reveals
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Henry's human struggle to endure the weight of kingly office. The symbol of unity is there, but it is surrounded by a richness of meanings such as the early Shakespeare never achieved.

The king and Hal appear together again at Shrewsbury, now in perfect harmony. Henry is so full of confidence that he can laugh at the ill omen of a gloomy morning. Throughout the day Hal is the picture of a true prince, extorting praise even from his enemies. With becoming humility in his words, he challenges Hotspur to single combat. Henry forbids that, perhaps because of still-continuing doubts in his son, but mainly because it would be foolish to give up the advantage of superior numbers. In the battle Hal shows brotherly pride at Prince John's valor, and afterward he allows his brother the honor of giving Douglas his freedom. When Hal saves his father's life from Douglas, the king recalls the charges that Hal has sought his death. The sincerity of Hal's indignation is supported by his deeds, and in fact only the king's remark makes him point out the significance of his act. Finally Hotspur, Hal's rival, dies under his sword, and the last picture of the prince is with his family on the battlefield won by their united valor. If the expression of this newly firm tie between the king and his son is almost entirely public and formal at Shrewsbury, those qualities make the last scenes complementary to the personal reconciliation of III.ii. Shrewsbury establishes the forces of order as dominant in the kingdom, and its final moment is this public symbol of unity, a king and his crown prince, reconciled and victorious.

The path of Hal's growth is a great arc. He must
move away from his father and the court so that he may find his personal autonomy. He must revitalize the Lancastrian line by renewed contact with the source of all political power, the commonwealth itself. Yet there is peril in this journey. If he plunges too deeply into the world of Falstaff and his companions, he will lose contact with his own heritage, with the birth that calls him to prepare himself for England's throne. And so the arc turns back. Hal must return to his father and prove his worthiness to be the Lancastrian heir. Now he must act for himself, yet to defend the primacy of the House of Lancaster. Only half-understanding what has happened to his son, Henry IV senses the ardor and enthusiasm that Hal has brought with him. The returned prodigal is the new hope of the forces of order, and especially of the king his father. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost and is found." Hal, and with him the Lancastrian line, are renewed.

The Percies and the Lancastrians.—The middle plot of *Henry IV* is, then, a subtle and complex version of the ancient story of the Prodigal Son. Both of the other two plots are so arranged as to comment on this theme of father and son. Most obvious is the parallel between Hotspur and Hal. From Worcester's first haughty reference to "our house" (I.iii.10) through the final combat between the two young representatives of the two houses, the Percies are contrasted with the Lancasters. As the Duke of York's family in the *Henry VI* plays draws together to defend his claim to the throne, so the Percies set forth their in-law as
rightful king. Like the Yorks this group bound together by kinship and wedlock seems a solid unity at first, but weaknesses begin to appear. Among the signs of internal disorder is the bickering in III.i over a kingdom that, it now appears, is not to be given to its rightful king entire but to be divided into three parts among the conspirators. Hotspur’s amusingly petty quarrels with Glendower only partly obscure the horror of his proposal. The conspirators manage to paper over their differences and call in the ladies to an ironically charming scene of marital affection. It is possible that there is a hint of symbolic disorder in Mortimer’s inability to talk to his Welsh-speaking wife, but the emphasis of the scene is on a domestic happiness that the plotters are leaving to take arms against their king. Once again there is a glimpse of the normal life against which this play shows the Percy rebellion.

As in the House of Lancaster, so there is a contrast between the generations of the Percies. Worcester and Northumberland illustrate Machiavellian policy gone to seed. They make some show of political scheming, but in fact they proceed spitefully out of a mixture of offended pride and thwarted ambition. They manipulate Hotspur to gain his support in I.iii, but by sheer youthful vigor he promptly wrests control of the rebel movement from them. When they bend to his superiority in virtue, the consequence is that the conspiracy is at the mercy of his impetuosity. He reveals the plot to a man who even he admits is likely to reveal it to the king “in very sincerity of fear and cold heart” (II.iii.30-31). He goes out of his way to antagonize Glendower, their sensitive Welsh ally, and
it may not be coincidental that Glendower fails them at Shrewsbury. The night before the battle Hotspur rashly favors an immediate attack on the king’s forces, an ill-conceived plan if, as seems likely, we are to accept the objections of the sensible and attractive Vernon. But Hotspur is growing in responsibility even then. As the bad news of a mighty enemy and the failure of his own reserves mounts up, he prepares with a new sobriety to go forth to what he must know is almost certain defeat.

His father’s failure to support the rebellion does most to doom their cause, as Hotspur at first acknowledges. Worcester expresses the point of Northumberland’s absence:

The quality and hair of our attempt
Brooks no division.

(IV.i.61-62)

Rebels, the proponents of disorder, can succeed only through their internal unity, as Falstaff implies of thieves. The central unit of this plot is the House of the Percies, and so when a break divides that unit, the rebellion is doomed.

Just after Worcester’s comment Hotspur hears that the Prince of Wales, whom he thought estranged from his father and lost in dissipation, is present and acting the part of a chivalric hero. Thus he learns that the division in his rival’s family is healed. Again his own family shows bad faith within itself when his uncle Worcester fails to tell him of the king’s offered clemency. Worcester deceives his nephew out of a prudent
fear that though Hotspur may be forgiven, his elders never will be. It is both noble and ironic that Hotspur rides forth to his death proclaiming the name and motto of his house. In spite of him the unity of the Percy family fails its supreme test.

Hotspur’s character is controlled by the nature of his heritage. Like Hal he grows to be morally superior to the older generation of his family (indeed, he shows this superiority sooner and more obviously than Hal), but he can be virtuous only at the cost of a crippling innocence. While his father and uncle tangle themselves in nets of their own plotting, the world is very simple for him. Military honor and family loyalty are the two poles of his nature. Unlike Hal he never has to separate himself from his family because he does not even perceive the difference between them and himself. The charm of his integrity is great, but the integrity toward which Hal is working is more impressive simply because it takes more into account. Somewhere there is an ethical ideal that allows for the necessities of political calculation, and the perfect king must find that kind of ideal if he is not to fall into quixotism, the vice in Hotspur’s virtue.

Insofar as Henry IV embodies true royalty and order, he is a model by which Hal can grow, but because of his guilt Henry is never at ease in the tension between ideals and policy. Hotspur offers a pattern of military chivalry to Hal and a rival whom he must overcome and transcend, but he too offers no final model. Even his thoroughly delightful marriage falls short of full maturity. Though he and his wife adore each other, their relationship has something of a boy
and girl playing at marriage. In short, he is another Mercutio, full of the charm of a limited nature. The final verdict of the play, reinforced by the symbolic tableau of Hal standing over Hotspur's body, is that he is not a sufficient pattern for the Prince of Wales. He cannot complete the redemption of the new generation because his ties are to a deeply corrupt part of the old and because he escapes his heritage only into a world of fantasy, where the simple absolutes of childhood become the standards of men.

Falstaff and the family.—Falstaff also illuminates Hal's relationship with his father. This is only one part of his significance, but he does function as an inverted parallel to Hotspur and a parody of Henry IV. If Hotspur is youth refusing to accept a fully human maturity, Falstaff is old age masquerading as youth. He turns everything unpleasant into a pleasant fiction: old age into the effect of too much piety, highway robbers into "Diana's foresters" (I.ii.25), and cowardice into a lion's instinct. The measure of his wit is the artistry with which he keeps this artificial world going. Hal's wit characteristically tests that world against reality and points out the ludicrous incongruity of the two. Our pleasure in Falstaff is the exhilaration of freedom, and Shakespeare's craft prevents us from noticing how meaningless that freedom can be. Falstaff revolts not against the older generation but against his place in that generation. As a result, he can teach Hal a route of escape from his father, but not how to put meaning into that escape.

Falstaff becomes specifically relevant to the theme
of fathers and sons when he makes himself a parody of Henry IV or, alternatively, of Hal to Hal's Henry. Both poses run through his conversations with Hal. His mimicking of Puritan cant suggests that he is a sage, paternal figure whose counsel Hal should follow. Thus Hal should overcome his youthful waywardness and turn to the vocation of highway robbery; Falstaff says to Poins: "Well, God give thee the spirit of persuasion, and him the ears of profiting, that what thou speakest may move, and what he hears may be believed" (I.ii.147-49). But not many lines earlier Falstaff is a prodigal corrupted by a devilish young prince: "O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint: thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it" (88-90). This theme is summed up when he and Hal stage two impromptu dramas on the lecture from his father that hangs over Hal. A closer examination of this scene should illustrate how the Falstaff plot sheds light on the relationship between Hal and Henry IV.

It is astonishing that Shakespeare can parody in advance one of the most moving scenes of the play without destroying its effect. All the elements of the formal Henry IV are in Falstaff's parody. Henry's severely rhetorical style is broadened into a parody-version of John Lyly's stilted moralizing. Using that mode, Falstaff burlesques the code of aristocratic birth in the course of his sermon:

That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that
doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point—why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher, and eat blackberries? A question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses? A question to be asked.

(II.iv.397-406)

_Noblesse oblige_ is not what marks this inheritance; rather it is “a villainous trick of thine eye, a foolish hanging of thy nether lip” that Hal shares with his father. The sun, that sacred image of royalty, becomes a truant schoolboy picking blackberries, as Falstaff toys with the serious pun on sun/son common in the lore of royal inheritance. (Compare, for example, _Richard III_, I.iii.263-69.) Even Henry’s tears are foreshadowed in Falstaff’s antitheses: “Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also” (410-12). Only the severe dignity of the real confrontation between Hal and his father, the quiet means by which it expresses its deep-felt emotions, could save it from this parody-in-advance.

A more serious parallel between Falstaff and Henry IV emerges when the knight uses both his acting roles to defend his “virtuous” companionship with Hal. Behind the joke of it is Falstaff’s constant desire to make a claim on Hal’s friendship. Henry is hurt because he does not understand the nature of Hal’s desire to flee the court; so Falstaff looks with mingled hope and doubt toward the future because he misjudges Hal. Neither of the old men is quite willing to allow Hal his independence, and so both stand in the way of
his growth toward full maturity. In a passage too often emended, Falstaff suggests this theme unconsciously. Continuing his defense of "that Falstaff" while the sheriff knocks at the door, he says to Hal, "Never call a true piece of gold a counterfeit: thou art essentially made without seeming so" (485-87). That is, Falstaff's virtue and worth live untainted under the disreputable appearances of his exterior just as Hal's royalty is hidden but not obliterated by his youthful pranks. Falstaff uses the figure of coins being stamped to suggest one Renaissance view of moral aristocracy: like pure gold, inherited virtue cannot be corrupted by external circumstances. But it is precisely this fact about Hal that makes Falstaff's eventual rejection certain.

This consequence is likewise implicit in the symbolic tableau at Shrewsbury when Hal stands above the bodies of Hotspur and Falstaff, the two half-men whom he has transcended. Of course Falstaff is not really dead (though presumably the audience does not know that when he falls under Douglas's sword); still Hal can never be so close to him as before. When in the impromptu play Hal symbolically takes the role of his father and banishes the eloquent knight with his final "I do, I will" (475), the outcome is already clear. Falstaff is only a mock father, and so when Hal must turn to the serious business of his life, the fat knight can be nothing to him. This element is only one dark thread in the delightful pattern of comedy that II.iv provides, but it is there, a clear statement of the serious theme of the play.

Hal stands at the center of I Henry IV, poised be-
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tween Hotspur and Falstaff. Through his rivalry with Hotspur, he enters the public realm of the play, the war of the Percy rebellion. Through his association with Falstaff, he enters a realm of tavern brawls and highway robbery. Both sides are relevant to the central theme of the play, Hal’s growth toward readiness for kingship. What gives this theme its pattern, the controlling myth of Hal’s growth, is the Prodigal Son story of a king and prince. From this point of view the crisis of the play is Hal’s confrontation with his father in III.i.i. Their reconciliation in that scene provides the turning point not only in their relationship but also in the destinies of Hotspur and Falstaff. Conversely these two figures provide a commentary on Hal and Henry IV by their words and by ironic parallels of which they are not fully conscious. 1 Henry IV is a rich and diverse play, but these thematic bonds help to give it a strong orderliness and pattern.

2 Henry IV

In many ways 2 Henry IV is an amplified repetition of themes from the previous play, yet both tone and emphasis are much changed. The Prodigal Son pattern reappears, but with less importance, partly because Hal and his father are less central figures. Hal first appears in II.ii and Henry not until III.i. Even in Hal’s story there is another morality pattern of almost equal importance, the Psychomachia, with Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice cast as vice and virtue warring for the prince’s soul. 16 That theme itself is only partly de-
veloped since their relationship to Hal is not fully dra-
matised. Falstaff expands beyond such a role so as
nearly to take over the play on his own account, and
the Lord Chief Justice has too little dramatic impor-
tance to justify his symbolic weight. The same tripar-
tite division of plots as in 1 Henry IV occurs here, but
the connections among them are at the same time
more schematic and less powerful. Indeed, the pri-
mary unity of 2 Henry IV is tonal: all three plots re-
inforce the impression of an old and dying land look-
ing with mingled hope and fear at the impending
change to a new generation. In the richness and vari-
ety of its individual scenes and characters, 2 Henry
IV is almost equal to its predecessor, but only the
tonal pattern gives coherence to the rather sprawling
whole.

This picture of a dying generation and the growth
of a new one to succeed it is the most panoramic ex-
pression of Shakespeare's concern with fathers and
sons. The initial dramatic impression is one of age and
decay. First we see the aged Northumberland's
crafty sickness and then Falstaff's even less elegant
ailment (whether syphilis or gout). But the primary
symbolic fact of the play is the king's illness, which
a number of the characters discuss before he appears
"in his nightgown" (stage direction at III.i.1). The
land declines in sympathy with its sick and dying king
until its omens mark his imminent death. The wan-
ing vigor of most of the characters creates an air of
impersonality in which superhuman forces rather than
strong personalities seem to control events. In such a
world an abstraction like Vergil's Fama is appropriate,
and she appears in the Induction as “Rumour painted full of tongues” (stage direction at 1). Rumor’s imagery recalls the more vigorous world of 1 Henry IV when she reports that the king

Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,
Quenching the flame of bold rebellion
Even with the rebels’ blood.

(25-27)

In contrast with this bold violence in the past is the scene to come, set in a “worm-eaten hold of ragged stone” (Induction, 35), where an old man lies feigning sickness to avoid the battle in which his son has died.

What other Shakespearian play is so full of old, sick men who fear or long for death? Yet at the same time there is another quality even in some of the old men themselves. After all, Falstaff is one of them, and his explanation for his aged appearance contains some truth behind the impudent fantasy: “My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head, and something a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with hallooing, and singing of anthems” (I.i.186-89). He shows the external signs of old age without its deficiencies. Justice Shallow is the epitome of age with his often-repeated and mendacious recollections of youth, his folly only barely covered by cunning, and his feeble pride in his land and wealth. Yet even he is associated with those ancient pastoral symbols of regeneration and growth, farming and raising flocks. If the king is sick unto death, his
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land still has reserves of vitality. Though less obviously than in \textit{Henry IV}, English life preserves something of its normal state, the quality that allows it to regenerate itself while the court declines under the strain of opposing the forces of disorder.

In such a world Hal appears subdued to the taint of those around him, his reformation in \textit{Henry IV} rather arbitrarily forgotten by the court. Shakespeare again follows the Prodigal Son pattern but changes its tone by use of a familiar motif, the king or prince in disguise.\textsuperscript{19} This device is common in Elizabethan drama, as in the two popular plays \textit{George a Greene} and \textit{Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay}.\textsuperscript{20} Its dramatic appeal is clear: it suggests the essential oneness of monarch and people since in disguise he can associate with them as equals. The king, that austere embodiment of glory and justice, is also a “king of good fellows,” as Henry V calls himself while wooing Katherine (V.ii. 256). Yet implicit in disguise is the other side. Only when he is unrecognized, only as Harry LeRoy, can the king be just a good fellow among the people. In his own name he is the ruler, sacred, untouchable, and lonely, with all the pathos Shakespeare gives to that loneliness.

Hal literally puts on a disguise when he and Poins transform themselves into drawers in order to spy on Falstaff. Hal comments sardonically on the effect: “From a god to a bull? A heavy descension! It was Jove’s case. From a prince to a prentice? A low transformation, that shall be mine, for in everything the purpose must weigh with the folly” (II.ii.166-69).” Hal’s disguise allows him to hear Falstaff picturing him
in ordinary terms indeed, but the knight’s description is as usual unrelated to truth, as he admits when Hal reveals himself. The physical disguise stands for no inner degradation, though it represents the whole land’s opinion of Hal.

Hal’s self-concealment, however, is not primarily physical. Shakespeare gives him a moral disguise so that all around him misjudge his nature. Hal is consistently ironic, aware of the discrepancy between what he seems and what he will prove to be. He can descend to be a drawer because the genuine Hal stands back and comments. The ingenuity of this device is that it leaves ambiguous just what the real Hal is and so makes the conversion both dramatic and plausible. Warwick portrays Hal as wholly untainted, if rather calculating for most tastes:

The Prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
’Tis needful that the most immodest word
Be look’d upon and learnt; which once attain’d,
Your Highness knows, comes to no further use
But to be known and hated.

(IV.iv.68-73)

The implication of this speech is that there can be no real bond between a king and lower men, that he must know them only to reject them. Yet Warwick seems to be reassuring the old king in the face of his own less sanguine view. He is as gloomy as the rest when Hal succeeds to the throne (V.ii.14-18). If Hal’s disguise is just policy, he has deceived everyone.
Surely, however, the truth is more complex. Shakespeare uses disguise ambiguously in his plays: it both conceals and manifests identity. Rosalind and Viola hide their femininity in boys' clothes, yet both can express their natures even more fully for their disguises. In donning a friar's robes and acting as spiritual guide, the Duke in *Measure for Measure* adopts the sacred equivalent of his secular position, and the two roles enrich each other. In the same way, Hal manifests himself in disguise, even frees a part of his nature that the court stifles. Not only does he escape its formality and develop the oneness with his kingdom that is the basis of true royalty, but he gets beyond the guilt of his inheritance by renewed contact with the people, the source of royal power and right.

More than in *Henry IV*, Shakespeare points this play toward the confrontation of the royal father and son. Until IV.v, when they come together, they appear separately. When Hal enters, he appears subdued to the over-all tone of gloom and decline. He has just returned from fighting the rebels, and he reveals shortly that he is grieving at his father's illness. Shrewsbury seems to have solved nothing. He is terribly conscious of his ordinary humanity, the obverse of his royal position. He can laugh at this side of himself and almost regains his spirits in wittily describing Poins's linen, but his companion's inadequacy makes itself obvious just then. Poins uses Henry's illness as a weapon in their battle of wits, oblivious to the sincerity of Hal's sorrow. Shakespeare transfers to this companion the feelings of Hal himself in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth.*²³ Poins's jesting drives
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Hal further into his characteristic irony, and the irony now has a tone of self-contempt that embitters his wit.

Hal tells Poins that he is seeking London pleasures rather than attending his ill father because he does not want to seem like a hypocrite. Although these words show that he is not insensitive to his father's illness, he is once again rationalizing his wildness, as he did in the 1 Henry IV soliloquy. He flees from his grief into dissipation, and so a companion like Poins necessarily misunderstands him. Because Hal is conscious of his irresponsibility, his irony remains strongly active. Falstaff's suggestion that he is to marry Poins's sister merely amuses him, though it throws Poins into confusion. But even his highest spirits are tainted with an uneasy self-consciousness. Thus he turns from the laughter at Falstaff's letter to a biblical-euphuistic reflection in Falstaff's own vein: "Well, thus we play the fools with the time, and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us" (134-35).

Through the whole of II.i1 runs a constant play on the themes of noble birth, kinship, and marriage. Poins hypothesizes imperviousness to mortal discomfort in Hal, "one of so high blood" (3), and ridicules Falstaff's pride in his knighthood, comparing it to the vanity of the king's relatives. Still he is quick to defend himself as no worse than "a second brother" (63) when Hal links him with Falstaff as a corrupter of the true prince. Hal praises him for strengthening the family by producing bastards. The page contributes a descent for Bardolph to explain his red nose and a kinship between Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet, which Hal promptly sets in its true light: "Even such kin as
the parish heifers are to the town bull” (149-50). Inheritance, kinship, and marriage in both high and low life seem like the tawdry shifts of a fallen world. As Hal reduces himself from a prince to a drawer, so marriage degenerates to a coupling of bull and heifer. But Hal’s ironic detachment saves him from being deeply tainted by this debasement of human values. He is consciously playing a witty game while reserving part of himself out of his companions’ view.

When Hal meets Falstaff, the knight describes his degeneration beneath his princely forebears (not knowing of Hal’s presence): “A would have made a good pantler, a would ha’ chipped bread well” (II.iv. 234-35). He calls Hal “a bastard son of the King’s” (280). Here the idea of Hal’s degeneracy is reduced to Falstaffian absurdity and thus banished. If Hal’s anger at Falstaff is feigned, his debasement to drawer—or tavern-companion—is equally unreal. When a summons to duty comes, his spirits rally with a dignity opposite which Falstaff’s pose of high responsibility is both comic and slightly contemptible. Thus Hal is never really threatened with attraction into Falstaff’s orbit in 2 Henry IV, though he is swayed by the need to escape his responsibilities and grief while he still can.

Poised opposite this scene is Henry IV’s first appearance, opening with his powerful soliloquy on the cares of sleepless royalty. This episode continues the pattern of aging men striving toward unreal goals. Hal turns with renewed vigor toward his future as he leaves Falstaff, but Henry falls into the old man’s trap
of seeing time on so large a scale that men's efforts appear useless:

O, if this were seen,
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book and sit him down and die.

(III.i.53-56)

His words compel an expansion of the dramatic horizons to take in more time, especially since he goes on to recall the origins of this upheaval, the events recorded in *Richard II*. His melancholy conceals from him any hint of his son's future glory, though in a still longer view his words evoke the whole pattern that the first tetralogy completes, with Henry V's early death and the loss of all his conquests. In such a broad view of history individual men, even kings, become tiny figures. Warwick merely reinforces this conclusion when he explains Richard's successful prophecy by the operation of historical necessity. Henry argues from these thoughts a code of fatalism, the only basis for responsible action in a determined world.

Thus the king shares with the rebels and Justice Shallow a fascination with the past and an obsession with the future. His plans show the irrational fluctuations of a sick man. He clings to his planned crusade to the Holy Land, which he must know will never come about, but which to him stands for escape from the disorder of the land. When in the wanderings of his illness he comes to a more realistic concern for the future, he broods over what will happen to England
with Hal's accession. There is nothing of this concern in III.i, but in IV.iv it forms the prelude to his confrontation with Hal. His first analysis of his son is not at all unperceptive; as far as it goes, it describes Hal's character in both this play and the next. When he advises Clarence how to strengthen the bonds of family with the new king, he draws on the tradition that ideal kings counsel with their kin, who far surpass the usual favorites in loyalty and disinterestedness. In combining this ideal with psychological acuity, Henry appears at his best.

The information that Hal is dining with his tavern companions throws his father into a quite different mood. The king is hurt by Hal's apparent callousness in enjoying himself while Henry lies ill. He can still see in his son "the noble image of my youth" (IV.iv. 55), the hereditary representative of his own heroic young manhood; but at the same time his personal anguish expands into a gloomy view of the future for England. Hal will be a typical weak king, like Richard II counseled by "rage and hot blood" (63). As he destroys the kingdom, his father, the symbol of lost order, will be "sleeping with my ancestors" (61). In this way the theme of the prince's wildness and redemption is brought forward and his relationship with his father made the vehicle for showing his growth, as in 1 Henry IV.

The theme receives a new coloring from Henry's nearness to death. He represents an old and dying generation, desperately afraid that it has failed to pass on to the new the traditional morality that is the basis of civilization. The omens mentioned by Gloucester
and Clarence are ambiguous in that they suggest an impending breach in nature, but at the same time are a continuing, cyclic natural process. They are of “Unfather’d heirs and loathly births of nature” (122), but they are part of a recurrent pattern, recalling the time “That our great-grandsire Edward sick’d and died” (128). That is the paradox of “The king is dead; long live the king!” The break in order is at the same time part of a larger order. Henry is no more than one link in the great historic process, a momentary and sicklied perception of which has thrown him into despairing fatalism.

It is ironic that in the final misunderstanding Henry attacks Hal for what has been great filial propriety. His sitting by the bed is a traditional office of affection. The similarity between his soliloquy on the crown and his father’s meditation on sleep indicates the fundamental harmony of the two men. Hal’s words are a perfect balance of filial grief and the consciousness of orderly inheritance:

Thy due from me
Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously.
My due from thee is this imperial crown,
Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me.

(IV.v.36-42)

His grief is “of the blood,” both deeply felt and natural, moved by the bond of kinship. At the same time
he takes on with proper dignity the "lineal honour" (45) of his new royalty. He shows that like his father he is concerned with the pattern of succession, which will in time invest his son with the same kingship. Thus Hal behaves properly in both his public and private roles, as son and as prince.

Henry's rage when he wakes to find the crown gone finally clears the air between the two. There is a moving irony in his exclamation:

See, sons, what things you are,
How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object!

(64-66)

The audience has just seen that to Hal the crown is a symbol of inherited responsibility. Henry in his anger reduces it to mere gold, the object of greed. He pictures himself and his son stripped of their royalty, a merchant and his wastrel heir. He associates himself with the "foolish over-careful fathers" (67) of classical comedy and its descendants. Calmed somewhat by Warwick's report of Hal's sorrow, he still falls back on the petulant question, "But wherefore did he take away the crown?" (88). Under the weight of his sickness and anger, he behaves as he never has in public before, without concern for his royal dignity.

Henry begins his accusation with an expression of his most intimate feeling, fear that Hal hates him and wants his death. He gives this mood the most terrible of expressions, the image of a son murdering his father:
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Thou hid'st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts,
Which thou hast whetted on thy stony heart,
To stab at half an hour of my life.

(106-8)

But with his figure converting Hal's tears to corona­tion balm, his thoughts turn from himself to the wel­fare of his kingdom. As man he is a forgotten father, and as king he is a rejected symbol of order:

Pluck down my officers; break my decrees;
For now a time is come to mock at form.

(117-18)

He speaks for the expectations of his people, or at least their fears, to judge from the gloomy conversa­tions in the court that open V.ii and from Falstaff and Pistol's hopes for the new reign. He sees as a conse­quence of Hal's accession the same apocalyptic col­lapse of order that Northumberland evokes in his grief at Hotspur's death (I.i.153-60).

Once again as in 1 Henry IV, Hal must justify him­self to his father. The tact and dignity with which he does so are convincing proof of his moral readiness for his approaching duties. He can allude only briefly to his purposed reformation as king, since the most serious charge against him is that he anticipates that time too eagerly. But the real source of Henry's pain is Hal's apparent lack of filial love. In reply Hal uses the language of family rectitude, showing his commit­ment to the order of the family. He makes his kneel­ing for pardon a symbol of "my most inward true and
duteous spirit" (147) and even his taking the crown "The quarrel of a true inheritor" (168) against its cruelty. In the latter explanation he can tell only half the truth since a father hungering for love does not want to be told of his son's self-confident readiness to replace him in the succession of royalty. (Contrast Hal's actual words at 40-46 with his report of them in 158-64.) Hal strikes exactly the right note in showing his awareness of the cares surrounding the crown. The words proclaim sympathetic affection for his father while proving that he is not excessively ambitious. That is not to say that he is hypocritically playing on his father's emotions. The genuineness of his love is shown both by his tears and by his dignified but pointed references to his own grief.

In spite of his capacity for ironic detachment, Hal is more than a coldly pragmatic politician. He has succeeded in ordering the public and private claims of his life. He can express his affections in such a way that they support his official role rather than undermining it. The passionate relief of Henry's reply shows how successful Hal's defense has been. He appreciates Hal's judgment as well as his affection, and so he opens his political stratagems more plainly than ever before. For the first time a less than penitential motive for his projected crusade to the Holy Land emerges, and he counsels Hal to imitate this plan by stimulating "foreign quarrels" (214). His guilt has immersed him in the disorder that perpetuates itself, though his very understanding of the situation shows that in some degree he has gone beyond the guilt. Whereas he seized the throne, Hal is successive heir,
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but that can be so only because Henry is indeed king. Hal can claim the throne simply and unequivocally, as his father could never do. That is the source of strength by which he surpasses his father, whose intricate political schemes and vague quest for purgation end with the grotesque irony of his death in the Jerusalem Chamber, not in the holy city of Jerusalem.

As in 1 Henry IV, the private reconciliation with his father leads to a public expression of Hal’s worth. In the earlier play he embodies chivalric heroism at Shrewsbury, and in this he gives public assent to the virtue of justice, the final measure of a king. When the Lord Chief Justice discusses the old king’s death with Warwick and Henry’s younger sons, all of them look forward with dread to the new reign. The newly crowned Henry V enters and senses their fear, which he sets out with fine tact to allay. He treats his brothers as fellows in a family, but also as representatives of a royal heritage. Now he is both their king and head of their family:

For me, by heaven, I bid you be assur’d,
I’ll be your father and your brother too;
Let me but bear your love, I’ll bear your cares.
(V.ii.56-58)

Thus Hal shows that he is concerned to maintain the unity of his family, as his father was before him.

When he turns to the gloomy Lord Chief Justice, a bit of his old ironic humor comes out, albeit subdued to his new dignity. He allows the old man to think that he is still angry at having been imprisoned
and so draws forth an impassioned defense of the rule of justice over all men, even a prince:

Be now the father, and propose a son,  
Hear your own dignity so much profan'd,  
See your most dreadful laws so loosely slighted,  
Behold yourself so by a son disdain'd:
And then imagine me taking your part,  
And in your power soft silencing your son.

(V.ii.92-97)

By giving Hal a significant imaginary role, the Chief Justice teaches that one cannot violate the laws of the state without breaking the whole moral order, even the bonds of family. All the more must a prince submit to the laws of a king who is his father. Hence his severe justice has been a defense of fatherhood as well as law in the state. Hal accepts this truth for himself and his posterity. Declaring to the Lord Chief Justice, “You shall be as a father to my youth” (118), he takes the total responsibility of his vocation. Hal has become Henry V, both a king and a man. If he must reject Falstaff and the pleasures of his youth in order to take up his new role, he firmly does so as he turns to the emblem of kingly justice.

The Decay of the Percy Rebellion.—The other two plots of 2 Henry IV are less fully relevant to this theme than their counterparts in 1 Henry IV. The episodes of the Percy rebellion are a strangely disjointed tale with no Hotspur to give them focus, but parts of this plot are related to the theme of father and son. In this
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play of brooding on the past, Hotspur’s fate is one obsessive memory to the Percies. Northumberland’s wild grief at his son’s death is genuine enough, though the poetry is in the old style of formal artificiality. This quality takes on symbolic overtones at one point in his lament:

Let heaven kiss earth! Now let not Nature’s hand
Keep the wild flood confin’d! Let order die!
And let this world no longer be a stage
To feed contention in a ling’ring act;
But let one spirit of the first-born Cain
Reign in all bosoms.

(I.i.153-58)

Here his sorrow at his son’s death becomes an expression of the disorder that the Percy rebellion arouses. Guilt at his own betrayal and grief at his son’s futile destruction lead him to an image of familial destruction. He invokes the fratricidal hatred of Cain to be the guiding principle of the universe. Extravagant though his outcry is, it suits a world in which political disorder has produced a breach in nature, so that old men live on while their heirs die before reaching maturity.26

Hotspur’s widow returns to this theme of broken paternal bonds while trying to persuade Northumberland to flee to Scotland. She is a helpless victim of political strife, like Lady Blanche in King John, but she is also a voice of his conscience as she reminds him of Hotspur’s virtues. It is bitterly appropriate that her recollections of her husband’s glory serve only to
unnerve his father so that he once again betrays his party by fleeing a crucial battle. In her brooding on Hotspur, Lady Percy has some of Constance’s intensity without her mad excessiveness, and Northumberland is as clumsy and weakly Machiavellian as King Philip. Shakespeare is at some pains to show the family life of the rebel group by this scene (II.iii), so that he may contrast that of the court as he did in 1 Henry IV. While the House of Lancaster overcomes the tensions within it to unite behind a king who carries on his father’s name and glory, the House of the Percies has collapsed into disorder memorialized by the laments of women and old men.

During the confrontation at Gaultree (IV.i-iii), the oratory of both sides is full of family allusions in the old manner. Most ominous of these is Hastings’s all-too-accurate prediction:

And though we here fall down,
We have supplies to second our attempt:
If they miscarry, theirs shall second them;
And so success of mischief shall be born,
And heir from heir shall hold this quarrel up
While England shall have generation.

(IV.ii.44-49)

This is the perverted inheritance that dominates the Henry VI plays. Calamity (“mischief”) is to thrive by a monstrous succession, to multiply itself out of this conflict like the heads of a Hydra (38). Earlier the Archbishop describes the condition of the state as a disease that only rebellion can cure (IV.i.53-66). When
Mowbray derives his quarrel from his father, Bolingbroke’s enemy in *Richard II*, and Prince John wages war in his father’s name, the pattern of generations trapped in an endless quarrel has already begun. There is a terrible weariness in the Archbishop’s explanation that the king will be glad to compromise in order to avoid breeding new quarrels with the heirs of the defeated rebels. All these men are oppressed by the futility of their actions, yet they must go on as though they believed in their cause.

If England were doomed to choose between its sick, aging king and these rebels, it would have little hope for the future. Prince John, however, is more difficult to evaluate. He is part of the younger, more vigorous generation, and Hal has praised his valor at Shrewsbury. His poise in command and the skill with which he outwits the rebels show him to be a formidable general. Falstaff’s soliloquy at the end of IV.iii makes this brother still another figure to be compared with Hal. Falstaff laments, “Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me, nor a man cannot make him laugh” (85-87). He suggests that, unlike his brother, Hal has enriched “the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father” (116-17) by judicious use of sack. This comic justification for drinking should not conceal his perception of a genuine difference between these two sons of one father, a difference expressed by Hal’s affection for Falstaff.

Although there is nothing that requires a general to keep faith with rebels, John’s use of equivocation, the Jesuits’ technique, cannot have endeared him to an Elizabethan audience; and surely we are not forced to
admire the glib piety of his comment on the success of his stratagem: "God, and not we, hath safely fought today" (IV.ii.121). His unsmiling virtue comes perilously close to smugness. He lacks his brother's sprezzatura, Hal's ability to carry his virtues lightly. That is why Hal can be amused and generous when Falstaff pretends to heroic merit, and John can only proclaim a generosity he shows no signs of having. Hence John is no more than his father's son, but Hal is the future hero of Agincourt, a king who can inspire by being both a heroic model and a good fellow.

_Falstaff in Decline._—Falstaff is less closely related to the family theme in this play than in _1 Henry IV_, though in the process of degrading him Shakespeare emphasizes his sterility, his isolation from the normal processes of marriage and rearing a family. Seeing him with the prostitute Doll Tearsheet in his lap, Poins exclaims (perhaps unfairly, if Doll's testimony can be trusted): "Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance?" (II.iv.258-59). The fat knight, who has been jesting about marriage and avoiding it for years (as in I.ii.241-43), can move the sentimental tears of a whore; but all his wit cannot hide the barrenness of his life. Even Shallow and Silence have children of whom to exchange news, and Shallow inquires after Falstaff's wife when Bardolph arrives on the recruiting trip. Falstaff is an outsider to all family bonds, in that way resembling Richard III. As with Richard, this detachment gives his wit the freedom to play freely over the family. His unfettered vision lets him see that "the son of the female is the shadow of the male; it is often so
indeed—but much of the father's substance!" (III.ii.129-31).

He can even view the inheritance of Henry IV’s sons with healthy cynicism. His wit breaks through orthodox doctrine to allow a fuller understanding of the difference between Hal and John, but he pushes his analysis no further than a jesting metaphor.

The comparison with Richard III does not go very far, of course, since Falstaff is by no means the same threat to the family. If we distinguish between the two sides of the Vice, jester and devil, Falstaff parallels the former and Richard the latter. In the symbolic pattern of the play, Falstaff embodies the semi-authorized detachment from orthodox values to which figures like the comic Vice and the Lord of Misrule give public expression. If one were to take Mistress Quickly’s sufferings seriously, then he would be a monster, but Shakespeare uses her absurdities to divert attention from the pathos of her situation. Also, Falstaff is more vulnerable than Richard III. Unmoved by his mother’s curse, Richard finds a worthy antagonist only in the whole force of Providence. Falstaff is susceptible to the griefs of old age and (though this is more lightly touched) of loneliness. An empty old man, he is forced to make claims on his youthful friend’s affections, claims that Hal’s position makes it impossible to honor. Hence there is a sharp pathos in his appeal to the new king, selfish though it may be, and in Hal’s blunt reply:

*Fal.* My King! My Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!

*King.* I know thee not, old man.

*(V.v.46-47)*
Here at a serious level is Hal’s constant reply to Falstaff’s fantastic wit, the test of reality. Falstaff can be nothing to the king, neither father nor companion; he is simply an old man.30

One must neither ignore nor exaggerate the pain of this rejection. Falstaff is hurt more deeply than in his hopes of advancement, yet he is not crushed. Like the figure that rose from the apparently fatal battle with Douglas, he turns to Justice Shallow and puts off his creditor with his usual bland unscrupulousness: “Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound” (73).31 Whatever Shakespeare’s plans for the knight’s future, it seems clear that he is hopelessly estranged from the king, but not destroyed. The Lord of Misrule both dies and lives forever; the isolated man has given no hostages to fortune. As for the new king, he has to reject Falstaff in order to accept his symbolic father, the Lord Chief Justice. Still the critics’ nagging sense of inadequacy in this scene has some justification.32 The main awkwardness comes from the thin dramatic presence of the Lord Chief Justice, who makes only the most perfunctory opposite to Falstaff. Henry V’s character suffers in many eyes because he chooses a symbol over a full-blooded dramatic character with symbolic overtones, but at the symbolic level the intent is clear: he chooses justice and family order over anarchy and disorder, the effects of a king who submits his state to selfish favorites. He chooses the wisdom of age, not the folly of age masquerading as youth. He chooses a man who can be a father to him as just king, not a man to whom fatherhood is only a joke.
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Conclusion: 1 and 2 Henry IV

The two parts of Henry IV show with the fullness of great dramatic art Hal’s development into a hero-king, the embodiment of glory based on order and justice. While England overcomes the principle of disorder in the Percy rebellion, a man develops into a king who will for a time offer the ideal alternative to disorder: union under a banner of patriotic glory and national purpose. Hal’s moral growth is shown as a series of decisions in which he accepts what is good in the various models proposed to him and resists their vices and weaknesses. Thus he finds a genuine heritage, his roots in the past, and at the same time goes beyond it.

Shakespeare gives depth to this theme by showing it at several levels. First, with human psychology he portraits a son who pulls away from his father to declare his independence and then is reconciled when his father comes to accept that independence and he accepts the responsibilities of his freedom. Because Shakespeare’s blank verse and prose have become flexible enough to suggest the tones of normal speech without being subdued to the commonplace, he can catch the humanity of his king and prince with uncanny precision. At the same time he can suggest symbolic levels. Most important of these is the underlying pattern of the Prodigal Son story, which not only universalizes Hal’s situation but gives it a religious overtone. To the Elizabethans a king was an earthly god in more than a purely figurative sense, a type of the King of Heaven. To them the story of the Prodigal Son had a secular, educational meaning, but also its primary religious sig-
nificance. Thus Hal is both a son reconciled with his father and a soul reconciled with the principle of order and virtue in the universe. Finally, Shakespeare uses the relationship of Henry IV and Hal to suggest a theme that runs through his whole career: the redemption of a sinful older generation by the idealism and faith of a new one. If Hal does not have the symbolic resonance of Perdita, still a sick land is revived by his accession, and the glory of Agincourt lies ahead of a kingdom only just emerging from civil war.  

The Elizabethans were as conscious as we of concrete reality, of things and men in themselves. At the same time, however, they saw things and men as expressions of a whole, as parts in a divinely ordered pattern. The family corresponds to the state, not just as a quaint figure of speech, but because in some mysterious but real way the king is indeed a father, the subject a son, and order in the family the same as political justice. In following this mental habit of his age, Shakespeare learns how to combine the public and the personal in one dramatic structure. Because he sees similarity of pattern where we see difference of content, he can unite ideal and actual, the symbolic and the realistic. To solve this problem for the family and the state is not to solve it for all of his drama, but the solution illustrated in the Henry IV plays points toward the even more complex handling of similar problems in the great tragedies.  

Taking this view of the Henry IV plays implies one answer to a serious critical issue. If the family is essentially parallel to the state and Henry V's royalty dependent on his successful growth as a son and brother, then Derek Traversi's argument that becoming a king
involves sacrificing part of one's humanity must be wrong. The whole tenor of this chapter has suggested that, but it may be worthwhile to state the issue in more abstract terms. Traversi's view springs from an important truth about Shakespeare's handling of kingship, that he emphasizes the king's isolation and consequent loneliness. In giving up Falstaff, Henry V is making a sacrifice. Does it follow, however, that he is less of a man for doing so? In part the question is one of definition, whether or not being a man involves cultivating openness and spontaneity over dignity and responsibility. But there is an issue of interpretation involved as well: is Hal as king or as prince cold and heartless? Does he play with Falstaff's feelings for purely utilitarian ends and then reject him without regret? Since Hal is necessarily playing the public role of newly crowned king in the rejection scene, we cannot tell with precisely what feelings he rejects Falstaff, and the disguise motif leaves even his earlier feelings veiled. Still, this chapter has suggested some reasons for rejecting the idea that Hal is from the beginning a coldblooded plotter. It also has suggested that Prince John is a contrast to Hal, not a parallel that Falstaff ironically misunderstands. Hence it seems reasonable to view Hal's growth from prince to king as paralleled by a growth from boy to man.

Whatever one's view of the Henry IV plays, no one denies that they manifest Shakespeare's dramatic maturity as none of the earlier history plays do. Something in the material at his disposal—chronicles of old civil wars, a crude dramatization of a wild prince's reformation, all the scores of known and unknown sources that
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flow together in the two plays—releases his imagination as even Sir Thomas More's imaginative portrayal of Richard III and the diverse materials behind Richard II had not done. This chapter has attempted to show how one theme, the relation of the family to the problems of state, shares in that sudden expansion of dramatic vision.

1 Most scholars date the two plays between 1595 and 1598, though there are the usual theories of revision from an earlier form. See the summaries of these two problems in the New Variorum Editions, Samuel B. Hemingway's Henry the Fourth Part I (Philadelphia, 1936), and Matthias A. Shaaber's The Second Part of Henry the Fourth (Philadelphia, 1940), and G. Blakemore Evans's supplement to the former, the third issue of Shakespeare Quarterly 7 (1956). John Dover Wilson, "The Origins and Development of Shakespeare's Henry IV," The Library 4th ser., 16 (1945-46), 2-16, sets forth a theory of major revision. Another vexed issue is whether the two plays are to be considered discrete dramatic units or whether together they constitute a single ten-act play. John Dover Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff (Cambridge, Eng., 1943); E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (New York, 1944); and A. R. Humphreys, The Second Part of King Henry IV, New Arden Edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. xxi-xxviii, are important defenders of the unified plan. Among major arguments on the other side are M. A. Shaaber, "The Unity of Henry IV," Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies, ed. James G. MclManaway et al. (Washington, D.C., 1948), pp. 217-27; Harold Jenkins, The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth (London, 1956); and Robert Adger Law, "The Composition of Shakespeare's Lancastrian Trilogy," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 3 (1961), 321-27. Whatever the origin of the plays, they are clearly coordinated in theme, character, and action.

2 For a general discussion of the Prodigal Son drama, see Chapter I, pp. 14-16. On the theme in Henry IV, see The Fortunes of Falstaff, pp. 17-25, and a reply by Peter Alexander, "Wilson on Falstaff," Modern Language Review 39 (1944), 408-9. Though most Renaissance educators are skeptical about wild youth's reforming, Henry Peacham is one exception. He even argues that "these of all other, if they be well tempered, prove the best metall" (Peacham's Compleat Gentleman, ed. G. S. Gordon [Oxford, Eng., 1906], p. 34).
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1 Henry IV, III.iii.77 (cf. Humphreys' note on the passage), IV.ii. 33-36; 2 Henry IV, II.1.141-42.


Genesis 4:11; see Humphreys' note on the passage.

William Empson discusses this episode in English Pastoral Poetry (New York, 1938), p. 44. However, to him it is an unequivocal condemnation of the king. Richard L. McGuire, "The Play-within-the-play in 1 Henry IV," Shakespeare Quarterly 18 (1967), 52, points out that counterfeiting is a central image in the play, and James Winn, The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare's Histories (New York, 1968), studies it at length.


5 Cf. the discussion in Tillyard, pp. 278-80.

6 "Behind Shakespeare's acceptance of a traditional story lies the sense, which grows as the action develops, that success in politics implies a moral loss, the sacrifice of more attractive qualities in the distinctively personal order" (Derek Traversi, Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V [London, 1957], p. 58).

7 "In this one instant, the disintegration of a family and the disintegration of a nation seem to have been simultaneously averted" (Alfred Harbage, William Shakespeare: A Reader's Guide [New York, 1963], p. 213).

8 H. M. Richmond, Shakespeare's Political Plays (New York, 1967), p. 157, rather perversely attributes Hal's boldness to his knowledge that his father will not let him fight. Surely Vernon's report of the incident (V.ii.45-68) makes Hal's chivalric impressiveness clear.

9 One would give much to have seen the impromptu play that Hal considers, with himself as Hotspur and "that damned brawn" Falstaff (II.iv.107-8) as Lady Percy.


11 Philip Williams, "The Birth and Death of Falstaff Reconsidered," Shakespeare Quarterly 8 (1957), 362, argues that during this scene Hal symbolically deposes a father-figure in Falstaff. There are two objections to the contention that Hal is satisfying unconscious parricidal impulses. First, he is playing his father's role in banishing Falstaff.
Hence the obvious symbolism of the episode suggests reconciliation with the values his father represents. Second, there is no substantial evidence in the text that Hal hates his father. Although he does resent his father’s disapproval, the tone is one of hurt affection rather than hatred. Mr. Williams shows Henry IV’s fears that Hal hates him and wishes for his death, but the passages he cites to show Hal’s alleged parricidal impulses (1HIV, V.iv.50-56; 2HIV, IV.v.157-67) overtly support the contrary. Only a strained psychological reading of the lines can yield evidence for his theory.


12 The close bond between king and kingdom, a commonplace of Renaissance political theory, is suggested by the habit of referring to a king by the name of his land—England, France, or whatever. Erasmus repeats a commonplace when he says, “What the heart is in the body of a living creature, that the prince is in the state” (The Education of a Christian Prince, trans. Lester K. Born [New York, 1936], pp. 175-76).


14 These plays illustrate the two potentialities of the motif. In George d Greene King Edward proves himself a man of his people, in particular when he vails his staff to the shoemakers of Bradford. The emphasis is on kingly humanity. Prince Edward of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, though attracted to fair Margaret, the lowborn natural aristocrat, overcomes his passion with the magnanimity of royal blood.

15 The passage may contain a pun on “case,” meaning both “state” and “costume or outer garb.” At the risk of pushing a metaphor too hard, I would suggest that the second sense implies a common truth: neither Jove, lord of the skies, nor Hal, the future king, destroys his essential being by disguise. Both are “essentially made without seeming so.”

16 Again Erasmus is typical of Renaissance moralists: “The common run of princes zealously avoid the dress and manner of living of the lower classes. Just so should the true prince be removed from the suffled opinions and desires of the common folk” (The Education of a Christian Prince, p. 150). Edgar T. Schell, “Prince Hal’s Second ‘Reformation,’” Shakespeare Quarterly 21 (1970), 11-16, sees Hal in this play as reformed from the start but symbolically filling the folkloric role of the Prodigal.
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28 Humphreys' note at III.ii.128-31 interprets the passage "so the son the mother bears is a likeness cast by the father—but often only the dimmest copy, with little of the paternal substance." But surely Shaaber's note in the New Variorum (at 133-5) is more accurate: "The point of all this punning is plain enough: Falstaff is casting aspersions on Shadow's paternity."

29 Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York, 1958), makes this distinction.

30 To make him a Saturn to Hal's Jove, as does Philip Williams, "The Birth and Death of Falstaff Reconsidered," p. 365, is clever and not untrue to the ritualistic emphasis that Shakespeare puts on the rejection scene. However, the association of Saturn with the Golden Age and hence utopian disorder is more relevant than any suggestion of symbolic parricide. For an interesting comparison between Falstaff's decline and Henry IV's, see S. C. Sen Gupta, Shakespeare's Historical Plays (London, 1964), pp. 133-34.

31 As Humphreys' note at V.v.73 points out, critics have read this line in many different ways, but his interpretation, which I follow, is most natural in view of Falstaff's next speech.


34 See Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V, chaps. 3 and 4.