

# The education of prince hal – king henry iv part 1



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The main aim of this play is to chart Prince Hal's transition from a rogue to his proper princely position. As with real people who are making a conscious effort to change the way they are, Prince Hal is always altering the perception of the world that he holds and peoples perception of himself. However, we only really get to see the changes that he is making at certain times in the play set at sufficiently regular intervals to allow them to be seen as updates on his personal progress.

These are his soliloquies, speeches spoken towards other characters but there for the benefit of the audience only. They are included to show us what is happening inside his head and about his emotional condition. Showing the emotion demonstrated in the soliloquies as part of a conversational piece of script would have seemed unrealistic in the time the play was written and so the soliloquy was utilised to both dramatic and realistic effect. We also see that with each soliloquy Hal matures and becomes more honourable.

The three soliloquies that I will be analysing are in Act 1 Scene 2, Act 3 Scene 2 and Act 5 Scene 4. Each shows Prince Hal's progression from a layabout to royalty and the story so effectively that it would be possible to follow what is happening using only these speeches and a minimal amount of other text.

The first of the prince's speeches is set in the tavern in Eastcheap and shows Hal's lowest point. The name of the town itself represents Hal's life of sin, the stress being put specifically on the "cheap" part of the town's title. He practically lives, with Falstaff, at the Bulls Head Tavern in the act of getting to know his future subjects in order to be a better leader. At least that's how

he sees it, and perhaps he began his life of vice with that intention but was led from the path by Falstaff and forgot his objective. We can see from the lines in the speech that go,

“ So when this loose behaviour I throw off,

And pay the debt I never promised”

This gives the impression that Hal can kick his habit at any time and will show those who doubt him that he can do what they never expected of him.

At this point in the play, Hal is still displaying behaviour totally unbecoming of a prince and is plotting to expose Falstaff as a liar and a coward for a joke. After discussing the plan with Poins, Prince Hal begins his soliloquy in a way that seems like a physical version of his current inner monologue.

“ I know you all, and will awhile uphold

The unyoked humour of your idleness”

This is the first line of the section as well as the first time that we see Hal's desire to be closer to his father and to prove his critics wrong. This is unexpected after the attitude that we have seen he shows to work. It also shows us that he is in control of his destiny, not Falstaff or any of the other vagabonds. He says “...and will a while uphold...” in the way that a parent tells a child that they will no longer tolerate bad behaviour. We get the impression that Hal intends to punish them for their ill deeds which seems a little treacherous and foreshadows events in later plays in this series.

We see a lot of symbolism in this soliloquy comparing the behaviour of himself and those around him to weather patterns. He describes himself as “imitating the Sun”, the Sun being a term widely used in reference to a king. Although the sun isn't strictly a weather formation, it begins a list of weather similes that are reminiscent of some kind of fable that uses imagery to give inanimate or unintelligent objects personalities. He compares Falstaff and his motley crew as ‘base contagious clouds’ and ‘foul and ugly mists’, claiming that they obscure his true beauty and stifle his potential. This uses loaded language such as ‘smother’ and ‘strangle’ in order to fix in our minds an image of Prince Hal choking and dying, unable to free himself from a prison of his own making. This is a further criticism of the Eastcheap ‘posse’, increasing our suspicion that Hal is merely using them as a fuel for his re-birth as the true prince.

At this point we have already seen a negative side to Hal's personality, a more devious and twofaced side than we would imagine a person in such a position could have. However, there are more unpleasant attributes still to discover. In the lines 164 and 165,

“If all the year were playing holidays,

To sport would be as tedious as work.”

I imagine this line to be spoken in the same manner as a spoilt child would proclaim that they are bored of a game or new toy, and gives the reader the impression that Hal is only changing his life because he has had enough of his current existence and not because of his sense of duty. This glimpse into

Hal's idea of his own future gives us a feeling that although the play is titled after Prince Harry, he may turn out to be the villain of the piece.

However, Hal redeems himself a little towards the end of his soliloquy by showing that he is not so selfish as we have previously thought and displays genuine remorse for the time he has wasted when he could have been doing great things.

“ My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,

Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes

Than that which hath no foil to set it off.”

These lines are essentially a justification of his deeds and bad behaviour, declaring that his ascension to pryncedom will be even more glorious because of the contrast between his former wickedness and his newfound honour.

Prince Hal ends the first soliloquy with a rhyming couplet, a common device used by Shakespeare to show that an important part of the play has ended.

“ I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,

Redeeming time when men least think I will.”

These two lines summarise Hal's intentions for the future. He is planning on cancelling out all of his misdeeds and building a new reputation for himself, making up for the years he has wasted in The Boars Head. He will also time

his turnaround as to make it as effective as possible and change the way his peers view him as much as he can.

One of the most important things about this soliloquy is that no one but the audience and himself know about it. This privacy gives us reason to doubt his seriousness to his cause because he can easily give up and revert to his old ways without losing face. When we look at the speech as a whole, we understandably have considerable doubts about Hal's dedication to his goal.

Another interpretation of this soliloquy is that Hal genuinely enjoys his time at the Boars Head and the company of his friends there. This contact with his subjects, and the acceptance as one of them that they offer him, will actually help him to rule as it gives him a greater understanding of their wants and needs. He may only be pretending to be a soak and a loser as a device for his great ascension. We cannot be sure of his true intentions so early on in the play, but only know that he will either be a great man or a liar.

The second soliloquy (Act 3 Scene 2) is set in much grander circumstances, before King Henry IV in his palace. Hal has been called there to speak with his father who wishes to talk about his way of life. Henry shows his disapproval of Hal's misdeeds and wonders whether he has been cursed with Hal for his sins. He tries to explain the behaviour that kings and royalty are supposed to display, basically describing the total opposite of Hal's life. The king insults Hal by proclaiming Hotspur, Hal's 'arch enemy' as a young Mars, the Roman god of war. Also, in lines 124 – 128, he tells Hal that not only does he find his sons ways wicked, but doesn't trust his loyalty either.

“ Thou that art like enough, through vassal fear,

Base inclination, and the start of spleen,

To fight against me under Percy's pay,

To dog his heels, and curtsy at his frowns,

To show how much thou art degenerate."

This is insulting to Hal because he has a high impression of himself and the king is saying that he would degrade himself by acting like a slave to Percy, desperately trying to please him. However, this insult to Hal's pride gives us our first glimpse into the changes that Hal promised would happen. First of all, the reply is calmer and more focussed than we would have expected from the 'old' Hal who, being brash and loud, would have perhaps been insolent and juvenile.

"Do not think it so, you shall not find it so;

And God forgive them that so much have swayed

Your majesty's good thoughts away from me!"

Hal shows maturity and confidence in this statement by accepting that he has made mistakes in the past but not all of what the king has heard is true but is the product of rumourmongers and Hal's enemies. Despite the trouble these people have caused Hal, he still asks God to forgive those who have been slandering him. This keeps with the religious aspect of the play by mirroring Jesus' quote as he is being sent to death whilst praying to God, asking him not to punish his aggressors. We already know that the king was seen as God's representative on earth and so the Prince of Wales may be

viewed as a Jesus figure, an idea that gives us a new angle on the importance of Hal's change.

He then vows to kill Hotspur as a gesture to prove his commitment to his cause and to redeem himself. He uses powerful imagery to depict how the death of Harry Percy will cleanse him of his sins.

“ I will redeem all this on Percy's head,

And in the closing of some glorious day

Be bold to tell you that I am your son,

When I will wear a garment all of blood,

And stain my favours in a bloody mask,

Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it.”

This means that Hal's will cover himself in Hotspurs blood and, when cleaned off, his sins will be washed away along with the gore. This will obviously not literally happen but it symbolises how Hotspurs death will 'cure' Hal.

In lines 138-141 Hal describes himself as the underdog, a tactic that we later discover is all part of Hal's plan to make his ascension seem more glorious and well earned.

“ This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,

And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.”



The way that Hal speaks seems to set himself up to fail and makes people expect that he would lose against Hotspur, whereas he is making as many people as possible as confident in Hotspurs victory as he can, so ensuring that if he wins he will be seen as superhuman.

Hal is so confident in himself that he wishes that he could double his sins so that his victory will be seen as even better in the eyes of his father and other royal peers. He plans on trading his misdeeds with Hotspurs glories on winning the fight, and would rather be rid of even more sins than he currently has.

“ Would they were multitudes, and on my head

My shames redoubled. For the time will come

That I shall make this northern youth exchange

His glorious deeds for my indignities.”

Hal dismisses Percy as a catalyst for his inevitable fame and grandeur, and says that he will claim all of Hotspurs honours by defeating him in single combat. This dismissal of Hotspur as a means for Hal’s own end is surprising as we see how much he is respected as a warrior by both allies and enemies, showing Hal’s extreme confidence and gall.

“ Percy is but my factor, good my lord,

To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf,”

As well as a promise to the king, Hal also promises to God that not only will he defeat Hotspur, he will also totally redeem himself in the eyes of his subjects. If he doesn't succeed in both of these objectives he wishes to be punished in the worst imaginable way.

“ This in the name of God I promise here,

The which if He be pleased I shall perform...

...And I will die a hundred thousand deaths

Ere break the smallest parcel of this vow.”

The changes we have seen in Hal's personality shown in this soliloquy are highly apparent when compared to the first, as his father now trusts him enough to grant him high command. This improvement of Hal's relationship with his father seems bound to affect the subplot of the play – namely Falstaff's relationship with Hal – detrimentally. We also now know that Hal is hell-bent on completing his task because he has publicly vowed both to his father and to God that he will defeat Hotspur.

The final soliloquy (Act 5 Scene 4) is set on the battlefield, the largest and grandest of the settings featured, with only himself, the deceased Hotspur and the supposedly dead Falstaff. Although running continuously for around thirty lines, it can be more accurately described as two speeches of half this length, one to Hotspur and one to Falstaff (who he presumes to be dead). Both sections are valedictions, reminders of their relationships that they had when they were alive. By this token Hal's speech to Hotspur is a solemn show of respect that he could never show when he was alive and Falstaff's is <https://assignbuster.com/the-education-of-prince-hal-king-henry-iv-part-1/>

a jovial goodbye and a fond farewell to the man who taught Hal how not to live.

We can see from the very way that the first section is written in blank verse that it will be a serious piece of writing, sans the frivolity of rhyme or rhythm that is present in the second half. This lack of flamboyant styles makes the audience concentrate on the words and meanings contained in the writing rather than the entertainment value.

Hal shows respect and honour to Hotspur by praising him as a great man and warrior, saying that now Hotspur is dead there is no one as courageous on earth. When once a whole kingdom was not large enough to contain Hotspur, now only a few feet of ground is needed to satisfy his needs, Hal points out.

“ When that this body did contain a spirit,

A kingdom for it was too small a bound.

But now two paces of the vilest earth

Is room enough...”

This is an insightful comment of the frailty and insignificance of life by Hal, as everyone from a peasant to a king is reduced to the ground from whence they came. This once again proves his newfound maturity and attitude.

Hal admits to himself that he would never let Hotspur know how much he respected him if he were alive but knows that he does the right thing by giving Hotspur the same treatment that he would give a friend.

“ If thou wert sensible of courtesy

I should not make so dear a show of zeal,

But let my favours hide thy mangled face,

And even in thy behalf I'll thank myself

For doing these fair rites of tenderness.”

The final three lines of this quotation tell us that Hal somehow knew that the fallen Hotspur felt the same way about their relationship, thanking himself on Hotspurs behalf for the courtesy he had shown in laying the plumes from his helmet over Hotspurs face.

The final three lines of the first section in this soliloquy show Hal's undying respect and reverence for the dead Percy, wishing him to only be remembered by his honour and not by his actions toward the king.

“ Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven!

Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,

But not be remembered in thy epitaph.”

We can tell at this point that Hal's has once again learned something, as he now realises that he can kill Hotspur and gain his princely status without Percy losing his honour. Hal acknowledges that Hotspurs good deeds far outweigh the bad and so wishes him well, concluding that he will go to Heaven.

After the serious first section, Shakespeare obviously decided that some comic relief was in order. Hal spots the dead body of Falstaff and begins a much more light-hearted and playful half of the soliloquy that would stir a number of emotions in an audience. This is because there is sadness present at the swansong of a well-loved character as the public could relate to him. In conflict to this emotion however is the laughter that Falstaff can cause even after death. Once again the rhyme and timbre the section plays a large role in setting the mood, this time a merrier and less solemn tempo.

“ What, old acquaintance, could not all this flesh

Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!”

Hal mocks Falstaffs weight in the same way that he would have in life, giving us the slightest suspicion that Hal knows he is still alive. He also refers to him as ‘ Jack’, a term meaning a criminal or a villain.

Again joking about Falstaffs sizeable trunk, Hal also officially ends his friendship with Falstaff and tells how he is now totally free of his old life and everything that represents it.

“ I could have better spared a better man.

O, I should have a heavy miss of thee

If I were much in love with vanity.”

This means that he would miss Falstaff more if he were still the man he used to be, still lounging in the Boars Head drinking and misbehaving. However, we know see that Falstaff was but a surrogate father for Hal who was

temporarily estranged from his paternal parent King Henry, with whom relations have now been repaired.

Hal ends the soliloquy a little more seriously as a tribute to Falstaffs bravery at the very end of his life (whilst still managing to slip a fat joke in) and grants him a little nobility by ‘allowing’ him to lie next to someone of true greatness.

“ Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,

Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.

Embowelled will I see thee by and by,

Till then in blood by noble Percy lie.”

Hal’s pun on Falstaff being as fat as a deer, but not being the dearest person to have died in the battle would almost certainly cause a reaction in the audience, most likely a groan, a fitting send-off for a man like John Falstaff. However, before Falstaffs ‘resurrection’ a few lines later the mood needs to be slightly more sombre as to ensure maximum comedic effect. Therefore Hal reminds the audience that Falstaff will be disembowelled, driving home the fact that Falstaff is indeed dead and will never return. This is a source of sadness or at least disappointment to viewers who have no knowledge of the play or its outcome.

In conclusion, we find Hal to be everything that he promised and more. Not only did he vanquish the enemies of the king, but also he has developed good judgement and generosity, skills that will help him in his later reign as

king. We can see Hal's new skills in action in lines 25 – 31 in Act 5 Scene 5, when he asks his father to allow him to dispose of the captured Douglas. Henry grants Hal's wish, expecting Hal to want to kill him in the same way that he would have. But the Prince of Wales orders his brother to free Douglas, as the defeated mans honour will also now belong to the king. This wise and shrewd decision shows us that the prince has finally finished his journey and education, from vagabond to royalty.