

---

## A Multidimensional Story of Making a King

In spite of its title, Henry IV, Part 1 is, without question, the story of a prince as he stands, however uncertainly, on the threshold of kingship. Yet Shakespeare's literary account of this historical figure is not merely a diary of a royal progeny engaged in the usual frivolous pastimes while biding time until the throne is vacant. It is much more than that; it is an engaging and multi-layered story of the making of a king. The key word here is making, as Prince Hal is the son of a usurper who knows better than to sit back and wait for kingship to be handed to him. Who better to know the uncertainty of inheritance and that blood does not guarantee attainment of the coveted crown? Prince Hal does well to heed his instincts to secure training and "field experience" in order to invent himself as a king, and as depicted in this play, he wastes no time beginning his schooling.

The kings in the Shakespearean history plays which preceded this one (i.e. Richard III, Richard II) were shown to have had little or no preparation for their reign, as one was, like Prince Hal's father, a usurper himself, and the other, merely a king by the old fashioned way-birth. Both lived (and died) to regret their ill-preparedness and/or unwanted reign. With this legacy, Hal was privy to what worked and what didn't work, and incorporated this into his edification as a would-be king. The men who came before Prince Hal not only paved the way for him to become king by altering the lineage path of the crown (i.e. his father, Henry IV), according to the works of Shakespeare, Prince Hal could well have gleaned some very valuable lessons from a few other notable men in these plays and/or in his life as far as what not to do as king (i.e. Richard II and his father, again) and what is idealistic and outdated (i.e. honor and chivalry) from his closest rival, Harry Hotspur.

To start with, there was Richard II, an altogether antithesis of the Machiavel and a perfect illustration of the idea that the qualities which make a man morally admirable do not, alone, lend themselves to capability and effectiveness as a ruler. As a man, Richard was introspective, poetic, and perhaps even interesting and likable, yet he lacked pragmatism and most fundamentally, the desire and drive to be a ruler. Arguably, Shakespeare wanted his audience to sympathize with the usurpers (led by the future Henry IV) or at least see the need for that monarch, who ascended to the thrown by virtue of his blood alone, to be removed. Indeed, this was a radical concept in light of the fact that heretofore, these people believed the king was anointed by God, and by virtue of that fact, could be removed only by God; even going so far as to believe he was God's representative on Earth.

Then there is Prince Hal's father, the man for whom the play is titled. In sharp contrast to Richard II, the reigning king is purely Machiavellian. To sum up Niccolo Machiavelli's complex

---

### Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

and revolutionary approach to government and politics: "The end justifies the means." This was put into action in Henry IV's rise to the throne and his subsequent defense of his crown from his detractors. However, the embattled king seems to have lost his touch as he slips into a more human persona, less Machiavellian in that he is riddled with guilt. Conscience and guilt have no place in Machiavelli's world, and in Henry IV's case, seem to serve only to weaken him and render him almost totally ineffectual. His obsession with his much talked about crusade to Jerusalem to avenge Christ's death is, although Machiavellian in theory in that he uses this devout piety as an armor to protect himself from retribution of the people, almost laughable, as it has no meaning. Hal would be all too aware of his father's potency slipping away as he softened, and no doubt, filed away this information, adding it to his edification.

While Richard II seemed more enamored with the regalia and glory of being a king, and Richard III, a voracious underdog (as he was at his best while "hunting down" the throne) though less capable as a ruler (staying at the top is harder for some than getting there), Prince Hal, on the other hand, wants it vehemently and he uses everything and everyone to ensure not only his path to the throne, but also that he has the tools and, most significant to this thesis, the hands-on experience on which he will be able to draw to assist him in maintaining his reign.

Although Prince Hal's success is not fully realized in Shakespeare's tetralogies until Henry V, at the close of Henry IV, Part 1, he emerges the victor in the battle waged against his father by Hotspur and the other rebels. It is a significant victory in that the king's antagonists were quite impassioned in their rebellion, supposedly fueled by resentment and anger at the king for betraying them and not living up to the promises he made to those who aided him in the dethronement of Richard II.

Since these plays were written in retrospect, after Hal had already reigned, and reigned quite successfully as Henry V, it could be argued that Shakespeare's "portrait of the king as a young man" is his own commentary on how and what makes an effective, competent and ultimately successful ruler and statesman. Conceivably, the Bard may well have been asking his Elizabethan audience to rethink their ideas of kingship along with him, and consider that perhaps the traits which make an effective ruler are not necessarily the most ethical or genial ones, nor traits one can assume one has by sheer parentage.

These questions would have been especially poignant during this transitional period in England's history and had become quite crucial and hotly debated in Shakespeare's time. For one thing, the usurping and dethronement which had occurred in England's not too distant past caused many to begin questioning the issues of kingship: entitlement, duties, accountability, etc. Add to that, the advancements in the sciences and philosophical thought which was ushered in by the Renaissance (Europe's most creatively and intellectually fertile period), as well as the increasing power of the Catholic Church and the subsequent resentment towards it, and what

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

resulted was an eye towards reformation.

Another factor is that England's trades people were gaining in economic power and perhaps looking to make strides politically, as well. England's class structure was in transition; the Renaissance saw the burgeoning of the bourgeois class. Nowhere is it more evident than in this play that Shakespeare was cognizant of this change and was enough of a visionary to see it as a harbinger for what was to come in England. This is the only one of his Histories in which the common people are seen and heard from, even interacting with royalty. The play is filled with the daily life happenings and the vernacular of "the people". (Of special note is the interaction of the royalty with the commoners. It was literally taboo at the time to portray this type of interaction within works of art, as well as in the patronage of the arts).

Shakespeare recognized that England and life in England was changing. The influx of immigrants from other European countries such as Holland (and the influence that a city like Venice was having on all of Europe, as it was the most progressive city during the Renaissance) brought diversity of customs, fashion, language, trades, etc. (A good illustration of this is the play *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Thomas Dekker). However, Shakespeare took the exploration of this phenomenon to a new extreme in his play by having royalty and commoners interact.

And lastly, yet certainly not of least importance, is the fact that England had expanded its kingdom through battle, and now included Wales, Scotland, Ireland, etc. Even without immigration, the king of England's realm had become diverse, and as evinced in this play, there was a clash of these cultures and their peoples. All this, no doubt, had some modicum of influence on all the artists and thinkers of the time, Shakespeare included. Nowhere is that more evident than in this, the most popular of his history plays.

A notable byproduct of the Renaissance was Niccolo Machiavelli's controversial treatise *The Prince*. In it, he outlines a new political ideology, which in short, contends that political stability is paramount, and a ruler, to ensure this, must be capable of whatever guile necessary.

Shakespeare's Prince Hal embodies this ideology not only later in his rule as Henry V, but also in his shrewdness and the calculating way in which he schooled himself prior to actually acquiring the crown. Prince Hal took bits and pieces from different role models, people he met along the way, and the life experiences he had and incorporated them, molding himself into the ruler he was to become. In almost vampire-like fashion, Prince Hal uses and later discards people he cavorted with during his youthful escapades in Eastcheap. Though Hal's father and most of England looked askance at the prince's unabashed "slumming", ironically, he learned some profoundly useful life lessons and adopted and honed invaluable skills in the way of interpersonal relations, the art of oration, cross-gender and cross-social class dynamics, and not

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

the least of all, survival skills in the battlefield and competition in general. It could be argued that in choosing to spend his youth as he did, Prince Hal was led by his instincts, wisely in this case, to go where he would learn the most. He displayed savvy in recognizing the value of learning about the people on whom he would eventually rely to support him in his reign. In this sense, the prince's edification and "apprenticeship" was received on the stomping grounds (i.e. the taverns, villages, marketplaces, etc.) of the common folk, most notably, Falstaff.

Falstaff is a key character in this play, not only because he illustrates the playwright's feelings that the Puritans were hypocrites (he claims to be Puritan, yet his actions rarely back up his proclamations, and he shown to use and misinterpret Bible quotations to justify his amorality) but more importantly, because he is a surrogate father to Hal and an almost inadvertent mentor to him. As stated before, Falstaff was a religious hypocrite, using an air of piousness to mask his questionable actions. In this sense, he can be seen as Machiavel-like since that school of thought suggests religion is a tool to be used as a costume when presenting oneself to one's constituents. Therefore, Hal learns even more Machiavellian ways through a proxy for his father.

Young Hal also learns from Falstaff that the concept of honor is just that, a concept, and that it is not a skill that can keep a man alive ("Honor hath no skill in surgery..." Act 5.1) His lesson here is to be pragmatic. And through some great verbal sparring, Hal learns the art of quibbling, from Falstaff, the original "spin doctor." Act 2.2 Falstaff: "What a plague mean ye to colt me thus" Prince Hal: "Thou liest; thou are not colted, thou art uncolted." (Prince Hal catches Falstaff stretching the truth, as usual).

However, Shakespeare gives us incidents where Hal surpasses even the excessive Falstaff. For instance, when Hal discovers that Falstaff was taking credit for killing Hotspur, he says to Falstaff: "For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have." This was merely a ruse and not true loyalty to a friend, as we see in Henry V that Hal expends of Falstaff when he has outlived his use.

A pivotal scene in the play takes place in Act 2 when the prince and Falstaff do some role playing. Falstaff asks Hal to rehearse what he will tell his father about the incident with the robbers when he ran in cowardice. Hal uses it as practice for when he will stand before his father to account for his "misspent" time. He practices showing reverence to his father. Then, the two switch roles and Hal has a chance to "act" the part of a king. While Falstaff's speech is rife with Biblical allusions, Hal impersonates his father using a classic mode of oration (referring to Falstaff as "that Vice of Iniquity, that Vanity in Years", and then going into rhetorical speech: "Wherein crafty, but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things?"), infused with some Renaissance thought (referring to Falstaff as "that trunk of humours") and throws in a little commonspeak for measure (i.e. "There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man").

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

Not only does the prince counterfeit loyalty here, he is also feigning modesty by allowing his friend to take the glory for something he actually accomplished. This incident in particular shows Hal's faculty for wily subterfuge and shows he has more than a little of Falstaff and his father in him, only Hal proves he is the master and destined for greater heights.

This exchange between the prince and Falstaff can be seen as the culmination of Hal's education, his final exam before he is given his diploma. Hal has studied hard and applies what he has learned over the years. He has incorporated all he has learned, all these tools of communication, expression and persuasion. Here he passes with flying colors, as we see his success in dealing with his father, his success in warfare, and later, his success in kingship

Another character whom Hal comes across while on his escapades with Falstaff is Francis, an actual apprentice. The character of Francis illuminates this idea that Prince Hal is in his own apprenticeship in that Francis is more or less the same age as Hal and doing what Hal would be doing had he not be born a noble.

In Act 2.5, Hal and Poins play a "monkey in the middle" kind of game with Francis that on one level, appears to mirror Hal's own dilemma of being in a tug-of-war between his father and Falstaff; torn between the expectations of him as a prince and the allure of the "sporting life". More significantly, as Hal mesmerizes Francis with his exercise in verbal calisthenics, he displays his hypnotic charm, while also foreshadowing his plan to abruptly end his own apprenticeship (by taunting Francis to run away from his, suggesting to him that he should go on to bigger things), and his eventual surpassing of his elders and superiors.

Interestingly, Hal's relatives and his subjects are not the only people from which Hal learns. In many ways, Hal studies under Hotspur, his closest rival and the other Harry in the picture. Suffice it to say, Hal's father was impressed by Hotspur and he made it no secret, that up to this point, he wished Hotspur were his son instead of Harry. This seemed only to fuel Harry with another purpose: to win back his father's love and approval. Perhaps it is this reason (and of course because he knew it would behoove him) that Prince Hal not only kills Hotspur, he imitates him and co-opts, at least superficially, Hotspur's most pronounced characteristic: his chivalry.

Prince Hal does come away with something very valuable from knowing Hotspur as revealed in Act 5.1 when he challenges Hotspur to a one-on-one battle. Prince Hal cleverly and masterfully impersonates Hotspur's gallantry and eloquence. The speech he gives is so gracious and so genteel in tone that it impresses Vernon, a member of Hotspur's camp.

Hal says of Hotspur: "I do not think a braver gentleman, more active valiant, more valiant-young, more daring or more bold is now alive." As proof of Hal's charisma and powers of persuasion,

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

Vernon is bought and sold, having witnessed this display of humility, and reports back to Hotspur:

"If he outlive the envy of this day, England did never owe so sweet a hope, so much misconstrued in his wantonness." According to the newly converted Vernon, England was wrong about the prince's indulgent life; he is a good prince and a nobleman. Prince Hal's education has paid off, as this is proof-positive of Prince Hal's ability to influence and beguile. Hal has set his plan in motion—all paths lead to the throne.

Shakespeare masterfully creates in Hotspur a character who is not totally ineffectual, as it would not be a leap of faith to think that Hotspur would have prevailed in an earlier time and had he not come up against the well-schooled and well-rounded Prince Hal. In fact, Hotspur is admirable in his quest to resurrect honor. However, it appears to be only for intrinsic value, honor for the sake of honor, which is shown to be empty and pointless.

At the same time, Hotspur is lacking in other areas in which Hal has the market cornered. To start with, as he is aptly named, Hotspur is impetuous; certainly not a quality one would want their leaders to possess. He is not a good listener (he ignores Blunt's advice), while Hal has shown to be a keen listener and observer.

Secondly, as a result of his prejudicial attitudes (he is intolerant and annoyed by his Welsh ally Glyndwr) he makes an egregious and costly mistake. Instead of making full use of his resources (these culturally different, yet united allies), he separates himself from them and has disdain for Glyndwr's ways. Not only does he have disdain for these foreigners and their customs (unlike Prince Hal, who finds use for the immigrants, as well as the commoners, who to him, might just as well have been from another country) he is appalled at their passionate ways and their expression of emotions, especially with their women. This is evident in the scene in which Hotspur witnesses the love shared by Mortimer and Glyndwr's daughter. He dismisses it as foolishness and distracting for a man and a soldier to waste his thoughts on such things as love. He says to his wife: "[...] This is no world to play maumets and to tilt with lips. We must have bloody noses and cracked crown, and we must pass them current, too [...]"

Hotspur is almost comical in the passion he displays for his horse, choosing it over his wife. This is quite a criticism of knighthood and chivalry and perhaps Shakespeare's way of calling for a new definition of manhood in general. As we will see in Henry V, Prince Hal becomes a man who, for whatever reason, knows the value of a woman and being well-married, and at the very least, this whole interlude of the Welsh women shows these mysterious and spiritual Welsh as a people who embrace their passions and relish in their display, making them, including their honorary Welshman Mortimer, seem at least, to be a happier, more fulfilled people.

Ultimately, Hotspur is shown to be rigid and inflexible, obstinate in his ways, and not able to

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

adapt to the changing times and climate. No doubt it was Shakespeare's hope that his audience would see themselves or at least, the old, medieval ways in this character and see that it, along with Hotspur, is insufficient and doomed for failure.

Thus, the apprenticeship of a prince. However, Hal is not done yet. He must pass the ultimate test in regaining the favor of his father. The scene in Act 3.2 has him going to his father, supposedly to acquiesce to him. On one level, it is a typical coming of age event most young men, at one time or another experience. Yet on another level, it is also the "apprentice" outfoxing the "master."

The king admonishes his wayward son for his debauchery and for cavorting with the "rude society," spending his time indulging in base pursuits, Hal responds: "I may, for some things true wherein my youth hath faulty wandered and irregular, find pardon on my true submission."

Here, the prince not only, at least outwardly admits he was wrong, in the ultimate sign of respect and reverence, he asks his father for forgiveness. Prince Hal's transition from boyhood to manhood is complete, as he gives up his childish ways, even admitting to his father that he was right and that he has seen the err of his ways. Although he gives lip service to cleaning up his act, so to speak, Hal has incorporated, and puts to good use what he learned about human nature, the mindset of the common people who will become his subjects; he learns at least to make them think he is not alienating them as his father failed to do, which led to his ever-threatened reign. Hal is shrewd enough to know he must find a way to adapt, to do whatever is necessary in order to reign over this new England, and most crucial, to assuage any ill feelings that would, of course, haunt a king who was the son of a usurper.

And so the apprenticeship of young Prince Hal is completed. He, along with his father, are the ones left standing, true to Machiavelian form, only Hal is obviously the strong one, not only more youthful, but proven to be a more astute pupil of the school of life and Machiavelli. In Henry V, as he did in real life, he will prove to be the ultimate Machiavel and the ideal king for the tasks he had at hand: unifying England, adding to his kingdom and last but not least, assuaging any ill-will the people may have harbored for the son of a usurper or any doubts they may have had as to whether a good king is anointed by God or can be a self-made man, albeit, one with a shady past, schooled in the university of life and human nature. Considering the success and prosperity he achieved in his reign, against odds, it would be easy to conceive that Prince Hal may well have been Niccolo Machiavel's model for The Prince.

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)