



## Henry IV, Part I

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Henry IV learns that independent lords who help one of their number to rebel against a king may turn against their former champion as well. Henry faces a headstrong group of former supporters, led by the powerful Percy family, who no longer trust his leadership.

The disorder of the state is paralleled by the private “riot and disorder” of Prince Hal among his disreputable cronies at the tavern. Sir John Falstaff, the old braggart soldier who earns a precarious living by an occasional highway robbery, beguiles the prince with a ready wit and jovial good fellowship, so foreign to the cold and often pretentious atmosphere of court.

When war actually breaks out, however, Prince Hal becomes his father’s champion and offers Falstaff a chance to redeem himself as well by resuming his proper role as a soldier. The wily Falstaff misuses his new power and plays dead on the battlefield to avoid fighting. Prince Hal performs brilliantly, however, not only saving his father’s life but also defeating the formidable Hotspur in single combat.

The play is a perceptive study of the meaning of honor and the requirements of kingship. Prince Hal must discriminate between the virtues and the flaws of several role models. He chooses the high seriousness but not the Machiavellian coldness of his father, the human understanding and wit of Falstaff but not his rascality, the bravery but not the foolish impetuosity of Hotspur.

## Bibliography:

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Bevington, David. Introduction to *Henry IV, Part I*, by William Shakespeare. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. General introduction to the play. Discusses its performance history, its sources, its major characters, its structural unity, and its politics.

Cohen, Derek. “The Rite of Violence in *I Henry IV*.” *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985): 77-84. A detailed analysis of Hotspur as structural center of the play, explaining his evolution from comic to heroic and then to tragic figure.

Fehrenbach, Robert J. “The Characterization of the King in *I Henry IV*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30 no. 1 (Winter, 1979): 42-50. Contends that a focus upon King Henry is crucial to comprehension of Shakespeare’s use of indirect characterization.

Levin, Lawrence. “Hotspur, Falstaff and the Emblem of Wrath in *I Henry IV*.” *Shakespeare Studies* 10 (1977): 43-65. Analyzes the relationship between Hotspur and Falstaff, contending Falstaff is a visual representation of the wrath that controls Hotspur.

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