

Synopsis of King Henry IV part II

The third play in the histories covering the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V. In this play Shakespeare explores loyalty, betrayal and growing old.

The play begins in the aftermath of the battle in Shrewsbury.

In despair at the death of his son Hotspur, the Earl of Northumberland pledges to lend his support to a second rebellion. This uprising is led by Richard Scroop who is the Archbishop of York.

The old king grows sick

As the threat of civil war looms over the country King Henry IV becomes increasingly unwell. He also fears that his son Prince Henry has returned to his old life with Falstaff and the other disreputable denizens of the Eastcheap tavern.

Falstaff and the prince are separated

The Chief Justice confronts Falstaff (who is also in bad health) with reports of his criminal behaviour. He warns him that Hal will be kept separate from him because the king is unhappy with the influence he has had on the prince.

Falstaff is sent on a recruiting expedition in support of King Henry's army. This force is being led by Prince John of Lancaster (the king's younger son) this time. But before he can set off he must face a court in the company of Mistress Quickly for his debts to her and for services rendered at her tavern.

The rebel army is met by the king's forces who are led by Prince John and bolstered by Falstaff's recruits. A treaty is brokered but is followed by betrayal.

A new king is crowned

King Henry wakes to find his son, Hal, trying on his crown. The dying king is angry at first but is reconciled with his son before he dies. A new, mature Hal accepts the crown as King Henry V and turns his attention to a war with France.

His old friend Falstaff finds himself excluded from the new king's court and company.