***Henry IV, Part 1***

1. i. The king and nobles hear news of Welsh and Scottish border wars

ii. Hal, Falstaff, and Poins plot a robbery; alone, Hal plans a reformation

iii. The king and the Percy family meet; without the king, the Percy family plots a rebellion

1. i. Robbery scene, with Falstaff among the robbers of the king’s treasure

ii. Robbery scene, with Hal and Poins recovering the treasure from the robbers

iii. Hotspur tells Kate it is time for him to make war

iv. Hal and Poins hear Falstaff’s version of the robberies and expose it for a tall tale, after which Falstaff and Hal stage a rehearsal of Hal’s next meeting with his father the king

1. i. Hotspur, Glendower, Mortimer, Worcester, and various ladies; the men agree on a confederacy of rebels and part from the women

ii. Hal meets with his father the king to pledge his reformation

iii. Accusations of thievery among thieves involves Falstaff, Bardolph, and the Hostess, before the Prince and Peto show up to admit they picked Falstaff’s pocket

1. i. Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas hear bad news

ii. Falstaff and Bardolph demonstrate how to be bad soldiers; Hal and Westmoreland, good ones

iii. Parley between the Percy side and envoys from the king

iv. Further plotting involves the Archbishop of York and Sir Michael

1. i. Second parley between the two sides does not avert battle

ii. Percy side agrees to go on to fight

iii & iv. Battle: Douglas versus Blunt; Falstaff and Hal; King, Hal, and Prince John; King versus Douglas; Hal versus Douglas; Hal versus Hotspur; Falstaff versus Douglas; Hal and Prince John; Falstaff versus Hotspur

v. King Henry IV, Hal, and Prince John decree punishments for the defeated rebels

About the Plots

The main plot of this play is Hotspur’s rebellion against King Henry; the subplot is a collection of escapades involving Hal, Falstaff, and their tavern companions. Each plot gets four of the first eight scenes of the play. The King and Hal appear together for the first time in the ninth scene, and in the tenth scene Hal involves Falstaff in the main plot, which thereafter is the only plot. There are obvious parallels and analogies: rebellion against the crown / robbery of the crown’s property; Falstaff as a father-figure to Hal / Henry IV as Hal’s father; Hal as a son / Hotspur as a son; Falstaff, cowardly and dishonest, but loyal / Hotspur, courageous and honest, but disloyal; Falstaff’s tall tale about the robbers being robbed on their spoils / his tall tale about killing Hotspur. [Hotspur’s death on the field of battle is played as a tragedy and then replayed as a farce, years before Karl Marx wrote the aphorism.] The most obvious analogy is the common Early Modern one of the macrocosm of the state being like the microcosm of the family; as soon as Henry IV’s sons are with him, rebellion against him must fall.

Familial and Political Relationships

The earls called Worcester and Northumberland are brothers, Thomas and Henry Percy; it is Henry’s son Henry who is called Harry or Hotspur. All the Percy men are northern border lords, pledged to keep the Scots out of England. [Scotland was in Henry IV’s time an independent – and usually hostile – kingdom.]

The Mortimer family in this play is represented by Edmund and his sister Kate, Lady Percy, Hotspur’s wife. Edmund is a western border lord, pledged to put down Welsh rebellions. [Wales was in Henry IV’s time part of England, but not happy about it.]

So when the English rebels ally themselves with some of the Scots and with some of the Welsh, they are conspiring both with an external enemy and with another set of internal rebels. Unsurprisingly, the rebels are not loyal to each other, even when they are related to each other. That’s why they lose.

Historicity

Two events in 1402 underlie events in this play, which alludes to them more or less obscurely:

* Glendower, who led a revolt against England every year (1400-1408), captured Edmund Mortimer, and Henry IV refused to ransom him, thinking he had lost on purpose.
* After Northumberland and his son Hotspur defeated a Scottish army led by Archibald, Earl of Douglas, Northumberland surrendered his prisoners to Henry IV but Hotspur refused to surrender his (including Douglas) because the crown owed him money for his border defense.

The 1403 conspiracy of Worcester, Hotspur, Douglas, Vernon, Glendower, and Mortimer is historical. They planned to put another Edmund Mortimer, Edmund and Kate’s nephew, 5th Earl of March, 11 years old at the time of the play, on the throne of England; he was closer in the line of succession to the throne of England than Henry IV, and his late father had been named Richard II’s heir. The involvement of Northumberland is unproven. Northumberland wrote Henry IV requesting reinforcement against the Scots. Henry led an army north in response, while Hal led another army toward Wales to fight Glendower. When Hotspur led his army out against Hal’s, Henry IV reinforced Hal before either Northumberland (if he was going to) or the Welsh could reinforce Hotspur. At the Battle of Shrewsbury, Douglas did kill Blunt, and an unknown soldier killed Hotspur. Afterward, Worcester and Vernon were executed for treason, while Douglas was kept a prisoner in England until 1408.

The tripartite division of the island of Great Britain was in fact discussed by Northumberland, Mortimer, and Glendower, in a later conspiracy, discovered in 1405. Shakespeare’s placement of it in this play suggests that he did not anticipate writing a sequel, although he may have preferred the obviously bad plan to break the island into three kingdoms to the possibly right and just plan to enthrone Edmund.

Shakespeare has also set the play up as though Mortimer and Hotspur were young men like Hal. In reality, Hal and his brother John were the only young people leading either side. Glendower, Mortimer, and Hotspur were in their 40s; Northumberland and Worcester, in their 60s.

Falstaff is a dramatic invention by Shakespeare.