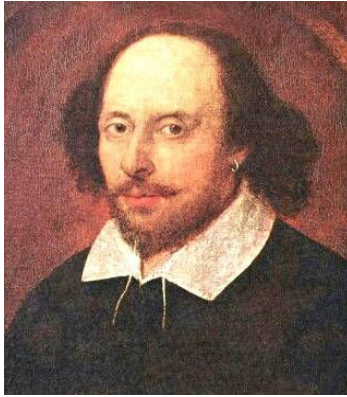


# HENRY IV, part 1

## by William Shakespeare



### THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

*Henry IV, part 1* is the second part of a tetralogy of plays dealing with the rise of the house of Lancaster (*Richard II*, *Henry IV, part 1*, *Henry IV, part 2*, and *Henry V*) and centering on the career of King Henry V (Prince Hal in the two *Henry IV* plays), and is for the most part a coming-of-age story about the growth of a carousing, self-centered prince into a young man with the potential to rule wisely and lead his people. It was written in 1596 and was so popular that Shakespeare not only produced the two sequels, but also wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, supposedly at the request of Queen Elizabeth herself, who wanted to see the clown Falstaff in love. The incidents described in the play took place during 1402-3, during the time of the Wars of the

Roses. As was true with many of Shakespeare's history plays, his principal source of information was Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. As in all his history plays, Shakespeare makes alterations in the facts (Hotspur was twenty-three years older than Prince Hal, who was sixteen at the time) and adds fictitious characters (the comic figures, especially Falstaff, fit into this category, though Shakespeare originally called his great comic creation Sir John Oldcastle - the actual name of a Lollard leader martyred under Henry V - but later changed the name when Oldcastle's family protested).

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- King Henry IV - The king of England at the time during which the play takes place, he is a disillusioned man. When he seized the throne from his predecessor Richard II he expected to be able to reign in peace, but England continues to be plagued by civil strife. He also feels guilty for having overthrown and killed Richard, and is terribly disappointed in his son Hal, the heir to the throne, who is throwing his life away in carousing and hanging out with a gang of rogues.
- Prince Hal - The Prince of Wales and heir to the throne, he is really the protagonist of this coming-of-age story. He spends his time among rogues and thieves, but is really a noble young man with a stout heart. He intends to reveal his true character when the time is right, and the civil war that forms the plot for this play provides the occasion. He ultimately distances himself from Falstaff and his other cronies and proves his mettle in battle, finally killing Hotspur in single combat. He later becomes King Henry V.
- John of Lancaster - Prince Hal's younger brother, he proves his valor in the battle of Shrewsbury.
- Earl of Westmoreland - Noble ally of Henry IV.
- Sir Walter Blunt - An ally of the king, he is killed by Hotspur while wearing the king's garments to deceive the enemy.
- Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland - Hotspur's father and the leader of the rebel confederacy against Henry IV. He becomes seriously ill before the battle of Shrewsbury and is unable to bring his troops to the fray.
- Henry Percy the Younger (Hotspur) - A hot-headed young warrior who serves as a foil for Prince Hal, he is obsessed with glory and jealous for the honor of his family. His rashness leads to his death when he meets Hal on the field of battle at Shrewsbury.
- Lady Percy - Hotspur's wife, she tries to dissuade him from fighting against the king, but he thinks of nothing but the offenses against his family and the glory that will follow his coming success.
- Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester - Hotspur's uncle, he masterminds the Percy rebellion.

- Sir Richard Vernon - An ally of the Percys, he wants to take the king's offer of clemency but is dissuaded by Worcester. Both are captured and executed after the battle.
- Richard Scroop, Archbishop of York - An ally of the rebels.
- Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March - A conflation of two historical figures, Mortimer in the play is the son-in-law of Owen Glendower. When Glendower captures him in battle, the king, who suspects him of treachery, refuses to ransom him. He joins the rebels, though he does not arrive in time for the battle of Shrewsbury with which the play ends. He is a key figure because his claim to the throne is at least as valid as Henry's, and he thus becomes part of the justification for the rebellion.
- Lady Mortimer - Owen Glendower's daughter and Edmund Mortimer's husband, she speaks no English and her husband speaks no Welsh, but they love one another deeply.
- Owen Glendower - Leader of the Welsh rebels, he believes himself to have magical powers and is swayed by superstitions and omens. He, too, arrives too late for the climactic battle. His daughter is Lady Mortimer.
- Archibald, Earl of Douglas - Leader of the Scottish rebels, he is a feared warrior who almost kills the king, but is routed by Hal; later he almost kills Falstaff in battle.
- Sir John Falstaff - A fat old man who hangs out in taverns and earns money through petty thievery, he is the chief comic figure in the play, and one of the greatest in all of Shakespeare. He has a quick wit, and is Prince Hal's friend and mentor. Hal's maturation can be measured by the extent to which he is willing to distance himself from Falstaff.
- Ned Poins, Bardolph, Peto, Gadshill - Rogues and thieves who are friends of Falstaff and Hal's companions at the beginning of the play.
- Mistress Quickly - Hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern frequented by Falstaff and his companions in crime.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Yea, there thou makest me sad, and makest me sin  
 In envy that my Lord Northumberland  
 Should be the father to so blest a son -  
 A son who is the theme of honor'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 dishonor 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 and his Plantagenet!  
Then would I have his Harry, and he mine.” (Henry IV, Ii, 80-92)

“He will give the Devil his due.” (Prince Hal, Iii, 121)  
“Before the game is afoot thou still letst slip.” (Northumberland, Iiii, 294)

*Falstaff:* “No, my good lord: banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish not him thy Harry’s company. Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!”

*Prince Hal:* “I do; I will.” (IIiv, 480-487)

“Tell truth and shame the Devil.” (Hotspur, IIIi, 64)

“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;  
The least of which haunting a nobleman  
Loseth men’s hearts, and leaves behind a stain  
Upon the beauty of all parts besides,  
Beguiling them of commendation.” (Worcester, IIIi, 192-201)

“I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord,  
Be more myself.” (Prince Hal, IIIii, 94-95)

“I will redeem all this on Percy’s head  
And, in the closing of some glorious day,  
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,  
When I will wear a garment all of blood,  
And stain my favors in a bloody mask,  
Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it.” (Prince Hal, IIIii, 135-140)

“Do thou amend thy face, and I’ll amend my life.” (Falstaff, IIIiii, 25-26)

“What is honor? A word. What is in that word honor? What is that honor? Air - a trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. ‘Tis sensible 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. Honor is a mere scutcheon - and so ends my catechism.” (Falstaff, Vi, 136-142)

“When that this body did contain a spirit,  
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;  
But now two paces of the vilest earth  
Is room enough.” (Prince Hal, Viv, 96-99)

“The better part of valor is discretion,  
In the which better part I have saved my life.” (Falstaff, Viv, 127-128)

## NOTES

**Act I, scene 1** - The play opens with King Henry IV (Henry Bolingbroke from *Richard II*) planning a crusade to the Holy Land with his advisors. Word arrives that the Edmund Mortimer, the Earl of March, has been defeated and captured by the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower. On the Scottish front, Henry Percy (also known as Hotspur) has won a victory, but proudly refuses to turn his prisoners over to the king. Henry IV bemoans the fact that his son, Henry Prince of Wales (Prince Hal) is such a wastrel compared to young Hotspur. He then decides to postpone the planned crusade in order to deal with these disruptions at home.

**Act I, scene 2** - Henry, Prince of Wales (Prince Hal), the heir to the throne, is hanging out with a group of rowdies headed by Sir John Falstaff, a fat old drunkard and the main comic figure in the play. They banter for a while, then Poins brings news that Gadshill has planned a robbery for the following day. Hal refuses to take part, but then Poins convinces him to come along, but hang back and join him in robbing the thieves after they have taken their prize. At the end of the scene, Hal delivers a soliloquy in which he assures the audience that he is putting on a front of carelessness in order to make a stronger impression when his true character emerges.

**Act I, scene 3** - The king meets with Northumberland, Worcester, Hotspur, and other nobles to resolve the matter of the prisoners. Hotspur explains that the king's messenger was rude and disrespectful, and he replied in kind, but still refuses to yield the prisoners unless Henry IV agrees to ransom Mortimer from captivity at the hand of Owen Glendower. The king refuses, arguing that, since Mortimer is married to Glendower's daughter, he probably was a traitor. Hotspur argues that Mortimer had fought valiantly, but the king refuses to listen and warns him that there will be severe consequences if the prisoners are not turned over to him. Hotspur and the others, bitter at such treatment at the hands of one whom they had placed on the throne after the death of Richard II, decide to join Glendower, Mortimer, and the Scottish Lord Douglas in a conspiracy to overthrow the king.

**Act II, scene 1** - At a roadside inn, the chamberlain tells Gadshill of a squire traveling with a large sum of money. Gadshill intends to rob him, and the chamberlain warns him of the gallows. Gadshill argues that he has nothing to fear, since his friends are of such noble rank that they will protect him even if he gets caught.

**Act II, scene 2** - Falstaff and his companions prepare to rob the travelers. Hal and Poins sneak off before the attack. The thieves bind and rob the travelers, then Hal and Poins, in disguise, rob the thieves and prepare for a hilarious joke on their friends.

**Act II, scene 3** - The scene begins with Hotspur reading a letter from a nobleman who refuses to join the rebellion because he considers the outcome too uncertain. Hotspur rages about the nobleman's cowardice, but when his wife enters and begs to know what is bothering him - he has been tense and irritable, and has been talking of warfare in his sleep - he refuses to tell her, then leaves.

**Act II, scene 4** - The scene takes place at the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap. Hal is in good spirits because of the prank played by himself and Poins, and has been bantering with the men in the tavern. Falstaff arrives with his confederates, and, after criticizing Hal and Poins for running away before the robbery, spins a tall tale about how he fought off a fierce band of a hundred thieves who set upon them and seized their booty. Hal uncovers Falstaff's tall tale and reveals the prank, telling them that he and Poins had stolen their money, and had it there in the tavern. Falstaff, refusing to be bested, claims that he knew the assailant was Hal all the time, but had taken it easy on him because he was the heir to the throne. A messenger then arrives at the tavern and tells them of the rebellion against the king, summoning all to the wars. Hal and Falstaff then carry on a mock interview between the prince and his father, in which Falstaff portrays the king. As the king, he accuses Hal of keeping bad company (with the exception of that noble fellow Falstaff, of course) and wasting his life. They then switch parts, with Hal playing the role of his father, in which guise he rebukes Hal firmly for hanging out with a buffoon like Falstaff. Falstaff, speaking as Hal, begs the king to banish all of Hal's other companions, but not Jack Falstaff, thus revealing his own insecurity about his relationship to the young prince. The sheriff arrives, and all hide except Hal, who straightens matters out by assuring him that the money will be recovered and repaid. They then prepare to go to the wars, with Hal stating that Falstaff will be given a small command of foot soldiers, and wondering if such a fat man will be able to walk far enough to keep up with his troops.

**Act III, scene 1** - The conspirators gather, though there is little love lost among them - Hotspur mocks Glendower when he claims magical powers. The three principles then bring out a map and divide the land among them - Hotspur is to get southern England, Glendower Wales, and Mortimer northern England, though they quarrel about some of the boundary lines. After Glendower leaves, Mortimer tells Hotspur not to mock him so, arguing that, though he can be a boring windbag, he is nonetheless a valiant soldier who is holding his temper out of respect for the younger man. Worcester tells Hotspur he needs to control his temper if he ever wants men to follow him. Mortimer and Hotspur take leave of their wives, though Mortimer, who is married to Glendower's daughter, cannot speak to her because she knows only Welsh.

**Act III, scene 2** - The scene begins with the king rebuking Hal for his wild lifestyle. Hal insists that the rumors far exceed the reality, but asks forgiveness for those escapades that are in fact true. The king continues, criticizing Hal for not attending to matters of state, and tells him that his familiarity with common, worthless fellows does not create the distance and mystery necessary for effective rule. Henry contrasts his own aloofness with the familiarity of his predecessor, Richard II, who had lost the respect of the people, and compares Hotspur, a valiant warrior even at his tender age, with his younger self. Hal responds by promising that he will prove himself on the field of battle against Hotspur. The king, impressed, agrees to give Hal a command. Walter Blunt arrives to announce that the English rebels have joined the Scots under Douglas at Shrewsbury, and the king and Hal leave to join their forces.

**Act III, scene 3** - Back at the Boar's Head, Falstaff is bemoaning his fatigue and claiming that Mistress Quickly has picked his pocket. Hal arrives and reminds Falstaff that there was no money in his pocket to steal. He then tells him of his infantry command and sends Bardolph with a message to his brother the Duke of Lancaster.

**Act IV, scene 1** - Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas hear that Northumberland is seriously ill and cannot join them, and that Glendower will be delayed for another two weeks. They remain confident that they can defeat the forces of the king, even with their depleted ranks, and Hotspur is eager to meet Prince Hal, for whom he has little respect, in battle.

**Act IV, scene 2** - Falstaff has allowed all his able-bodied men to buy themselves out of military service, and arrives at the camp with a ragged group of incompetents (one observer tells him that it looks like he has assembled his company by emptying the gibbets along the road). Hal tells Falstaff that his soldiers look a pathetic lot, but the time has come for battle.

**Act IV, scene 3** - In the rebel camp, the commanders quarrel over whether to attack immediately or wait until the following day. Sir Walter Blunt then arrives with a message from the king. The king asks for an enumeration of grievances, and promises that if they be just, they shall be corrected and all who have gathered under the rebel banner pardoned. Hotspur answers that the king had come to power as Duke of Lancaster through the help of his father, but had then seized the throne, contrary to his original promise, had killed Richard's followers, and finally had deposed and killed the king himself. In addition, he had placed burdensome taxes on the people, and had refused to ransom Mortimer when he was captured by Owen Glendower. Blunt asks if he should relay this answer to the king, but Hotspur tells him to return in the morning for their final answer.

**Act IV, scene 4** - The Archbishop of York, who is part of the conspiracy, sends letters to his friends expressing his fear that the battle will not go well for them, and that the consequences will be dire indeed.

**Act V, scene 1** - Worcester visits the king's camp with a list of the conspirators' grievances. Henry denies the charges against him. Hal sends a personal challenge to Hotspur, praising his prowess and offering to settle matters in single combat. The king again offers pardon if the rebels will settle without a fight, but doubts that they would agree to do so. Falstaff begs Hal to protect him in battle, then demeans the concept of honor before he heads off to the field.

**Act V, scene 2** - Worcester returns to the rebel camp, but tells Hotspur nothing of the king's gracious offer because he doesn't trust the king to keep his word; Vernon speaks of Hal's challenge, praising the young prince for his nobility.

**Act V, scene 3** - The battle begins, and Douglas encounters Blunt dressed like the king and kills him in combat. Falstaff sees Blunt's corpse, and again speaks badly of honor, indicating that, of his 150 soldiers, only three remain alive. Hal comes upon him; Falstaff claims to have killed Hotspur, but Hal knows better and voices his disgust at Falstaff's cowardice.

**Act V, scene 4** - The king's forces are in retreat and Hal is wounded. Douglas meets the king and they fight; the king is near to defeat when Hal steps in and takes on Douglas, forcing him to flee. Hotspur then enters, and he and Hal fight. Falstaff enters and cheers Hal on, but is surprised when Douglas returns and begins to fight him; Falstaff feigns death to avoid the real thing. Hal then kills Hotspur, and praises him after death. He then sees Falstaff, thinks him dead, and says a sad farewell. Falstaff gets up after Hal leaves, stabs the dead Hotspur, and carries him off to claim credit for his demise. Hal tells him that he killed Hotspur himself, and Falstaff accuses him of lying; Hal lets him have his moment in the sun.

**Act V, scene 5** - The battle is over and the forces of the king have won. Worcester and Vernon are condemned to death, but Hal releases the captured Douglas without ransom, and the combatants leave to fight the remaining rebels.

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In the plays of Shakespeare, regicide and rebellion are viewed as terrible sins, and always bear bitter fruit in the lives of the perpetrators. How is this truth evident in *Henry IV, part 1*? Does it matter whether the king is a good king or not? Compare the point of view of the play with Paul's discussion of man's responsibilities to his rulers in Romans 13:1-5.
2. One of the major themes running through the history plays of Shakespeare is the nature of good government. What makes a good king? Answer the question using specific incidents and quotations from William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*.
3. William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* is among other things a coming-of-age story. To a large extent, the maturation of Prince Hal can be measured by his willingness to distance himself from his friend and mentor Sir John Falstaff. Demonstrate how this is true, using specifics from the play to support your arguments.
4. Prince Hal undergoes a major transformation during the course of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. In your opinion, is his transformation largely his own doing, or is it the result of the circumstances into which he is drawn? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
5. Prince Hal may be the protagonist of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, but he is far from flawless. In the course of the play, he shows himself willing to deceive those around him, manipulate situations for the benefit of his friends, and later disown those same friends when circumstances call for it. Does Shakespeare view these traits as flaws in Hal's character or does he see them as essential characteristics of a strong king? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.

6. In William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, Falstaff is unquestionably a wretch, but the audience, along with Prince Hal, can't help liking him. Why? What is there about Falstaff that makes him such an attractive figure? Support your arguments with details from the text of the play.
7. One of the themes of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* is the nature of honor. While Prince Hal demonstrates the quality at the end of the play, both Hotspur and Falstaff have much to say on the subject. What, according to Shakespeare, is honor? Use specifics from the play to support your arguments.
8. Discuss the relationship between honor and violence in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. Is it possible to be an honorable man without demonstrating valor in combat? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
9. Compare and contrast Prince Hal's two father-figures, King Henry and Falstaff, in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. What do the two characters communicate about who Hal is and what he becomes? What valuable lessons does he learn from each man? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
10. Discuss the use of ethnic stereotypes in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, focusing particularly on his treatments of Owen Glendower and the Earl of Douglas. What is the point of these stereotypes? What role do they play in the social commentary of the play? Be sure to use specifics from the play in developing your arguments.
11. A *foil* is a character who serves to accentuate aspects of another character by contrast. Some plays have many pairs of foils. Choose a pair of foils from William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* and discuss how the characters are different, how each serves to bring out certain characteristics in the other, and how these contrasts contribute to the themes of the play.
12. At the end of Act I, scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, Prince Hal describes his plan for revealing his true character. Among other things, he implies that he intends to serve as his own foil. To what extent does this turn out to be the case? Do you think his strategy was a good one? Why or why not? Support your argument with specifics from the play.
13. If anyone in the Shakespearean canon embodies the philosophy of *carpe diem*, it is the character of Sir John Falstaff in *Henry IV, part 1*. In your opinion, does Shakespeare value the philosophy of which Falstaff is the chief exponent? Why or why not? Use specifics from the play to support your arguments.
14. In the civil war that drives the plot of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, both sides attempt to justify their respective causes. Which side, in your opinion, is in the right? Do the forces of the king or the armies of the rebels hold the moral high ground? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.

15. Critic Harold Bloom describes the character of Falstaff in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* as "a man made out of words." What does he mean by that? What role does language play in Falstaff's identity as he presents it to others? Is this true to some extent of all people, or is it uniquely true of Shakespeare's great comic creation? Use specific quotes from the play to support your conclusions.
16. At the end of Act I, scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, Prince Hal tells the audience that he has deliberately been concealing his genuine character, but that he intends to reveal his true self when the time is right. Discuss his motive for doing this? Is it nothing more than an excuse for carousing with a group of low-lives? Is he afraid of the responsibilities of royalty? Is he, as he says, trying to make his true nature look better to everyone by contrast with his assumed character? Is he trying to get to know the people he will eventually rule? Some or all of the above? Defend your conclusions with specifics from the play.
17. Discuss the character of Hotspur in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. What are his greatest strengths and weaknesses? Would he have made a good king? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
18. It is not at all surprising that William Shakespeare devoted so much attention to the Wars of the Roses in his history plays. During the time when these plays were written, Queen Elizabeth was getting along in years, and obviously would produce no heir. Civil war loomed on the horizon if the succession were not settled peacefully. As a result, the history plays spend a great deal of time meditating on the nature of good kingship and the consequences of rebellion. Discuss the applications of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* to the dilemmas of the Elizabethan Age. How does this play, in particular, address some of the key issues that concerned the people of Shakespeare's day? Be sure to use specific incidents and quotations from the play to support your arguments.
19. Discuss the relationships between fathers and sons in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. According to Shakespeare, is the path to maturity found by obeying one's father or by rebelling and charting one's own path? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
20. Discuss the extent to which the king in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* practices the political philosophy espoused by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Is Henry IV more concerned with power than he is with right and wrong? Is it more important to him to be efficient than it is to be just? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
21. In William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*, how does the rejection of Falstaff by Prince Hal illustrate the costs of leadership? Support your arguments with specific quotations and incidents from the play.