



Introduction to the Play

Background to *Henry IV, Part One*

Henry IV, Part One is actually a sequel to Shakespeare's play *Richard II*. Richard II was crowned King of England on July 16, 1377, when he was only ten years old. A Regency Council was formed to govern because Richard was so young. The council included six earls, three of which were Richard's uncles: John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster (father of Henry Bolingbroke, who becomes Henry IV); Edmund of Langley (also known as the Duke of York); and Thomas of Woodstock (also known as the Earl of Gloucester).

However, once Richard II became older, he rejected the control of the council and conspired to eliminate their control over England. Also, Richard II alienated many of the old and titled earls of England by lavishing gifts and titles on his favorites, Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. This led to accusations of treason and great disorder in England. In one of his political moves, Richard II exiled John of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, for ten years. Once Henry was out of the picture and John of Gaunt died, Richard changed the exile from ten years to life and took over the estate of Henry's uncle, John of Gaunt. This was an illegal seizure of property and money, and it served to alienate many against Richard II.

Being informed of Richard II's actions regarding his inheritance, Henry Bolingbroke, supported by allies, returned to England to

demand his rights to his father's estate. The families who helped Henry in his quest were the earls of Northumberland and Worcester, who were brothers, and Northumberland's son, Hotspur. Not only did Bolingbroke win back his family's estate, but he and his allies also deposed Richard II, imprisoned him, and crowned Henry King Henry IV. One of Henry IV's first acts was to arrange for the murder of the deposed Richard.

The opening of *Henry IV, Part One* continues the story of Henry IV's reign and the problems he faces with his guilt over Richard's death, his struggles with his profligate son Hal, and the growing disloyalty of the earls who helped him achieve the throne.

Synopsis of *Henry IV, Part One*

Act one, Scene 1

King Henry IV is disappointed that he cannot launch a crusade to the Holy Land because of all the problems in England. He promises to Westmoreland that he will try to solve England's internal problems. New trouble appears as Westmoreland reports that Glendower, a Welsh chieftan, has captured the King's cousin, Mortimer, and that Mortimer has married the daughter of Glendower. However, King Henry is cheered by the additional report that Hotspur has been successful against the Earl of Douglas and has taken prisoners in the northern part of England near Scotland. While King Henry is pleased with

will be returned with interest, and that he will put Falstaff in charge of a small group of foot soldiers.

Act three, Scene 1

At Glendower's home, the rebels meet to discuss how to split up the rule of England once they are successful in battle. According to their map, Hotspur will have Scotland, Glendower will have Wales, and Mortimer will have England. During the discussion, Hotspur is impatient with Glendower's claims of spiritual powers and also with his share of the island. Lady Percy and Lady Mortimer come in to say good-bye to their husbands Hotspur and Mortimer. Lady Mortimer sings to her husband in Welsh, and Lady Percy and Hotspur continue their good-natured teasing.

Act three, Scene 2

Prince Hal and King Henry meet and discuss Prince Hal's behavior and the troubles in England. King Henry tells Hal not to be like Richard II, a "skipping" King who "ambled," not taking his rule seriously. Prince Hal states that he will now act as he should to support the King and, with his victories over the rebels, will gain more honor than Hotspur.

Act three, Scene 3

At the Tavern in Eastcheap, Falstaff and Bardolf joke about Falstaff's becoming thin. The hostess, Madam Quickly, enters, and Falstaff claims that he was robbed while he slept at the inn. The hostess does not believe

Falstaff, and states that he is claiming he was robbed to get out of paying his debts to her.

Prince Hal enters and tells the story about how he was the one who picked Falstaff's pocket, but that all that was in the pocket was bills and one piece of candy. Then he says he has taken the stolen money to the King's bank where it belongs. Falstaff is sad that the money is gone. Prince Hal tells Falstaff that he must command some foot soldiers because the rebellion is growing against the King. Then Prince Hal departs to command his army.

Act four, Scene 1

Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas are readying for battle in the rebel camp near Shrewsbury. A messenger arrives to announce that Hotspur's father, Northumberland, is ill and cannot come to the battle. The rebels realize that this will be very harmful to their cause. Then Vernon arrives to announce that King Henry IV is coming with a huge army of thirty thousand troops, and that Prince Hal is a leader, wearing his battle armor with glory. He further tells them that Glendower is unable to bring together his army to support the rebels. Hotspur, however, is undeterred from the fight and is willing to die for the rebel cause.

Act four, Scene 2

Falstaff has assembled an army of ragtag men—former prisoners, those out on their luck, and other unsavory types. He has earned illegal money by drafting young men about to be married or who are wealthy, and these men pay a bribe to Falstaff in order to be relieved of

loves his wife Kate, but loves honor more. At the beginning of the play, Henry IV wishes his son, Prince Hal, were more like the honorable Hotspur.

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland: Referred to in the play as Northumberland; he is Hotspur's father. He helped in the overthrow of Richard II to place Henry IV on the throne, but now he distrusts Henry IV and wishes to overthrow him.

Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester: Referred to in the play as Worcester; brother to Henry Percy and uncle to Hotspur. At the end of the play, he betrays Hotspur by withholding important information.

Lady Percy: Wife to Hotspur; Kate is witty, wise, and affectionate. She is also the sister of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March.

Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March: Referred to in the play as Mortimer; brother to Lady Percy. He has a claim to the throne as a descendent of Richard II and is actually a cousin of Henry IV.

Owen Glendower: A great leader from Wales and self-proclaimed magician

Lady Mortimer: Married to Mortimer and daughter of Owen Glendower. She speaks only Welsh and her husband, Mortimer, speaks only English.

Archibald, Earl of Douglas: Referred to in the play as Douglas. A leader of the Scottish army against Henry IV. He is a hot-tempered but also a noble man, whose worth is ultimately valued by Prince Hal.

Richard Scroop, Archbishop of York: An ally of the Percy family in their rebellion against the King

Sir Michael: An attendant of the Archbishop of York

Sir Richard Vernon: A nobleman in the rebellion. He conspires with Worcester to withhold important information from the King for Hotspur.

The Boar's Head Tavern crew

Sir John Falstaff: The funny, rotund, witty companion of Prince Hal. Unlike Hotspur, Falstaff values life more than honor.

Ned Poins: Prince Hal's tavern friend. He plans a joke on Falstaff that maintains the Prince's honor and humor.

Bardolph: A drinking companion of Prince Hal. Known for his nose that is very red from too much alcohol consumption.

Peto: Another drinking companion of Prince Hal

Gadshill: He arranges the highway robbery.

Francis: A waiter at the Boar's Head Tavern. He always says, "Anon," which means, "I will help you presently."

Vintner: The tavern keeper

Mistress Quickly: The jovial hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern

The Stable Crew

First Carrier: Carries goods to customers using a packhorse

Second Carrier

Hostler: A groomer in a stable

Chamberlain: Takes care of rooms in an inn,
and sometimes sets up the travelers for
robbery

First Traveler

Other Minor Characters

*Sheriff, Servant to Hotspur, Messenger, Second
Messenger, Soldiers, Travelers, Lords,
Attendants*

Shakespeare and Stage Directions

The plays of Shakespeare are so well written that they seem to leap off the page and come to life. However, the plays themselves have very few stage directions. Perhaps this is because Shakespeare's plays were performed in large amphitheaters that were very simple.

This was a time before electric lights, so the plays needed to take place during the day to utilize the natural light. The average time for a performance was between noon and two in the afternoon. Theater historians report that there were typically no intermissions; plays ran from beginning to end without a break and took about two hours.

The set might be painted canvas to illustrate whether the play was occurring in a forest or a town, for example. Sometimes the background was accompanied by a sign that indicated the place as well. Props were few and large: a table, a chariot, gallows, a bed, or a throne.

However, the audience attending Shakespeare's plays expected a spectacle for the price of

admission. Therefore, there were many devices to produce a gasp from the audience. For example, a device in the loft of the theater could raise and lower actors so that they could play gods, ghosts, or other unusual characters. Additionally, a trapdoor in the stage offered a chance for a quick appearance or disappearance. The actors could suggest a beheading or hanging with various illusions on the stage. Sound effects suggesting thunder, horses, or war were common. Music was important, and drums and horns were often played.

Most important to the sense of spectacle were the costumes worn by the actors. These were elaborate, colorful, and very expensive. Therefore, they often purchased these outfits from servants who had inherited the clothes from their masters or from hangmen, who received the clothes of their victims as payment for their services.

Though Shakespeare's stage directions are sparse, definition of a few key terms will be helpful for the reader. The following is a brief glossary of stage directions commonly found in Shakespeare's plays.

Selected Glossary of Stage Directions in Shakespeare's Plays

Above: an indication that the actor speaking from above is on a higher balcony or other scaffold that is higher than the other actors

Alarum: a stage signal that calls the soldiers to battle; usually trumpets, drums, and shouts

Aside: words spoken by the actor so the audience overhears but the other actors on

the stage do not. An aside may also be spoken to one other actor so that the others on stage do not overhear.

Calls within: a voice offstage that calls to a character on the stage

Curtains: Curtains were fabrics draped around a bed that could be opened or closed for privacy.

Draw: Actors pull their swords from their sheaths.

Enter: a direction for a character to enter the stage. This can be from the audience's right (stage right) or the audience's left (stage left).

Enter Chorus: a direction for an actor to come to the center of the stage and offer some introductory comments, usually in blank verse or rhyming couplets. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Chorus delivers a sonnet, a form of poetry associated with love.

Exeunt: All characters leave the stage, or those characters named leave the stage.

Exit: One character leaves the stage.

Flourish: A group of trumpets or other horn instruments play a brief melody.

Have at: Characters begin to fight, usually with swords.

Pageant: a show or spectacle of actors in unusual costumes, usually without words

Prologue: an introduction spoken by the Chorus that gives an overview to the audience and invites them into the play or scene

Retires: A character slips away.

Sennet: a series of notes sounded on brass instruments to announce the approach or departure of a procession

Singing: a signal for the actor to sing the following lines as a tune

Within: voices or sounds occurring offstage but heard by the audience

But Shakespeare still had what is considered his finest writing to do. He began his writing of tragedies beginning with *Hamlet* in 1600. In the following five years, Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*. Why Shakespeare turned to these darker, more serious themes is widely debated by scholars. But all agree that these plays established Shakespeare's premier place in English literature.

Toward the end of 1609 through 1610, Shakespeare began to write his problem romances. These works, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, are rich with mature themes of forgiveness, grace, and redemption.

After 1611, at the age of 47, Shakespeare moved back to Stratford exclusively, settling into life at New Place and enjoying a renewed relationship with his daughters, especially Susanna. He prepared a will, which has become famous for the request to leave his wife their "second best bed." Many have debated whether this is a sentimental or cynical bequest. In the same year that his daughter Judith married, 1616, Shakespeare died at the age of 52. However, it was not until 1623 that all his plays were collected into one manuscript, now referred to as the *First Folio*. The fellow King's Men players who compiled the manuscript, Heming and Condell, entitled it *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*.

Shakespeare's England

The age of Shakespeare was a glorious time for England. William Shakespeare's life in England was defined by the reign of Queen

Elizabeth I (1558–1603). During her leadership, England became an important naval and economic force in Europe and beyond.

England's rise to power came when its navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, when Shakespeare was about 24 years old. Queen Elizabeth was skillful in navigating through the conflicts of religion. She maintained religious independence from Rome as the Church of England became firmly rooted during her reign. Additionally, she financed the establishment of colonies in America to grow the British Empire and expand its economic opportunities. At the end of her reign, England was the leader in trade, naval power, and culture.

Because of its role as the main economic, political, and cultural center of England, London became the hub of England's prosperity and fame. If anyone wanted to become famous as a poet or dramatic writer during Shakespeare's time, he would need to be in London. In fact, London was full of great writers besides Shakespeare, such as Marlowe, Sidney, and Jonson. Yet, even as London was full of parties, trade, and amusement, it was also full of poverty, crime, and disease. Crime was a large problem, and the main jail in London was called the Clink. Disease and poor sanitation were common. In fact, twice in Shakespeare's lifetime, London endured an outbreak of the plague, which killed thousands upon thousands of people.

Before Queen Elizabeth took the throne, London was a modestly sized city of about 60,000 people. By the time James I took the throne at her death, more than 200,000 people

lived in London and its suburbs. People were attracted to London because it gave many opportunities for work and financial improvement. It was also a vibrant social scene for the upper class. In fact, one honor of being a noble was the opportunity to house Queen Elizabeth and her entire party if she was in your neighborhood. If she were a guest, it was expected that her noble hosts would cover all the expenses of housing her group. She made many “progresses” through England and London, establishing her relationships with the nobility. However, several nobles asked to be released from this honor because the expense of supporting her visit had often caused them bankruptcy.

Perhaps it was better to be a flourishing member of the English merchant middle class. Their numbers and influence were rising in England at the time of Shakespeare. This was a new and an exciting development in Western European history. One major factor in the rise of the middle class was the need for wool for clothing. The expansion of the wool trade led to the formation of entire cities throughout England and sparked progress in many other areas of commerce and trade.

With the rise of the middle class came a concern for more comfortable housing. Rather than serving simply as shelter or defense against attack, housing developed architecturally and functionally. One major improvement was the use of windows to let in light. Also, houses were built with lofts and special places for eating and sleeping, rather than having one multifunctional room. However, doors between rooms

were still very rare, so that privacy in Shakespeare’s time did not really exist.

Meals in Shakespeare’s England were an important part of the day. Breakfast was served before dawn and was usually bread and a beverage. Therefore, everyone was really hungry for the midday meal, which could last up to three hours. If meat was available in the home, it was usually served at this time. A smaller supper was eaten at 6:00 or 7:00 P.M., with the more wealthy people able to eat earlier and the working class eating later. Cooking was dangerous and difficult since all meals were cooked over an open fire. Even bread was not baked in an oven but was cooked in special pans placed over the fire. A pot was almost always cooking on the fire, and the cook would put in whatever was available for supper. This is most likely where the term “potluck” came from.

Furniture was usually made of carved wood, as woodcarving was a developing craft in Shakespeare’s day. One important part of an Elizabethan home was the table, or “board.” One side was finished to a nice sheen, while the other side was rough. Meals were served on the rough side of the board, and then it was flipped for a more elegant look in the room. The table is where we get the terms “room and board” and having “the tables turned.” Another important part of a middle or an upper-class home was the bed. Rather than being made of prickly straw, mattresses were now stuffed with softer feathers. Surrounded by artistically carved four posts, these beds were considered so valuable that they were often a specifically named item in a will.



ACTIVITY 1

Clarifying Circumstances (continued)

8. How do the Prince, Falstaff, and friends make their living (refer to Scene 2)?

9. Does the Prince ever plan to reform his “wicked” ways? How do you know?

10. How does Hotspur explain his not giving the King his prisoners?

11. Hotspur wants his brother-in-law, Mortimer, ransomed from Glendower, who is holding Mortimer captive. Why is the King (for whom Mortimer was fighting) angry with Mortimer, and why does he refuse to pay the ransom (refer to Scene 3, lines 76–91)?

12. Hotspur defends Mortimer to the King in Scene 3, lines 91–111. Write his response in your own words.

13. According to Hotspur, Worcester, and Northumberland, why does the King *really* dislike Mortimer?

14. What part did Worcester and Northumberland play in the previous king’s (Richard II’s) death?



ACTIVITY 2

Paraphrasing the Prince

Act one, Scene 2

Background The prince and his friends spend most of this scene carousing in his apartment. After they leave, Prince Henry delivers a soliloquy during which we learn that he does not plan to lead his present lifestyle much longer.

Directions Write the speech by Prince Henry in lines 181–203 in your own words to better understand why he seems to embrace the criminal lifestyle despite his royalty.



ACTIVITY 4

The King's Spy

Act one, Scene 3

Background In Act one, Scene 3, Hotspur, Northumberland, and Worcester begin to plot a rebellion against King Henry IV.

Directions Imagine that you are one of King Henry's most trusted spies. Compose a brief report ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page) in which you detail the treasonous words shared between Hotspur, Northumberland, and Worcester in lines 180–296.