Falstaff Riseth Up

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We should probably prepare ourselves. In this lecture, I shall go as far as I can to present Falstaff, body and soul, as the center of meaning and liveliness in *Henry IV, Part One*.[1] No doubt some will think I go too far in my enthusiasms, not respecting boundaries, moralities, legalities, and even the words of God and His saints. The trimming of my excesses I expect--later. For now, with the blessing of the Dean, and your prankish attention, the hour belongs to Falstaff.

"Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" [2] With these words, an old fat man invokes his first presence on stage, accompanied by his "lad," named Hal, who happens to be Prince of Wales, heir to the crown. Only to this man, not even to his father, is he affectionately known, almost always, as "Hal," his "boy," his "lad." The power to name, given by God to Adam for his recognition of the essences of creatures, is the power to summon them into presence for play or rule. As expected from first words, this question opens up the characters and plot. Hal immediately replies, "What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day?" [3] After all, his self-summoning time is simply "now"—whether it's napping at noon or carousing to the chimes of midnight hardly matters--but never is it the now of paying back a debt, or keeping a promise made to expiring nobility; never the now of chivalric contests and courtesies defunct; and never the nows that creep coldly into oblivion to make room for the next bloodsucking

[1] This essay, written for delivery to the community of St. John's College, April 12, 2019, with discussion afterwards, retains the style of the lively spoken word as intrinsic to the meaning of the whole.
[2] I. ii. 1
[3] I. ii. 6

generation of warm bodies. The old fat man does, notwithstanding, inquire about the future: "Sweet wag, shall there be gallows standing in England when thou art king?" [4] But his purpose here is to know when "the now" will operate in the kingdom as it does in him, as a time of freedom from reckoning of debts, laws, punishments, and sins. He exits this scene of unspecified time and location to return to the Boar's Head Tavern of Eastcheap, his garden of pleasures, to the cry of Hal's, "Farewell, the latter spring! Farewell, all-hallown summer!" [5] His long-lived *presence* to youth does not prohibit, on occasion, a current of melancholy, born of the solicitations of autumnal reason, with its farewell looks and pinches towards other times and places.

But must life succumb to this pinching reason, and be panted out in short, laborious breaths of acquisition, regret, and anticipation? Falstaff, for of course that's the name of Hal's unending summer friend, "recreates" himself with riches acquired without back-bending work or mental anguish.[6] Stealing, in other words, avoids the labors that man incurs outside the garden under sentence of death. The fatness of this thief is utterly shameless: because his globular shape betokens the promised land--pregnant with wet and sweet--to spectators stealing time from their hard labors to fill themselves up at the tavern and (Globe) theatre; just as Joseph, that shameless dreamer, able--like this man--to brook all things, preserves the suffering house of Abraham by storing up of grain in the fleshpots of Egypt, the laws thereof at his commandment. Thus does Falstaff, upon introduction

[4] I. ii. 61
[5] I. ii. 161
[6] I. ii. 158

as the fat "re-creator," intent on stealing for sake of youth,[7] manifest his entire meaning: deathless play in the garden of the tavern with his friend, Hal, and others who make the night as good as the day in the yielding up of pleasures, as intended for man by God before law multiplied sin and the knowing world became corrupt and political.

Whoever's not attracted to the character of Falstaff—youthfully old, prophetically fat, and instinctively thieving—has no taste for paradise.

We may now draw out the implications of Falstaff's question, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" What kind of lad or lass are you, whose days and hours are numbered? Are you a named maker of self who feeds on the times? Or are you made by the times, "food for powder."[8] Are you open, free of promises and their guilty burdens? Or are you hidden, trying painfully to keep promises made by some other? Are you a counter-down of the disappointing days until your release? Or are you a riser up to ever more of the days and nights' delights? These are the questions of the play for us tonight.

The name, *Falstaff*, derives from his double essence. He's staffed upright (on two legs), and he's extended laterally by a big belly, signifying that the usual separation of rising and reclining, labor and rest, day and night, youth and age, fertility and barrenness, subdivided tediously into hours, minutes, and seconds until nothing is left, apply not at all to his person. That is why the scenes in which he appears always last longer than

[7] "Young men must live," shouts Falstaff while robbing the pilgrims at Gad's Hill. II. ii. 90
[8] IV. Ii. 66

historical dramaturgy warrants. The tavern scene of Act II-- the second longest in all of Shakespeare--gives us the feeling that were it not for doors registering the knockings of sheriffs, merchants, and politicians seeking to prosecute, trade, and enlist, the plays and pleasures of the tavern *would not have to stop*. The fat of Falstaff orients him towards the horizon, where his breadth of character contrasts favorably with the vertical orientation of lean-minded, ambitious men who populate Shakespeare's history plays. His fatness they incessantly ridicule, which merely arouses his potency, like caresses, and they know it. Words that issue from the top end of his bowels, the mouth, come from deep grounding within the concocting kitchen of his guts, and that is how the Promethean fire catches and spreads as the great and awful comedy of human life, in opposition to the death-lovers.

Warriors, in the heat of battle, are also present in "the now." Any reckoning of interest outside the present focus opens a gap for death to enter and steal away young life. This happens to Hotspur, at the instigation of Falstaff, who turns our heads away from the climactic sword fight between the two Harrys, by occupying--alive and dead--their field of glory. Falstaff is the reason that Hal is able to rob Hotspur of his youth and honor, which Hal shares with him after his rising from the dead and claiming the body as his own prize. These four actions--Falstaff's entrance to the fight, his falling down "as if" dead, his rising up from the ground, and his bearing off the body of dead Hotspur on his back—manifest the mysteries and meanings of the play, as I intend now to show you.

Let's hasten to the battle of the Harrys at Shrewsbury, where these four actions occur. In the rhythm of the first four scenes of Act V, a

proposition is under contest: *The breath of life does not have to be drawn short and thin*. We feel the beats of that rhythm in the entrances and exits of Hotspur and Falstaff, whose motions are the moving joints of a demonstration of that proposition's truth.

Scene one opens with 117 lines of last-minute negotiation between King Henry IV and the rebels. I'm about to recite the king's attempt to conclude the scene with a general exit. That's what royalty like to do, make everyone come and go according to their naming and timing.

King. Hence, therefore, every leader to his charge;
For, on their answer, will we set on them,
And God befriend us as our cause is just!

Exeunt. Remain Prince and Falstaff.

Not once in three plays does Bolingbroke (Henry IV) utter a moving battle speech, though he's always at war. Listen to Falstaff take over from this king who lacks inspiration, on that cue of divine friendship, which he brings down to earth, to "set [Hal] on" to the work of human friendship, with no invocations of justice:

Falstaff. Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and
bestride me, so! 'Tis a point of friendship.

Prince. Nothing but a colossus can do thee that friendship.
Say thy prayers, and farewell.

Falstaff. I would ‘twere bedtime, Hal, and all well.

Prince. Why, thou owest God a death. [*Exit.*]

Falstaff. ‘Tis not due yet: I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, ‘tis no matter; honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. 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 insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I’ll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon—and so ends my catechism. *Exit.*[9]

This speech is a rhetorical masterpiece. Note how Falstaff keeps plucking from himself in audience the word “no,” a pricking word of obliteration. The disgrace of the no’s I leave for others to overcome in the yeas of their virtue. But let me affirm that the speech is true to the action of history that we have been witnessing since Richard II threw his warder down marking the end of chivalry. Even the Chief Justice, Falstaff’s enemy, will

[9] V. i. 118-141

do Falstaff honor because of the report that he fought Hotspur at Shrewsbury. (And Falstaff's honor is of necessity Hotspur's dishonor.) Remember also this: the sources of feeling in a speech of negation, if unchecked, may lead to the nothingness of tragic despair (as in *King Lear)*. For what is left to human dignity when honor is naught, friendship declines to serve, God goes unheard, and the new science of politics puts you in the company of men like Worcester and Westmoreland: traitors, time-servers, lackeys, all? There is one other thing left: the tavern and its answer "anon, anon" to the call of desire, all the humors of time present to entertain and edify. Falstaff's devastating speech of negation, stolen from the arsenal of tragedy, serves the purpose of comedy, to affirm the goodness of life *even* in a base modern world, in which surgery saves rotten bodies and slander plus gunpowder equate all persons.

Now in scene two, it's Hotspur's turn to make clear to the audience what he will have none of: "mincing poetry." [10] He stands by the courtesies of chivalry, to which he commends his soldiers briefly, not possessing, as he says, "the gift of tongue,/ Can lift your blood up with persuasion." [11] At this precise moment of verbal and visceral self-denial, a messenger enters to deliver Hotspur a letter. He drives off the messenger and delivers his warrior's creed:

Hotspur. I cannot read them now.
O gentlemen, the time of life is short!
To spend that shortness basely were too long

[10] "'Tis like the forced gait of a shuffling nag," (III. i. 133-134).
[11] V. ii. 77-78

If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
And if we live, we live to tread on kings;
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!

……

Now, Esperance! Percy! And set on.
Sound all the lofty instruments of war,
And by that music let us all embrace;
For, heaven to earth, some of us never shall
A second time do such a courtesy.[12]

The author and content of the dismissed letter remain unknown, like what might have been. We do know, however, that at this moment of extreme peril, Hotspur is deceived by his uncle, Worcester, who belies the King's offer of peace, and by his own first principles, now under contest with Falstaff: that life must be short, since basely led, and therefore best ended in battle with kings. The unopened letter presents a last-minute challenge to Hotspur's code, but he has not learned leisure to give letters a sound hearing.

Most important is this dramaturgical fact: we're more impressed by Falstaff's catechism to bury honor, because it's a better and truer speech than Hotspur's. Honor is going to stay buried until Henry V makes use of "the gift of tongue" to inspire his soldiers at Agincourt to seek a fellowship

[12] V. ii. 79-86, 96-100

in blood that will story time until "the ending of the world." [13] He learned the rhetorical tricks of raising up the blood to do miraculous things from letters, and the fat man who makes letters dance from his tongue like light.

In scene three, the battle begins. Falstaff is summoned to military presence *twice* by Hotspur's words, as (dramaturgically) they continue to contest the proposition concerning life. He first appears when the rebels are winning; Douglas is killing the counterfeit kings one by one. He and Hotspur exit in confidence to Hotspur's words: "Up and away!/ Our soldiers stand full fairly for the day." [14] On this cue Falstaff enters to "stand full fairly" in Hotspur's vacated place and to point demonstratively, like someone at the blackboard, to the dead Sir Walter Blunt: "There's honor for you! Here's no vanity!" [15] If you find this disrespectful of the brave dead, he is quick to point out that modern war uses lead, shot from pistols and canons, saying: "I need no more weight than mine own bowels," as if he were a defender of heroic chivalry.[16] A desperate Prince objects to his idleness, but not to his critique of modern killing:

Enter the Prince.

Prince. What, stands thou idle here? Lend me thy sword.[17]

[13] *Henry V,* IV. iii. 58
[14] V. iii. 28-29
[15] V. iii. 33
[16] V. iii. 35
[17] V. iii. 39

Three times the Prince demands Falstaff's sword. He offers him his pistol in its case, the sword being reserved, he claims, for Hotspur, on whose dead body he will indeed use it. Hal accepts the case , but finds inside not a pistol, but a bottle of sack, a joke, to those who get it, on what war has become. But Hal becomes angry and shouts a version of the play's opening question:

> *Prince.* What, is it a time to jest and dally now?
> *He throws the bottle at him. Exit.*[18]

He does not stay for Falstaff's answer:

> *Falstaff.* I like not such grinning honor as Sir Walter hath. Give me life; which if I can save, so; if not, honor comes unlooked for, and there's an end. [*Exit.*][19]

Falstaff's "so," one of his tricks of speech--we heard it before ("Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, so!"[20])--is like the action of a postulate. Of course life is to be saved—that's a begged and given power, "so," just as "there's an end" is a given limit, if you don't accept that life is to be saved. "Grinning honor," which sounds like "winning honor," is the iconic grin of death, out-jesting human dalliance with winning. Hal gets angry (only this once in the two *Henry IV* plays) because he does not like Falstaff dramatizing the best alternative to the powder and pistol time of

[18] V. iii. 55
[19] V. iii. 58-61
[20] V. i. 121-122

history: namely, drinking sack, for the free play of intellect in the tavern of delights. You must bear in mind that Falstaff never drinks in order to get wasted--that's Sir Walter's condition—but quite the opposite: to quicken and prolong his performances.

Somewhere in scene four, the Prince finds his sword, which he uses to save his father from Douglas. This fight, a prelude to his showdown with Hotspur, comes first for reasons we need to understand.

King Henry IV has many counterfeits dressed like him on the battlefield. The fierce Scotsman, Douglas, is expert in killing counterfeits. When he finally "fall'st on" Henry IV, he doubts the presence of royal character and articulates, by then, a familiar principle:

Douglas. I fear thou art another counterfeit;
And yet, in faith, though bearest thee like a king.
But mine I am sure thou art, whoe'er thou be,
And thus I win thee.

They fight, the King being in danger, Enter Prince of Wales[21]

We know that the exiled Bolingbroke came back to England to claim his patrimony; but he wins the crown because Richard II, though never losing the bearing of a king, does lose the power to keep himself his. That little word, "win," is Henry IV's virtu on the eve of battle with the rebels under

[21] V. iv. 32, 34-37

foul-looking skies: “Nothing can seem foul,” he says, true to himself, “to those that win.” [22] Thus in less than four lines given to Douglas, Shakespeare retells the progress of recent history under Bolingbroke.

The king is struck down to the ground. This action cues the entrance of the Prince, who arrests Douglas as he stands over the prostrate king, about to strike him mortally.

> *Prince.* Hold up thy head, vile Scot, or thou art like
> Never to hold it up again. The spirits
> Of valiant Shirley, Stafford, Blunt are in my arms.
> It is the Prince of Wales that threatens thee,
> Who never promiseth but he means to pay.
> *They fight: Douglas flieth.*[23]

The Prince, by means of the spirits of the dead in him, turns Douglas’s head away from his prize by promising a worthily named fight. He thus takes the side of nobility to save his father and his ignoble principle that foulness (ugliness) does not apply, so long as you win. The Prince “redeems” his “lost opinion” right here, and his father pronounces that redemption right away.[24] So the Prince’s fight with Hotspur, sixteen lines later, is not about redeeming himself. That’s already been done. This is important to realize, along with the curious stage direction that Douglas (who’s no coward)

[22] V. i. 8
[23] V. iv. 38-42
[24] V. iv. 47

flees.[25] The fact is that Shakespeare needs Douglas, the counterfeit killer, to remain alive to fight Falstaff, the "lying counterfeit," hence the real thing. Now, let's put these two points together: the fight between the Prince and Hotspur proceeds on *another plane*, according to *Falstaffian principles* of redemption, timeliness, and life-saving, not Henry IV principles or chivalric principles--although the outcome of that fight does similarly depend on the influence of the dead, the turn of the head, and authority over names. So here's how the fight starts.

The Prince, about to exit the stage, is arrested by a voice relished for its exuberant, guileless urgency to cross danger for honor's sake:

Hotspur. If I mistake not, thou art Harry Monmouth.

Prince. Thou speak'st as if I would deny my name.

Hotspur. My name is Harry Percy.

Prince. Why, then I see a very valiant rebel of the name.
I am the Prince of Wales, and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any more.
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
Nor can one England brook a double reign
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales.

[25] After all, he did not flee from Hotspur, though "discomfited" in three previous battles and taken prisoner once (III. ii. 114).

Hotspur. Nor shall it, Harry, for the hour is come
To end the one of us; and would to God
Thy name in arms were now as great as mine!

Prince. I'll make it greater ere I part from thee,
And all the budding honors on thy crest
I'll crop to make a garland for my head.

Hotspur. I can no longer brook thy vanities. *They fight.*[26]

As they fight over their names and the rule of England, something extraordinary happens that breaks the expectations of heroic stage combat:

Enter Falstaff.

Falstaff. Well said, Hal! To it, Hal! Nay, you shall find
No boy's play here, I can tell you.[27]

The fight that Shakespeare promotes through five acts, with mounting anticipation, is interrupted by the voluble entrance of the old fat jester, who keeps a bottle of sack in his case, makes money by impressing the classes who buy out their services, and leads the impoverished as "food for powder."[28] What is Shakespeare doing by admitting *this* very man to the climactic scene of martial glory? Again we notice that Falstaff is summoned

[26] V. iv. 58-73
[27] V. iv. 74-75
[28] IV. ii. 66

from absence to presence by Hotspur, this time with the words, “brook thy vanities,” and the blows that are supposed to put the end to vanity. “To brook” is to put up with something that one would prefer not to, and that is what we feel when Falstaff enters on that word. Do we have to put up with laughter during blood and tears? Do we have to hear cheerful prosaic words louder than the music of brave blows? Do we have to witness fat tripping unbecomingly over soldiers’ graves? Must we, *really*, *now*, when all we want is to see a good fight, put up with Falstaff? Yes, emphatically, now *is* the time to jest and dally at the things demanding life’s payment, honor and title.

Thus our eyes turn from the solemnity of mortal combat to the maker of wit and fellowship. This turning of attention, which the Prince forced upon Douglass to save his father, matters a lot. Notice that the Prince is named “Hal” again; blows are made words again, as in the tavern (“Well said, Hal! To it, Hal!” “I can tell you.”); and Hal’s mortal danger (”no boy’s play here”) is reduced to commentary by an expert showman. The worst thing you can do to a man like Hotspur, wholly devoted to the beauty of honor, is to turn the heads of onlookers (that’s us) towards the opposite--the fat man to whom honor is nothing. Falstaff’s entrance thus begins to fulfill the Prince’s promise to “crop” Hotspur’s honors and wear them in costume.

Theatrically speaking, Falstaff “steals the scene” from the warriors. He does this, not simply because he’s that kind of pig, but with full authorial warrant, beloved of the creator. In a moment, Hotspur will affirm the theft of his scene, when he feels the sword enter and leave his body: “Thou hast

robbed me of my youth!" he accuses the Prince.[29] But the robbing could not have happened without Falstaff the head-turner, who makes robbing his "vocation" and sport for Princes. [30]

But I'm getting ahead of things. So, patiently, look at what next happens to our attention:

Enter Douglas. He fighteth with Falstaff, [who] falls down as if we were dead. [Exit Douglas.] The Prince killeth Percy.

The great question of the play now arrives: Is Falstaff dead, or faking death when we see him fall down? He convinces the experienced Douglas and the Prince that he's quite dead—"breathless and bleeding." [31] We lookers-on simply do not know, unless the actor makes obvious that he's faking, but that I think is wrong. Additional questions now steal our attention from the fight that continues. Shall we feel bad that the fat man is cut off, or hope that he'll come back? Could we be witnessing a third outcome to the Lord and Bondsman encounter not imagined by Hegel?--that is, neither master nor slave, could Falstaff be a free player outside the determinations of logic and history? Does Falstaff's fight with Douglas represent how every human encounter puzzles us with this question: how much of my own body and soul must I raise up or let fall to play with this person for a while at politics, war, or love? Is this or that person who faces me alive or dead?--and to what extent? These questions open up a gap in the prescribed flow of historical

[29] V. iv. 76
[30] I. ii. 107
[31] V. iv. 133

events. There is room in that gap for surprises. Our attention, stolen again from the combatants, goes toward the belly that now lies in profile on stage, a rotund symbol of "all the world." Falstaff is down, looking dead, his belly still rises, as the fight goes on. Let us get some help at this point from the tavern scene (mentioned earlier) to determine that belly's powers as guardian.

Recall that Falstaff has run away from the disguised Prince and Poins at Gadshill. They try to trap him with reason, which keeps track of what's fantastic and contradictory in his storytelling. When they think they've got him to confess that he ran from cowardice, he escapes the trap of reason by uttering this meta-theatrical profundity: "By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye." [32] Hal's maker (after God and Bolingbroke) is Shakespeare, via the chronicles. Falstaff is almost entirely Shakespeare's invention, and as such, offers freedom from the compulsory history of the chronicles. His name is elaborated more times than any other name in Shakespeare by people who think they know him and how to peg him. But the questions of who he is and what will become of him are the ones most freely alive in the English history plays, and they put us in close touch with the maker, and with our own cause of freedom.

Listen now to some of the attempted naming of Falstaff, with Hal impersonating his biological father, Henry IV, and Falstaff playing Hal:

[32] II. iv. 267

Prince [*as Henry IV*]. There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man….Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoll'n parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloakbag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that gray iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? Wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? Wherein cunning, but in craft? Wherein crafty, but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy, but in nothing?

Falstaff [*as Hal*]. I would your Grace would take me with you. Whom means your Grace?

Prince. That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff. My lord, the man I know.

Prince. I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know. That he is old, the more the pity, his white hairs do witness it….If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. If to be fat be to be hated, then

> Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. 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.* I do. I will. [*A knocking heard.*] [33]

Falstaff urges his own company in the voice of youth, ruled by bigness of heart and capacity of enjoyment, knowing no harm in its urgings. Good for "nothing," says the Prince; all the world, sweet and wet, says Falstaff. The Prince's double banishment in double time and character ("I do. I will.") provokes silent wonder at the cold commitment of politic man. And then the politic world comes knocking: the sheriff and his watch are looking for a "gross fat man." [34]

Is now the time for Hal to turn the fat man over to law? "Dost thou hear, Hal?"--Falstaff asks him to reckon the time that knocks.[35] In the privileged intimacy of friendship, he continues: "Never call a true piece of gold a counterfeit. Thou art essentially made without seeming so."[36] Their shared essence, as players who know their own makings-up, persuades the Prince to send the sheriff away with a "good morrow" to the latter's "good

[33] II. iv. 446-481
[34] II. iv. 512
[35] II. iv. 491
[36] II. iv. 491-492

night" (it is 2 o'clock).[37] The time in the tavern is all one, as all come knocking, morning and night, wanting what's in Falstaff's belly of theirs. That belly, presiding over the battle of the Harrys, has much of Hal invested in it to be saved from arrest by whatever comes knocking. Death knocks for Hal at Shrewsbury. How does the belly that he saved, save him?

Hal is down and out of breath, just as his father was before Douglas. But the head-turning comic presence of Falstaff operates as usual to turn things to their opposites: cowardice to meta-knowledge, reason to invention, traps to freedom, son saving real father to adopted father saving son, by this means (foreshadowed in a name-calling contest in the tavern): "this huge hill of flesh" turns into the "vile standing tuck" (an upright rapier) that will pierce Hotspur into "food for worms." [38] How? Like this : Hotspur, impetuous, never pausing for letters, untaught in comedy (where desire stands up though the man be down)—this very Hotspur rushes the fallen Prince, who raises his rapier from the ground, exampled by the nearby "hill of flesh," [39] and on the instant of death's knocking impales Hotspur on his own momentum; he falls, and the rapier is withdrawn as we hear surprised accusation in Hotspur's first words of unbecoming: "O Harry, thou hast robbed me of my youth!" [40] That is how the "madcap" lad of sweets defeats the "mark and glass" knight of honor in a fashion that actually makes sense by taking account of the decisive comic presence of Falstaff.[41]

[37] II. iv. 524-525
[38] II. iv. 243, 247; V. iv. 85
[39] As the embattled Israelites were advantaged by the upheld staff of Moses on a hill. *Exodus*, 17:9
[40] V. iv. 76
[41] I. ii. 146, IV. i. 94; *Part Two*, II. iii. 31

Hotspur gasps for breath: “O, I could prophesy,/ But that the earthy and cold hand of death/ Lies on my tongue.” [42] I think Hotspur intends to say that the line of Bolingbroke will not continue long to occupy the throne of England. And he would be right.

Hotspur’s image of the “hand” of death lying on the “tongue,” stopping access to a cut-off future, reminds me of a disturbing image that opens the play. The Welshwomen, serving as the “rude hands” of Owen Glendower, performed a “beastly shameless transformation” upon the thousand “butchered” soldiers of Mortimer, “as may not be/ Without much shame retold or spoken of.” [43] It is clear from Shakespeare’s source and the tone and reactions to this speech that the dead soldiers were castrated and their genitals put inside their mouths, on their silent tongues, by the women. Think about that.

What does it mean? The tongue cannot, by speaking, provide for its own continuity in life; words alone are not potent of life. The tongue must not be cut off from the body’s business of generating life, nor should the lower body be cut off from the tongue’s business of transforming low to high. Henry IV acts as if a man could issue seed from his mouth, for he thinks that he can become the legitimate king and father of kings in an act of speech, without the help of blood. He is wrong. Henry V will think that the French and English, two different tongues, can be united as one through an act of blood, with no common speech. He is wrong. Henry VI, last of the line to reign, lacks powers both of speech and blood, and so he loses France

[42] V. iv. 82-84
[43] I. i. 45-46

and the throne of England. *By contrast*, as we're about to witness, Falstaff, after being cut off, "riseth up," in blood and speech, the "true and perfect image of life indeed." [44] He stabs Hotspur in the thigh, gives rise to him on his back, impregnated with Hotspur's honor in reports to come. This proves that honor, *unlike life*, is generated by the tongue of the "double man," who mouths his own rising to posterity.[45] The oral genital imagery that opens the play, thus closes it as well. In between, while we are on the subject, remember how Kate, Hotspur's adoring and spirited wife (would you prefer honor to a woman like that?), grabs his little finger and tries to break it off to make him return to her bed and share his manly business with her. He responds by calling for his horse:

> *Hotspur*. And when I am a-horseback, I will swear
> I love thee infinitely.[46]

After the battle, we see Hotspur a-horseback the fat lover of life, who's sworn infinitely, in every lie he utters, to give unbroken ride to body that steals him a hold on life's pleasures.

Hotspur articulates his passing as a stoppage of time in its survey of "all the world," so little of which he got to see.[47] Ironically, he uses Falstaff's words "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!"). So as we hear Hotspur speak these dying words, we turn our heads again to the great belly of desire, still seeming dead on stage, but from its prominence we feel

[44] V. iv. 118
[45] V. iv. 137
[46] II. iii. 100-102
[47] V. iv. 81

less sad over Hotspur, as the Prince covers his "mangled face." [48] Dying courtesy mingles thus strangely with the stronger will to comedy. Falstaff listens, as always, for his cue to return to presence:

The Prince spieth Falstaff on the ground.

Prince. What, old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man.
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee
If I were much in love with vanity.
Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.
Emboweled will I see thee by-and-by;
Till then in blood by noble Percy lie. *Exit.*

Falstaff riseth up.

Falstaff. Emboweled? If thou embowel me today, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too tomorrow. 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit….Counterfeit? I lie ; I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valor is

[48] V. iv. 95

discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life.[49]

Notice how hard it is for the Prince to keep his love for the old fat man down. Hal has the cold-heartedness to cut people off once their use has run out. But his love of the "fat deer" goes deeper than he knows, and we hear it struggle here with the political. Why disembowel Falstaff? To preserve him flattened in burial is to level the hills and mountains of human nature, in other words, to suppress the rebelliousness of comedy, of disrupting desire, for the sake of a smooth-running unified politics of Christian empire. The Prince will "brook" no "double reign" in England, as we heard him say to Hotspur, nor on the continent, as he will say later: "No king of England, if not King of France." [50] So Hal's victory at Shrewsbury and his plans to disembowel Falstaff, herald his dream as Henry V, to restore imperial Rome under a new English Caesar. (It cannot be a mere coincidence that Shakespeare's next play after *Henry V* is *Julius Caesar*.) Falstaff's rising maintains the hills and mountains that make life a wondrous surprise of opposites, a disunity of differences that keep it rich and strange. Sack instills the wit to know and express these riches with spontaneous acuity. Falstaff's rising is thus a triumph over the "cold and settled," "dull and cruddy" sameness of death and empire;[51] it is a triumph over making fine ladies the same as irascible men (Kate, bless her, refuses to learn Hotspur's swearing lessons); it is a triumph over the spirited ambition that fits, shrunk by death, into a vile hole of earth. The honor-loving Hotspur, about to descend that hole, professes to "better brook the loss of brittle life/

[49] V. iv. 101-119
[50] *Henry V*, II. ii. 193
[51] *Part Two*, IV. iii. 101, 107

Than those proud titles" lost in conquest.[52] Again this word "brook" directs our attention to Falstaff, who was summoned by that word, and whose life, opposite brittle, brooks anything—including death, which he plays to perfection.

The stage direction, *Falstaff Riseth Up*, perhaps the greatest in dramatic literature, is a paradox and pun with Biblical, sexual, and historical resonances. Its performance touches the still tingling splinters left in the soul from original creation out of the ground and into the garden. There is something counterfeit in a soul that does not feel risen with Falstaff to mate the savory stuff of earth with the articulate spirit of air. Thus of him may it truly be said: "he dost raise up himself whom he himself hath filled, and death he swallows up in the victory." [53]

We read eight of Shakespeare's plays in sophomore seminar. Do we raise ourselves up to read them fluidly and merrily, or declining the body, dryly and soberly? Old photos of our dear college show that seminars used to be lubricated and smoky, like the tavern. Much has changed, as we become more politic, less seminal, but one Falstaffian practice has endured. Falstaff, like us, speaks prose *all the time*, even in the presence of his verse-speaking superiors, whom he questions. There is no other major character in Shakespeare who does this so conspicuously, to his credit and ours. He does not respect the measured endings of lines, the debt-paying schedule of verse. Do not mistake what you read on the printed page. The arbitrary line breaks you see there are the falsifications of the bookish medium. Falstaff's lines,

[52] V. iv. 77-78
[53] Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, xxviii, xxx

like his girth, intend "out of all compass," off the page.[54] The margins on the page, like knockers at the door, are stoppages of speech to be sent away. The word that is mediated by the print medium imprisons the tongue that consents to its silent setting down on the page. Falstaff makes the chains on the tongue drop. Henry V banishes Falstaff by *mediating* him at a ten mile distance, to be covered by messengers who report on his amendment in the respecting of margins. The Chief Justice in *Part Two*--the letter of the law, external to human feeling, the same monotonous text over and over again--is precisely the one to supervise Falstaff's banishment.[55] Thus the fountain of living speech turns into reported text, safely distant from the source. This is the meaning *for us* of Falstaff's banishment: breathless, bloodless, flattened, papered words, whose pockets are picked by sneaky textual accountants scorning the expenses and risks of full-bodied fluidity.

Now you can understand why Falstaff's death in *Henry V* is mediated by report of how he becomes "cold as any stone." [56] Shakespeare does not dare to let Falstaff appear and speak in person at his death, for then he would steal the scene again and never consent to die. Richard II is like that, for he refuses to be turned into text when he declines to read over his sins and subscribe to them in public. The Prince knows this danger of the intact man, and thus intends to disembowel him, which means to reduce him to skinny, hunger-less script. Falstaff's rising is the reincarnation of speech as situational, agonistic, and powerful to raise the blood and make life perform true to its embodied self.

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[54] III. iii. 22

[55] It is my hunch that he fathers the invasion of France by teaching Henry to abide by the analysis of ancient genealogical and geographical texts in the keeping of churchmen favorably disposed to kings.

[56] *Henry V*, II. iii. 25

Here's how he teaches us to read plays seminally, for purposes of life, not banishment. First, you must fall down as if dead, which means shut down on the surface and go silently inward to the sources of verbal and gestural creation. Throw everything historical and mediated into doubt and rediscover the first principle of believable performance: "I am no counterfeit, but the self-knowing thing itself—*life*--embodied *here, now*." The activities of reading and writing require this temporary absence from the world, in imitation of death, in order to overhear its violent sounds and agonized confessions, unsure of the side of victory, but longing for it, sometimes even crying out for the maker to warm the feet back to the standing of life. To fall into likeness of death is merely to imitate the author: alert in ear, outwardly naught, "smiling upon his finger's end," touching the world, like God, point by point, making "green fields" appear on stage for bodies to act in love thereon with life.[57] Although the politic world imposes tribulations of counterfeiting on every human soul, Falstaff, in good cheer, teaches how to overcome that world.[58]

The poetic truth in the historical lie that Falstaff kills Hotspur, I hope now to have persuaded you to take seriously. To the wounding and the carrying off of the body, a brief closing look is in order. The resurrection speech continues:

> *Falstaff.* Zounds, I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead. How if he should counterfeit too, and rise? By

[57] *Henry V*, II. iii. 9-24
[58] Cf. *John*, 16:33

> my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I'll make him sure; yea, and I'll swear I killed him. . . . Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me. Therefore, sirrah [stabs him], with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me.
>
> *He takes up Hotspur on his back.*[59]

We witness here how myths and religions get going. Imagine for a moment that after Achilles kills Hector, he leaves the body for Thersites to desecrate, haul away on his back, and misreport as his own conquest. That is the kind of action Shakespeare gives us here. It's offensive to witness this treatment if we still carry shining Homeric heroes in our heads. Apropos of that, after the *Henriad*, Shakespeare wrote the modern (that is to say, the true) version of the Trojan War. In it, Achilles is fat and out of breath, for that *is what happens* when you stop exercising and keep eating, and Thersites is the wit who persuades Achilles, with much malicious delight, that to fight for a cuckold like Menelaus, or the adulterer, Paris, is no honor. But to my point: "gunpowder Percy" properly belongs to Falstaff, on his back. The horses of chivalry are no more; the embracing of knights has yielded to the arguments of "vile politicians," as Hotspur himself says.[60] And besides, honor always rides the backs of the living, who lay the world full of rising lies to give standing and estimation to dust.

What good news does Falstaff rise up from the dust to announce? I shall speak for him one last time, and there an end. Be confident to play the

[59] V. iv. 120-128
[60] I. iii. 239

coward to save a life too goodly rare to spare. There are plenty of lives less good in their own estimation, counterfeit kings and queens, ready to make brave sacrifice for those who know themselves to be the real things. Let them do what makes them grin. Take the offer of sweet and wet; outstretch the margins in merriment. Let the reputation of corruption and villainy serve as a breeze to better your countenance and quicken your wit to weigh the value of things. Listen for the cue to raise the belly to its standing mouth, there to perform the miracle of transforming guts into speech. Hoist on your back--or front-- the beauties of a lost world and use them shamelessly to make modern life less ugly. If you've got it, flaunt it baby, flaunt it! Anon, anon come the props to serve all turns. The stage is set. The time to make answer—whom to love, whom to banish--is now. The matter worth listening to is not derived from the compulsions of reason that would pin you to the wall. Stand there amazed at the fatness of this unreasonable matter. Staff yourself on legs warmed foot to thigh by touch, with eyes burning like fire to do it again, after falling to bed or earth, rising up to flames of laughter. Halt not for halters. You will find that all this that I've been saying (and he could on all night), it takes some discretion. Paradise—is true, and don't I know it, but it's not for everyone—
no, it's not for everyone—
as it is for him—elevated and big as the horizon—
drinking it all up—life—
oh, bother the mending—
his face turns, but not to crack.
Thank you.

Falstaff.

Gallants, lads, lasses, hearts of gold, all the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? Shall we have a lecture intemperate?

Prince.

Content—and the argument shall be your rising up!

cf. *Henry IV, Part 1,* II. iv. 277-280

Falstaff.

Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

I. ii. 1

Falstaff.

Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

Prince.

What a devil hast thou to do with
the time of the day?

I. ii. 1, 6

We have heard the chimes of midnight.

--Falstaff

Falstaff.

Sweet wag, shall there be gallows
standing in England when thou art king?

I. ii. 61

Prince.

Farewell, the latter spring!
Farewell, all-hallown summer!

I. ii. 161

While robbing the pilgrims at Gad's Hill:

Falstaff.

Young men must live.

II. ii. 90


BONTIE-DETECTIVE

The Four Determinative Actions of Falstaff:

- Entrance to the fight of the Harry's
- Falling down dead
- Rising up
- Bearing Hotspur on his back

A Proposition:

The breath of life does not have to be drawn short and thin.

King.

Hence, therefore, every leader to his charge;
For, on their answer, will we set on them,
And **God befriend** us as our cause is **just**!

Exeunt. Remain Prince and Falstaff.

Falstaff. Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, **so**! 'Tis a point of **friendship**.

Prince. Nothing but a colossus can do thee that **friendship**. Say thy prayers, and farewell.

V. i. 118-124

Falstaff.

I would ‘twere bedtime, Hal, and all well.

Prince.

Why, thou owest God a death. [*Exit.*]

Falstaff.

‘Tis not due yet: I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, ‘tis no matter; honor **pricks** me on. Yea, but how if honor **prick** me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? **No.** Or an arm? **No.** Or take away the grief of a wound? **No.** Honor hath no skill in surgery then? **No.**

V. i. 125-134

Falstaff.

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 insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? **No.** Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon—and so ends my catechism. *Exit.*

V. i. 135-141

Hotspur. (on poetry)

‘Tis like the forced gait of a shuffling nag.

III. i. 133

(on speech-making)

. . . I that have not the gift of tongue,

Can **lift your blood up** with persuasion.

V. ii. 77-78

Hotspur.

I cannot read them now.
O gentlemen, **the time of life is short!**
To spend that shortness **basely** were too long
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
And if we live, we live to tread on kings;
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!

……

Now, Esperance! Percy! And set on.
Sound all the lofty instruments of war,
And by that music let us all embrace;
For, heaven to earth, some of us never shall
A second time do such a courtesy.

V. ii. 79-86, 96-100

Hotspur. Up and away!
Our soldiers stand full fairly for the day.
[*Exeunt.*] V. iii. 28-29

Falstaff. Soft. Who are you? Sir Walter Blunt.
There's honor for you! Here's no vanity! . .
God keep **lead** out of me. I need no more
weight than mine own **bowels**. . . .
V. iii. 32-35

Prince.

What, stands thou idle here? Lend me thy **sword.**

V. iii. 39

Prince.

What, is it a **time** to jest and dally now?

He throws the bottle at him. Exit

V. iii. 55

Falstaff.

I like not such **grinning** honor as Sir Walter hath. Give me life; which if I can save, **so**; if not honor comes unlooked for, and **there's an end**. *[Exit]*

V. iii. 58-61

Douglas.

I fear thou art another **counterfeit**;
And yet, in faith, though bearest thee like a king.
But **mine** I am sure thou art, whoe'er thou be,
And thus I **win** thee.

They fight, the King being in danger, Enter Prince of Wales

V. iv. 34-37

interpreting the **foul**-looking skies before battle:

King.

Nothing can seem foul to those that **win**.

V. i. 8

Prince.

Hold up thy head, vile Scot, or thou art like
Never to hold it up again. The spirits
Of valiant Shirley, Stafford, Blunt are in my arms.
It is the Prince of Wales that threatens thee,
Who never promiseth but he means to pay.

They fight: Douglas flieth.

V. iv. 38-42

Hotspur. If I mistake not, thou art **Harry Monmouth**.

Prince. Thou speak'st as if I would deny my **name.**

Hotspur. My name is **Harry Percy**.

Prince. Why, then I see a very valiant rebel of the **name.**
I am the Prince of Wales, and think not, **Percy**,
To share with me in glory any more.
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
Nor can one England **brook** a double reign
Of **Harry Percy** and the Prince of Wales.

Hotspur. Nor shall it**, Harry**, for the hour is come
To end the one of us; and would to God
Thy name in arms were now as great as mine!

V. iv. 58-70

Prince.

I'll make it greater ere I part from thee,
And all the budding honors on thy crest
I'll crop to make a **garland** for my head.

Hotspur.

I can no longer **brook** thy vanities. ***They fight.***

V. iv. 70-73

Enter Falstaff.

Falstaff.

Well said, Hal! To it, Hal! Nay, you shall find no boy's play here, I can tell you.

V. iv. 74-75

Hotspur.

O Harry, thou hast **robbed** me of my youth!

V. iv. 76

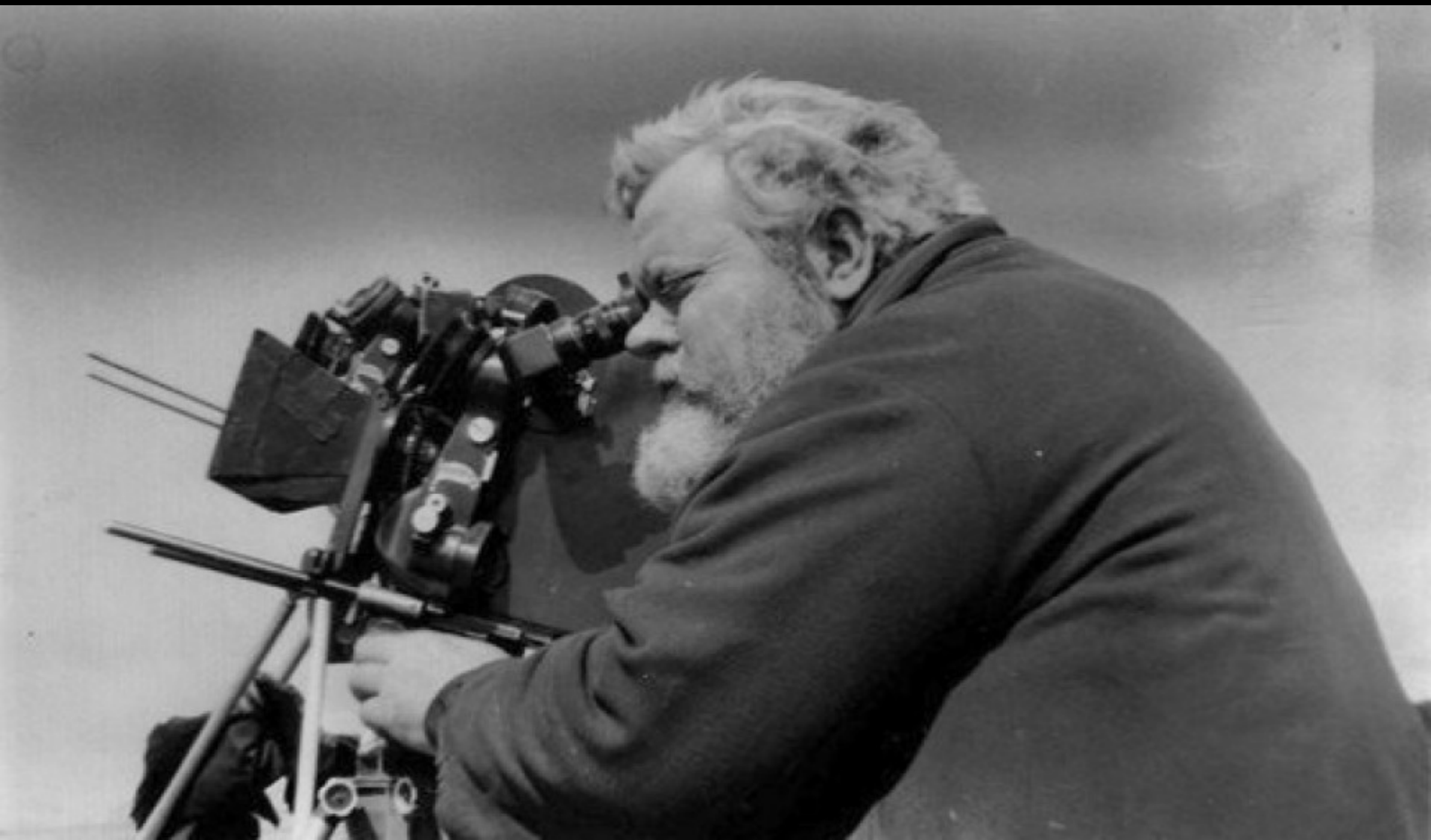
Enter Douglas. He fighteth with Falstaff, ***[who] falls down as if we were dead.*** *[Exit Douglas.] The Prince killeth Percy.*


The
Guardian

Falstaff.

By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye.

II. iv. 267



Prince [*as Henry IV*].

There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man….Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoll'n parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloakbag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that gray iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? Wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? Wherein cunning, but in craft? Wherein crafty, but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy, but in **nothing**? II. Iv. 446-459

Falstaff [*as Hal*].

I would your Grace would take me with you. Whom means your Grace?

Prince [as Henry IV].

That villainous abominable misleader of youth, **Falstaff,** that old white-bearded Satan. II. Iv. 460-463

Falstaff [as Hal].

My lord, the man I know.

Prince [as Henry IV].

I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know. That he is old, the more the pity, his white hairs do witness it….If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved.

II. Iv. 464-474

Falstaff [as Hal].

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 . **I do. I will.** [*A knocking heard.*]

II. iv. 474-481

Falstaff.

Dost thou hear, Hal? Never call a true piece of gold a **counterfeit**. Thou art essentially made without seeming so.

II. iv. 491-492

Prince.

. . . This bed-presser, this horseback-breaker, **this huge hill of flesh**—

Falstaff.

. . . You starveling . . . You bull's pizzle . . . **you vile standing tuck**!

II. iv. 241-245

(pizzle = penis)
(standing tuck = upright rapier)

Hotspur.

O Harry, thou hast **robbed** me of my youth!

V. iv. 76

Hotspur.

O, I could prophesy,
But that the earthy and cold hand of death
Lies on my **tongue.**

V. iv. 82-84

Westmoreland.

A thousand of his people butchered;
Upon whose dead corpse there was such misuse,
Such **beastly shameless transformation**
By those Welshwomen done, as may not be
Without much **shame** retold or spoken of.

I. i. 42-46

Hotspur (to his wife, Kate).

And when I am a-horseback, I will swear
I love thee infinitely.

II. iii. 100-101

The Prince spieth Falstaff ***on the ground.***

Prince. What, old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man.
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee
If I were much in love with vanity.
Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.
Emboweled will I see thee by-and-by;
Till then in blood by noble Percy lie. *Exit.*

V. iv. 101-109

Falstaff riseth up.

Falstaff.

Emboweled? If thou embowel me today, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too tomorrow. 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit.... **Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit.** To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but **the true and perfect image of life indeed.** The better part of valor is **discretion**, in the which better part **I have saved my life**.

V. iv. 110-119

Hotspur.

I better **brook** the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.

V. iv. 77-78

Prince.

Emboweled will I see thee by-and-by;
‘Till then in blood by noble Percy lie. *Exit.*

Falstaff riseth up.

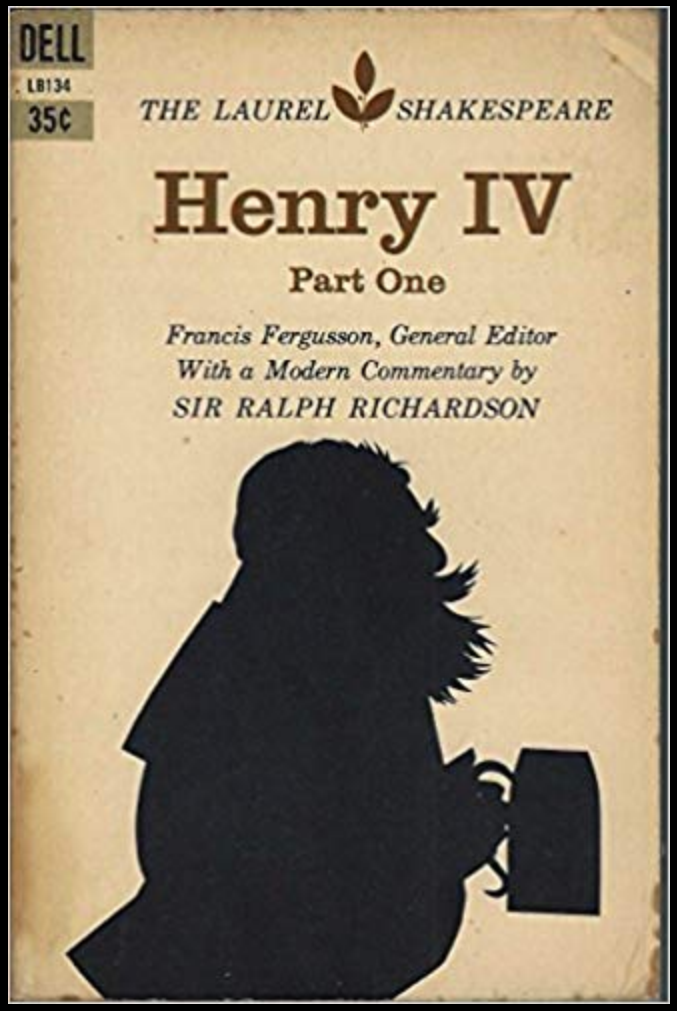
Falstaff.

Emboweled?

V. iv. 108-110

He dost raise up himself whom he himself hath filled, and death he swallows up in the victory.

--Augustine, *Confessions,* X. xxviii. xxx


DELL
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THE LAUREL SHAKESPEARE
Henry IV
Part One
Francis Fergusson, General Editor
With a Modern Commentary by
SIR RALPH RICHARDSON

If I tell you a lie, spit in my face, call me horse.

The first humane principle of orals: forswear thin potations and addict yourselves to sack.

What is honor?


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In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

--John, 16:33

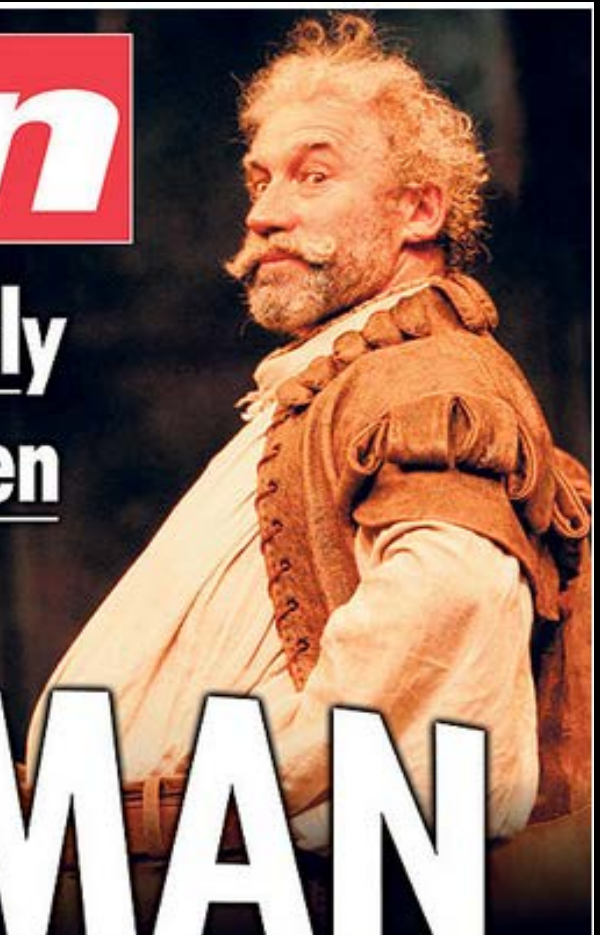
Falstaff.

Zounds, I am afraid of this **gunpowder Percy**, though he be dead. How if he should counterfeit too, and rise? By my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I'll make him sure; yea, and I'll swear I killed him. . . . Nothing confutes me but eyes, and **nobody sees me**. Therefore, sirrah [stabs him], with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me.

He takes up Hotspur on his back.

V. iv. 120-128

THE Sun



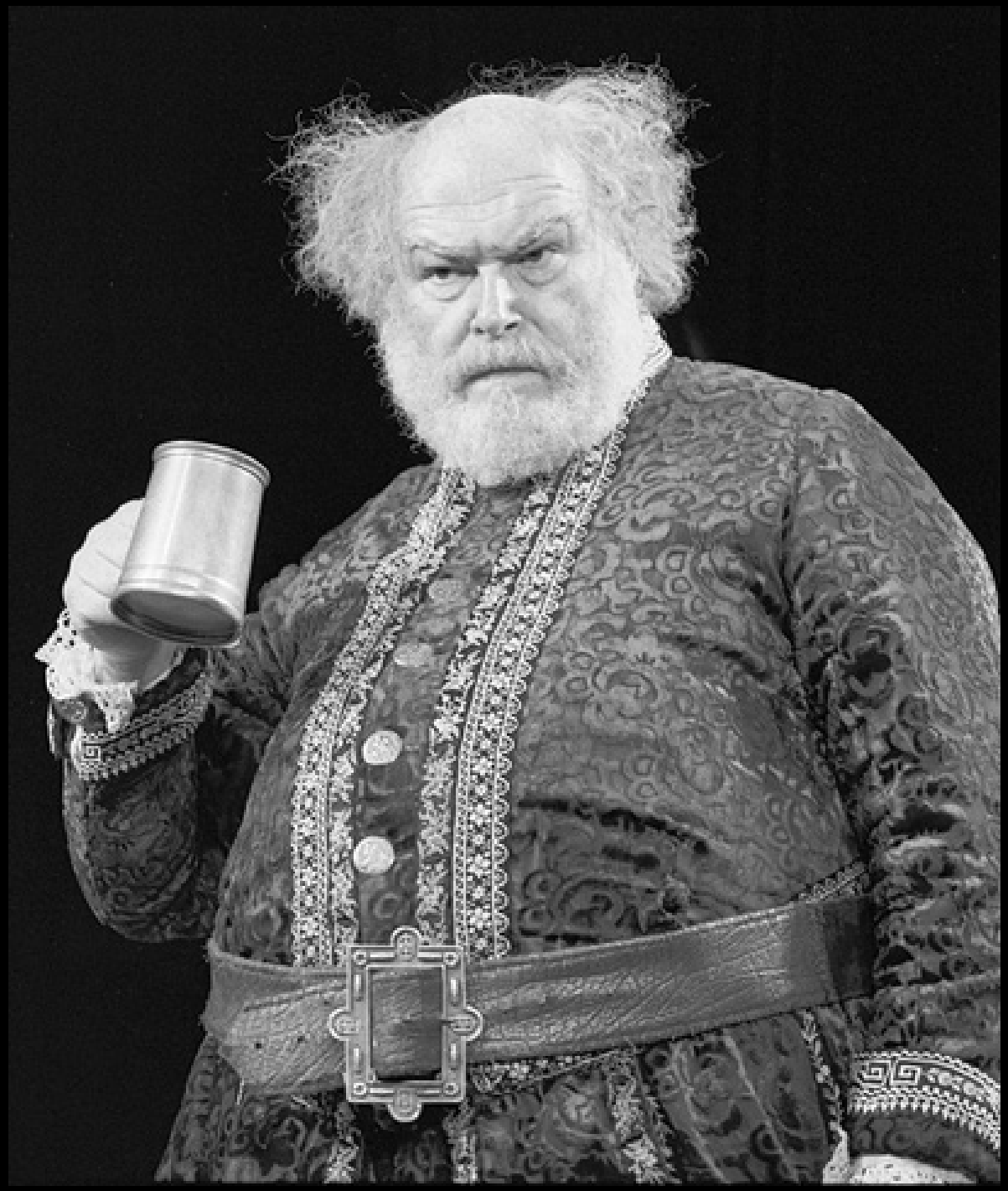
Prince's portly pal is drunken lying crook

FATMAN & ROBBIN'

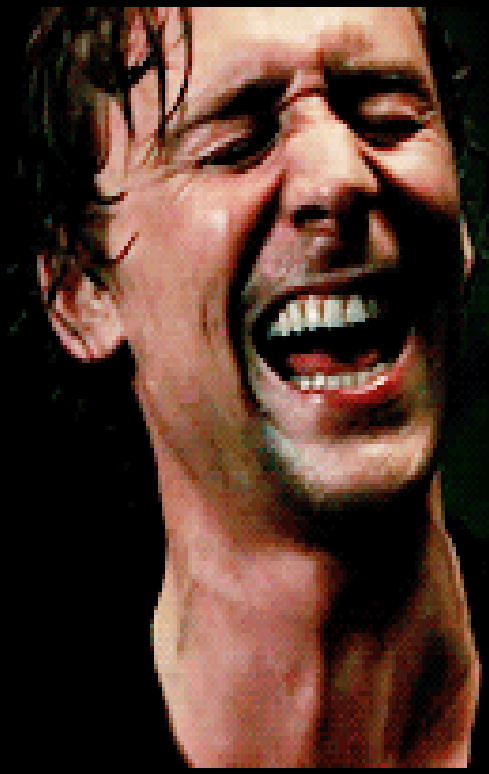
FALSTAFF EXPOSED BY THE Sun

DRINK "FALSTAFF" BOTTLED BEER


FALSTAFF
FALSTAFF
DRINK "FALSTAFF" BOTTLED BEER




BBC HD




BBC TWO

Do thou amend thy face, and I’ll amend my life.