### THE FACTS

**WRITTEN:** Shakespeare wrote the play in 1597, two years after completing “Richard II”, the action of which immediately precedes the action of this play.

**AGE:** The Bard was 33 years old when he wrote “Henry IV, Part 1” (Shakespeare B.1564-D.1616)

**CHRONO:** The play falls in 15th place in the full canon of 39 plays; in the two years that elapsed between the writing of the two historically-chronological plays of “Richard II” and “Henry IV, Part 1”, Shakespeare wrote “Romeo and Juliet”, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “The Merchant of Venice”.

**GENRE:** “The Major Histories” (Bloom)

**SOURCE:** The “Chronicles” of Raphael Holinshed (1577) and the first half of a surviving and anonymous play called “The Famous Victories of Henry V” -- “a rousing patriotic rant of a play, perhaps mostly written by the comic actor Dick Tarlton”. (Bloom); and, in the chronicles of English history, a Sir John Falstaff figures as a cowardly commander in the French wars.

**NAME:** The character who became the immortal Falstaff was originally called Sir John Oldcastle who died a Protestant martyr, heretic and traitor. His descendants were not pleased to see him portrayed in “Henry IV, Part 1” as a wicked glutton and walking vice; Shakespeare was compelled to change the name although he retained Hal’s reference
To “my old lad of the castle” as a wink to the original. (It is jarring to imagine Verdi’s opera with the title “Oldcastle” instead of “Falstaff”!)

TEXT: Many critics go so far as to applaud the play saying: “Here at last we encounter intelligence without limits.” (Bloom); and, “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 characters.” (Hegel)

FAMOUS: “I do, I will.” (Act II, Sc 5, Line 481) – Hal’s crucial words to Falstaff as a key turning point in both the relationship and the play; that foreboding is intensified and concluded in “Henry IV, Part 2”.

STRUCTURE: “‘Henry IV, Part 1’ is Falstaff’s play, the record of the fat knight who was not only witty in himself but the cause of wit in other men.” (Trewin); Falstaff shines as “the voice of spontaneous anarchy as opposed to that of calculating order.” (Speaight); “Falstaff stands – not by sheer bulk alone – at stage center, something that in Part 1 can be a little unfair to the captains and the kings, the Prince of Wales (Hal) and Hotspur, both grand theatrical parts. The fusion of high dramatic verse and robust comedy is almost unmatched in the rest of the Shakespeare canon.” (Trewin)

SUCCESS: The play was an immediate success and has continued to entertain audiences worldwide for nearly 425 years; “Falstaff needs an audience and never fails to find it; we need Falstaff because we have so few images of authentic vitalism and even few persuasive images of human freedom.” (Bloom)

FIRST: “There is clear evidence of the early popularity of ‘Henry IV, Part 1’. However, the details of its first performances remain shrouded in mystery. It was produced at a time when the affairs of Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, were particularly unsettled. By the mid-1590s Shakespeare and the Chamberlain's Men were becoming very successful and prosperous. Shakespeare bought his family a coat of arms in 1596 and then the second largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1597. In the winter of 1596-7 his company trumped their rivals, the Admiral's Men, by being given all of the
season’s command performances at the Court of Elizabeth I.” (R. Gaby, Shakespeare Editions)

**ACTORS:** It is believed that the then-stars of Shakespeare’s Lord Chamberlain’s Men, Richard Burbage and William Kemp originated the roles of Hal and Falstaff; over the centuries the roles have been coveted by many of the greatest actors of their generations including acclaimed Ralph Richardson as Falstaff and Laurence Olivier as Hotspur in 1945.

**RECENT:** Many recent productions have combined both Parts of the “Henry IV” story into consecutive afternoon and evening performances; frequently the “next in line” play of “Henry V” is added to the cycle as well; in 1951 the Stratford Festival even added the earlier play of “Richard II” for the “Festival of Britain” staged on a single permanent set with actors carrying through their roles from one play to the next.

**FILM:** “A vastly different treatment of the play and the subsequent play ‘Henry IV, Part 2’ is Orson Welles's 1965 cult classic film, *Chimes at Midnight*. The film has been written about extensively, and hailed by most as a ‘flawed masterpiece’. Welles himself played Falstaff in the film, and identified strongly with the role. Shakespeare's history is framed by Falstaffian nostalgia as the story, shaped from Falstaff's perspective, becomes one of betrayal, the passing of time, and the imposition of a new world order. Orson Welles said of his interpretation: “the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince is not the simple, comic relationship that it is in Shakespeare's ‘Henry IV, Part 1’, but always a preparation for the end” (Lyons 261). *Chimes at Midnight* was re-named *Falstaff* at one point in its history.” (R Gaby)

The somewhat controversial 2019 film, “The King” combined key elements from the two Parts plus “Henry V” into a 140 minutes production starring young Timothee Chalamet as Hal-to-Henry V and Joel Edgerton as Falstaff (of a much “reduced size”).
THE PLAY

SETTING: The play moves back and forth from the Court of Henry IV to the Boar’s Head Tavern to the meeting places of the Rebels and finally to the battlefield at Shrewsbury.

YEAR: The play spans the year from the Summer of 1402 to the summer of 1403. (By then Henry IV had reigned illegitimately for three years since usurping the throne and murdering Richard II).

KEY ROLES: HENRY IV: The ever-treacherous “Bolingbroke” during the reign of Richard II, Henry IV was not the rightful heir to the throne three years earlier when he first imprisoned Richard, usurped the throne and eventually had Richard murdered. This illegitimacy plays a key role in the relationship between father and son and the future of the latter. “So shaken as we are, so wan with care” is the first line Henry utters at the start of the play; even though only 37 years old his reign had been difficult and now his health waning.

HENRY, PRINCE OF WALES (Hal): The King’s older son in line for the throne. Troubled with his father’s illegitimacy on the throne, seemingly in need of a more supportive and understanding father figure and immersed in “wild days” unacceptable to father the King, Hal relishes the ribald fun and earthiness of the Boer’s Tavern with the likes of Falstaff, Mistress Quickly and the lads. However, hidden in this playful mood he clearly stands ready to turn his back on the tavern life and rise like a phoenix in support of his father and brother and eventually replace Henry IV on the throne.

JOHN OF LANCASTER: The King’s younger son is always at his father’s side in defense of the throne and the country against all rebels as the “good example” loyal son until Hal rises to the occasion.

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF: Raised in stature to the title of “Sir” for “valiant efforts as an able warrior against the Welsh” (Asimov), the witty, intelligent and clever Falstaff has fallen deeply into a life of sack, women and song. His tongue-in-cheek claim to be of “some fifty years” is well-known in the Tavern to be an under-estimate for this
much-older “bon vivant”. His unlikely rapport with Hal frequently echoes the words “father” and “son”. Falstaff’s allegiance and deep fondness for Hal gives all signs of a secure future for Falstaff when Hal becomes King; but Hal’s four-word, “turning-point” comment near the end of Act II -- “I do, I will” -- references his never-doubted plan to abandon Falstaff and the lads later in “Henry IV, Part 2” as he prepares to replace his dying father on the throne.

HENRY PERCY (Hotspur): The hot-blooded warrior-son of the Earl of Northumberland (also named Henry Percy), Hotspur is intensely loyal to northern England against the Scots as well as later with Wales, Scotland and angry Englishmen in the West against King Henry IV. As his name implies, Hotspur is stubborn, determined and always ready-for-action. Early in the play and later in confrontation with his then-wayward son, Hal, the King clearly expresses his “what if” hopes for Hotspur to be his son and heir rather than the delinquent Hal. (See the note on Hotspur’s age below.)

AGES: Shakespeare takes creative liberty with the ages of some key characters for more dramatic effect. Historically Hal, Prince of Wales was 15 years old in 1402 and his nemesis Hotspur, Henry Percy was 38 years old, one year older than the ailing King Henry IV. In order for the King to better “compare” the two men and for Hal and Hotspur to later be pitted in “to-the-death” battle, Shakespeare raises one and lowers the other to make both men in their early 20’s.

OTHER ROLES: See additional document with visual groupings of characters: “The Court”, “The Tavern” and “The Rebels”

SYNOPSIS: Henry IV’s son John of Lancaster is leading the ongoing war against the Welsh chieftain, Owen Glendower, and Hotspur’s father, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland. The swaggering Falstaff has become even more corpulent and outrageous, sponging off his hostess, Mistress Quickly, abusing the Lord Chief Justice, preening for the admiring Doll Tearsheet, and taking advantage of everyone, especially his ensign, Pistol, and his old friends Justice Shallow and Justice Silence.
Prince Hal, worried about his father’s ill health but still curious about Falstaff’s activities, goes to Eastcheap in disguise to spy on his old friends. When the king learns of Hal’s whereabouts, he desairs for the future. News comes that Prince John has settled the war (through a perfidious betrayal of promises made to the enemy leaders as a condition of their disbanding their forces). Henry talks, yet again, about a pilgrimage so that he can die in the Holy Land. After a misunderstanding in which Hal—thinking his father has died—removes the crown from the king’s pillow and leaves the sickroom, father and son are reconciled on the king’s deathbed. The wily Henry advises Hal to avoid internal strife during his own reign by seeking foreign quarrels.

Hal prepares to become king, setting aside his previous frivolous image and reassuring his brother of his loyalty to him and his genuine grief at their mutual loss. Falstaff arrives with his entourage, expecting a lively and generous welcome from his old friend. Instead, Hal, now King Henry V, denounces Falstaff, orders him and his cronies to repent their profligate ways, and has the Lord Chief Justice take them to the Fleet prison until they have reformed. As they are led away, Prince John prophesies war with France.

**FOR OPTIONAL VIEWING.....**

**YOUTUBE – FREE**
The PlayMakers Repertory Company (2012) – “The Story of Henry IV” – Brief (8-min), entertaining, informative story-telling by directors and key cast members preparing their highly-regarded production; the presentation includes short bits on “universal themes” and “epic stories”. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4xly9v5t2M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4xly9v5t2M)
PBS Great Performances (2013) – “The Hollow Crown / Henry IV, Part 1” – Film - Jeremy Irons (King) and Tom Hiddleston (Prince Hal)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ch6ZI-qzzKI&list=ELoeLF_GTm-_WAA8m4-mkOoA&index=3&t=0s

Free Preview: The King summons Prince Hal to court (Act III, Sc 2) -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6u009U1q69A&list=PLPKrYJ9QJYRyzeLiRboUZvMTSgcTmqYM

The Brussels Shakespeare Society (2017) – “Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2” - A filmed-live, concisely-performed, small-venue, bare-bones stage production running both plays together in one performance
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hItvO_Tpb4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ8dAvTGGyw

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3129954/?ref_=fn_al_tt_4