



# VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University  
VCU Scholars Compass

---

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---


2017

## A Dull Soldier and a Keen Guest: Stumbling Through The Falstaffiad One Drink at a Time

Emma Givens

Virginia Commonwealth University, [givense@mymail.vcu.edu](mailto:givense@mymail.vcu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#), and the [Theatre History Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/4826>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

© Emma Givens 2017  
All rights reserved

*A Dull Soldier and a Keen Guest:  
Stumbling Through The Falstaffiad One Drink at a Time*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at  
Virginia Commonwealth University.

Emma Pedersen Givens

Director: Noreen C. Barnes, Ph.D.  
Director of Graduate Studies  
Department of Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
March, 2017

### Acknowledgement

Theatre is a collaborative art, and so, apparently, is thesis writing. First and foremost, I would like to thank my grandmother, Carol Pedersen, or as I like to call her, the world's greatest research assistant. Without her vast knowledge of everything Shakespeare, I would have floundered much longer. Thank you to my mother and grad-school classmate, Boomie Pedersen, for her unending support, my friend, Casey Polczynski, for being a great cheerleader, my roommate, Amanda Long for not saying anything about all the books littered about our house and my partner in theatre for listening to me talk nonstop about Shakespeare over fishboards. Thanks to Dr. David Kathman for sending me to the right books about bars, and to Cary Carpenter for letting me leave the bar to write. Finally, a special thank you to Dr. Noreen Barnes for being a great friend and mentor, for grounding me when I flew off in a million directions, and for sending me to Falstaff.

*Table of Contents*

Abstract .....	iv
Preface: A Brief History of the Plays .....	1
Introduction: Give them Bread and Circuses .....	5
Chapter One: Before There Was Falstaff.....	11
Chapter Two: Falstaff .....	16
Chapter Three: Falstaff In War .....	31
Chapter Four: Falstaff In Love .....	50
Chapter Five: Falstaff In Death .....	54
Works Cited .....	60
Bibliography .....	62
Vita .....	64

*Abstract*

A DULL SOLDIER AND A KEEN GUEST: STUMBLING THROUGH THE  
FALSTAFFIAD ONE DRINK AT A TIME

By Emma Pedersen Givens

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

Director: Noreen C. Barnes, Ph. D.

Theatre history has long interwoven with the production, consumption, and peddling of alcohol. While the seedier aspects of our past generally go unremembered, we can find traces of them in the culture of the times. If we read Shakespeare through the lens of drinking culture, what can we discover about the play and what can that tell us about how to produce his works today? By looking at the rules and customs surrounding alehouses during the English Renaissance I have analyzed the three plays contained within the Falstaffiad (*1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Merry Wives of Windsor*).

## ***PREFACE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PLAYS***

*Henry IV Part One* (1596/1597)

Based on historical events with some inspiration from an earlier play, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, Shakespeare's version of the events which took place in the 1400s tells the story of Henry Bolingbroke's early reign as King Henry IV and his wayward son, Prince Hal. The King, who usurped his cousin, King Richard II, to gain the throne is preparing to go on crusade when he is brought word that the Earl of Northumberland and his followers have captured another cousin, Edmund Mortimer, in an act of defiance. Northumberland and his son, Henry Percy (who is everything the King wishes for in a son), are ready to fight to take back the crown from the usurper.

The action of the play switches from scene to scene between the world of the court and the world of Mistress Quickly's inn in Eastcheap where Sir John Falstaff, an overweight, drunk lecher, entertains the crowds which include Prince Hal, King Henry's wayward son, and heir to the throne. While the King is dealing with the potential war, we are introduced to Falstaff as he prepares a great theft of some passersby staying at the inn. Hal is to be part of the theft, but he makes secret arrangements with another member of Falstaff's group, Ned Poins, to steal the loot from Falstaff once they have stolen it from the travelers in order to catch Falstaff in an elaborate lie which they hope will be entertaining.

While the caper is underway, the King is preparing to go to war with Northumberland and his supporters. Hal returns to his rightful position beside the King and readies himself for his inevitable fight against Hotspur. Falstaff must complete his knightly duties by gathering together a group of fighters to go to war for his king. Though he does find soldiers, they are drunks, criminals, and dullards with no fighting experience.

The two armies finally meet in The Battle of Shrewsbury; Hal defeats Henry Percy and saves his father while Falstaff defeats death by staying alive.

#### *Henry IV Part Two (1597-1599)*

Word comes to Northumberland that his son, Henry Percy, was victorious in The Battle of Shrewsbury. Amidst their celebration, a second messenger arrives with the real news of Percy's death at which point his widow convinces Northumberland to continue fighting the King.

At the same time, the King, sick on his deathbed, has sent the Chief Justice to deal with Falstaff, asking him to further divide the knight and Hal so that the heir apparent might be ready to assume his place as the next king. Still in the midst of war, Sir John must put together another group of soldiers to go off and fight with Prince John, King Henry's younger son. Always on the lookout for ways of raising quick money, this time Falstaff finds men who will pay him so they might abstain from fighting. The ones who cannot afford to pay their way out of the war all die, though the King's army is overall victorious.



Once the fighting is done, Falstaff goes back to the inn in Eastcheap, sure that once his friend Hal is King he will receive a great reward. The news comes that Henry IV is dead succeeded by Henry V and Falstaff races to his friend to claim his rightful place by his side only to be banished by the new king.

*Merry Wives of Windsor (1597)*

Anne Page, the daughter of Mistress Page and Page, is ready to be married, but to whom? Her mother wants her to marry the doctor, Caius, her father wants her to marry Slender, and she wants to marry Fenton. Falstaff, a visitor to Windsor, hopes to woo both Mistress Page and her friend Mistress Ford in order to gain access to their money.

Mistress Ford's husband, Ford, is an incredibly jealous man who does not trust his wife.

Mistresses Page and Ford are shocked that Falstaff has the gall to try to seduce them and so decide to make an example of him by publicly humiliating him. Each time they invite him over, they orchestrate a scenario in which he will look like a fool. The first time, they hide him in a laundry basket filled with dirty clothes they then instruct their servants to dump in the river. The second time, they dress him up as an old maid to sneak him past their husbands.

While this is happening, Anne is trying to find a way to marry the man she loves instead of the idiots her parents have chosen for her, and Ford has assumed an alias in order to spy on his wife's relationship with Falstaff. After the old maid trick, however, the wives let their husbands in on their game and Ford promises to stop being jealous and start trusting his wife.

Working together, the Fords and Pages come up with a final humiliation: they will have all the children in the town dress up as fairies and gather in the woods, where they will lure Falstaff in order to terrify him. At the same time, Mistress Page has asked Caius to come to the forest, Page has asked Slender to come to the forest and Anne has asked Fenton to come to the forest each promising a hopeful suitor Anne's hand in marriage. Each suitor leaves the forest with the person they think is Anne, running to the nearest priest who might perform their wedding. The first two find themselves married to disguised boys while Fenton and Anne marry each other.

Mistress Page and her husband are embarrassed when they discover their daughter has gone against their will by choosing her own spouse. They quickly forgive her, and everyone is invited to celebrate their union, including Falstaff whose own humiliation at the hands of the wives is overshadowed by the excitement of a wedding and a party.

## ***INTRODUCTION: Give Them Bread and Circuses***

No, by my troth, not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter  
1 Henry IV, 1.ii.21

### **1**

Thespis was a multi-faceted figure: poet, choreographer, actor, and drunkard.  
Augusto Boal

Drinking has been a central part of Western civilization for the entirety of our written history. A cornerstone of hospitality, the British began to regulate the way we imbibe in 1266 with the passing of the Assize of Bread and Ale, which put the control of the quality of ale in the hands of local government (Hailwood 23). As ale became stronger and spirits with higher alcohol content became more widespread, selling alcohol became more monitored and imbibing more policed.

As the modern alehouse was developing, many of the regulations put in place came out of fear. Fights between religions and power struggles between the Crown and Parliament were frequent, and so groups of people sitting in bars drinking and talking worried those in power. A 1495 Act of Parliament allowed Justices of the Peace to deny anyone the right to sell ale if they felt that their behavior was suspect. If an ale-seller was thought of as an unsavory character, they would be denied a license to sell, “This reflected a growing concern with a perceived link between alehouses and disorder, and in particular criminal activity” (Hailwood, 23).

Some Renaissance laws still exist today in one form or another, for example, “The 1606 ‘Act for repressing the odious and loathsome sin of drunkenness’ criminalized drunkenness for the first time, introducing a five shilling fine for anyone convicted of drunkenness” (Hailwood 25). ‘Drunk in Public’ is still a crime punishable by jail time and a fine.

Because of the negative outcomes of drunkenness and the stiff regulations (including many still left over from Prohibition), drunks are often dismissed as being beneath the rest of society. However, there is more to drinking in bars than getting drunk; they are places of camaraderie, celebration, mourning, education and storytelling. They create community.

Storytelling is a huge part of bar culture. How do the stories we tell change as we drink? They become bits of performance, becoming more elaborate and animated with each retelling.

I began wondering if it was possible to tell the history of theatre through drink. I grew up on theatre by Shepard, O’Neill, and Albee, all of whom feature drinking as a central theme in their plays or have plays with very drunk characters. I started to think about college, when I was cast as Gertrude in a very abbreviated version of *Hamlet*; does she drink the poisoned wine in the end to save Hamlet from dying or does she die because she drank wine, which was forbidden by law (and church)? Or maybe she had to die as Shakespeare’s nod to Sophocles. Many scholars have drawn parallels between *Hamlet* and *Oedipus*; comparing Oedipus’ relationship with his mother to Hamlet’s relationship with his own. If that is true, then Gertrude must follow Jocasta’s path by

dying. The wine is an interesting twist, though, adding an extra layer to Gertrude's untimely end.

Telling the history of theatre through drinking culture is a huge undertaking, so I began narrowing my focus, at which point I realized there were three main time periods to tackle: Ancient Greeks and Romans, Post-Dark Ages birth of Modernity (and the alehouse), Twentieth Century and beyond. Heading into this project, I knew mostly about theatre history, and current drinking culture, but very little about the history of drink or how much scholarship existed on the subject.

Not one to start at the beginning, I began looking into the Renaissance and made a few quick discoveries, namely that John Heminges – half the team who published the First Folio – ran an alehouse attached to (or near) The Globe. There is not much known about the venture aside from a few facts gleaned from legal documents, including Heminges's will, but I came across the name of a current scholar, Dr. David Kathman. A quick Google search gave me his contact information and I reached out with vague 'Questions about Shakespeare' to which he immediately responded with a list of recent scholarship on drinking during the English Renaissance.

One of the earliest pieces of scholarship on drinking in England was Peter Clark's *The English Alehouse: A social History 1200-1830* which was published in 1983 but the field went relatively untouched until about ten years ago when scholars decided that taverns and inns and alehouses could tell us a lot about society. Everything I have read cites Clark's book, and scholars in the field agree his is the most comprehensive work to date. I still haven't found any readings of Shakespeare through the lens of alcohol, so the conclusions drawn are my own based on my research into alehouses and Shakespearean

criticism. However, there are many contemporary theatre companies that produce various versions of “Drunk Shakespeare” where the actors drink while performing different plays.

What is the fascination with drinking and Shakespeare? For me, it is important to take his work off the ‘High Art’ pedestal on which he was placed hundreds of years ago. Keeping him up there helps make him inaccessible, which is antithetical to the plays he wrote. Putting on an elevated English accent and posturing while wearing fussy costumes is not Shakespeare, it is using Shakespeare for cultural cache. Where is the humanity? Trying desperately to communicate the lines effectively while on the verge of drunken oblivion, on the other hand, sounds like a great way to experience Shakespeare both onstage and in the audience.

This project is huge and narrowing down the scope of my investigation would have been impossible without Dr. Barnes’ gentle guidance, which went something like this, “It’s a 60 page paper, just write it. I hate *Measure for Measure*, do Falstaff.” And I am very glad I did Falstaff.

As I’ve been working on this, I have found two camps: those who think Falstaff is a coward and a fool whose only purpose is to offer a little levity, and those who love Falstaff and understand his desire to live as the core of humanity against a stark backdrop of power-hungry warriors. I fit into the latter camp and do believe his *raison d’être* is more than for the audience to laugh at a fat man trying to find a horse over the course of three plays. Even so, I offer points of view counter to my own in order to dig into the three plays that constitute the Falstaffiad. My main goal is not to lavish praise on a character, but to understand more about the plays and what they can tell us about

themselves because of how they deal with drinking in the hopes of understanding more about society then and ways of producing them now, because we still drink.

As I began to research, I was following John Heminges around London; as well as being a good friend to Shakespeare, a leading actor in his troupe, and one of the two responsible for publishing the First Folio, Heminges also ran the taphouse attached to The Globe. (Egan) I dropped that line of research, but many months later I came across this in *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography*, “Edmond Malone said Heminges played Falstaff, though no evidence for this survives” (319). Most accounts say that Heminges was not one of the better looking members of The King’s Men, so it stands to reason he’d play the fat knight. What I like about this connection, however, is that dramaturgically, Shakespeare had someone with real and personal knowledge of the workings of a bar in his plays, many of which are partially set in bars.

If Shakespeare had someone to help with the dramaturgy of bars in writing his plays, do we not owe it to the bard to understand enough of pub culture (then and now) to fully realize his plays? Falstaff could have been drunken comic relief anywhere, like the tipsy, talkative porter in *Macbeth*, or always drunken Borachio in *Much Ado About Nothing*. They both serve as comic relief, their medium is drunk foolery, but they exist in the worlds of the rest of the play: the Porter is in Macbeth’s castle and Borachio in Leonato’s house where they overindulge in drink to entertain the audience. Falstaff does not exist in Hal’s world. Instead, Hal visits Falstaff where he lives, in Mistress Quickly’s tavern in Eastcheap, where the young Prince must adapt or be treated like an outsider.

Today, bar culture is as easily dismissed while being as important and lively as it was in the seventeenth century. Each bar has its own rules and regulars, making every

place unique. How do we use that in modern productions? What can we learn about ourselves through an investigation of how we drink together? Who was Falstaff then and who is he today?

Cautionary tales of the evils of drink exist everywhere, so I see no need to reiterate those points. Instead I aim to investigate how we drink, how we tell stories while we drink, and what drinking can teach us.



## **CHAPTER ONE: BEFORE THERE WAS FALSTAFF**

### *An Introduction*

Practices of sociability are central to understanding the character and development of all societies. Decisions regarding with whom to voluntarily associate beyond the contexts of work and the home are central to the development of social bonds, social networks, collective identities and forms of community.

Hailwood 6

In the right bar, you can find a makeshift family, kinship, a significant other, a job, a lusty thirst for life, and good conversation. Not everyone likes bar culture, but we also live in a world where not everyone can agree that we are all dying from the moment we are born. The religious among us love to reject bar patrons as the lowest members of society, and as pervasive as religion is in our lives, that sentiment has become general consensus. Why would they, though, when the only people who would take in Joseph and Mary in their time of need were keepers of an inn, which in those days was a place for drinking first.

Religion, theatre, and drinking have been linked since the beginning of our recorded history. Dionysus is the God of theatre, wine, and religious ecstasy; Ancient Greek festivals in his name were Bacchanals of excess and creativity. Great Greek tragedies we still perform today were given their first audience at these fetes during which drinking was a main event. Even the Grecian philosophers we now study understood the importance of drinking, though not in excess.

In order to understand why drinking calls to mind the lowest of society, we must understand how alcohol was originally made, where it came from, and how it has changed. In Ancient Greek and Roman times, ale was a part of the daily diet; it was a good source of nutrition and hydration for any social class. When the Romans talked about “bread and circuses” the bread portion was as much about the grains used to create beer as the wheat used in the production of bread. What did the people need? Sustenance and entertainment, and beer was as important to longevity as bread. Laborers were guaranteed ale as part of their daily payment because it was understood to be an integral part of everyday life. At that point, most ale was made by chewing wheat and letting it sit out to ferment - a process which was instigated by the natural bacteria in saliva - before adding water and serving. Because of this, it had a very low alcohol content and its quality varied depending on the class of the producer because poorer people had access to lesser grains. Think of ale as something close to a mildly alcoholic porridge.

Grapes needed (and still need) special cultivation, climate, and time, which meant wine was made for higher society and had a higher alcohol content than the plebeians’ ale. Because of this, the philosophers at the time (who spent hours debating over decanters of the elixir) saw the effects of drunkenness regularly and usually in their elevated debates. There are some philosophical writings from the time which talk about the need for drink, but warn against the dangers of drunkenness, like this quote often attributed to Socrates, “Worthless people live only to eat and drink; people of worth eat and drink only to live.” Because of the low grade of alcohol in ale, and the poor’s inaccessibility to the more alcoholic (and expensive) wine, I wonder how much drunkenness they saw outside of their closed circle of wealthy men.

Drinking is especially interesting to look at because it has been heavily regulated by both the church and state and looked down on by the upper classes (even as they grip their needed glass of wine because, of course, hypocrisy is not a modern day invention.)

A storm of criticism erupted against alehouses in the late sixteenth century which continued until the English Revolution. Puritan preachers, government ministers, magistrates and village worthies all raised their voices loud in condemnation... hostility was fuelled by fear, sometimes bordering on the hysterical, that alehouses were being transformed into the strongholds of a populist world which aimed to overthrow established, respectable society.

Clark 145

So where did taverns come from? “Inns began to make their first appearance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and were fairly numerous by the fifteenth” (Clark 6). (I am going to use tavern, inn, alehouse, taphouse, and bar fairly interchangeably as each is a place where you can sleep, eat, and drink to varying degrees. Some offer more variety in terms of food, some have better lodging, but they all sell beer and because of that last part, they all were regulated similarly.)

Coming out of the Dark Ages, what we know about alcohol trade is that it was mostly run by women. “By the early fourteenth century ale-selling was undoubtedly a common economic activity both in towns and countryside... The great majority of those involved were women” (Clark 21). Alewives or polewives were women brewers who sold ale out of their houses, which were recognizable by a branch or pole outside their doors. Often these women were poor widows who made ale for short periods of time in order to support their families during particularly financially difficult times. They were not crafting, but rather churning out product and so had less expensive and poorer quality

ale. (They also did not have money to spend on good grains, so the ingredients were lesser, too.) Some alewives, however, were higher-class wives of tradespeople who would brew year-round and so were able to understand the craft of brewing. Because they started in a better financial place, their ingredients were better, they were able to experiment so their process was better as well as their recipes, which all led to a better, pricier, product. These women would sell their wares out of their houses, but they would also sell at outdoor festivals and markets.

In the late Middle Ages competition from larger brewers, whether in towns or countryside, seems to have led to a winnowing-out of some poor, part-time ale-wives... It is arguable that while overall numbers of ale-sellers declined in late medieval England, those that continued, now operated on a more regular basis, their premises beginning to display the characteristics of an established alehouse.

Clark 32

What was also happening was the addition of hops to the ale as a means of preserving the beer:

In the fifteenth century, the English began brewing a new type of drink called beer that contained hops. The addition of hops created a bitter drink that was stronger and lasted longer than ale, but the complexities of the brewing process led to the development of large commercial breweries that had no place for the traditional alewives.

*Alcohol 95*

So here we are, leaving the Middle Ages, moving toward the Renaissance, and coming upon the beginnings of the modern alehouse, and Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff, who is, in his own words, "A goodly portly man, 'i faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage" (1 Henry IV, II. iv. 433).

As the modern alehouse was finding itself and navigating changing regulations, Shakespeare was competing with Ben Jonson for the title of ‘Best Playwright In Town’. By looking into the Bard’s use of bars in his plays, we can gain a little more insight into his characters, their relationships and the way society worked during his lifetime. Nestled into the four plays that make up the Henriad (*Richard II*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two*, and *Henry V*) is a smaller and perhaps more interesting grouping of plays (depending on which scholar is asserting their opinion) called the Falstaffiad, which takes the two Henry plays as bookends and inserts *Merry Wives of Windsor* in between.

Using the Falstaffiad, what can we uncover about what Shakespeare had to say about religion, government and war? How does he treat women, language and social status? Finally, can we take what Falstaff teaches us and find ways to apply it to modern productions?

It is because he drinks that Falstaff is a useful gateway to understanding society during the English Renaissance and can be used to shed light on our current society in modern productions. Drinking encourages free-flowing words, which sometimes get us closer to the truth.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: FALSTAFF***

### *Another Introduction*

#### **1**

One word more, I beseech you: if you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France, where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man. My tongue is weary; when my legs are too, I will bid you good night.

*Henry IV Part 2, Epilogue*

In the Epilogue from *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare left the only reference to who Falstaff was before publication: a reimagining of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord of Cobham, and friend - for a time - of the real King Henry V. The impetus for *King Henry IV Part One and Two* was an anonymous play titled *The Famous Victories of King Henry the Fifth* in which Oldcastle took his rightful place next to Prince Hal. When Shakespeare went to write his versions of the story, he kept the characters' names historically accurate until Oldcastle's descendant, the Baron Cobham and Lord Chamberlain under Queen Elizabeth 1, complained about the liberties Shakespeare took with his ancestor's character. Although there are many different versions of this story, all citing different specifics, upon this much do they all agree.

Sir John Oldcastle's friendship with King Henry V ended abruptly when he was hanged for treason and heresy because he broke from Catholicism and went against his old friend, the Crown. Shakespeare's version of Oldcastle is a boisterous, gluttonous, and drunk man trying to fulfill his carnal desires, which was an issue for Baron Cobham who wanted his family remembered in a better way. After a great deal of arguing and many performances, Shakespeare changed the name. All written versions we have today reflect that, except for the Epilogue in *2 Henry IV*, lest we forget that Falstaff is definitely not Oldcastle.

## 2

There is nothing but roguery to be found in villainous man, yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with a lime in it.

*1 Henry IV, 2.iv.129*

We are introduced to Falstaff and his merry band of degenerates in the fifth act of *King Richard II* when the newly crowned Henry Bolingbroke is looking for his eldest son, his heir, Prince Hal:

**Henry Bolingbroke:**

Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?  
'Tis full three months since I did see him last: -  
If any plague hang over us, 'tis he.  
I would to God, my lords, he might be found:  
Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,  
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,  
With unrestrained loose companions, -  
Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,  
And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;  
While he, young wanton and effeminate boy,  
Takes on the point of honour to support  
So dissolute a crew.

**Henry Percy:**

My lord, some two days since I saw the prince,  
And told him of those triumphs held at Oxford.

**Henry Bolingbroke:**

And what said the gallant?

**Henry Percy:**

His answer was, - he would unto the stews,  
And from the common'st creature pluck a glove,  
And wear it as a favour; and with that  
He would unhorse the lustier challenger.

**Henry Bolingbroke:**

As dissolute as desperate; yet through both  
I see some sparkles of a better hope,  
Which elder days may happily bring forth. –  
V. iii. 37-58

This passage is a good starting point for our introduction to Falstaff for a number of reasons. First, we are given a glimpse into his world from the perspective of someone in the highest station, fitting what we know about how the upper classes viewed tipplers at the time, which, like today, was not good. One of the biggest causes of fear for respectable citizens was that they would lose the younger generation to the company they found in alehouses, a fear which underlies King Henry's words.

Yet for the young man or apprentice the alehouse offered one of the few opportunities to escape from the increasingly regimented and status-conscious environment of the household, where the integration of workshop and living quarters, and the cramped communal nature of eating, sleeping and most other activities permitted little real privacy. At a time of his life when he enjoyed limited standing at home, the world of the alehouse gave the young man a measure of social recognition, however fleeting, a sense of good fellowship and the liberty to mix with older folk on more equal terms.

Clark 148



It is important to remember that although Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* in 1595, Henry IV took power at the end of the fourteenth century, when drinking customs were different. “In Shakespeare’s history plays, as we have seen, the “history” being staged tends to conflate a number of time periods: the time in which the play is set, the time in which it is written, and the time(s) in which it is performed” (Garber 314). It stands to reason that the historical inaccuracies would reflect the time in which it was written and Henry IV’s worries about his son mirrored society’s about their children. Because of the mixing centuries and customs, it is easier to parse what Shakespeare was using to tell the story of King Henry V’s ascension to the throne and what was a comment on the society in which he lived.

By frequenting a space that mixed genders and generations, the elder elites were worried that young, impressionable boys would learn bad habits, like thinking for themselves. On top of that, taverns were required to house travellers, leading to a variety of views from all over the country being voiced, which in turn led to inns as hotbeds for discussion, especially about the church and the state. Alehouses were one of the few places citizens could express their real views on Parliament, religion, and the King without fear of punishment, though as we will see by the end of *2 Henry IV*, Falstaff is not so lucky. “There was also more to alebench politics than opposition to the injustices meted out by the ruling elites, The alehouse was a site where ‘topics such as taxation, royal succession, ecclesiastical policy, and the very nature of the relationship between the crown and church were the subject of heated debate” (Hailwood 68).

The ‘alebench politics’ sets a scene where we can see similarities between the time when Hal became Henry V and when Shakespeare wrote about his ascension. This

is perhaps why the Bard chose to write *Henry IV* when he did. As the monarchy was backed by the church, there was a certain divine authority held by whoever wore the crown, but that authority would only go so far as the people bought into that hegemonic structure. When Parliament was formed and began to check the monarchic power, it, too, needed the ruled to believe in its power. If the power of the ruling class was questioned by the governed, then its power dwindled; those debates were safely housed in taverns.

In order to dismiss these conversations, those who frequented alehouses were rejected by good society as thieves and drunks, which - though sometimes an accurate representation - was not true of everyone. The relationship between Hal and his friends establish in *Richard II* comes to fruition in both *I Henry IV*, and *2 Henry IV* as half the action takes place in a tavern in Eastcheap. Late 1500s historically accurate political talks underscore the late 1300s historically accurate wars over the throne as Renaissance England was heading into its own Civil War, coup and the Interregnum.

The second thing we are given to understand from the *Richard II* passage is time frame. Because we know Prince Hal and Falstaff are comrades at the beginning of Henry IV's reign, we have a context in which to witness their dissolving relationship, as Prince Hal becomes King Henry V. If Prince Hal and Falstaff are new friends at the beginning of *Henry IV Part One*, an audience is likely to dismiss Falstaff as the drunk lecher like Hal does. By understanding the necessary love between the two which kept their friendship strong over the almost fifteen years of Henry IV's reign, we can better connect with their end.

This relationship is also important to establish so that the audience understands the impact Falstaff had on Hal's education. Hal's surrogate father helped raise him by

exposing him to society's underbelly; a faction of the population he would never have spent time with otherwise. Through his alehouse schooling, Hal learns many things including the irreverence for authority about which his father worries.

Finally, Shakespeare sets up a joke on Falstaff with the line, "and with that/ He would unhorse the lustier challenger," as Falstaff spends the two Henry plays in search of a horse which he never finds. In Act 2, Falstaff cries out after the Prince, "I am accursed to rob in that thief's company. The rascal hath removed my horse and tied him I know not where. If I travel but four foot by the square further afoot, I shall break my wind" (II. ii. 10). And then a few moments later upon the Prince's return, "Give me my horse, you rogues. Give me my horse and be hanged!" (ln. 31). He never finds a horse, which is probably practical as much as anything, but what a sight to see an actor large enough and old enough to play Falstaff trying to mount a horse. Though lost to a modern day audience, those in the 1600s would have appreciated a knight, in the midst of warfare, roaming around the stage, unhorsed.

### 3

**Falstaff:** Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

**Prince Hal:** Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.

*1 Henry IV I.ii.1*

In their first meeting in *I Henry IV* we can see their relationship has begun to sour when Hal immediately berates his old friend for asking the time of day. No longer as friendly as he once was (as described by his father), Hal has fulfilled the prophecy Henry IV predicts for him in *Richard II*, “As dissolute as desperate; yet through both/ I see some sparkles of a better hope,/ Which elder days may happily bring forth” (V. iii. 56). We see he has moved on and is no longer showing affection for his friend; he has instead tired of his games, though Falstaff still sees his “sweet young prince”.

This first scene sheds a lot of light on Falstaff’s character; he loves life, he’s boisterous, he is very smart and good with language, and is free from social constraints as a knight who slums it with the lowest of the low. “Given what we know about the poverty of many tipplers and the shabbiness of their establishments, at least before the Civil War, it comes as no surprise that the great majority of alehouse customers were recruited from the bottom half of the social order” (Clark 123). Falstaff is the embodiment of the ruling class’ fear of alehouse community in that he is irreverent and speaks out against the church and state while at the same time being a member of the ruling class in that he is a knight.

Before Sir John leaves Hal’s side, he makes a prediction which we find comes true at the end of *2 Henry IV*, “By the Lord, I’ll be a traitor then when thou art king.” Prince Hal confirms the knight’s future in his soliloquy at the end of the scene:

So when this loose behavior I throw off  
And pay the debt I never promised,  
By how much better than my word I am,  
By so much shall I falsify men’s hopes;  
And, like bright metal on a sullen ground  
My reformation, glitt’ring o’er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes

Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend to make offense a skill,  
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

I.iii.215

“I know you all and will awhile uphold/ The unyoked humor of your idleness,” he tells the audience. In a world on the precipice of war, he knows he must leave his bar life and join his father on the battlefield to protect what will become his crown. In the first scene, King Henry IV wishes his son would be more like his rival’s son, Harry Percy, “Yea, there thou mak’st me sad, and mak’st me sin/ In envy that my Lord Northumberland/ Should be the father to so blest a son,/ A son who is the theme of Honor’s tongue,” and at the end of the second scene, Hal promises he will fulfill his father’s dreams.

In his first soliloquy — and first soliloquies are usually significant — he declares that he associates with them in order that, when at some future time he shows his true character, he may be the more wondered at for his previous aberrations. You may think he deceives himself here; you may believe that he frequented Sir John's company out of delight in it and not merely with this coldblooded design; but at any rate he thought the design was his one motive. And, that being so, two results follow. He ought in honour long ago to have given Sir John clearly to understand that they must say good-bye on the day of his accession. And, having neglected to do this, he ought not to have lectured him as his misleader. It was not only ungenerous, it was dishonest. It looks disagreeably like an attempt to buy the praise of the respectable at the cost of honour and truth. And it succeeded. Henry always succeeded.

Bradley 254

Critics often praise Harry’s ascension to the throne as a brilliant change of character, especially when they dismiss Falstaff. However, if you take Falstaff seriously, it begins to look like Hal is manipulative, uncaring, with the possibility of tyrannical rule bubbling under his surface.

As alehouses became more established, they were more scrutinized and put under more regulation as was the ale and wine they sold:

By the turn of the seventeenth century, there existed a regulatory framework for alehouses designed to stamp out those that were disorderly and to license a controlled number that kept good order... Yet the raft of further legislation passed in the early part of the seventeenth century – four new Acts were passed between 1603 and 1609, followed by the detailed Royal Proclamation of 1619, and three further Acts in the 1620s – changed the nature of the regulatory framework in significant ways

Hailwood 24

Because beer had begun being mass-produced, the alcohol content of each batch could be monitored and managed, so the product was the same after each brew. This led to rules about how long each patron was allowed to sojourn in an alehouse. For a period of time, no one was to drink in a tavern for more than an hour each day.

It was also at this time that the law decided who would be “legitimate patrons” of an alehouse: travellers who stayed no more than one night and the local poor (Hailwood 39). There are recorded incidents of alehouses being shut down for refusing to give food and drink to the town’s poor or turning away visitors on their way from one place to another.

Though Falstaff is a knight and companion to the Prince, he makes his living begging from his rich friends and stealing from friends and strangers indiscriminately:

**Prince Hal:** Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?

**Falstaff:** Zounds, where thou wilt, lad. I’ll make one, an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.

**Prince:** I see a good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking.

**Falstaff:** Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation.

*I Henry IV I.ii. 105*

His big thievery of *I Henry IV* happens in the first half of the play when the keeper of the tavern (for a small fee) tells him of wealthy travellers, when they are leaving and where they are going. For a laugh, Hal and his friend, Poins, decide to thwart Falstaff's master plan by stealing from the thieves after their planned theft. Knowing that Falstaff exaggerates, they hope to catch him in a lie, and though they do, he is too clever and wriggles his way out of it.

Thinking about alehouses as lodging for travellers is intriguing in a modern day context because of the nationalism plaguing the world. Staging *Henry IV Part One* today with scenes vacillating between a war for power and control and the lowest of the low mingling with foreigners in bars could be perfect. Falstaff and his friends prey on the travellers because they are from somewhere else and are not part of their community. What does that say about Hal's cruel trick? Does this add to evidence to support the claim of possible future tyranny?

## 5

Mocking rituals, threatening images, and anonymous libels all represented forms of alehouse political culture that were shrewder and more sophisticated political weapons than desperate individual outbursts of people with minimal political awareness.

Hailwood 68

One of the most well-known and often quoted scenes from *1 Henry IV* comes right after Hal's trick when he and Falstaff alternately mimic the King. In this scene Hal and Falstaff entertain the tavern-goers:

**Prince Hal:** Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the particulars of my life.

**Falstaff:** Shall I? Content. This chair shall be my state, this dagger my scepter, and this cushion my crown.

**Prince Hal:** Thy state is taken for a joined stool, thy golden scepter for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown.

**Falstaff:** Well, an the fire of grace be not quite out of thee, now shalt thou be moved. – Give me a cup of sack to make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept, for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein.

*1 Henry IV* II. iv. 389

Because of what we know of tavern culture at the time, we know the previous scene would not be an unlikely scene in an early modern English pub, and so we have another conflation of times. Though alehouses were safe spaces for dissent among the poor and working classes when Shakespeare was writing, they had not become so when Henry IV was fighting to keep his stolen throne, so we know Shakespeare added this detail for his audiences. Unfortunately we cannot know what the audience reaction would have been at the time. Because Falstaff was such a popular comedic character, though, we can postulate that they probably laughed. Whether that laughter came from the comedy of the situation or discomfort from Falstaff aping the monarch, we cannot know. Thinking about these reasons could help frame and shape a modern day production.

Harold Bloom calls this scene “The glowing center of *Henry IV, Part One*, intense with Falstaff's poignant wit and Hal's cold fury. Ambivalence explodes into positive hatred in Hal's final summation” (302). What begins as good fun with Falstaff



playing a merry king, painting himself (Falstaff) as a man of virtue changes quickly when Hal ‘deposes him’:

**Hal:** Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I’ll play my father.

**Falstaff:** Depose me? If thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker or a poulter’s hare.

**Hal:** Well, here I am set.

**Falstaff:** And here I stand. – Judge me masters.

*1 Henry IV, II. iv. 447*

At this point, Hal shows what he himself will be like as a king while imitating his Father:

Thou art violently carried away from grace. There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man. A tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen 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?

*1 Henry IV, II. iv. 462*

He is not playing anymore. He might don the same costume Falstaff took off to give him, but it is not funny when he does this because he is the heir apparent and one day he will be king, and when he is, there will be someone else in this alehouse with a cushion-crown on his head making fun of him as he is his father. He has spent his life maneuvering easily between his father’s castle and the tavern in Eastcheap, but once he ascends to the throne, he will no longer be able to visit the vagabonds who frequent Mistress Quickly’s inn. This moment comes and we must ask if all his previous rejections of Falstaff were in anticipation of this moment of realization?

It is only after we see Falstaff as Hal's imposter father that we see the prince with his real king. The age difference between Harry and Sir John makes the fat knight look the part of his father, and indeed, Falstaff is Hal's surrogate father until this scene. When we see the king and prince, they share the following exchange:

***King:***

Tell me else,  
Could such inordinate and low desires,  
Such poor, such bare, such lewd, such mean  
attempts,  
Such barren pleasures, rude society  
As thou art matched withal, and grafted to,  
Accompany the greatness of thy blood,  
And hold their level with thy princely heart?

***Prince:***

So please your Majesty, I would I could  
Quit all offenses with as clear excuse  
As well as I am doubtless I can burge  
Myself of many I am charged withal.  
Yet such extenuation let me beg  
As, in reproof of many tales devised,  
Which oft the ear of greatness needs must  
hear,  
By smiling pickthanks and base  
newsmongers,  
I may for some things true, wherein my  
youth  
Hath faulty wandered and irregular  
Find pardon on my true submission.

III. ii. 12

Pressed further about his change, Harry assures the King he has changed, "I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord,/ Be more myself" (ln 94).

By taking back his father as his own, the audience understands, though perhaps Falstaff still does not believe the change, that Harry has emancipated himself from the knight and returned to his rightful place, under God, and by his father's side. Moving

forward in the play, the audience has information Jack lacks about his adoptive son, namely that he no longer has one.

The scene ends with the Sheriff interrupting their play, searching for Falstaff and his thieving brothers to arrest them, at which point, Falstaff hides behind an arras where he, always drunk, falls asleep. But none of this can happen before Falstaff responds to Hal-as-King's tirade, which he does as he acts out Hal:

**Falstaff (as prince):** 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. But that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster, that I utterly deny. 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.

*1 Henry IV, II. iv. 483*

The sheriff loudly knocking on the door at this point both uses their moment of high tension and breaks it. Breaks it because everyone scatters and uses it by building excitement after such a serious moment; the moment where Hal promises to banish his old friend in yet another rejection. What does Shakespeare want us to think? Is he simply presenting us with facts and asking us to draw our own conclusions?

His readers expect him to mark in some distinct way his approval or disapproval of that which he represents; and hence where they disapprove and he says nothing, they fancy that he does not disapprove, and they blame his indifference... or at the least are puzzled. But the truth is that he shows the fact and leaves the judgment to them.

And again, when he makes us like a character we expect the character to have no faults that are not expressly pointed out, and when other faults appear we either ignore them or try to explain them away. This is one of our methods of conventionalising Shakespeare. We want the world's population to be neatly divided into sheep and goats, and we want an angel by us to say, ' Look, that is a goat and this is a sheep,' and we try to turn Shakespeare into this angel. His impartiality makes us uncomfortable: we cannot bear to see him, like the sun, lighting up everything and judging nothing.

Rejection of Falstaff 255

Without an understanding of how viable tavern life was and is you might be on the side that damns Falstaff, dismissing his age and drunkenness and carnal desires. If you dismiss the underbelly of society, you miss out on a rich and vital life. Falstaff and his merry band are not in this play merely as comic relief as some people will suggest and some directors will stage. He adds a depth of humanity Hal cannot attain alone and his irreverent humor makes it easy to miss because you will laugh a lot.

### **CHAPTER THREE: FALSTAFF IN WAR**

#### *An Investigation*

##### **1**

**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. (*He exits*)

**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, honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on, how then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? 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. Honour is a mere scutcheon – and so ends my catechism.

*1 Henry IV V. i. 122*

Hal is hungry for war; in order to win honor and make up for the shortcomings his father perceives in him, he must kill Harry Percy, and he is excited to do that. He is coming into his own, preparing himself to rule and in order to do that, he must get rid of the last traces of his adoptive father, which he can only do by proving himself. He must

kill Harry Percy, thereby killing the last vestiges of Falstaff still living within him. The old knight's wit, love of life, and wondrous enjoyment of all earthly things are a powerful draw, but the Prince has a taste of his potential power and that has a bigger draw on him.

Falstaff, on the other hand, wants nothing more than to live, which is one thing war cannot promise. He does not need power and that is perhaps why critics have so often overlooked him; how can a man not thirst for whatever power is within his grasp? The answer is that he is, instead, thirsty for a bottle of sack and great conversation and a beautiful woman and good fellowship (and probably another bottle of sack.)

For a society based on war, the suggestion of a world where power no longer matters would be terrifying. Think of how powerful that message could be today in a world on the brink of war because too many people are grasping for power. In walks Falstaff, without caring for any of that while still living a fulfilling life. He does not try to challenge the way they live, but his very being brings into question everything they live for and he is not even trying.

## 2

**Falstaff:** O Hal, I prithee give me leave to breathe awhile... I have paid Percy; I have made him sure.

**Prince:** He is indeed, and living to kill thee.

I prithee, lend me thy sword.

**Falstaff:** Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be alive, thou gett'st not my sword; but take my pistol, if thou wilt.

**Prince:** Give it me. What is it in the case?

**Falstaff:** Ay, Hal, 'tis hot, tis hot. There's that will sack a city.

*The Prince draws it out, and finds it to be a bottle of sack.*

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

*He throws the bottle at him and exits.*

*1 Henry IV V. iii. 47*

As the first part of *Henry IV* draws to a close, we see the battle we have been promised from the beginning. Northumberland and his son, Harry Percy, are drawing closer in an attempt at stealing the throne back from Henry Bolingbroke. Falstaff, in his position as a knight, and indebted to Hal for repaying the sum he stole earlier in the play, has gathered together a rag-tag group of incompetent soldiers who he will general until all but two or three are dead.

“There’s that will sack a city,” says Falstaff, playing with the word sack. The audience gets to laugh and Hal has another excuse to push Falstaff farther away. Both characters play with language; Hal uses the way he speaks to indicate where he is and Falstaff uses double entendre to amuse his audience.

Language can signal place and time as well as serve as a shibboleth for people to find their own communities. If you go into the right pub today and order a ‘poorman’s’ not only will you get a layered drink with hard cider on the bottom and Guinness on top, but you will also signal to the bartender that you are either in the industry or a frequent visitor in the know. They will understand that you will tip well and so you will get better service and maybe a free drink or two.

There has been some scholarship on the vernacular in British pubs as they developed from the 1500s to 1800s. Much of the language came from the tradespeople who frequented the watering holes, other words came from sailors who were also regular patrons. Many authors also credit taverns as the birthplace of modern English literature because Geoffrey Chaucer begins *The Canterbury Tales* at the Tabard in Southwark with “Wel nine and twenty in a companye,/ Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle/In fellowship,

and pilgrimes were they alle/ That toward Caunterbury woulden ryde” (Chaucer, General Prologue).

None knows the language of a drunk better than Chaucer’s Miller, as he comments on his level of drunkenness by referencing his speech: “‘Now herkneth,’ quod the Miller, ‘alle and some!/ But first I make a protestacioun/ That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun;/ And therefore, if that I misspeke or seye,/ Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I yow preye’” (Chaucer, Miller’s Tale). Southwark is just on the other side of the river - via the London Bridge - from Eastcheap, and Falstaff’s favorite watering hole. Southwark is also important for theatre and understanding the language of taverns. It was that borough which historically housed the bear-baiting rings that later became theatres, and there that many theatres first started because it was out of the purview of London’s laws. “In the twelfth century it became a fashionable place for important men to build a second residence. These manors came with certain perks, such as being excluded from the jurisdiction of London’s sheriffs, and they became known as ‘liberties’” (Brown 77).

Because Southwark existed outside of the city’s rules it was peopled by the poor, thespians, drunks, criminals, and sailors - or watermen - who “were a close-knit community, and developed their own argot, seemingly based mainly on swearing and insults” (Brown 74). This slang infiltrated the bars, which became part of the tavern vernacular. Like any group of people who spend time together, bar patrons develop a common tongue, and Falstaff and his friends are no exception, and Hal, by using the language he learned from them, shows that he is part of their club.

The Prince speaks prose when he is with his friends and pentameter when he is around his father. When he enters this scene with Falstaff, he speaks firmly in pentameter



while the knight speaks in verse. Does this signal that the end of their friendship is real? Communication is a basic necessity in any relationship. In this case, it is not that Hal cannot speak the same language as his old teacher but rather that he chooses not to. That he ends the interaction with Falstaff by throwing a bottle of wine at him further supports their end.

Falstaff has not, in this case, subverted Hal on purpose by giving him his beverage instead of a weapon. He has brought the wine with him for courage in the face of battle and finds it a more apt weapon for him than a gun or sword. Given the opportunity to make a pun, he cannot resist which is why, “There’s that will sack a city,” is funny for the audience and enraging for Hal.

Falstaff seems eager to help his former student defeat his enemy, but is that in hopes of ingratiating himself back into the Prince’s good graces? Perhaps it is another mean by which he hopes to stay alive. After Hal exits, Falstaff is left alone onstage with a fellow knight, Sir Walter Blunt’s, dead body, “Well, if Percy be alive, I’ll pierce him. If he do come in my way, so; if he do not, if I come in his willingly, let him make a carbonado of me. 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” (V. iii. 60). With death staring him right in the face, he again looks for life.

**Hotspur:** O Harry, thou hast robbed me of my youth.  
 I better brook the loss of brittle life  
 Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.  
 They wound my thoughts worse than they sword my flesh.  
*1 Henry IV V. iv. 78*

The penultimate scene gives us two deaths for which we have been waiting: Harry Percy, or Hotspur, and Falstaff. Hotspur dies with honor, fighting a valiant fight against his enemy, the Prince. He says, “No Percy, thou art dust,/ And food for –/” “For worms, brave Percy. Fare thee well, great heart” (ln.87), replies Hal, and with that, his connection to his former life is severed. By fulfilling his promise to his father, he leaves his past in the bar and gets ready to assume his role as the heir apparent to the English crown.

At the same time this fight is happening, Falstaff is fighting with Douglas and he falls down. As Hal metaphorically ends their relationship, we can see the physical end, too. After the Prince’s duel is over, we see a final bit of sympathy and care for his old companion when he finds the body:

**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 mess 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.  
*1 Henry IV V. iv. 104*

By giving Jack a place next to Percy, we can transfer the respect Hal has for his enemy to his old friend. We see a soft side shine through in this moment of tenderness

when the Prince says goodbye which enhances our understanding of the love between them and why they stayed in each other's company for so long.

Like Jesus, though, Falstaff does not stay dead long. No sooner does Hal leave than he rises, his death simply an illusion, something feigned to forestall the real event. And why should Falstaff not be allowed to trick and evade death? He is a man who must live for he loves life!

**Falstaff:** 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. 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.

*1 Henry IV, V. iv. 113*

Falstaff's part in this play ends a few moments later when Hal comes back with his brother to find the knight still alive. Our last vision of the old man is of him, exiting the stage, carrying Hotspur's dead body on his back. Hotspur is dead, Falstaff is alone, and Hal is off with men more suited to his station, preparing to be king.

Hal defeating Hotspur is a serious moment in the play and in the war, but Falstaff treats it like a tavern tale. Taking a well-deserved swig of sack, he tells everyone that it was he who killed Henry Percy. He takes credit for the kill in an elaborate and animated story, fuelled by drinking and the adrenaline from his near death experience.

I am to avow then, that I do not clearly discern that Sir John Falstaff deserves to bear the character so generally given him of an absolute Coward; or, in other words, that I do not conceive Shakespeare ever meant to make Cowardice an essential part of his constitution.

Morgann 12

Before we dive into *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, I want to address Falstaff's character as a man both from my own point of view and in popular culture throughout the ages. In 1777, Maurice Morgann wrote one of the first criticisms of Sir John Falstaff (quoted at the beginning of this section after altering some of the spelling to make it clearer to a contemporary audience.) Morgann defends Falstaff against the popular claim that he was a coward and written for an audience to laugh at his cowardice.

He dies where he lived, in a Tavern, brokenhearted, without a friend: and his final exit is given up to the derision of fools. Nor has his misfortunes ended here; the scandal arising from the misapplication of his wit and talents seems immortal. He has met with as little justice or mercy from his final judges the critics, as from his companions of the Drama. With our cheeks still red with laughter, we ungratefully as unjustly censure him as a coward by nature, and a rascal upon principle.

Morgann 22

Instead, he claims that Falstaff possesses “a high degree of wit and humor, accompanied with great natural vigour and alacrity of mind” (17) which audiences are given to misunderstand because his charming personality combined with his part time occupation as a soldier have allowed him to get away with everything and though, “He seems, by nature, to have had a mind free of malice or any evil principle; but he never

took the trouble of acquiring any good one” (17). He does not appear in possession of any good virtues, not because he is on the Devil’s side, but because he never found it necessary to acquire any.

The evidence on the side of cowardice comes from two scenes in *1 Henry IV*: the botched theft and the battle at the end. In the first, Falstaff drops everything and runs away at the first sign of danger and the second, he lies down and fakes his own death to escape his (much more skilled) opponent. Taken out of context, both events point to a man filled with cowardice. However, in the context of the politics of the time and Falstaff’s affinity for tipling houses, his actions make a little more sense.

Falstaff makes his disdain for power clear both through his relationship with Hal and in Mistress Quickly’s tavern when he postures as the King. He treats Hal, the heir apparent of England, as a child and almost like a son. A Royal tutor would treat the Prince with the respect due his station, but our fat knight is a free agent and treats nothing with respect except for, perhaps, a bottle of sack. So when it comes to fighting in a war he does not believe in or support, why should he risk his life? He knows Hal will always bail him out, so is keeping the money after the attempted robbery worth bodily harm? Is he a coward or does he have different priorities than his critics?

He appears, now, as such a character, which every wife man will pity and avoid, every knave will censure, and every fool will fear: and accordingly Shakespeare, ever true to nature, has made Harry desert, and Lancaster censure him: -- Tho’, if this were so, it might be hoped, for our own credit, that we should behold him rather with disgust and disapprobation than with pleasure and delight.

Morgann 21

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men. I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one.

*2 Henry IV*, I. ii. 6.

Two of the major contemporary critics of Shakespeare deal with the two *Henry* plays differently: Harold Bloom puts them together, allowing us to follow the relationship between Falstaff and Hal as one entity while Marjorie Garber splits them in two chapters so that she might put *1 Henry IV* above its companion, using the play's own words against it "Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance" (II. iv. 234). As I am looking at the plays thematically, I wanted to keep the war together in order that we can fully appreciate the effects of war on Falstaff and his drinking.

While the scene structure in the two parts of *Henry IV* mirror each other, unlike *1 Henry IV*, where Falstaff and his Prince are inseparable until the end, the second part keeps them apart but for two scenes. Instead Falstaff spends a majority of the play avoiding the almost-King's proxy, and the highest law of the land, the Chief Justice. Because Hal is no longer there, Falstaff (though he does not realize it) no longer has his patron protecting him from the 'Crown' and the 'Law'.

**Chief Justice:** I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life, to come speak with me.

**Falstaff:** As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service, I did not come.

**Chief Justice:** Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy.

**Falstaff:** He that buckles himself in my belt cannot live in less.

**Chief Justice:** Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

**Falstaff:** I would it were otherwise. I would my means were greater and my waist slender.

**Chief Justice:** You have misled the youthful prince.

**Falstaff:** The young prince hath misled me. I am the fellow with the great belly, and he my dog.

*2 Henry IV*, 1. ii. 135.

In their first interaction, we can see that the Chief Justice is not capable of keeping up with Falstaff's wit like his predecessor, Hal, who under the fat knight's tutelage had sharpened his own tongue. Compare this to Falstaff and the Prince's first interaction; our knight asks for the time and his prince launches into an eloquent and witty monologue about all the reasons that question is inappropriate. The Chief Justice does not understand the language and next to Falstaff, who we let stand in for all bars, the Chief Justice, law incarnate, comes off as a dullard. Similarly in English society, the law, as much as it tried, could not quite keep up with tippling houses and the dissident political discourse held within their walls. "For the Crown, the principal fear was that the alehouse could serve as a breeding ground for sedition, subversion and irreligion, and feed a challenge to established authority" (Hailwood 61). As we saw in the first *Henry*, where Falstaff and Hal took turns taking on the role of the King, the Crown had a reason to be suspicious.

While mirroring the first scene between Falstaff and Hal in *Henry IV Part One*, this passage between Falstaff and the Chief Justice also harkens back to our introduction to Hal's "unrestrained loose companions" in *Richard II*, and the 'alebench politics' which so frightened both religion and law.

Falstaff is the first major joke by the English against their class system; he is a picture of how badly you can behave, and still get away with it, if you are a gentleman - a mere common rogue would not have been nearly so funny.

Bloom 293

The Battle of Shrewsbury at the end of *1 Henry IV* left Falstaff on a high note, honorable and victorious; even his first scene in *2 Henry IV* keeps him elevated - at least linguistically - above the law. His second scene, however, throws him back to his old station when he is threatened with an arrest by Mistress Quickly because his debts are past due. "He hath eaten me out of house and home. He hath put all my substance into that fat belly of his. But I will have some of it out again, or I will ride thee o' nights like the mare" (*2 Henry IV* II. 1. 76).

Along with fear of subterfuge, the religious, political, and financial leaders worried that bar life bred poverty. At the same time, however, it was required that the proprietors of tippling houses admit and serve the poor, "Petitioners seeking to secure a license for an alehouse also often made their service of victuals to the local poor - the other 'true and principal' function - a cornerstone of their argument" (Hailwood 35). Hailwood goes on to talk about another example where citizens petitioned the town to shut down an inn on the grounds that the proprietor refused his religious duty of serving the poor. These two incidences occurred in 1608 and 1627 respectively, so we can see that the rules governing alehouses were very much in flux.

Though Falstaff is not a poor person, he never has money, but he can always get some. By the end of the scene, he has sweet-talked the hostess Quickly into not only lending him money, but pawning her belongings to do so, "Pray thee, Sir John, let it be but twenty" (II. i. 159), and has reserved a table that evening at her inn and the company



of his favorite prostitute, “Will you have Doll Tearsheet meet you at supper,” she asks, “No more words,” replies Falstaff, “Let’s have her” (II. i. 169).

Falstaff’s debt is momentarily forgotten because he calls on his station as a gentleman; he is the King’s knight, and that King is soon to be his protégé. As Hal has gotten him out of debt before, there is no real reason for him to suspect anything else to be true in the moment, though the audience is aware his relationship has changed even if he is blind to it himself.

7

**Prince:** Before God, I am exceeding weary.

**Poins:** Is ‘t come to that? I had thought weariness drust not have attached one of so high blood.

**Prince:** Faith, it does me, though it discolors the complexion of my greatness to acknowledge it. Doth it not show vilely in me to desire small beer?

**Poins:** Why, a prince should not be so loosely studied as to remember so weak a composition.

**Prince:** Belike then my appetite was not princely got, for by my troth, I do now remember the poor creature small beer.

*2 Henry IV, II. ii. 1*

With his father on his deathbed, we see Hal struggling between his old life and his new: he wants to drink small beer. Small beer was brewed and filtered during the fermentation process to reduce the amount of alcohol, specifically to feed to children and the poor, but also in an attempt to curb drunkenness. That Hal has a hankering for it is a problem because it harkens back to his old life under Falstaff and not his new life as a man ready to say goodbye to his father and take his place as King. Hal is very self-aware,

refusing to show his sadness with tears because he knows his people will not look kindly on what they will view as hypocrisy coming from one of Falstaff's followers.

As Hal quickly talks himself out of his momentary desire for beer, the audience is once again reminded that he is on his way to a full rejection of the knight. By remaining abstemious, Hal keeps himself above the world of bars in which Falstaff raised him. Soon after, Shakespeare reminds us once again of *1 Henry IV*, when the Prince and Poins form a plot against Falstaff. In the first play, they plan to steal from him right after he has stolen from the travellers so that they might catch him in a lie. When he recounts the incident, their two swords become the swords of ten monstrous men the knight had to fight off.

“How might we see Falstaff bestow himself tonight in his true colors” asks Hal; by donning costumes and pretending to be something they are not, comes the obvious answer from Poins. Has Hal turned back to his old ways? Will he and Falstaff be friends once again? Or is this one last chance for Hal to venture into the bar and see his old friend, this time with a prostitute in tow, to make fun of him and set himself firmly in his course of becoming king?

**Falstaff:** You make fat rascals, Mistress Doll

**Doll:** I make them? Gluttony and diseases make them; I make them not.

**Falstaff:** If the cook help to make the gluttony, you help to make the diseases, Doll. We catch of you, Doll, we catch of you. Grant that, my poor virtue, grant that.

II. iv. 42

Our introduction to Falstaff's Doll Tearsheet shows us why she is his favorite prostitute; she may have given him diseases, but she can throw his language back in his face, too, giving him as good as he gets. Without Hal to play off in this play, he needs a substitute intellectual equal. The line, “we catch of you, Doll, we catch of you,” refers to

when we first meet Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*: he has sent his urine away to be tested for diseases by a doctor. Though I did not read much in the way of whorehouse culture on this journey, I wonder if the lower classes would know to check for disease. Here we find another connection between bars and theatres as prostitutes operated out of both venues.

The conversation between Doll and Falstaff is set up for the meat of the scene, which is Falstaff and Hal's first of two interactions in this play, and their final discourse. After a slew of generally mild insults aimed at the Prince and Poins, the two unmask themselves by coming forward to confront their slanderer.

**Prince/Poins:** Anon, anon, sir.

**Falstaff:** Ha? A bastard son of the King's? -- And art not thou Poins his brother?

**Prince:** Why, thou globe of sinful continents, what a life dost thou lead?

**Falstaff:** A better than thou. I am a gentleman. Thou art a drawer.

**Prince:** Very true, sir, and I come to draw you out by the ears.

II. iv. 287

Everything Falstaff does, however backwards, he does out of love and joy, which is what makes him such a rich character. He loves Harry, he loves drinking, he loves eating, he loves fornicating, and he loves all of those with gusto. Imagine the impact of this scene, and how it differs from the moments after the Gad's Hill caper from *Part One*. In the first part, everyone is drinking, there are no women other than Quickly, and the scene ends (somewhat ominously) after Hal and Falstaff take turns aping the King. When Hal was drinking with them, he could relate to Falstaff. By deciding on an abstemious lifestyle, he rejects Falstaff and the world of taverns.

Hal begins the scene in *Part Two* sober; he is no longer drinking and his view of the world is marked with added severity. Each time Falstaff tries to engage him in the

word play he loves, Hal deftly parries, refusing to get lost in the knight's games. When Peto enters at the end with news of the King, the heir to the throne slips easily back into iambic pentameter, rejecting Falstaff's language, Falstaff's world, Falstaff himself. Still in denial, the Knight refuses to acknowledge his rejection and as the scene ends, we see him on his way back to a war he does not want to fight and some semblance of respectability.

## 8

(James C.) Scott argued subordinates in societies with a profoundly unequal distribution of power - 'the ruled' - rarely risk an open and public challenge to the authority of the elite - 'the rulers'. Instead, he argued that they reserved their criticisms for expression in situations that were free from the usual constraints of power, and out of earshot of elites. In such contexts 'subordinates' developed a shared, radically subversive worldview that contrasts sharply with their public displays of deference. Scott labels this 'backstage' worldview the 'hidden transcript'.

Hailwood 64

As a Knight preparing for war, Falstaff must assemble a group of soldiers to fight under him as he fights for the crown. This scene is another one which is used against him and as proof of his cowardice for the group of soldiers he assembles are chosen for their unfitness to serve in any army. They have names like Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, Feeble, and Bullcalf: clues to the audience as well as the actors about their characters and abilities. In keeping with Falstaff's character, he has culled together this particular group

not because they are good fighters, but because he sees an opportunity to make a little money.

When Falstaff exits the stage momentarily, two of the potentials approach Bardolph and bribe him so they might not serve. They are the two best men assembled, but Falstaff lets them go because he now has an extra three pounds. Falstaff, again, does not care for politics and the King's war for it is a power move which will not benefit him personally in the end. If he brings four men with him, he will be paid, if he is paid, he can buy whores and wine.

Falstaff goes to serve under Hal's younger brother, John, and the play heads back to battle, the brief respite from fighting, like in *Part One* is over. When next we see Falstaff, his recruits are all dead and he is disarming a rebel the best way he knows how, with his tongue. "Well then, Colevile is your name, a knight is your degree, and your place is the Dale. Colevile shall be still your name, a traitor your degree, and the dungeon your place, a place deep enough so shall you be still Colevile of the Dale" (IV. ii. 5). Once again he has cheated death and disgrace through sheer luck and charm; the war is over, the King is near death, and all that is left is for him to claim his payment from the war and wait in a tavern for Hal to take the throne.

Sir John, thy tender lambkin now is king. Harry the Fifth's the man.  
*2 Henry IV*, V. iii. 119

For two plays we have waited for Hal's ultimate rejection of Falstaff, but it does not come. When the knight hears his old friend is now King, he wastes no time in bragging about his soon to be fortune and his close friendship with their leader, "I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses. The laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!" (V. iii. 138). Finally Falstaff will get his revenge on the law and think how witty he will be when that happens, the words he will throw at the Chief Justice. Falstaff rushes to gather his entourage and they race off to the new King where he arrives quickly. Does that mean he finally finds a horse?

Other than in war, the final scene of *Henry IV Part Two* is the only time we see Falstaff out of his element. Before this, he is either in his bar, or just outside of it playing tricks. Now, however, he enters Hal's world, and his mode of speaking for one line.

**Falstaff:** My king, my Jove, I speak to thee, my heart!

**King:** I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.  
 How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester.  
 I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,  
 So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;  
 But being awaked, I do despise my dream.  
 When thou dost hear I am as I have been,  
 Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,  
 The tutor and the feeder of my riots.  
 Till then I banish thee, on pain of death,  
 As I have done the rest of my misleaders,  
 Not to come near our person by ten mile.  
 For competence of life I will allow you,

That lack of means enforce you not to evils.

V. v. 46

In then end, it is not Prince Hal, Falstaff's almost son, who banishes the fat knight; instead, it is King Henry V. They no longer live in the same world; the crown only belongs in bars when it is being questioned or ridiculed, and Falstaff cannot live anywhere else.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FALSTAFF IN LOVE**

### *An Imposter*

Though this competes, in my judgment, with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as Shakespeare's slightest comedy, nobody can wholly dislike what became the basis for Verdi's *Falstaff*. I begin, though, with the firm declaration that the hero-villain of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a nameless impostor masquerading as the great Sir John Falstaff. Rather than yield to such usurpation, I shall call him pseudo-Falstaff throughout this brief discussion. (Bloom 315)

Legend has it that after seeing *1 Henry IV*, Queen Elizabeth was so enamored of Sir John Falstaff that she requested Shakespeare write him into a play where he falls in love. Of course, there is no true love for Falstaff, instead he spends the play wooing and re-wooing two married women in the hopes that he might curry enough favor with one to get her husband's money. So we see from the beginning that he is full of his same old tricks from *Henry IV*. The main difference in this is that no matter how hard he tried, Hal could never really make Falstaff look a fool and the two wives, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, do so adeptly three separate times.

Where this play fits in the Falstaffian chronology has been fairly well debated; does it come between the two *Henrys* as the Queen Elizabeth story would indicate or after as time period would dictate? "What is less clear is the time period in which the play is supposedly to be set, since despite this reference to an episode in a play chronicling the



history of a medieval monarch, much of the action clearly takes place in ‘contemporary’ – that is, late-sixteenth-century – Windsor, with a personage on the throne who is alluded to as ‘our radiant queen’ (Garber 361).

I will add another piece of information, which takes us out of Hal’s time, and that is Mistress Quickly. In the *Henry* plays, she is the bawdy tavern hostess where Falstaff and his men spend all their time. She makes sure they are drunk, fed, have a whore and then comes collecting when they forget to pay. All of this is likely - and historically accurate - for as taverns were finding themselves in the late Middle Ages, women still regularly ran inns. They made the transition from alewives working out of their houses to running larger operations until the early Renaissance when men ousted them from their work and took over as hosts.

In *Merry Wives*, Mistress Quickly is still there as part of Falstaff’s entourage, but she has switched jobs and is now the housekeeper for Dr. Caius. Because it is Falstaff and he must have drink, there is still an alehouse, The Garter Inn, which is run by a man, an unnamed host. So this tells us that we have moved forward several decades from where we left them in *Henry IV Part One*.

Is this anachronistic as Marjorie Garber suggests? It mixes time periods only so far as the characters exist in two different time periods, but they are not real people, they are created by Shakespeare first to fill out Harry’s world and then to entertain the Queen. Falstaff does not exist in time, anyway, as we have discovered he cannot be killed.

Whether the Falstaff in *Merry Wives* is the real Falstaff or some imposter in a fat suit does not diminish a few important themes, which elucidate a further understanding of Elizabethan society.

The alehouse might also cause strains between husband and wife. Though, as we know, women could go drinking with their husbands, the accepted occasions were limited: most men spent the bulk of their time at the alehouse with members of the same sex, friends and strangers.

Clark 148

This is the first time in the Falstaffiad we have been introduced to tradespeople firmly rooted in the middle class. Master Page and Master Ford are respectable citizens of Windsor who live quiet, respectable lives with their wives and children. They work, they make sure their household is in order, maybe they hunt a little, and they argue with their wives about who should marry their daughters. It is a “lively ‘citizen comedy’ that anticipates, in its spirit, both Restoration drama and the screwball comedy of early-twentieth-century film, combining as it does elements of farce, comic violence, and sophisticated and witty dialogue” (Garber 358).

Because of their social status, they would have been unlikely to be alehouse patrons, which makes Falstaff, both a knight and a drunk, an unknown quantity to be feared from the beginning. Added to that is his manner; his behavior, had it belonged to a lower class citizen, would have grave consequences. Falstaff behaves badly and gets away with it – for the most part – because he is of high status. He crosses the boundaries of worlds while the Masters stay firmly within the confines of theirs. Anything unknown is likely to breed fear and skepticism, and it is with a healthy dose of both that the husbands view their wives’ burgeoning relationships with the fat knight.

Another device used to separate class in *Merry Wives* is language. Prince Hal uses his switch from verse to pentameter to illustrate his severed relationship with Falstaff while Shakespeare uses foreign accents and double entendre to add humor and farce to the wives’ story. Between the mispronounced words of one Welshman and one

Frenchman, and Mistress Quickly's lewd and overblown sexual innuendos, we know exactly where we are: in a broad comedy where characters' foibles separate them from each other in order to make the audience laugh.

**CHAPTER FIVE: FALSTAFF IN DEATH**  
*An Afterlife*

**Bardolph:** Would I were with him, wheresom'er he is,  
either in heaven or in hell

**Quickly:** Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's  
bosom, if ever a man went to Arthur's bosom. A made a  
finer end, and went away, an it had been any christom  
child; a' parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at  
the turning o' th' tide: for after I saw him fumble with the  
sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger's  
ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as  
sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields. 'How now,  
Sir John!' quoth I: 'what, man! Be o' good cheer.' So a'  
cried out 'God, God, God!' three or four times. No I, to  
comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God; I hoped  
there was no need to trouble himself with any such  
thoughts yet. So a' bade me lay more clothes on his feet:  
and I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were  
as cold as any stone; and so upward and upward, and all  
was as cold as any stone.

**Nym:** They say he cried out of sack.

**Quickly:** Ay, that a' did

**Bardolph:** And of women.

**Quickly:** Nay, that a' did not.

**Boy:** Yes, that a' did; and said they were devils incarnate.

**Quickly:** A' could never abide carnation; 'twas a colour he  
never liked.

*Henry V, II.iii.10*

As the Henriad comes to a close with *Henry V*, so does Falstaff's life. Never making an appearance in the play because he and the King cannot exist in the same world after his banishment, his death is messengered in by the provider of his vice, Mistress Quickly, who is back to being the Hostess of the tavern in Eastcheap after her sojourn as

the doctor's housekeeper. She proclaims his death to all of his friends, appropriately, in the bar he called home. As the rules surrounding alcohol consumption became stricter and stricter, a few exceptions always remained: weddings, births, and funerals. Even when women were prohibited from imbibing, they were allowed drink to celebrated death. Even today, usually dry countries sometimes make exceptions when celebrating life and death.

For all of *I Henry IV*, Falstaff refused to admit his age, instead likening himself to the younger people around him. When we first meet him, he is eager to describe himself in terms of his youth and it is not until he is sitting with Doll Tearsheet in his lap in *Part Two* that he begins to understand and admit his age. By letting him die offstage, Shakespeare gives us permission to imagine that he might be alive yet. After all, he rose from the dead once, would that feat be too difficult a second time? Nonetheless, by ending him offstage, the audience is free to imagine him however they like and because of that, he becomes immortal.

Falstaff has been resurrected a couple of times. At the end of his life, Verdi attempted his second comic opera, *Falstaff*, which he based on the Falstaff in *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Arrigo Boito's libretto keeps Falstaff as himself and does not attempt to change or better Shakespeare's creation. In 1973, Falstaff found himself once again in legal trouble, this time in American Supreme Court case, "United States v Falstaff Brewing Corp." Falstaff Beer was an American Lager that really reached its highpoint in the 1960s when Budweiser was the king of beer and Pabst Blue Ribbon was winning blue ribbons. In advertisements it promised "man sized pleasure". Falstaff Beer Corp was

taken to court for violating a number of regulations while trying to acquire Narragansett Brewing Company.

Scholars disagree about Falstaff's role in Harry's ascension to the throne and the Prince's rejection of his fat knight. Many believe that he is meant to embody the Medieval Morality play's characters, Vice and Gluttony (Hal even calls him, "that reverend vice"), a foil against which Prince Hal pushes to become ready to rule. They believe that Falstaff, in his grotesqueness, was created so that the moment of his final rejection, when the newly crowned Henry V sends him to jail, the audience would understand.

I cannot imagine relegating Falstaff to a position like 'foil', but many do so because it is easy to dismiss him.

I have cited Hegel's fine observation that Shakespeare made his best characters 'free artists of themselves.' The freest of the free are Hamlet and Falstaff, because they are the most intelligent of Shakespeare's persons (or roles, if you prefer that word). Critics rarely condescend to Hamlet, though some, like Alistair Fowler, morally disapprove of him. With Falstaff, alas, it is different; many critics not only condemn him morally, they also lord it over him, as if Sir John knows less than they do. If one loves Falstaff (as I do, and as we all should, even as a role), they are likely to term one a 'sentimentalist.'

Bloom 271

Overweight men who love women and drinking are as rejected today as in the vast time period that encompasses the Falstaffiad. Perhaps if he were not quite so fat, or so old, or so drunk he would be taken more seriously. As a society, we tend to disregard those we perceive to be the lowest among us, which means they are in a position of seeing the most. Falstaff is in a unique position of understanding more than most because

of his friendship with Hal and because of the scope of the plays he is in, he can tell us a lot.

Through his behavior in the two *Henry IVs*, we have a peek into Medieval theatre and practices; we can see some theatrical holdovers and older drinking customs. Vice was an important character in morality plays; one who helped the church spread their values among the people. Seeing vice personified on the stage is more convincing than slapping strictures on people. Was he merely a cautionary tale of what can happen when a man overindulges? Or was he a comment on society or a secret message to the lower classes about the possibilities of freedom?

In the eyes of many respectable folk the alehouse posed a threat to the fabric of the family in four main ways: by attracting grown children and servants to spend their time and money there away from the tutelage of parents or masters at home; by separating husbands from wives; by encouraging family members to drink with all sorts of company; and by serving as a place where prostitutes could be met and casual sexual liaisons formed.

Clark 147

Alehouse culture was viewed as a threat to family, to religion, and to the state - as would be anything that encourages free flowing discussion when the state is unsure of itself. Using this culture as a lens through which to understand the world of the play gives a director the tools to understand it in a modern context. Who is Falstaff today? What kind of bar would he frequent? What can he tell us about our current society? What would be different about a production where the bar was a seedy motel bar versus a neighborhood bar versus a club?

There are just as many rules about drinking today as when bars were first formed. In Virginia, for instance, as in Elizabethan England, bars must serve food. In fact any bar

not serving \$45 of food for every \$55 of alcohol can be shut down by Virginia's alcohol regulation department, the ABC. When you apply for a liquor license, members of the community have an opportunity to voice their concerns. Why might they not want a bar in their neighborhood? For many of the same reasons people have always rejected drinkers: concerns about violence, and volume, and dissenting conversations against the church, and political arguments, and poverty, and rampant sexuality.

It all comes back to fear; alcohol makes you lose your inhibitions which allows you the freedom to be more open to who you really are. Falstaff never hid his true self from anyone. (He may not have admitted his age, but that is because he truly did not feel it.) In the words of Falstaff's biggest fan, Harold Bloom, "Falstaff needs an audience, and never fails to find it. We need Falstaff because we have so few images of authentic vitalism, and even fewer persuasive images of human freedom" (314).





## Works Cited

- Alcohol : A Social and Cultural History*. English ed.. ed. Oxford ; New York: Oxford ;  
New York : Berg, 2006. Web.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: the invention of the human*. New York: Riverhead, 1999.  
Print.
- Bradley, A. "The Rejection of Falstaff." *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature (1901-1907)* 139.2 (1902): 147. Web.
- Brown, Pete. *Shakespeare's pub: a barstool history of London as seen through the windows of its oldest pub - the George Inn /*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012.  
Print.
- Clark, Peter. *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830*. London; New York: Longman, 1983. Web.
- Folger Shakespeare Library. *Henry IV Part One* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 13 April, 2017. [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)
- Folger Shakespeare Library. *Henry IV Part Two* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 13 April, 2017. [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)
- Folger Shakespeare Library. *Henry V* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 13 April, 2017. [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)

Folger Shakespeare Library. *Merry Wives of Windsor* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed.

Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger

Shakespeare Library, 13 April, 2017. [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)

Folger Shakespeare Library. *Richard II* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat,

Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 13

April, 2017. [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org)

Garber, Marjorie B. *Shakespeare after all*. New York: Anchor, 2005. Print.

Hailwood, Mark. *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England*.

Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2014. Web.

Morgann, Maurice. *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*. London:

Printed for T. Davies, 1777. Print.

## Bibliography

- Crockett, Bryan. "Shakespeare, Playfere, and the Pirates." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66.3 (2015): 252-85. Web.
- De Grazia, Margreta. "Shakespeare's Timeline." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 65.4 (2014): 379-98. Web.
- Hames, Gina. *Alcohol in World History*. London; New York: London ; New York : Routledge, 2012. Web.
- Hey, Valerie. *Patriarchy and Pub Culture*. London; New York: London ; New York : Tavistock, 1986. Web.
- Landt, D. B. "The Ancestry of Sir John Falstaff." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17.1 (1966): 69-76. Web.
- Lathrop, Elise. *Early American Inns and Taverns*. New York: New York, B. Blom, 1968. Web.
- O'Callaghan, Michelle. *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge, UK ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2007. Web.
- Richardson, William, 1743-1814. *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff and on His Imitation of Female Characters to which are Added, some*

*General Observations on the Study of Shakespeare. by Mr. Richardson..* London:  
London: Printed for J. Murray, 1789. Web.

*The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography.* Cambridge, United Kingdom:  
Cambridge University Press, 2015. Web.

Kümin, Beat A. *Drinking matters: public houses and social exchange in early modern  
Central Europe.* Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Kermode, Frank, and John Hollander. *The Oxford anthology of American Literature,  
volume I: the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century.* New York: Oxford U  
Press, 1973. Print.

Singh, Jyotsna G. *A companion to the global Renaissance: English literature and culture  
in the era of expansion.* Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.  
Print.

Nicholl, Charles. *The Lodger Shakespeare: his life on Silver Street.* London: Viking,  
2008. Print.

## ***Vita***

Emma Pedersen Givens was born in New York City on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, 1985. She graduated from Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, in 2007 where she received a BA with a concentration in Theatre and Music Composition. After graduation, she started and ran the Meat and Bone Theatre Company in New York where she cultivated new works from local playwrights while fostering a community for theatre artists. Since moving to Virginia, she has directed at local theatres and colleges (favorites include: *Cowboy Mouth*, *Six Characters In Search of an Author*, and, *The Memorandum*), performed such great Shakespearean roles as Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Paulina (*Winter's Tale*), Rosalind (*As You Like It*), and Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*) with the Hamner Theatre's touring Shakespeare Company. As a lifelong bar tender and manager, alcohol has always been part of her work and she is happy that it has found its way into her research.