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## Robert Nye's *Falstaff*: A Remarkable Case of Creative Reception

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### ABSTRACT

Among fictitious autobiographies as well as among historical novels, Robert Nye's *Falstaff* (1976) is a special case in that it is not the autobiography of a historical personage, but of a dramatic character—who happens to be one of the most famous in Shakespeare, indeed in world drama, to be dictated by Falstaff to various *amanuenses*. After briefly discussing the sub-genre of fictitious autobiography, this paper will analyze the varied use of intertextuality, the tensions fabricated between the autobiographer and his helpers, and the critical thoughts and tendencies which Nye absorbed in preparing the work with particular emphasis on the clash between the Shakespearean intertexts and the diction surrounding it.

### 1. Introduction

Nye's *Falstaff* won the Hawthornden Prize and the Guardian Fiction Award in 1976, and shares with Brian Moore's *The Doctor's Wife* the 1976 slot in Burgess's *99 Novels*. A radio version by David Buck was broadcast on Radio 3 and later staged at The Fortune in 1981 and by the RSC in Stratford in 1994 (Matcham, 1999: 82; Allen, 1983: 548). It belongs to historical fiction like Nye's other novels for adults except the extremely 'experimental' *Doubtfire* (1967). However, among these eight historical novels, which

show, to varying degrees, elements discussed in Hutcheon's chapter "Historiographic Metafiction" (Valdivieso, 2005: 46) there are interesting differences of emphasis. Three are biographical accounts of the central characters, purported to be written by persons who knew them well: *Faust* by his assistant, Wagner, *The Life and Death of My Lord Gilles de Rais* by Dom Eustache Blanchet, a priest serving de Rais during the latter's last three years, and *The Late Mr Shakespeare* by John Reynolds (Matcham, 1999: 78), like John Mortimer's John Rice, an (invented) boy actor remembering during the early Restoration (up to the Great Fire of 1666), from long personal observation and their relationship, the dramatist, the theatrical world around him, the many plays and the parts he acted in them. Thus in some aspects this novel bears similarities to Rose Tremain's *Restoration* (1989), in which Charles II and the period play such important parts. The closest model is, however, Mortimer's *Will Shakespeare* (Rozett, 2000: 41). Already in these accounts from the sidelines, there is a great deal about the narrators themselves, particularly Dom Eustache. The same goes for another of Nye's novels: *Mrs Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (1993) (which may roughly be aligned with Graves' *The Story of Marie Powell* (1943)): her tale is indeed about William, but just as much about Anne Shakespeare, née Hathaway, herself, focusing on a week she spent with him in London in April 1594 and may thus also figure under the heading of autobiography, as do Chapter 6 and sections I-V of the "Epilogue" in Burgess's *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964).

This also applies, of course, to two novels using other types of autobiographical narrative: *The Voyage of the Destiny*, presented as Sir Walter Raleigh's diary of his last—doomed—voyage to the New World in 1618, culminating in his execution (Hassam, 1988: 34-36) and *The Memoirs of Lord Byron: A Novel* (1989) (Maack, 1999: 145-49). Nye's *Byron* as well as the two Shakespeare novels fit to some extent into the useful scheme and definitions developed for a specific thematic purpose by Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars in *The Author as Character* (1999), although they do not consider the subgenre exemplified by the central text discussed here. The novel *Merlin* (1978) would, had Maack included it, have richly deserved her label "experimental". Along with *Falstaff*, *The Voyage*, and *Lord Byron* (and largely *Mrs Shakespeare*), *Merlin* squarely belongs to an as yet not fully recognized subgenre, of which Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (Green, 1962: 46; Presley, 2000: 83-86; Leonard, 2000: 112) have provided signal examples, as has Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (1951), followed, for instance, perhaps in the wake of Nye, by Giardina's *Good King Harry* (1984): that is, a novel pretending to be the autobiography of a known historical (or legendary viz. literary) personage, as opposed to the traditional autobiographical novel using an invented character, a genre well established at least since Defoe that might justifiably go back to Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). While readily recognizing similarities and overlaps in procedure and technique with history and the novel, studies of autobiography as a genre are, it seems, firmly anchored in the notion of an existing person writing his or her own life (Pascal, 1960: 11-32; Fowlie, 1988: 165). On the other hand, studies of Biography as a genre tend to annex and submerge this subgenre,<sup>1</sup> the most fitting label to give the sub-genre is indeed

fiktive (Breuer, Schabert, Maack), that is, not fictional, but fictitious autobiography. This (the German *fiktiv* [e]) is also the label that Neumeier attaches to Falstaff, which seems more precise than Rozett's terms "mock memoir" and "mock autobiography" (2000: 144, 163).

With regard to the autobiographical subject, Falstaff as a literary character is in a class of his own, though to some extent Shakespeare's world-famous character resembles Merlin and Faust (whose historical existence is nebulous, while their literary credentials are strong). Another special characteristic is that Falstaff in the novel does not write, but *dictates* his life to various amanuenses. Thirdly, because of the density of direct and oblique references (which by far exceeds that in Nye's other novels, even *Mrs Shakespeare* and *The Late Mr Shakespeare*), this exciting work may be called the "intertextual novel as such" (Neumeier, 1988: 151), exemplifying both the wider, more or less floating, ubiquitous, hence indeterminate Kristevian concept and the narrower, specifically demonstrable concept of intertextuality (Pfister, 1985: 14-16). It is the latter, falling under Genette's (1982: 8) category (1), which is of immediate interest here. Connected with it is a fourth characteristic that is unique within the body of Nye's fictitious autobiographies: *Falstaff* is an outstanding example of the creative reception of a literary work in another literary work (Holub, 1984 and 1992), and it represents, fifthly, an example of the criticism of a literary work in another, thus answering to Genette's category (3) of metatextuality (10) —enriched by the veiled use of certain tendencies in criticism of Shakespeare's *Henry* plays— with strong elements of the category (4) of hypertextuality (11). However in his weighty review of Falstaff, Stewart uses a less erudite term: "elaborative literature", but Genette's terminology, though somewhat rebarbative, has distinct advantages.

## 2. Relation to hypotexts and overall structure; text type

Although Shakespeare is only mentioned once: "Shake, spear!", as a humorous analogy to "*Fall Staff!*"(10), already the title points to a close relationship, reinforced by the dedication, by "R.N.", to the literary agent and writer Giles Gordon as a pastiche of the dedication of the *Sonnets* (1609) to "Mr W.H." as "the onlie begetter". Sir John Falstaff figures in five of Shakespeare's Plays: he is a central character —indeed, many argue *the* central character (Quiller-Couch 1917: 115; Baker 1929: 157; Trewin 1978: 113) — in *1Henry IV*, *2Henry IV*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; in *Henry V*, Falstaff's illness and death are reported (2.1.79-86, 114-24; 2.3.1-44) and Captain Fluellen comments on his treatment by the King (4.1.11-50); in *1Henry VI*, finally, Sir John Fastolf (whom Nye merges with Falstaff) is accused of cowardice in the battle of Patay (1.1.130-36), has his Garter ripped off by Talbot and is banished by the King in Paris (4.1.9-47). But in history, this was proved unjust, and Fastolf was rehabilitated. Based on this material, Nye constructs a full, vivid, extremely funny and "raunchy" (Valdivieso 2005: 53) life of Falstaff, nearly wholly as seen by Falstaff himself, and presenting historical events from an unusual angle, in 100 chapters or "days" running

—with calendar days jumped at times from New Year’s Day (then 25th March) to Halloween, 31st October 1459 (436).<sup>2</sup>

50 of these 100 chapters, as Neumeier (1988: 153) points out (Rozett, 2000: 158), are given to Falstaff’s early life from his conception onwards, though how Falstaff came by any knowledge of the circumstances remains unexplained; 25 to Falstaff’s close relationship with Hal, the Prince of Wales; and 25 to the subsequent period up to Falstaff’s death. Though not exactly borne out by the distribution by pages in early life: 1-249, more than half; association with Hal: 250-330, much less than a quarter; and later life: 331-475, more than a quarter, which conveys a basic notion of the overall structure. At one point Falstaff remarks that the time with Hal was “one of the greatest and happiest periods of my life [...] and the most full of events and wisdoms” (246). Here the overlap in action with the two *Henry IV* plays is so substantial that one might speak of ‘concurrence’ between hypertext and hypotext, and the insertion of intertexts from these plays is especially consistent (Neumeier, 1988: 153). Thus one might consider this part central not only in position, but in importance. What goes before and follows could then be termed ‘complementation’ by antecedent and subsequent events (Klein, 1999: 1-7), which underscores the central importance of the time with Hal. Yet such a scheme is too neat to do the book justice. There are so many side-glances, anticipations and substantial digressions, all kinds of insets,<sup>3</sup> that one needs to consider the type of text with which one may align Nye’s *Falstaff*.

Lanham (1976: 18) distinguishes two “characteristic modes” in Western literature: “narrative and speech, or serious and rhetorical”, as well as “two ranges of motive”, i.e. “serious and purposive” versus “dramatic and playful”. Similarly, but specifically concerned with prose fiction, Weinstein (1981: 4) discusses two types: “mimetic” and “generative”. Clearly, the latter type in these binary oppositions applies to Nye’s novel. It is a pity that in his weighty study of Rabelais, Bakhtin mentions Falstaff only once in passing (1984: 143); but the affinity of Shakespeare’s creation to Bakhtin’s thinking, observations and theses is obvious, as recent Shakespeare criticism has not failed to notice (Macdonald 1995: 81-83; Laroque 1998: 83, 89). And Falstaff’s fictitious autobiography brings this out in heightened form.<sup>4</sup> In general, the impact of Rabelais’ *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1532-34) is visible not only in the strong prominence of equally humorous and crass physicality embracing all orifices and external organs and their functions, but in such things as the chapter headings (the “How” and “About” exactly corresponding to the French *Comment ...* and *De ...*), though Cohen’s translation tends to vary more, with lists of all sorts, from the 69 variant spellings of Falstaff’s name (11) (Concha 2004: 79; Valdivieso 2005: 53), and the items of the truly Rabelaisian meal Falstaff’s father consumed in Wells on the way to attend his wife in labour (15), to an “inventory” of Caister Castle (422-25), with many others in between. There are three other listings of enormous meals in Falstaff (18, 64-65 and 175), a list of odd ways some famous people met their deaths (95), another of the children of King Brokenanus and his wife Goneril (116f), including most unlikely names, just like a list of giants toasted (320), whereas a list of the Popes whose health Falstaff once drank (225) only contains historic names. Furthermore, displaying a wide range of

heteroglossia (i.e. additional to the heteroglossia in-built, according to Bakhtin, in all novels), there are many insets, e.g. "Duncan's Tale" (88), "Bardolph's Tale" (280-85), "Pistol's Tale" (355-58), Lord Grey of Ruthin's letter to Prince Hal (156f), Mrs Quickly's account of Falstaff's and his wife Milicent's amazing "focative" activities on their wedding day (333-36), and Nym's "jingle" about Joan of Arc (408). However, Mrs Quickly's idiolect, familiar from the *Henry IV* plays, soon fades out.

With the exception of open (as opposed to oblique, implied or only alluded to) indecency, such characteristics of a "dramatic and playful" or "generative" text are shared, as is well known, by Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), which is closer to *Falstaff* in that it is also told by an eponymous first-person narrator. And while Rabelais certainly keeps up a kind of dialogue by frequent addresses to the readers, Sterne intensifies this element, activating the reader even more (Iser, 1988: 61), and so does Nye. The novel is studded with appeals to the reader (Valdivieso, 2005: 54) —as generally "you", or "Sir" (70), or "Madam" (71), often with adjectives: "pious" (82), "lewd" (120), "unbiased" (257), "gentle" (300), "attentive" (365) as well as with questions and interjections suggested (38): "Reader, do you wonder how I managed it?". The impression created is of speech, a conversation, and once this surfaces even explicitly: "The freedom I allow myself —those bright swifts mating! — extend it to you, and you, and you, my readers. Ideally, *my listeners*" (160). And this dialogic method includes the typical distance between the experiencing and the narrating (or, in Iser's terms, "reflecting" self), though Franz Stanzel's 'narrating self' (*erzählendes Ich*), seems preferable, notably in the following remark: "What you are hearing, Dear Guests, is Fastolf on the day at each Day's title, Fastolf *here* and *now*, remembering *then*." (367). The impression of speech is also accentuated by inter interruptions such as talking to his secretaries, "How are we for figs from Cerne Abbas?" (190), and other events or remarks on the level of narrating time, "There's Miranda at the door. Enough for today. Amen" (45), "The mice [his secretaries] are away. The cat can play" (24), or "If I shut my eyes now, I can still hear her crying" (34).

Sterne is also behind Falstaff's frequent reflections on his narrative, which render Nye's novel, like *Tristram Shandy*, markedly metafictional. These reflections may concern style, "the comparison is imperfect" (59) and "I'll give you more of the real King's English in due course, perhaps" (146), "This won't do. Let me attempt a more philosophico-political style" (179); or the nature of his narrative, "I am told that the tone and tenour and general temperature of these memorials is too low" (115), "All my stories are moral stories" (237); or they may interrupt the flow of narrative by a comment like "The business I am telling you about must have started ..." (180); or they are programmatic, as when in an elaborate chapter on the figure of 100, he explains his project of telling his life in 100 chapters (40) and when he introduces the main characters frequenting The Boar's Head tavern "in the chapters now following" (251). Clearly unimpressed by Swift's satirical invective against digressions, Sterne, inspired by Locke, famously made a "strategy" of them that "structures the whole novel" (Iser 1988: 71; Mendilov 1968: 100-04; Rozett 2000: 156). Nye does not go that far, but preserves a balance between what Burgess in 1984 called "the forward drive of modern

fiction” and the “wordy divagations of a more monkish [i.e. Rabelaisian] tradition”, but the playful and generative is strong enough to impede progression. As Falstaff observes about his life’s story: “I may most be telling that story when I seem to wander away from it. You do not always take a castle by advancing in a straight line” (93).

### 3. Intertextuality and anachronism

This Falstaff (whose Shakespearean model was chiefly firm in knowledge of the Bible) is amazingly well read. Various kinds and functions of intertextuality, adaptation, relocation and burlesque are foremost in Nye’s novel, and its function here is, apart from amusement, mostly subversion. Many of the countless intertexts are incompletely marked, many more wholly unmarked (Helbig: 1996). This throws up the question of the target readership. Concha (2004: 83) asserts that the novel could not be read without its hypotexts. This would severely restrict the circle of potential readers and seems rather exaggerated; there is so much fabulation, adventure and fun in the book that anyone might enjoy it. The vast majority of readers would have heard of Shakespeare and of Falstaff in any case. However, readers picking up everything will be very rare. And Shakespeare is the principal, but not the only point of reference. Besides, in Shakespeare one hesitates between assigning Nye’s intertextual elements to either of Broich and Pfister’s categories of ‘individual reference’ and ‘system reference’. Many are surely both. Rather, one’s amusement and enjoyment will increase the more spottings and placings one achieves of specific words, phrases, passages, or bare mentions and allusions, including those referring to historical figures and situations.

To begin with the wider field, some examples to illustrate the range: “Gurth Fastolf my ancestor fought for King Harold”(8) —in the context of an emphasis on his Saxon forbears together with snide remarks about William and his Normans (8-10), the name ‘Gurth’ calls up the sturdy figure in Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819). Falstaff’s Uncle Hugh is said to have been a student of Paracelsus. Describing the “poeticule Skogan” (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2), Falstaff opines “Hell hath no fury like a poet reviewed in public with a cudgel” (179). Falstaff asserts after Pascal: “I fart, therefore I am” (111). In the course of some complicated multiple ‘network’ with the *bona roba* of that name (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2) we read “Shallow rushed in where Fastolf [...] would have feared to tread”, anticipating Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (III.65). Even more hilarious is to hear Mrs Quickly unwittingly combining Keats’ final dictum in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* with T.S. Eliot’s *Tradition and the Individual Talent* in reaction to a nursery-rhyme version (1872) of the folk-ballad *Sir Lancelot du Lac*, of which the first extant version was printed in Thomas Deloney’s *Garland of Good Will* (c. 1586) (a varied beginning of which Falstaff sings early in *2 Henry IV* 2.4):

I sang them [...] one my songs of King Arthur:  
 When good King Arthur ruled this land,  
 He was a goodly king;  
 He stole three pecks of barley-meal

*To make a bag-pudding.*

“That’s true poetry”, said Mrs Quickly. “I always liked a bit of true poetry. Beauty is truth, truth beauty. I mean to say —it’s an escape from your personalities, isn’t it?. She belched. (304-5)

Replying to his own question of why he returned to the wars, Falstaff, with savage irony, alludes to the famous 1914 poster showing Lord Kitchener: “First, because I am an Englishman, and my country needed me” (313), followed by “Second, because I needed the money”. And the aftermath of the battle of Shrewsbury (21 July 1403) includes “whole hillocks of corpses [...] awaiting the cart to Dead Men’s Dump” (295) that resembles Isaac Rosenberg’s poem of 1917. Thus the anachronisms, while provoking smiles, can intensify attitudes to serious issues, as is also shown in Falstaff’s evocation of Joyce during the siege of Kildare by a mob of “Boglanders” to do with “Devolution” and “Home Rule” (220): “I recall [...] a young man rather like a question-mark in shape, whose battle-cry was something about History being a nightmare from which he was trying to awake. An Irish proverb, no doubt” (221).

As John Skow’s wittily inverting review of *Falstaff* highlights, the very fact that Falstaff makes abundant use of Shakespearean texts is in itself one huge anachronistic joke: “He is dictating in the year 1459, of course unaware that nearly a century and a half later an unscrupulous playwright [...] will ransack his memoirs for the better parts of three plays [...] Shakespeare stole from Falstaff in other dramas too [...] So much for the Borrower of Avon” (Skow, 1976: 118). Regarding works other than the *Henriad*, the first thing that strikes one in Nye’s *Falstaff* —apart from single words or phrases— is the plethora of Shakespearean names, mostly female like “your Pillicock” (202) (*King Lear* 3.4.75), “your poperin pear” (344) (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.1.38), “country matters” (344) (*Hamlet* 3.2.112), and the novel’s last words: “Remember me” (450) (*Hamlet* 1.5.91). And here subversion has a proper —or rather improper— beanfeast (Neumeier, 1988: 159; Concha, 2004: 82). Falstaff has a pet rat called Desdemona (53 and later) who does curious things to his body; put into skirts at the behest of the Duchess of Norfolk, his maiden bed-fellows (whom he is too young to do much with) include Rosalind and Portia (62); joining forces with his step-sister Ophelia (97 and later) he loses his virginity; with his niece Miranda he has an ongoing, inventively passionate sex affair. It was not Iachimo but Falstaff who played the trunk-trick on Imogen (202); and, of course, it was penetratingly successful. Indeed, there is hardly a female character in Shakespeare who does not benefit from Falstaff’s priapism, like Juliet, Perdita, Titania, and Beatrice (202). To boot, in boyhood he dressed up a stick as a horse to play with and called it “Roan Barbary” (*Richard II* 5.5.78), his cook is Macbeth (3 and later), who was sired on his mother by a papal legate, his father substituting for a couch (79), the name of a lecherous hermit in “Pistol’s Tale” is Malvolio (357), and Falstaff knew “a dago called Iago” (367).

Humorous subversion also manifests itself in reassignment and dislocation of passages. Thus Falstaff wonders at his social and financial success over the years: “O brave old world, in which such things are possible. For an Englishman” (40) (*The*

*Tempest* 5.1.183). The Duchess of Norfolk says of Falstaff the page: “A woman’s face [...] with nature’s own hand painted (60) (Sonnet XX). Thousands of Italian Flagellants run around “in the vast dead of night” (122) (*Hamlet* 1.2.198). Will Squele introduces his wife to Falstaff in a variation of Touchstone’s words about Audrey: “A poor thing, Jack, but mine own”, which she caps with “A poorer thing, Jack, but mine owner (145) (*As You Like It*, 5.4.56), “the milk (and fat) of human kindness” (190) (*Macbeth* 1.5.192). And Mrs Quickly, still describing Falstaff with Milicent, interestingly varies Cassius: “She was his Cleopatra. He her Antony, bestriding her like a Colossus” (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.135).

### 3. The *Henriad* as a *Falstaffiad* and Shakespearean critics

Expressions and phrases from the four Shakespeare plays containing Falstaff material, from *1 Henry IV* and even more *2 Henry IV*, but also *Henry V* (not *1 Henry VI*) are liberally strewn about in all parts of the novel (7, 37; 159, 364). References in the Shakespeare plays to past action are expanded to full-blown stories, notably *2 Henry IV* 3.13-33. Shallow’s reminiscences of his wild time at St Clement’s Inn, are inspired by Falstaff’s soliloquy (3.2.290), where he details Shallow’s boastings as a pack of lies which form Chapter XXV: “How Sir John Falstaff broke Skogan’s Head”, a resounding victory witnessed by Henry IV’s four sons (128-35). Chapter XXVI: “A parallel adventure: Mr. Robert Shallow v. Mr. Sampson Stockfish”, a mean ruse of Shallow’s, who had bribed Stockfish to play the injured loser (136-42). Finally, Chapter XXVI: “About swinge-bucklers & bona robas”, describing the other early companions to a man abler than the wretched and impotent Shallow (136-42); which is followed by Chapter XXXIV: “About Mrs Nightwork & the night at the windmill” (165-69) with Chapter XL “About Sir John Fastolf’s Prick” not far off (199-206).

Similarly, the brief report of the Messenger in *1 Henry VI* 1.1.30-36 is developed into Chapter XCVII: “About the reverse at Patay, & the fall of France” (427-35), which shows Falstaff as rational and competent, with Talbot wrong and obstinate, causing the defeat. Before that, Falstaff’s death, reported in *Henry V* 2.3.1ff. is revealed as a trick, worked in collusion with Mrs Quickly, to evade debt collection (155, 395), which enables Nye to present Falstaff as participating —intermittently (360) at the required distance of 10 miles from Henry V (*2 Henry IV* 5.5.64-66)— during the British campaigns in France under Henry V (361-79), including Harfleur, Bardolph’s Execution, and Agincourt in *Henry V* 3.1, 3.2, 3.6.20-59 (96-109) and the King’s triumphant entry into London (Prologue to Act 5), with Meaux (not shown in Shakespeare) added, and under Henry VI (361-411, 416-20, 427-35) including Orleans, Rouen, and Patay (*1 Henry VI* 1.2, 1.4-6, 2.1,3.2) with the burning of Joan of Arc (not shown in Shakespeare) thrown in. All is seen from Falstaff’s perspective, and mostly Falstaff achieves glory in two notable victories: at Agincourt, Falstaff put a French force to flight by a bombardment with baggage items, making Henry V revoke his order to kill all prisoners (374-75) (*Henry V* 4.6.35-38); in reality this order was not revoked



either in historical fact (Jacob, 1971: 155) nor in Shakespeare, who has been repeatedly criticised for his presentation (Bromley, 1971: 88). And during the Siege of Orleans, Sir John Fastolf with a small detachment brought a convoy of 300 (rather than "400") wagons filled with munitions and much-needed provisions (mainly herrings), successfully defending them against a French-Scottish force. This "Battle of the Herrings" (416-20) reads like a fantasy, but has a historic background (February 1429) near Rouvray. But even at Agincourt, Henry V shows that he has learnt something from Falstaff at Gadshill (372, 290, 312). Also at Shrewsbury, Hal benefited from "the tactics and strategy I had taught him" (290)

What Nye does in relation to *1 and 2 Henry IV* in the novel's middle portion (250-330) is perhaps best described with Genette's as a palimpsest in which well-known scenes and passages are slanted *at maiorem Falstaffii gloriam* and the balance of Shakespeare's plays amusingly skewed as the Falstaff-action assumes pride of place while the large portions in which he is not concerned dwindle. In this process of rewriting (and converting the multiple point of view in drama to a single one in fiction), Shakespeare criticism played an interesting role (Neumeier, 1988: 155). Scholarship is twice jokingly glanced at, when Falstaff quotes the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* called by Thomas Elmham "a disinterested but well-instructed source" (Kingsford, 1910: 61); but Elmham's authorship is no longer accepted (Jacob, 1971:122). Regarding the night at The Boar's Head corresponding to *2 Henry IV* 2.4, Falstaff says that Pistol made "dirty jokes and puns "which nobody could have followed without footnotes" (307). A table of corresponding chapters/scenes will make the unfolding of the tale (and the shifted weights) clear:

| Chapters             | Scenes  |
|----------------------|---|
| LI (250)             | Portrait of Hal   |
| LII (251)            | Portraits of Bardolph, Pistol, Peto, Gadshill, Nym, Poins |
| LIII (252-58)        | 1HIV 1.2  |
| LIV-LVII (259-67)    | 1HIV 2.2  |
| LVIII-LIX (268-75)   | 1HIV 2.4  |
| LX (276-77)          | 1HIV 3.2, 3.1   |
| LXIV (289-91)        | 1HIV 4.2  |
| LXV-LXVI (292-300)   | 1HIV 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4                                   |
| LXVII (300-03)       | 2HIV 2.1  |
| LXVIII-LXIX (304-11) | 2HIV 2.4, 3.1   |
| LXX (312-13)         | Assessment of Hal   |
| LXXI (314-16)        | 2HIV 3.2, 4.1, 3.2  |
| LXXII (317-18)       | 2HIV 4.5  |
| LXXIII (319-23)      | 2HIV 5.3  |
| LXXIV-LXXV(324-30)   | 2HIV 5.5  |

Chapter LIII, refashioning *1 Henry IV* 1.2 is set, as suggested by Edmond Capell (1768) and others, in Westminster Palace, “in a private apartment of the Prince of Wales” (252). Others like Wilson and Humphreys follow Theobald (1733) by setting it in London. Hal deliberately drinks less than Falstaff, and shows malice (254); Poins is queer and is Hal’s “male varlet” (255, 254), while Falstaff shows “superior wisdom and experience” (256) and realises that Hal “was playing with me as he played with his father” (257). The robbery is amusingly given in three versions (LIV-LVI), followed (LVII) by the revelation, put forward by Hudson (1848) and often taken up (Wilson, 1943: 48-56), that Falstaff recognized his attackers in 2.2 and is leading Hal on by his exaggerations (Bradley, 1909: 265) during the dispute in 2.4: “It was my object all along to make the Prince of Wales believe himself to be a much finer fellow than he was” (267). Chapter LVIII continues with 2.4, the playlet climaxing in Hal’s fateful words, “I do. I will” (273, 308). Chapter LIX narrates the picking of Falstaff’s pocket, and Chapter LX provides glimpses of Shakespeare’s 3.1 and 3.2. After a transition about Falstaff’s recruiting methods (LXIV), which deftly paraphrases *1 Henry IV* 4.2, there follow two chapters about the battle of Shrewsbury (LXV and LXVI) with swipes about Hotspur’s, Hal’s and Clarence’s concept of honour (292) which for Falstaff, following in the footsteps of Priestley (314), is just “cant”. Falstaff insists (300) that who killed Hotspur is an “Open Question”, which it is indeed in Shakespeare’s sources, but not in his plays (Bullough, 1962: 191; Jacob, 1971: 52 and E.J. Priestley, 1979: 14); that it might have been Hal or him, but that he blundered in contradicting Hal, for which he was never forgiven (300).

Chapter LXVII is based on *2 Henry IV* 2.1, Mrs Quickly’s attempt at having Falstaff arrested, Chapters LXVIII and LXIX are very skewed reworkings of *2 Henry IV* 2.4, the last Boar’s Head scene, with a hilarious send-up of Henry IV’s soliloquy 3.1.1. worked in (311). Chapter LXXI briefly narrates 3.2, the recruiting scene and 4.1, the despicable trick by which in Shakespeare Westmorland and Prince John of Lancaster dupe and arrest the leaders of the 1405 rebellion in Gaultree Forest —with the symptomatic variation that, according to Falstaff, Prince Hal was in charge and was there, which is historically untrue (Jacob, 1971: 61, Black, 1973: 380). Hal, already characterised as an actor (312, 313, 363) (Winny, 1968: 45-47), acts the contrite son before his dying father, the “Leper King” (LXXII), before the narrative jumps to the second Gloucestershire scene 5.3. Pistol’s arrival with the news that Hal is now King setting in motion the hasty departure for London. The banishment scene 5.5 (LXXIV) is rendered very pathetically, Falstaff’s hand being wounded by Henry V’s spur (Rozett, 2000: 161), in addition to the deeper wounds the harsh speech and “those cold eyes” (328) inflict on his soul. “With the term “Harry the Prig”, a commonplace of criticism inimical to Henry V (Stoll, 1960: 489; Hemingway, 1952: 310), the retrospect (LXXV) adds the last blow to the consistent anti-Hal bias, perceived as Hal’s base ingratitude (300), which extends, again like much criticism (Traversi, 1946: 26; Calderwood, 1979: 37; Willems, 1990: 50) to Hal’s father and brothers (216, 292, 325) and is the reverse side of Falstaff’s equally consistent self-aggrandizement. Like many modern critics, he obviously shares Hazlitt’s opinion that “Falstaff is the better man of the two” (285)

(Quiller-Couch, 1917: 115; Goddard, 1951: 186; Grady, 2002: 144). This bias, understandable from his own point of view, remains unchanged. So does Falstaff's view of himself as essentially, indeed exemplarily, English (13, 159, 429). Though his Englishness differs from that of the establishment (257), the "disestablishments" which he loves are shown up (189). His attitude to killing, war and honour also remains unchanged. As a "professional soldier" (69) he does not gladly fight or kill (135, 294), dislikes war, and thinks little of glory and honour: see especially his silent game, during a talk with the Duke of Norfolk, of substituting 'onions' for 'honour' (241-42), a remarkable pendant to Falstaff's "catechism" in *1 Henry IV*, 5.1.127-40. However, like Shakespeare's character, Falstaff the autobiographer rejects all accusations of cowardice (265).

#### 4. Coda: language, dictation, and metafictionality

There are many other aspects of this exciting and amusing novel which cannot be gone into here, such as the descriptions of Boyhood (20-23), the Black Death (32-37), May Day (162-164), and recurrent motifs like "the chimes at midnight" (146, 233), but three require at least a brief glance. Rozett observes that the innumerable intertexts "blend imperceptibly with Falstaff's eclectic diction" (2000: 158). One must add that Nye's discreet modernising contributes to this (304-309). And, like that of Graves in the *Claudius* novels, his diction as a whole is decidedly modern (Cohen, 1960: 74). What sticks out most are specific turns of phrase that a seventeenth-century person is unlikely to have used such as "the right rate for the job" (39), "forked out" (178), and "starting from scratch" (223), also words that apparently did not yet exist in English, like "prissy" (29, 158, 241), "punch-up" (179), "historicity" (197) "gamahuche" (384) "a nancy", and "sentimentalities" (449).

A few things Falstaff writes down himself (23, 193, 229), but mostly he uses one or other of his six "secretaries", who are sharply distinguished from one another: Worcester (loyal but squeamish), Bussard (imperturbable), Hanson and Nanton (a pair of bisexual lightweights), Friar Brackley (rarely used), and Stephen Scrope, Falstaff's nephew and the most unwilling and rebellious of them all. There was also a seventh, Peter Basset, who wrote a Latin account of Falstaff's French campaigns (198, 366), but he is not present. Falstaff teases and taunts them mercilessly, thus foregrounding the narrative present. Indeed, one reason for the whole enterprise of these "memorials" (25), "annals" (83), and "*Acta*" (255), is that he can annoy these secretaries (192, 193). And they also give rise to much metafictionality, both local (199, 234, 339) and general: "I am your author. Agreed. But I am also *their* author [...] Do you know for certain that any of them exists? [...] Do you know for certain that I exist? That I don't have an author?" (159). Indeed, the whole of 159-60 is in this vein, the reader being offered a part in forming patterns.

Like Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* 2.4.222 "Is not the truth the truth?" (164, 185) Nye's Falstaff often insists on the truth of his tale (1, 172, 278), yet early on doubts are

planted: “Only now is ever true” (42); “Reader, truth is various” (265, 268); it is linked to those in power (83), and Clio, the muse of history, often invoked, is really a whore (64, 77, 153, 154). Truth is also hard if not impossible to get at (190). Falstaff juxtaposes “fact and fiction” (171), and in once place proudly points to having imparted “that air of reality [...] verisimilitude, so necessary to belief” (119). This is where nephew Scrope comes in. Shirking secretarial work for a long time, he eventually does some. And Nye gives him seven “Notes” of his own—in which Scrope unleashes his hatred and contempt for Falstaff and his “monstrous lies” (337), branding the whole compilation as “a work of fiction” (387). And, as Falstaff is increasingly struck with blindness (340, 352), Scrope can get away with writing what he wants to, and even tamper with Falstaff’s will (444). And he has the last word because “the Devil is dead” (448). All through, Scrope has been presented in such a negative light—mean, pig-headed, narrow-minded, vicious, etc.—that one is really sad to find out in Falstaff’s notes for his confession to Friar Brackley (445–47) that the account of his life was indeed mainly made up, amorous exploits and all. Obliquely alluding to the misunderstanding between Pistol and Silence about “greatest man” (2 *Henry IV* 5.3.88–79), Falstaff sums up the book with “I always cared to picture myself as a great man. I was only ever a fat man” (447, 446). Yeats’ jolly “Fiddler of Dooney” (Stewart, 1976) and Thurber’s Walter Mitty (*Publishers Weekly*) with dozens of others rolled into one. A whale of a story.

## Notes

1. See e.g. Maack (1993: 170), similarly Maack (1991), and notably Schabert (1990), who includes under “fictional biography” Nye’s *Voyage* (23, 61, 103) and Graves’ *Claudius* novels (41). Only once are *Claudius* and *Marie Powell* granted a special status as “fictional historical autobiography” (103). By contrast, see the neat separation of autobiography from biography in Lejeune’s (1975: 18, 38).

2. The last two pieces are not of the same order: chapter XCIX, notes towards Falstaff’s confession, was found later and added under “Halloween, 31st October”; and like Graves’ *Claudius*, Falstaff could not report his own death (whereas Giardina attempts also this, see the “Epilogue”). Therefore Chapter C (significantly dated All Saints’ Day, 1st November), is written by his nephew Scrope (448–50).

3. See Chapter VI: summary of his mother’s play about Pope Joan (29–31); Chapter XXII “The art of farting: an aside of Sir John Fastolf’s” (109–14), which ends in Sternian squiggly drawings, Chapter L “About heroes” (248).

4. For the link to Rabelais via Bakhtin see Neumeier (1988: 160–61): carnivalesque physicality and emphasis on the bodily functions; also Ángeles de la Concha (2004: 74): two chronotopes, court and low-life; 77–79: the carnivalesque, emphasis on the people.

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