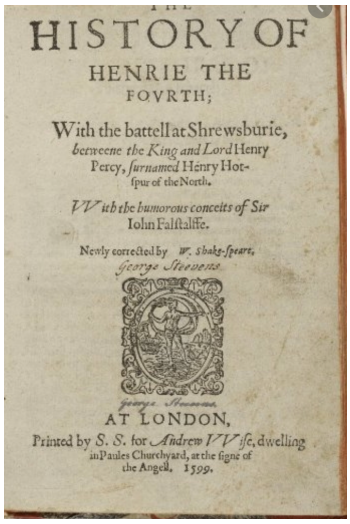
From the Boar's Head to the Battlefield: Your residuals

First, some background. Useful to our course and project, the chapter reveals how Shakespeare's theater can furnish our own theaters of the mind with plenty of dramas to enact such that we might better consider how to act "out there" in that sphere we call the "real world."

In the safety of **this theater of the mind**, we can imagine ourselves as Jack Falstaff, utterly and completely free to pursue pleasure, to live in the moment, to ridicule the institutions and commitments of the world, and to offer that world only the hope that we might at some point reform ourselves. But first, some more sack.

We can consider ourselves re-forming, evolving, maturing in the ways that Hal does, moving from the tavern and easy fraternity of drinking buddies toward commitments that increasingly involve service, sacrifice, and, therefore, selflessness. In other words, in this theater we can imagine and even enact what makes Hal's life good in ways Falstaff cannot claim.


THE
HISTORY OF
HENRIE THE
FOVRTH;
With the battell at Shrewsburie,
betweene the King and Lord Henry
Percy, surnamed Henry Hot-
spur of the North.
With the humorous conceits of Sir
Iohn Falstaffe.
Newly corrected by W. Shake-speare.
George Steevens.
AT LONDON,
Printed by S. S. for Andrew Wise, dwelling
in Paules Churchyard, at the signe of
the Angell. 1599.

(To Sage's question, we don't want the **complexity** of life mirrored in our theater. If we can't navigate complexity in our "real" lives, we wouldn't be able to do it in a theater of equal complexity. We celebrate theater's ability to focus our attention on some aspect of that complexity, such as the costs of maturing into ever greater levels and roles of responsibility and sacrifice. To compare duty to self v. duty to family, father, and country, without actually having to do either. To isolate, to simplify, and to do all of this in fully realized worlds with characters so vivid and memorable. They run around my head ALL THE TIME. Leopold Bloom sits in a recliner in my head all the time, talking under his breath. We get to imagine before acting.)

We can imagine the terrible end of Falstaff, who seems destined to die alone and in debt, perhaps with an STD. He might be enjoying life in Henry IV, part I, but this isn't the entirety of his life. Meanwhile, we imagine Hal either leading England into a glorious future or, perhaps, dying for country on the battlefield. In other words, we might see in these characters something of the **commitments** that determine either a good or less-than-good life. And I keep coming back to attention. What is it that we spend what all of us have in equal amount – our **attention**. We attend to those things to which we have made commitments, which is to say, those things we **love**.

This activity of erecting, furnishing, and populating a theater of the mind isn't unrelated to the metaphor of the snow globe. Worlds in miniature. (Peyton points out their fragility.)

As some of you wonderfully did, we should apply our increasingly large store of ideas, concepts, values, and metrics for the good life to, in this case, the characters of Henry IV. Who lives a life of more good and, more importantly, by what rationale? How might Kennedy, Aristotle, Tabensky, Mitchell, and Csikszentmihalyi respond?

Hal cannot claim integrity in the ways Kennedy described; he changes and reforms (re-forms?). Falstaff can claim integrity but would fail Aristotle's test of habits and commitments. Hal's social sphere gets ever smaller as he banishes his erstwhile friends, such that Aristotle might be concerned about his social connectedness and community. Neither seem to display what Csikszentmihalyi describes as flow, but accessing only a theatrical play, we shouldn't expect to see this.

A huge theme in this play is redemption, and this inspired a large number of your residual questions. Hal uses his past to mark and display his development, his becoming. "Like bright metal on a sullen ground," he begins to shine, and his brightness is all the more dramatic as one remembers how dull he seemed as frat boy on a binge. The sordid past did not predict his glorious future, which redeems that past and, in the process, Hal himself. And Hal is, of course, synecdoche for England, so it is England's sullen past that becomes so bright. He redeems the time. This likely has implications and applications for each of us. We all probably have chapters, phases, events in our lives that might be redeemed. What might it look like in our lives to "redeem the time," to take full advantage of it, to save it, to find or acquire or learn wisdom?

Conversely, no one needs redemption more than Fat Jack, who isn't interested, and to his great peril, for he will be banished. Yes, he's endearing, even charming and enchanting, and we should wonder why? Why are we so enamored with this character, and why has he proven so durable over time? There's something going on here. Is it that in this theater of our minds, we like to live vicariously through him, to imagine ourselves so uninhibited, so free to romp guiltlessly through life, a festival of self and superego? Knowing all the while that we will have to close the curtains and move out into our otherwise "real" lives? We want to be free souls, but we know that to live a good life is in part to make commitments that take us beyond ourselves and that, therefore, require sacrifice. We should think about the right and proper role of sacrifice in the context of commitments and causes and ambitions much larger than any one of our lives.

Shakespeare's use of language as metaphor really interested me, and it predicts the many ways film directors would use metaphor in similar ways today. Notice in your favorite Netflix series how the character's car, which likely is product placement, is a metaphor for the kind of person he or she is. Breaking Bad is a good example. Watch Matt Damon go slowly bald as his life falls apart in The Informant. If you dig this kind of thing, read one of my favorites, Roland Barthes.

Picking up on the last concept, if we think about it, "nation" is mostly a theater of the mind. It is imagined, which is Benedict Anderson's contribution. We meet only the smallest fraction of our countrymen and women. We only believe there is an Idaho; few have ever seen it or known anyone from that state. We invest so much emotion and pride into a flag, but it is only a symbol, a piece of cloth. Whatever meaning it might have, we invented it. We have to mostly imagine whatever it is we mean by "nation," making it a unifying concept and construct. In some ways, it barely exists, as the insurrection on Jan. 6 seemed to demonstrate.

OK, to your residuals. Thank you for your patience.

Morgan wonders about Shakespeare's intentions with Falstaff. He's not good, nor is he pursuing a good life, but he is necessary as foil to Hal's progression. So, if Falstaff's "sins" and excesses helped propel Hal to greatness, could they be regarded as "sins" at all? Is Falstaff's Unreason that which led to Hal's finding Reason?

Kayla wonders whether patriotism is a necessary element of citizenship. What makes a good citizen? When does patriotism become toxic? Is nationalism really just hate dressed up as love of country? Mackenzie asks how national identity might contribute to a good life, especially as it relates to motivating someone to desire to make nation a better place – speaking up for human rights, for example?

Moraima points out that Shakespeare addresses subjects that writers and thinkers have engaged with over the centuries. Why has Shakespeare's work endured while so much by others has receded into oblivion? What is it about Shakespeare's characters that make them so memorable, transcendent, durable?

She also asks us to define honor, because the term seems to be used differently in different contexts. How does Shakespeare wish to use it?

Riley asks us to contemplate our seeming obsession with redemption. As trope, it is everywhere, from Star Wars to Hunger Games to sports and religion. What is so attractive or magnetic about redemption?

Annabell zeroed in on the Hal-Hotspur rivalry, which is far more complex than people give it credit. Why were they enemies, because they seem to have the same values, including patriotism? Why does Hal seem so much more substantial than Hotspur? Hotspur is, above all, loyal, but are his loyalties "good"? (Kennedy and value neutrality; the object of the loyalty is what determines that loyalty's virtue.)

Annabell also wonders what we would consider the agenda-setters of today compared to the agenda-setter theater was, according to Carroll. Social media? Similarly, Kelsee would like a contemporary example of Elizabethan theater in its capacity to furnish Elizabethans with a shared outlook and experience.

Abhi asks a really good general question about the role of Elizabethan theater. Henry IV is a history play, but in no way can Shakespeare claim accuracy. So what's the playwright really doing? What are his obligations? To promote patriotism? Moral behavior? Good citizenship? Something else?

In 1984, Falstaff became a Hell's Angels biker. I have him taking a selfie. Where do we find Falstaff in 2021, Madeliene wonders?

Maria asks one of the most frequently asked questions about Shakespeare since his death: Where did he stand on religion? Did he have a position? Was he Protestant? Catholic? Religion was such an influence during his lifetime, how is it that we don't know his views?

Finally, you get ALL of Sterling's questions because girlfriend be rockin'!! Check these out:

1. "In [Hal's] transformation is an irony: To unite England, or as Sicherman puts it, to be a brother to all Englishmen, Hal has separated or isolated himself" (12-13). Throughout theplays, Hal's development from a rowdy youth to a fully dedicated leader is seen as positive. In the Aristotelian sense, Hal exhibits acts of moral good as he works to unite England and bring forth a new era. However, in the process he creates a deficit of pleasure. Tabensky would argue that pleasure and "cheerfulness" are also important to reach the end goal of "happiness" (or a good life). How should and individual discern when they are expending too much effort performing acts of moral good (keeping in mind that some acts of moral good that lead to eventual happiness might prove painful for an individual in the moment)? Is it possible to have a "good" or "happy" life if one leaves little to no time for pleasure?

2. Hal's drastic shift from rabble-rousing youth to responsible leader is described as planned in order to create a greater sense of awe when Hal fully

transformed into King Henry V. However, in a more realistic situation, individuals can experience a change in heart or change in attitude without any planning. In reference to Kennedy's definition of integrity as it relates to identity, do the past actions of a "changed man" prevent integrity? If one's identity is knitted together over time (as discussed in previous class periods), with one's sense of self, therefore, evolving with time, how is "trying on different faces" different from acts that relate to one's idea of self at a particular time versus another?

3. Can one live a moral life if one has to hurt others in pursuit of a "greater good"? Hal banishes Falstaff in order to usher in a new age of unity in England, despite his long-standing relationship with Falstaff. How much collateral (in terms of people or physical objects) is acceptable when one is acting for the good of others? This brings to mind the classic "Trolley Problem" in which we must choose either to divert a runaway trolley by shoving a (large) innocent bystander into its path, thereby killing the bystander but saving five people in the trolley's path, or to do nothing and allow the five to be plowed over but without danger to the bystander. What if the collateral in the decision is oneself? Does the act of self-sacrifice affect the level of "moral goodness"?

And, for reference, Shakespeare's plays with dates for when they were written (as best anyone can tell). The links take you to full texts of the plays:

First Performed	Plays	First Printed
1590-91	Henry VI, Part II	1594?
1590-91	Henry VI, Part III	1594?
1591-92	Henry VI, Part I	1623
1592-93	Richard III	1597
1592-93	Comedy of Errors	1623
1593-94	Titus Andronicus	1594
1593-94	Taming of the Shrew	1623
1594-95	Two Gentlemen of Verona	1623
1594-95	Love's Labour's Lost	1598?
1594-95	Romeo and Juliet	1597
1595-96	Richard II	1597
1595-96	A Midsummer Night's Dream	1600
1596-97	King John	1623
1596-97	The Merchant of Venice	1600
1597-98	Henry IV, Part I	1598
1597-98	Henry IV, Part II	1600
1598-99	Much Ado About Nothing	1600
1598-99	Henry V	1600
1599-1600	Julius Caesar	1623
1599-1600	As You Like It	1623

1599-1600	Twelfth Night	1623
1600-01	Hamlet	1603
1600-01	The Merry Wives of Windsor	1602
1601-02	Troilus and Cressida	1609
1602-03	All's Well That Ends Well	1623
1604-05	Measure for Measure	1623
1604-05	Othello	1622
1605-06	King Lear	1608
1605-06	Macbeth	1623
1606-07	Antony and Cleopatra	1623
1607-08	Coriolanus	1623
1607-08	Timon of Athens	1623
1608-09	Pericles	1609
1609-10	Cymbeline	1623
1610-11	The Winter's Tale	1623
1611-12	The Tempest	1623
1612-13	Henry VIII	1623
1612-13	The Two Noble Kinsmen*	1634