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VOLUME 8

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Cambridge New York Melbourne Madrid Cape Town Singapore São Paulo Delhi

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108005807

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1946, 1958

This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00580-7

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521094757

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First published 1946

Reprinted 1949

Reprinted as Pocket Edition 1958

Reprinted as First Edition 1958, 1964

First paperback edition 1968

Reprinted 1971, 1975, 1980

Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-07532-9 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-09475-7 paperback

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INTRODUCTION

I. *Two Parts but one play*

As with *Hamlet* so with 1 and 2 *Henry IV* the commentary has much exceeded the limits of this edition, and I have found myself obliged to contrive two supplementary volumes for the overplus. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, published in 1943, deals with the much debated character and career of the fat knight, and so allows me to concentrate here upon *Henry IV* as a chronicle-play, which was after all what Shakespeare set out to write. A second excursus, concerned with the sources and textual history of the double play and its sequel *Henry V*, and including a discussion of the reasons for the change from 'Oldcastle' to 'Falstaff' (see below, p. xxix), is being prepared in collaboration with Dr Duthie; and I have contributed to the Greg Presentation Number of *The Library* (June 1945) a tentative outline of my conclusions as regards *Henry IV*, references to which will be found in the Notes below. Meanwhile, the present Introduction¹ and the Stage-history are concerned with both Parts, which, issued separately for convenience, each with its own notes and glossary, have in fact been envisaged and edited as one drama.

Dr Johnson wrote:

These two plays will appear to every reader, who shall peruse them without ambition of critical discoveries, to be so connected that the second is merely a sequel to the first; to be two only because they are too long to be one².

But very few have since subscribed to, or even noticed, this judgement; and whatever modern actors, critics or

¹ Which, it should perhaps be stated, was written before the appearance of Dr Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays*.

² Johnson's *Shakespeare*, 1765, iv. 235.

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editors may say on the matter—most of them say nothing at all—they seem agreed to treat the two Parts as independent, if serially related, plays¹. The only exception I know of is Quiller-Couch², formerly captain of this adventure, to whose memory the following edition, of what was I think, after *The Tempest*, his favourite play, is inscribed.

Of the serial character there is of course no question. Second and third of a tetralogy on the rise of the house of Lancaster, they are linked by *Henry V* with another, earlier written, tetralogy on the fall of the same house, while in *Henry VIII* we have a kind of pendant to the chain, in which the twilight of the Civil Wars and the night of Crookback's tyranny are offset by a picture of the blessed day of a Protestant king, uniting the 'roses' in one stem, from which springs the infant Elizabeth, whose baptism at the hands of Archbishop Cranmer brings the play and its eight predecessors to an appropriately 'Elizabethan' conclusion. Furthermore, as hinted at the end of the Introduction to *Richard II* and argued more fully in the volume on the sources to follow, it seems at least possible that the series which begins with *Richard II* and ends with *Henry V* once existed in a pre-Shakespearian form as three, not four plays, and that it only became four through the expansion, at Shakespeare's hands, of a single *Henry IV* into a two-part play. In a word, the two parts proceed, I believe, from an underlying textual unity. That does not necessarily mean that the unity persists in their present state; for one cannot, or should not, argue from textual premises to aesthetic conclusions³. Falstaff was originally called Oldcastle, and his character, difficult

¹ G. L. Kittredge writes, in the latest edition from America (p. viii): 'The two Parts of *Henry IV* are not two halves of a single play. Each part is complete in itself.'

² *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 134.

³ v. *Modern Language Review*, xxv. 404-6.

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as it is to credit the fact, was certainly distilled by some strange alchemy of popular legend and ecclesiastical defamation from that of a fine soldier and a stalwart martyr for conscience' sake. But Lollardry has nothing dramatically to do with the knight of Eastcheap, and is irrelevant alike to our enjoyment and our criticism of him. Similarly, to prove, as I think is possible, that the two parts grew out of one is not to prove that they are one still. It has, however, this negative bearing on the question: it rules out a different textual diagnosis, which has been widely accepted or assumed, and from which other critics have not hesitated to draw aesthetic conclusions of their own.

It is commonly held that *2 Henry IV* was an afterthought on Shakespeare's part, or, as one writer puts it, like *2 Tamburlaine* 'an unpremeditated addition, occasioned by the enormous effectiveness of the by-figure of Falstaff'¹. And the following from the Arden edition of the play is a good illustration of the kind of criticism that flows from such assumptions:

The Second Part of *Henry IV* is unquestionably inferior to the First Part as a work of dramatic art...[It] is faulty in construction, and occasionally feeble in execution. For the greater part of four acts the poet is occupied with a theme, of which the interest had been exhausted in the previous play, and which grows stale by repetition².

I am far from sharing this editorial boredom; but I admit at once that *1 Henry IV*, which was probably being acted on Shakespeare's stage while *2 Henry IV* was still in the process of composition and rehearsal, exhibits a certain unity that its sequel lacks. Neither, however, is in any true dramatic sense complete or self-contained, as are for instance *Richard II* and *Henry V*, the first and fourth of the same series; and the comparison with

¹ C. F. Tucker Brooke, *Tudor Drama*, 1911, p. 333.

² *2 Henry IV* (Arden Shakespeare), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

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Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* only serves to bring out the fundamental distinction between the two cases. *1 Tamburlaine* is a play, rounded off and clearly written without thought of a second part, which was only added in the hope of repeating the harvest reaped from Part 1. *1 Henry IV*, on the contrary, is as patently only part of a whole, inasmuch as at its close all the strands of the plot are left with loose ends. The rebels, Northumberland and Archbishop Scroop, are still at large after the battle of Shrewsbury; and the Archbishop is introduced and given a scene to himself in 4. 4 in order to prepare the audience for the expedition of Prince John in Part 2. The relations of the Prince with his father, eased by the interview in 3. 2 and his brilliant conduct in battle, still await that final clarification which, as Elizabethan auditors acquainted with the merest outline of the life of Henry of Monmouth would know, belonged to the death-bed scene in the Jerusalem chamber. Most striking of all perhaps is that stone of stumbling to modern interpreters, the soliloquy at the end of the second scene of Part 1, which looks forward not only to the coronation of Henry V but also to the rejection of Falstaff, neither of which occurs until the very end of Part 2. If Part 1 be an integral drama, and Part 2 a mere afterthought, the soliloquy is inexplicable; indeed, the failure of critics to explain it is itself largely due to their absorption in the first part and their neglect of, or contempt for, the second. In short, the political and dynastic business of this history play, which is twofold, the defeat of the rebels and the repentance of the Prince including his reconciliation with his father, is only half through at the end of Part 1. As for the comic underplot, by treating the drama as two plays critics have unwittingly severed and so overlooked all sorts of subtle threads of character and action belonging to it. In particular, as I have shown elsewhere, Falstaff's false claim to the *spolia*

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opima of Harry Hotspur, though the key to his character in Part 2, seems nothing more than a farcical incident. unless the last scenes of Part 1 and the opening scenes of Part 2 are considered as belonging to the same play¹.

On the other hand, think of the two parts as one, and the structure of the whole is revealed in its proper proportions. The normal dramatic curve, so to say, in Shakespeare is one that rises in intensity up to the middle of the play, e.g. in the trial scene of *The Merchant*, the play scene of *Hamlet*, the deposition scene of *Richard II*; relaxes during act 4, partly in order to gather up loose secondary threads of the plot, partly to give the principal actors a much-needed rest, and partly to relieve the strain upon the attention of the audience; and mounts again for the second and final climax of act 5, which we call catastrophe in tragedy and solution in comedy. Such and no other is the shape of *Henry IV*, in which the battle of Shrewsbury is the nodal point we expect in a third act, while the political scenes of minor interest, which in Part 2 round off the rebellion and dismiss the old king's troubles before the auspicious accession of his son, are just the kind of hang-over we get in a Shakespearian fourth act. And the curve, so plain to the eye in the rebellion plot, is to be traced as surely, if less obviously, in other plots also, all of which, it may be noted, find their acme or turning-point in the battle of Shrewsbury. There Prince and King, as I said, come to a temporary understanding, to drift asunder again for most of Part 2, only to reach harmony in the moments before death separates them for ever. There Falstaff, as the accepted slayer of Hotspur, attains the height of his credit and his fortunes, which then fluctuate during the first half of Part 2, take an upward turn (which deludes him but not us), with his prospects of a loan from Justice Shallow and

¹ Cf. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, pp. 90-1.

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of becoming chief favourite at the court of the young King, and finally come crashing to the ground outside the Abbey. There, too, the Prince's friendship for him finds its tenderest expression in the epitaph over his vast corpse on the stricken field, is obscured for the next four acts (because Shakespeare deliberately keeps the two characters apart except for the brief and, from Falstaff's point of view, doubtful meeting in the presence of Doll Tearsheet), and once again reaches finality at their second meeting, after the coronation. Yet another indication of planning is the symbolic arrangement, which excludes the Lord Chief Justice from Part 1, though there are indications that he appeared early in the pre-Shakespearian version¹, restricts that part to the theme of the truant prince's return to Chivalry, and leaves the atonement with Justice, or the Rule of Law, as a leading motive for its sequel. In short, when the Queen of the blue-stockings remarks, 'I cannot help thinking that there is more of contrivance and care in Shakespeare's execution of this play than in almost any he has written'², one cannot help thinking she is right.

The whole series of events, with all the moral forces that are brought into collision, are directed to a single end. The action as it advances converges on a definite point. The thread of purpose running through it becomes more marked. All minor effects are subordinated to the sense of an ever-growing unity. The end is linked to the beginning with inevitable certainty, and in the end we discern the meaning of the whole.

The words are taken from S. H. Butcher's well-known summary of Aristotle's views on drama in the *Poetics*³, and every one of them is applicable to the play before

¹ v. notes 1. 2. 63-4, 83-6; 3. 2. 32-3.

² Elizabeth Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, 1769.

³ *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (4th ed.), pp. 284-5.

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us. Yet this end—τὸ τέλος μέγιστον ἀπάντων—the crown and meaning of the whole, is the Repentance of the Prince and his Rejection of Falstaff, which almost all the commentators since Hazlitt have themselves rejected. Taking the play as two and not one, they have never seen it as a whole, nor guessed that it might have been planned as a single structure, and probably intended when completed to be acted by the Lord Chamberlain's men on alternate afternoons. Until it be thus thought of, it will continue to languish in the undeserved neglect into which it has fallen since the eighteenth century. Once its unity is accepted by readers and producers, it will stand revealed as one of the greatest of dramatic masterpieces.

II. *'The History of Henrie the Fourth'*

Henry IV is Shakespeare's vision of the 'happy breed of men' that was his England. Here he meets Chaucer on his own ground, and stretches a canvas even wider and more varied than that of *The Canterbury Tales*. True, he was to paint vaster worlds still in *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*; but those worlds, despite the animation of the titans which inhabit them, are of necessity remote and somewhat indistinct, whereas in the great expanse of *Henry IV* every incident and personage, whether tragic or comic, momentous or trivial, bears the hall-mark, not merely of poetic genius, but of pure English gold, standard and current in the realm of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. True, also, its political theme, together with the historical setting and design, interests the subjects of King George VI less than it did hers; but that again simply attests its supreme excellence as an Elizabethan history play. Nothing dates like political issues; and generally speaking the more keenly they are felt by one generation the less likely are they to be understood by another. Historians

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and scholars, however, should be proof against such changes in the climate of opinion, and it is strange to find Sir Edmund Chambers writing:

In *Henry IV* chronicle history becomes little more than a tapestried hanging, dimly wrought with horsemen and footmen, in their alarms and their excursions, which serves as a background to groups of living personages, conceived in quite another spirit and belonging to a very different order of reality¹.

The distinction here drawn between the political and comic groups is sadly misleading. *Henry IV*, at both social levels, was written by an Elizabethan called William Shakespeare; that is to say, it is at once 'for all time' and of its own age, through and through and from top to bottom. If we are to see it in correct perspective, and enjoy it as its creator meant it to be enjoyed, we must appreciate alike the medieval elements in the 'reverend vice' Falstaff and the modern appeal of the 'truant to chivalry' Prince Hal. Above all, we must recognize that its history was as relevant and fascinating to Elizabethan and Jacobean Englishmen as the history in Hardy's *Dynasts* and Scott's *Antiquary* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is to Englishmen, Scots, and Russians in 1945. By 1600, indeed, it had become so exciting that the authorities would only permit Part 2 to be printed after a drastic purge, which robbed the political scenes of some 170 lines, and then, apparently repenting of even that concession, thought best to suppress it altogether².

But that the political and comic scenes in *Henry IV* should seem in modern eyes to belong to 'different orders of reality' is due as much to a disproportionate attention paid to the latter as to things gone out of mind in the former. 'Sir John, Sir John', exclaims

¹ E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: a Survey*, p. 118.

² See Note on the Copy, *2 Henry IV*, pp. 119-23.

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the Lord Chief Justice, 'I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way.' And had Maurice Morgann and nineteenth-century critics taken a hint from these words they might themselves have preserved a 'level consideration' of the play. In the little book above mentioned I have attempted to restore Shakespeare's balance, and do not need to repeat my arguments here. Yet Falstaff was certainly extraordinarily popular in Shakespeare's own day, was even perhaps the most captivating figure that ever lured Elizabethan and Jacobean crowds to the playhouse. The very prentice boys who paid their pennies to stand about the stage stopped cracking nuts, we are told, when he appeared¹. From the other end of society, we have the legend, more plausible than most, that the great Queen could not have enough of him; and, on hearing of his unexpected death in *Henry V*, commanded his resuscitation in a new play which should show him in love. Yet it is also certain that his vast form did not then appear to dwarf the rest of the characters and make the scenes in which he was not present look faded and outmoded. On the contrary, it is safe to say that those scenes, political and military for the most part, were so full of interest in themselves that Shakespeare could make the comic under-plot as fascinating as he liked without fear of disturbing the balance of the play.

More, indeed, is involved than *Henry IV*. For if Hal be the cad and hypocrite that many modern readers imagine, or even if he seem merely 'dimly wrought' by the side of his gross friend, then the whole grand scheme of the Lancastrian cycle miscarries, since it is the person and reign of King Henry V which gives the bright centre to that dark picture, a brightness that by contrast makes the chaos that follows all the more

¹ v. *Stage-History*, p. xxxi, below.

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ghastly: When Shakespeare set forth along the road which begins with *Richard II*, he had the whole journey in view; had, indeed, already traversed the second half of it; and envisaged the road immediately before him, which stretched from the usurpation of Bolingbroke, through the troubles of his reign, to the final triumph of his son over the French, as a great upward sweep in the history of England and the chapter of that history which the men of his age found more interesting than any other. How lively was this interest is shown, on the one hand, by the otherwise puzzling identification, in the private letters of statesmen and courtiers and in her own words, of Elizabeth with King Richard, coupled with the evident touchiness of the authorities on the subject of Henry IV's accession, which came in 1600-1 to be associated with the Essex crisis¹; and on the other by the fact that the anniversary of Agincourt was still a day of national rejoicing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be rememberéd,

seemed very truth to those who first heard the lines, though to-day St Crispin has been long since forgotten and Agincourt is but a name in the history books. To understand, then, what Shakespeare attempted in *Henry IV*, and to see Falstaff within the dramatic frame to which he belongs and from which modern criticism has improperly released him, we must do what we can in the twentieth century to recapture the political significance of the play.

First then, *respice finem*; everything leads up to the coronation of the Prince. Little as it has been observed

¹ v. Introduction to *Richard II* (New Shakespeare), pp. xxx-xxxiv, and *2 Henry IV*, pp. 120-3.

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during the past two hundred years, this last scene is the inevitable finale, as inevitable and as much foreseen by the audience from the very beginning as the death of the hero in a tragedy. Everything that goes before is coloured by its approach. Harry Monmouth is heir apparent: how will he behave when he comes to the throne? Even the comic under-plot turns on the answer to this question; it is the theme of the very first conversation that Hal and Falstaff hold in our hearing. And inseparable from the coronation scene is that which foreruns it, the great accord with Justice, wherein the young King, his wildness buried in his father's grave, makes his peace with the old judge who had previously committed him to prison. 'There', he declares, 'is my hand';

You shall be as a father to my youth,
My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear,
And I will stoop and humble my intents
To your well-practised wise directions¹.

In speaking thus Henry exhibits the spirit of the true 'governor' as distinct from that of the tyrant. For, as Hooker observes,

By the natural law, whereunto he [God] hath made all subject, the lawful power of making laws to command whole politic societies of men belongeth so properly unto the same societies, that for any prince or potentate of what kind so ever upon earth to exercise the same of himself, and not either by express commission immediately and personally received from God, or else by authority derived at the first from their consent upon whose persons they impose laws, it is no better than mere tyranny².

We are so apt, in this 'democratic' age, to be taken up with the prerogatives, exercise of power, and high

¹ *2 Henry IV*, 5. 2. 118-21.

² *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, x, par. 8.

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handed ways of the Tudors with their parliaments, as to forget that, though themselves the representatives and embodiment of

The majesty and power of law and justice¹,

this law was not their dictates, or Diktate, but the Common Law of England derived from ancient usage, or, as the formula ran, 'the laws of Edward the Confessor'. We forget too how keenly conscious the best of them were of the duties and responsibilities to which they were called both 'by express commission immediately and personally received from God' and 'by authority derived at the first from their consent upon whose persons they impose laws'. 'To be a king and wear a crown', declared the aged Elizabeth to her turbulent last parliament, in the very spirit of the speech on the Burden of Kingship which Shakespeare had given to his Henry V a couple of years before, 'is more glorious to them that see it, than it is pleasure to them that bear it'. And again,

I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king, or royal authority of a queen, as delighted that God hath made me His instrument to maintain His truth and glory, and to defend this kingdom from peril, dishonour, tyranny, and oppression².

More surprising perhaps to some will it be to read of her unhappy sister, Mary Tudor, falling upon her knees at a meeting of her Council before her coronation, and speaking

very earnest and troubled, of the duties of kings and queens, and how she was determined to acquit herself in the task God had pleased to lay before her, to his greater glory and service, to the public good and all her subjects' benefit³.

¹ *2 Henry IV*, 5. 2. 78.

² J. B. Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth*, p. 194.

³ H. F. M. Prescott, *Spanish Tudor*, pp. 243-4.

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It is in such a mood we are to imagine Shakespeare's Prince going to his own coronation; it is with such parallels in mind that we should interpret his 'conversion', which is not so much a moral reformation or repentance for sin in the theological sense—Hal has very little 'sin' about him—as a dedication to public service. Yet the conversion is complete and deeply religious. He too falls upon his knees, not like Mary in the presence of her Council, but by the bedside of his dead father, as he believes him to be, in a scene which is one of the finest that Shakespeare ever wrote¹. And the anointed king who emerges from the Abbey is a different *man* from the prince who entered:

Presume not that I am the thing I was².

Any discussion in print or on the stage of the constitutional position of Henry IV and of his heir would have been dangerous during Elizabeth's reign; but I suppose that something like the following more or less tallies with contemporary opinion on the subject. King Richard had been weak, capricious, tyrannical. Such defects tend to upset the balance of the monarchical state, since they encourage the planetary nobles, who revolve about the sovereign, to start from their spheres in pursuit of personal ambition, and if the worst befalls 'chaos is come again', as it came during the reign of the *roi fainéant* Henry VI. Bolingbroke saved England from this fate by imposing his will upon her; but, in so doing, he sinned. Richard II, for all his instability and evil deeds, was the Lord's anointed; and in lifting up his hand against him, Bolingbroke had struck at God himself. In the Shakespearian Addition

¹ *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, pp. 77–80.

² *2 Henry IV*, 5.5. 57.

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to *Sir Thomas More*, the great Lord Chancellor thus instructs a crowd of rioters:

For to the king God hath his office lent
Of dread, of justice, power, and command;
Hath bid him rule and willed you to obey;
And to add ampler majesty to this,
He hath not only lent the king his figure,
His throne and sword, but given him his own name,
Calls him a god on earth. What do you then,
Rising 'gainst him that God Himself enstalls,
But rise 'gainst God; what do you to your souls,
In doing this, O desperate as you are?¹

In like manner Bolingbroke has put his soul in jeopardy by the sin of usurpation, sees one consequence of it in the wayward son God has given him,

That, in his secret doom, out of my blood,
He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me²,

and seeks to expiate it by undertaking a crusade to the Holy Land. Other members of the state are also conscious of his plight. The rebel barons feel themselves peers of the man they have set upon the throne and resent the exercise of authority they have helped him to usurp; and Hotspur, afire for glory, eaten up with ambition, is the spokesman of their point of view. For a weak title in the monarch is only less dangerous to the realm than a weak character, and the disorder that flows from such weakness is one of the chief political themes of *Henry IV*. But Shakespeare lived in an age when men were becoming increasingly aware that above the interests of nobles, however brilliant and attractive, was the cause of

this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England;

¹ ll. 98–107 (with spelling and punctuation modernized). See Pollard and others, *Shakespeare's Hand in 'Sir Thomas More'*, 1923.

² *1 Henry IV*, 3. 2. 6–7.

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and that above the very throne itself sat Justice. They knew too that the only security for England against internal strife and the 'envy of less happier lands' was a Prince who, with divine right on his side, that is, with a clear title to the throne and the sceptre firmly in his grasp, could be the leader of a united and harmonious common weal, in which noble, merchant, yeoman, and peasant worked together for the good of the whole. Such a Prince was Queen Elizabeth; such is Shakespeare's Harry Monmouth¹.

The blessing, then, which rested upon Henry V during his all too brief reign, was denied his father; and the contrast between their dispositions and prospects forms yet another leading theme of the play. Shakespeare deliberately reshapes the historical data derived from Holinshed in order to bring it out. Henry IV actually reigned from 1399 to 1413; *Henry IV* begins a 'twelve month' after his coronation and compresses the fourteen years into a period of not more than a year and a half². Condensation of this kind was greatly to the advantage of dramatic art; it also does much to quicken our sense of the reign's brevity and inquietude³. In history again, Henry's main difficulties were solved by the Battle of Shrewsbury, fought on 21 July 1403, ten years before his death; the rising of the Archbishop of York in 1405, the final defeat of

¹ The foregoing paragraph is repeated, with variations, from *The Essential Shakespeare*, pp. 93-5.

² P. A. Daniel (*Time-Analysis of Shakespeare's Plays*) reckons that Part 1 takes 'three months at the outside' and fancies that for Part 2 'a couple of months would be a liberal estimate'. As Part 2 opens within a few days of the Battle of Shrewsbury, the two parts comprise not more than five months of dramatic time, which gives us 17 months from the end of *Richard II* to the end of *2 Henry IV*.

³ Hall heads his chapter on Henry IV 'The Unquiet Time of Kyng Henry the Fourthe', and that on Henry V 'The Victorious Actes of Kyng Henry the Fifth'.

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Northumberland and Lord Bardolph in 1408, and the death of Glendower (which Holinshed dates 1410, though it actually took place c. 1416) being so to speak minor sequels to the crushing of Hotspur. By bringing all these events into the same year, and dwelling at considerable length upon the second and third, Shakespeare gives an impression of the usurper struggling with a hydra, which but for his sons he could never have overcome and only succeeds in overcoming within an hour of his death.

And this impression is further accentuated by other devices. Henry IV, though only 36 years of age at Shrewsbury and dying in his 46th year, is represented as a sick, care-worn, and old man throughout the play. He strikes the note in the very first words of Part 1:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care—

words which must be taken as referring both to his realm and to himself. At the opening of Part 2 he has become gravely ill; in the first scene of its act 3 we have a glimpse of him in his bed-chamber at Westminster, vainly seeking the slumber that comes so easily to the peasant and the ship-boy; and brooding, as ever, on the past, on his guilt, on Richard, the despised victim who had prophesied that these troubles would pursue his supplanter, that the Percies would revolt yet again, that

The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption.

And though on this occasion he avers, to Warwick and Surrey,

Then, God knows, I had no such intent
But that necessity so bowed the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss¹,

¹ *2 Henry IV*, 3. 1. 72-7. I now think that I overstressed the sincerity of these words in my Introduction to *Richard II*, p. xxi.

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he calls God to witness a different story, when speaking to Harry in a later scene:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crookt ways
I met this crown, and I myself know well
How troublesome it sate upon my head¹.

The disease that lays him low is apoplexy; but, as Falstaff expounds his Galen, apoplexy has its original 'from much grief, from study [i.e. brooding] and perturbation of the brain'²; a diagnosis corroborated by Prince Thomas, who shortly before his father's death declares:

Th' incessant care and labour of his mind
Hath wrought the mure, that should confine it in,
So thin that life looks through and will break out³.

Shakespeare leaves his audience in no doubt that the root of the king's sickness is sickness of soul.

And this brings me to the other device for underlining the usurpation; not only is Henry haunted by Richard, and constantly speaking of him, but Shakespeare is plying us with suggestion on the source of Henry's cares from beginning to end of the drama. Here, and not poverty of subject-matter, is the chief explanation of that 'repetition' which the 'Arden' editor finds so boring⁴. The dramatist desires both to make the issue clear to spectators who have not seen his *Richard II* on the stage, and to keep it continuously before the minds of all. Hotspur first broaches it in the third scene, where he taxes father and uncle with having helped

To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke.

¹ *Ibid.* 4. 5. 183-6.

² *Ibid.* 1. 2. 113-14.

³ *Ibid.* 4. 4. 118-20.

⁴ v. *supra*, p. ix.

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Bolingbroke gives us his own picture of Richard, 'the skipping king', in the first interview with Prince Hal; and in the parleys before Shrewsbury, Worcester reminds him, in turn, of the oath he had taken, shortly after landing at Ravenspurgh, that he 'did nothing purpose 'gainst the state'. In Part 2, again, besides the references by the sick king already spoken of, we have at 1. 1. 187-209 the account of the archbishop's crusade against Richard's sacrilegious murderer, and at 1. 3. 87-108 his scorn for the fickleness of the common people, who after rejecting Richard for Bolingbroke, are now, like a dog returning to his vomit, 'become enamoured' of the dead man's grave; while in the talk between the rebels and Westmoreland at Gaultree (4. 1. 113-39), the presence of Mowbray, son of the Mowbray whose quarrel with Bolingbroke furnished the occasion of the latter's banishment by Richard, leads to a discussion of that episode, which had been the beginning of all the trouble. Thus, constant allusion to Richard and his fate is combined with skilful variation in the incidents referred to, so that by the time the play is finished the whole story has been recalled. There is, in truth, no repetition; only insistence upon the circumstances of Bolingbroke's accession, upon the weakness of his title, the illegality of his usurpation, the inexpiable crime of Richard's murder.

Moreover, this harping upon Richard's tragic end had its bearing upon the character and actions of the Prince as well as on those of his father. When the King sees his Harry conducting himself like Richard and treading the path that leads to deposition and death, we wonder that he should understand his son so little. Yet the career of Richard was undoubtedly a warning to the prodigal Prince, and Shakespeare reminds us of it, again and again, in order that we may the more appreciate the wisdom and rightness of the reformation when it comes. Whether he ever turned over the pages

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of Hall's *Chronicle* we do not know; but if he did, the following passage from the opening paragraphs of the chapter on Henry V influenced his shaping of the play:

For what can bee more shame or reproche to a prince, then he whiche ought to gouerne and rule other shall by cowardnes, slouth and ignorance, as a pupille not of viii or x yeres of age, but beyng of xx or xxx yeres and more, shalbe compelled to obey and folowe the willes of other, and be ruled and beare no rule, like a ward and not like a gardē, like a seruant and not like a Master. Suche a gouernour was kyng Richarde the seconde, whiche of hymself beeyng not of the most euill disposicion, was not of so symple a mind, nor of suche debilitie of witte, nor yet of so litle herte and corage, but he might haue demaunded and learned good and profitable counsaill, and after aduise taken, kept, retayned and folowed the same: But howsoeuer it was, vnprofitable counsailers wer his confusion and finall perdicion. Suche another ruler was kyng Edwarde the seconde, whiche two before named kynges fell from the high glory of fortunes whele to exstreme misery and miserable calamittee. By whose infortunate chance (as I thynke) this kyng Henry beyng admonished, expulsed from hym his old plaie felowes, his preuie Sicophantes and vngracious gard as authors and procurers of al mischifes and riot, and assigned into their places men of grauitee, persons of actiuitee, and counsaillers of greate witte and pollicie².

Nor is the theme relinquished with *Henry IV*. The crowning proof of its importance for Shakespeare and his audience is that it recurs in *Henry V*, and at the most solemn moment of that play. Listen to the hero-king's prayer before Agincourt:

O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts,
Possess them not with fear: take from them now
The sense of reck'ning, or th'opposéd numbers
Pluck their hearts from them. Not to-day, O Lord,
O not to-day, think not upon the fault

² Hall's *Chronicle*, p. 47 (ed. 1809).

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My father made in compassing the crown!
 I Richard's body have interréd new,
 And on it have bestowed more contrite tears,
 Than from it issued forcéd drops of blood.
 Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
 Who twice a day their witheréd hands hold up
 Toward heaven, to pardon blood: and I have built
 Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
 Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do:
 Though all that I can do is nothing worth;
 Since that my penitence comes after all,
 Imploring pardon¹.

The prayer is granted, and the victory won. But it is written that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, and the terrible curse pronounced by the Bishop of Carlisle in *Richard II*² remained to be fulfilled in the Wars of the Roses, of which 'continuall discension for the crowne of this noble realme' King Henry the Fourth was by his crime 'the first auctor'³, as Shakespeare reminds us yet again in each of the Three Parts of his *Henry VI*⁴. To us, who do not shrink from crowning a younger brother in place of his elder, when it suits the country's convenience, and for whom a king is no longer

the figure of God's majesty,
 His captain, steward, deputy-elect⁵,

all this makes but slight appeal, if it does not pass altogether unnoticed; in days when absolute monarchy, legitimacy, and 'the divinity that doth hedge a king' were pillars of the social system, it touched the central nerve of political thought and feeling. Had Shake-

¹ *Henry V*, 4. 1. 285 [306]ff. ² *Richard II*, 4. 1. 136ff.

³ v. title of Hall's *Chronicle*, cited pp. xxv-vi of my Introduction to *Richard II* (New Shakespeare).

⁴ 1 *Henry VI*, 2. 5. 64-71; 2 *Henry VI*, 2. 2. 19-31; 3 *Henry VI*, 1. 1. 104-42; *Richard III*, 3. 3. 9ff.

⁵ *Richard II*, 4. 1. 125-6.

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Shakespeare not insisted upon it, his gorgeous historical tapestry would have lacked the scarlet thread that, dyed in the blood

Of fair King Richard, scraped from Pomfret stones¹,
runs through the eight plays.

III. *Falstaff's 'day's service' in 1942*

'This is a play', Mrs Elizabeth Inchbald tells us, 'which all men admire and which most women dislike. Many revolting expressions in the comic parts, much boisterous courage in the graver scenes, together with Falstaff's unwieldy person, offend every female auditor; and whilst a facetious Prince of Wales is employed taking purses on the highway, a lady would rather see him stealing hearts at a ball'². If one did not know that was written in 1817, the last words would almost betray the date. Yet I am not without evidence that modern women are still much of the same mind; and the comparatively infrequent appearances of *Henry IV* in the nineteenth-century theatre may well be due to an increase in the female portion of the audience. Of the play's abiding popularity with men, on the other hand, there has never been any question; and Johnson speaks both for the eighteenth century and for his sex when he declares: 'None of Shakespeare's plays are more read than the first and second parts of *Henry IV*. Perhaps no author has ever in two plays afforded so much delight'³. It is even reported that this delight has been turned to military account in the

¹ *2 Henry IV*, i. i. 205.

² Cited by Hemingway, *1 Henry IV*, New Variorum Shakespeare, p. 395.

³ Johnson's *Shakespeare*, iv. 355. For the play's 18th-century popularity v. pp. xxxiii ff.