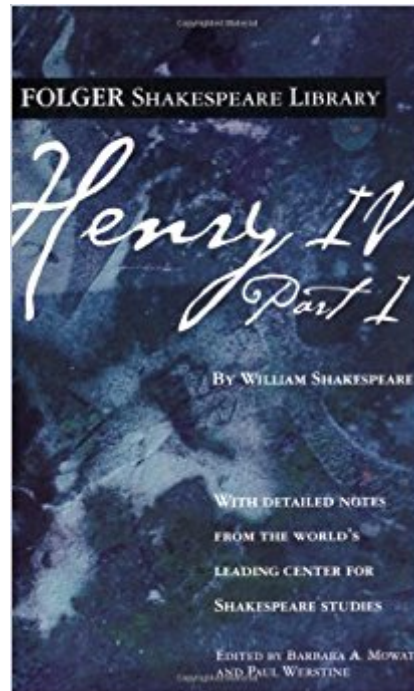


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Henry IV, Part 1 (Folger Shakespeare Library)



Synopsis

Family relationships are at the center of *Henry IV, Part 1*. King Henry IV and Prince Hal form one major father-son pair, with Henry in despair because Hal lives a dissolute life. The father-son pair of Hotspur (Lord Henry Percy) and his father, the Earl of Northumberland, is in seeming contrast; the king envies Northumberland and wishes he could claim the gallant Hotspur as his own. Meanwhile, Hal has entered into a quasi-father-son relationship with a disreputable but amusing knight, Sir John Falstaff. Another strand of action centers on still more family relationships. Hotspur's stand against Henry focuses on Hotspur's brother-in-law, Mortimer. Mortimer, who fought against the Welsh magician Owen Glendower, was defeated and captured and has married Glendower's daughter. King Henry pronounces Mortimer a traitor whom he will not ransom. Hotspur, in declaring war on Henry, sees himself as fighting for Mortimer, his wife's brother. The authoritative edition of *Henry IV, Part 1* from The Folger Shakespeare Library, the trusted and widely used Shakespeare series for students and general readers, includes:

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Essay by Alexander Leggatt

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Customer Reviews

The lengthy title for the 1598 printing was "The History of Henrie the Fourth, With the Battell at Shrewsburie, between the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North, with the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe". Surprisingly, Hal, Prince of Wales, (later Henry V) was not even mentioned in this verbose title although many would consider him to be the central character. This play is clearly the dramatization of a struggle for a kingdom, but it is equally the story of Hal's wild and reckless youthful adventures with Falstaff and other disreputable companions. Shakespeare did not write his plays about English kings in chronological order, but these plays do have a historical unity. It is helpful (but not essential) to read the tetralogy Richard II, Henry IV Part 1 and 2, and Henry V in chronological order. Whatever route you take, I highly recommend buying a companion copy of Peter Saccio's "Shakespeare's English Kings", an engaging look at how Shakespeare revised history to achieve dramatic effect. A wide selection of Henry IV editions are available, including older editions in used bookstores. I am familiar with a few and have personal favorites: The New Folger Library Shakespeare is my first choice among the inexpensive editions of Henry IV. "New" replaces the prior version in use for 35 years. It uses "facing page" format with scene summaries, explanations for rare and archaic words and expressions, and Elizabethan drawings located on the left page; the Henry IV text is on the right. I particularly liked the section on "Reading Shakespeare's Language in Henry IV" and Alexander Legget's literary analysis (save this until you have read the play).

Shakespeare's "Henry IV Part I" shows King Henry IV dealing with complex problems: England is in the midst of civil unrest, as the Percy family, angered by their treatment after unwittingly helping Henry IV ascend to the throne, threatens to depose the monarch. At home, Henry IV is despairing over the development of his son, Henry, Prince of Wales, heir to the throne. Prince Henry consorts with thieves, rogues, and scoundrels - his scandalous personal relationships seem to threaten the King's peace of mind more than the state of his kingdom. Aside from these larger concerns that frame the play, "Henry IV Part I" deals more with Prince Henry than it does with the monarch of the title. Throughout the play, Prince Henry is seen more amongst the rabble commoners than attending

to matters of state. He is guided in his licentiousness by the enormously funny (pun intended) Sir John Falstaff, whose schemes and drunkenness are more innocent and endearing in Part I than they become in Part II. Falstaff's reckless and conceited behaviour casts a shadow over the entire play, symbolic as it is of Prince Henry's moral dilemma and of the precarious state of the nation. Falstaff instantly calls to mind Kenneth Grahame's magnificent Mr. Toad from "The Wind in the Willows," and is Toad's direct literary forefather. Falstaff is the most interesting and dynamic figure in "Henry IV Part I" and certainly the most memorable character in the play. Prince Henry discovers that his responsibilities outweigh his fondness for Spanish wine, and is called to lead the King's army against that of the arrogant 'Hotspur' Percy, himself a rising political force.

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