

From Oldcastle to Falstaff
The Politics of Martyrdom and Conformity in 1 and 2
 Henry IV

There is a critical consensus that Shakespeare's Falstaff is linked to the fifteenth-century Lord Cobham, the Lollard Sir John Oldcastle, who was remembered as a proto-Protestant martyr in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.¹ Evidence suggests that Shakespeare's Falstaff was once called Oldcastle in performance. In *1 Henry IV* Hal addresses him as 'my old lad of the castle' (1.2.40), there is an unmetrical line that could easily be mended by replacing the name 'Falstaff' with 'Oldcastle' (1H4 2.2.105), and the 1600 quarto of *2 Henry IV* contains the speech prefix 'Old.'² Whether intentionally or not, it seems that Shakespeare had offended the sixteenth-century inheritors of Oldcastle's title, William Brooke and his son Henry, and therefore had to change the name.³

Earlier critics read Shakespeare's portrayal of Oldcastle/Falstaff as a Catholic satire of a revered Protestant martyr.⁴ However, David Scott Kastan has noted that, in the last decades of the sixteenth century, the Lollards became increasingly associated with Puritanism and its supposedly

¹ I cite the *Henry IV* plays from the following editions: *King Henry IV Part 1*, ed. David Scott Kastan, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Bloomsbury, 2002; *King Henry IV Part 2*, ed. René Weis, The Oxford Shakespeare, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

² Shakespeare, *Second part of Henrie the fourth* B2v. Alternative explanations for these textual traces of 'Oldcastle' have been offered by Kastan, who notes that the unmetrical line is part of a passage printed as prose up to the eighteenth century and thus perhaps not evidence of revision. He also suggests that the speech prefix 'Old.' might instead refer to 'Old man' (*Shakespeare after Theory* 218nn.4 and 5). Concerning the performance of 'Sir John Old Castell', which allegedly took place in the household of the Lord Chamberlain, George Carey, on 6 March 1599/1600, Roslyn L. Knutson speculates that this might have been neither Shakespeare's play nor the two-part *Sir John Oldcastle* written for the Admiral's Men, but another, lost play (95–7).

³ For the name change and a call to substitute 'Oldcastle' for 'Falstaff' in modern editions, see Gary Taylor, 'Fortunes of Oldcastle'. For arguments against the name change, see Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* 83–96. On the question of censorship, see Dutton, *Mastering the Revels* 102–7; Clare, 'Art Made Tongue-Tied' 76–80. On the court context of the Oldcastle controversy, see Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics* 401–34; Gibbon; White, 'Shakespeare, the Cobhams'.

⁴ See Gary Taylor, 'Fortunes of Oldcastle' 98–100, and 'Forms of Opposition' 295; McAlindon, 'Perfect Answers' 100.

inherent tendencies towards sedition. According to Kastan, Shakespeare's denigration of the Lollard martyr thus suggests 'a Protestant bias rather than a papist one, providing evidence of the very fracture in the Protestant community that made the accommodation of the Lollard past so problematic'.⁵ That is to say, Shakespeare's satire of the Lollard martyr would have to be read as an attack on Puritanism rather than Protestantism as such.

Significantly, recent criticism has moved away from attempts to tease out Shakespeare's personal beliefs from his literary oeuvre, while nonetheless acknowledging his productive engagement with the various religious developments and forms of belief of his time. In *A Will to Believe* (2014), Kastan comes to the conclusion that 'Shakespeare declines to tell us what to believe, or to tell us what he believed',⁶ and Andrew Hadfield, stopping short of calling Shakespeare a Nicodemite, has recently observed that '[i]f the works are thought to be Catholic then the life looks Catholic; if the works look Protestant then the life looks Protestant too'.⁷ This chapter likewise avoids such vexing questions of confessional identity and instead attempts to shed new light on Shakespeare's treatment of church politics in the *Henry IV* plays. Central to my argument is the fact that Shakespeare turns the historical martyr Oldcastle into a notorious dissembler. While Oldcastle died a witness to the Lollard faith, Falstaff fakes his own death during the Battle of Shrewsbury in order to save his life. Rather than taking sides in a confessional conflict, Shakespeare vindicates the refusal to undergo martyrdom as such. Shakespeare's portrayal of the proto-Protestant martyr can thus be read as a reflection on dissimulation at large, including its religious, political, and, not least, theatrical implications.

This chapter begins by contextualising Shakespeare's portrayal of Falstaff in Oldcastle's Elizabethan afterlife. I argue that Shakespeare makes no claim, especially after the name change, that Falstaff is really supposed to be identified with Oldcastle. However, all of Shakespeare's plays featuring Falstaff are littered with references and allusions not only to the name change but also to Oldcastle's martyrdom. These establish an intertextual framework in which – or rather against which – Falstaff's own dissimulation as a means of self-preservation can be productively interpreted. Furthermore, Shakespeare ties Falstaff's dissimulation to a defence of the theatre itself. By doing so, I contend, he mitigates the stereotypical

⁵ Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* 89. ⁶ Kastan, *A Will to Believe* 7.

⁷ Hadfield, 'Biography and Belief' 23.

hypocrisy of the stage Puritan, with which Falstaff is usually associated. Rather than a satire of the Lollard martyr, Shakespeare's transformation of Oldcastle into Falstaff can thus be read as a vindication of the Elizabethan policy of outward conformity. As such, he is sharply contrasted with Shakespeare's representation of the rebellious Archbishop Scrope in *2 Henry IV*, which highlights the seditious aspect that Elizabethan authorities perceived in any claim to martyrdom and resistance in the name of religion.

Oldcastle in Tudor Historiography

In the sixteenth century, it was not only Catholics that had their doubts about whether Oldcastle really deserved praise as a martyr. There was one massive flaw in Oldcastle's image: he was not just burned as a heretic but also condemned for treason, and no challenge to political legitimacy was more feared in Elizabethan England than the spectre of religious resistance, be it Catholic or Puritan. Oldcastle was convicted of heresy in October 1413, but from then onward his career took a turn that made him a rather problematic figure for the sixteenth century. Oldcastle managed to escape from the Tower and in January became implicated in the so-called Ficket Field Rebellion, a failed uprising outside London. He was not captured, if he was ever present there, and continued to stir unrest before he was arrested in late 1417. According to a contemporary chronicle, Oldcastle declared before Parliament that the assembly had no right to judge him as long as Richard II was still alive, a reference to the pseudo-Richard that the Scots had set up in order to justify their invasion into England earlier that year. Finally, Oldcastle was simultaneously hanged and burned as a traitor to God and King.⁸

John Bale's *Brefe chronycle* (1544) and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* went to great lengths to clear Oldcastle of the charge of treason, to repudiate the rebellious intention of the Ficket Field assembly, and to establish the Lollard martyr as an exemplary forerunner of English Protestantism. Some Tudor chronicles adopted this Protestant revisionism. Richard Grafton, for instance, writes in his account of the Ficket Field rebellion that 'it is not like to be true' that the assembly had a seditious purpose.⁹ Grafton further takes a sympathetic view of Oldcastle's execution, stating that '[s]ome think that the offence of thys Syr Jhon Oldecastell, was neither so greuous nor so heynous as it was inforced to bee' and that Oldcastle was

⁸ For the historical Lord Cobham, see Waugh. ⁹ Grafton IIIV.

merely persecuted for questioning the privileges of the clergy.¹⁰ However, most chronicles remained rather vague and uncommitted in comparison to Bale and Foxe. Edward Hall, for instance, concludes his discussion of the rebellion as follows: ‘The iudgement . . . I leaue to men indifferent. For surely all coniectures be not true, nor all writynges are not the Gospel, and therefore because I was nether a witness of the facte, nor present at the deede I ouerpasse that matter and begyn another’.¹¹ Finally, some chronicles, like John Stow’s *Annales of England* (1592), reproduced pre-Protestant condemnations of Oldcastle, as will be seen later in this chapter. Suffice it to say for now that Oldcastle remained a controversial and divisive figure, and Shakespeare’s mockery of him was, even if it may have insulted the Elizabethan Lord Cobham, by no means exceptionally iconoclastic in terms of the Lollard’s more general historiographical afterlife.¹²

However, Shakespeare’s principal source for the rough storyline of Falstaff was not provided by the chronicles but by his dramatic predecessor, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*. Published in 1598, the play was presumably staged in the late 1580s and arguably was an important model for Shakespeare’s two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.¹³ One of the members of the young prince’s band of robbers in *The Famous Victories* is alternately named ‘Sir John Oldcastle’ or ‘Jockey’. The character’s youthful exploits, which are also prominent in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays, may not have been meant as an insult. Even Bale admitted that Oldcastle’s ‘youth was full of wanton wildness before he knew the scriptures’.¹⁴ In fact, despite its potentially delicate subject matter, the politics of *The Famous Victories* are perversely innocent. While the historical Oldcastle refused to acknowledge the authority of the Lancastrian king, deferring instead to Richard II, who was allegedly still alive in Scotland,¹⁵ no trace of the Lollard’s rebellious nature is to be found in the play.

In *The Famous Victories*, Oldcastle may be a robber, but there is no suggestion whatsoever that he will eventually turn against his King. On the contrary, once the prince is crowned, Oldcastle dutifully observes his

¹⁰ Ibid. 113r. ¹¹ Hall a3r.

¹² On Oldcastle’s historiographical afterlife, see further Patterson, ‘Sir John Oldcastle’. Notably, there is critical disagreement on Holinshed’s position on the Oldcastle controversy. Thomas S. Freeman and Susannah Brietz Monta, in ‘Holinshed and Foxe’, argue convincingly that Holinshed was decidedly less sympathetic towards Oldcastle than Patterson suggests. For a more comprehensive account of Oldcastle’s afterlife and the sources for Falstaff’s character, see also Baeske.

¹³ I cite from the critical edition of *The Famous Victories* contained in *The Oldcastle Controversy*, eds. Corbin and Sedge 145–99.

¹⁴ Bale 7. ¹⁵ Walsingham, *St Albans Chronicle* 2:729.

former fellow-bandit's aura of divinity: 'Oh, how it did me good to see the King when he was crowned! Methought his seat was like the figure of heaven, and his person like unto a god' (9.19–21). The political whitewashing continues as the controversial legitimacy of the Lancastrian dynasty is brushed aside with a crude act of political amnesia. When Henry Bolingbroke vaguely tells his son 'how hardly I came by [the crown], and how hardly I have maintained it' (8.57), the latter replies: 'Howsoever you came by it, I know not; but now I have it from you, and from you I will keep it' (8.58–9). The author(s) of *The Famous Victories* thus judiciously try to evade the sensitive political issues of the play's source materials and re-enact what Paul Strohm has described as a specifically Lancastrian 'program of *official* forgetfulness: a forgetfulness embracing their own dynastic origins, their predecessor's fate, the promises and opportunistic alliances which had gained them a throne'.¹⁶ In *The Famous Victories*, the deposition of Richard II is a non-event.

In his treatment of Oldcastle/Falstaff, Shakespeare ostensibly follows the structural template established by *The Famous Victories* rather than that of the chronicles. That is, he limits himself to Hal and Falstaff's friendship without representing the latter's eventual estrangement from the King as a heretic and traitor. However, Shakespeare is arguably much more willing to explore the ideological troubles of the early Lancastrian dynasty, on both the political and the religious front. For instance, when the future Henry V asserts the legitimacy of his claim to the crown in the presence of his father, the play echoes *The Famous Victories*: 'You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me; / Then plain and right must my possession be' (2H4 4.3.351–2). However, one might rather speak of a parody of *The Famous Victories*, considering that Shakespeare's plays lack the complete political amnesia of their predecessor and revolve to a large extent around the loss of legitimacy that followed the deposition of Richard II, which the prince denies so vigorously at this point. Throughout the play, Jonathan Baldo notes, 'historical memory appears to be the rebels' trump card',¹⁷ as is evident in their frequent allusions to Richard's deposition. Neither is the transformation of Oldcastle into Falstaff so complete as to render the Lollard's political and religious legacy entirely intransparent. Paradoxically, Shakespeare invokes the name change in conspicuous moments of forgetting. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Page declares that she 'can never hit on's name' (3.1.22), and Fluellen's memory in *Henry V* is equally compromised: 'I have forgot his

¹⁶ Strohm 196. ¹⁷ Baldo 68.

name' (4.7.48–9). Presumably, Isabel Karremann speculates,¹⁸ such oddly collective onomastic amnesia could not have failed to remind audiences and readers of the martyr, whose name had so ostentatiously been consigned to oblivion in Shakespeare's plays.

This dynamic of forgetting and remembering Oldcastle's name is in line with Baldo's observation that Shakespeare 'does not simply avoid the difficult inheritance of Lollardy. Instead, he reminds us of what power wishes us to forget, calling attention to the divisions within historical memory in both Lancastrian and Elizabethan England'.¹⁹ While *The Famous Victories* might be considered a *result* of the Lancastrian programme of forgetting, Shakespeare rather sheds light on political and confessional *processes* of forgetting and thus retains an intertextual framework that continuously highlights the contrast between the martyr Oldcastle and the dissembler Falstaff. Even though Shakespeare does not actually represent Oldcastle's treason and martyrdom and follows the politically more anodyne storyline of his dramatic predecessor, this chapter illustrates how Shakespeare's plays both displace and transform, but do not dismiss, the challenge to political and religious authority which the historical Oldcastle embodied.

Falstaff Redivivus

Part of the editorial controversy over whether Oldcastle's name should be restored in modern editions of Shakespeare's plays centres on the extent to which Falstaff has become a distinct character that is no longer, especially in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, related to the historical Lord Cobham. Regardless of the intentions with which Shakespeare may first have conceived the character of Oldcastle/Falstaff, the fat knight eventually took on a life of his own, especially in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which could no longer be conflated with the historical Oldcastle. As David Bevington argues in the single-text edition of *1 Henry IV* for The Oxford Shakespeare, "Falstaff" had become a fictional entity, requiring a single name. Since that name could no longer be "Oldcastle", it had to be "Falstaff", in *1 Henry IV* as in the later plays'.²⁰ However, even if the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not meant to be identified with the historical Lord Cobham and was never called 'Oldcastle' to begin with, the character Falstaff is contaminated with too many traces of the historical Oldcastle – in *all* plays in which he appears or is mentioned – in

¹⁸ Karremann 120. ¹⁹ Baldo 71. ²⁰ Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 1*, ed. Bevington 108.

order for the Lollard martyr simply to be ignored. This does not mean that the historical Oldcastle should be read back into Shakespeare's dramatic character, but rather the contrary: even though the similarities between the two keep haunting Shakespeare's plays, the fact that Falstaff is *not* Oldcastle is a central aspect of his character. As the epilogue of *2 Henry IV* informs us, 'Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man' (30–1). We are justified in taking the epilogue at face value. Still, the invocation of Oldcastle is important because many aspects of Falstaff's behaviour and speech patterns can be fully appreciated only against the foil of the Lollard martyr. His dissimulation and conformity gain their full meaning only in contrast to the alternative of resistance and martyrdom, embodied by the historical Oldcastle, whom Shakespeare's plays refuse to forget entirely.

As Richard Wilson has shown, numerous traces of Oldcastle's fiery demise are still to be found in Shakespeare's plays.²¹ Falstaff is described as a 'roasted Manningtree ox' (1H4 2.4.440), he 'sweats to death' (1H4 2.2.105) in the fiasco of the Gadshill robbery, and he is eventually compared to 'a candle, the better part burnt out' (2H4 1.2.152–3). Even as the aforementioned epilogue insists that Falstaff is not identical with the Lollard martyr, we learn that 'Falstaff shall die of a sweat' (2H4 29) or, as Nell Quickly puts it in *Henry V*, 'he is so shaked of a burning quotidian tertian that it is most lamentable to behold' (2.1.118–20). Allusions to Oldcastle's martyrdom continue in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Falstaff complains that the court 'would melt me out of my fat drop by drop' (4.5.91), Mistress Quickly demands that Falstaff's innocence be tested 'with trial fire' (5.5.84), and the fairies in Windsor Forest '[p]inch him and burn him and turn him about, / Till candle and starlight and moonshine be out' (5.5.101–2). However, though sweating and melting, Falstaff does not burn for the truth of the Gospel.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the only thing that is on fire is Falstaff's libido. He observes that 'the appetite of [Mistress Page's] eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning glass' (1.3.63–4), and the fairies later sing: 'Lust is but a bloody fire, / Kindled with unchaste desire, / Fed in heart, whose flames aspire, / As thoughts do blow them, higher and higher' (5.5.95–8). The jealous Ford even more explicitly clothes his declaration of repentance to his wife in religious terms: 'Now doth thy honor stand, / In him that was of late an heretic, / As firm as faith' (4.4.8–10). Such talk of heresy and constancy recalls Oldcastle's martyrdom, especially because Ford, when

²¹ Wilson, 'Too Long for a Play' 51–2.

spying on Falstaff, chooses as a pseudonym the name 'Brooke', that is, the name of the Elizabethan inheritors of Oldcastle's title.²² However, all these allusions to martyrdom remain metaphors and merely reinforce the contrast between the heroic martyr of old and the silver-tongued and incombustible *bon vivant*, who got away to 'laugh this sport o'er by a country fire' (Wiv. 5.5.234).

The plays' concern with religious controversies is also evident in more contemporary allusions, in particular in Falstaff's Puritan tendencies. Falstaff is remarkably well-versed in the Scriptures. Naseeb Shaheen assigns twenty-three of fifty-five Biblical references in *1 Henry IV* to Falstaff and observes that 'Shakespeare makes him a fallen knight who rejects his religious background, facetiously paraphrases Scripture, and frequently mimics Puritan idiom'.²³ In *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton* (2000), Kristen Poole likewise highlights Falstaff's thinking in categories that had become crucial to the Puritan vision,²⁴ such as his justification of purse-taking in terms of vocation. Similarly, his concern with the difference between the 'saints' and the 'wicked', when he berates Hal for being 'able to corrupt a saint' (1H4 1.2.88), betrays a Puritan mindset, as does his admission that he is 'little better than one of the wicked' (1H4 1.2.91). Contrary to Shaheen, Poole further argues that Falstaff does not deliberately parody Puritanism but is himself a parody of Puritanism in the vein of Martin Marprelate.²⁵ Like Martin, Falstaff is a quick-witted and carnivalesque figure who shares traits with the Lord of Misrule and stands out with his grotesque, Rabelaisian physicality.

There are residual traces of Oldcastle's rebellion in Falstaff's irreverent taunts against Hal's royal status, which would also have resonated with contemporary fears of a Puritan revolt.²⁶ For instance, Falstaff declares: 'I'll be a traitor then, when thou art king' (1H4 1.2.138–9). At another point, he tells Prince Hal: 'If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more' (1H4 2.4.130–3). One might further add that when Falstaff protests that he will 'be damned for never a king's son in Christendom' (1H4 1.2.93–4), an early modern audience might have thought of Acts 5:29, 'We ought [*sic*] rather to obey God than men', one

²² The name was changed to 'Broome' in the Folio for reasons that are far from clear. For an overview of different explanations, see Gibbon 114–16.

²³ Shaheen 408. On Falstaff's Biblical references, see also Hamlin 231–70. ²⁴ Poole 35–6.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 37. For the alleged origins of the stage Puritan in the Marprelate controversy, see also Collinson, 'Theatre Constructs Puritanism' 164–7.

²⁶ Poole 38–9.

of the most important blueprints for religious resistance. However, the threat of rebellion is made only in jest and remains entirely inconsequential. The authors of *1 Sir John Oldcastle* (1599), which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, accused Shakespeare of turning the martyr into a ‘pampered glutton’ and an ‘aged counsellor to youthful sins’ (prol. 6–7), but they did not charge him with slandering Oldcastle as a traitor.

Falstaff’s subversive tendencies are mostly contained, at least in *1 Henry IV*, in a carnivalesque holiday setting without serious consequences.²⁷ However, the repeated invocation of the nexus of religious dissent, martyrdom, and rebellion serves as a constant reminder of the historical Oldcastle’s revolt and arguably provides a foil against which Shakespeare’s treatment of Falstaff gains its specific contours. Unlike Oldcastle, Falstaff exudes life, and the very idea of martyrdom or any other sort of noble death is incomprehensible to him. According to Falstaff’s ‘catechism’ (1H4 5.1.140) – ironically, a genre particularly popular with puritans – honour is nothing but a ‘word’ (5.1.134), or ‘Air’ (5.1.135), ‘insensible . . . to the dead’ (5.10.137). Shakespeare’s fat knight has no appetite for posthumous fame, let alone the crown of martyrdom. When Falstaff comes close to something like martyrdom in his encounter with the imposing Earl of Douglas in the Battle of Shrewsbury, he simply throws himself on the ground and plays possum.²⁸

In the light of the fate of the historical Oldcastle, Falstaff’s miraculous resurrection after the battle is a blasphemous joke. However, this perversion of the very idea of an *Imitatio Christi* culminating in martyrdom was not without resonance in Oldcastle’s controversial afterlife. To begin with, Oldcastle’s constancy in confessing Christ was disputed, as Falstaff’s counterfeiting in Shrewsbury might have reminded Shakespeare’s audiences and readers. Bale reports that when Oldcastle was condemned for heresy, his opponents ‘counterfeited an abjuration in his name’ in order to discredit him,²⁹ as Foxe notes too.³⁰ In turn, Catholic controversialists

²⁷ However, for a perceptive analysis of how Falstaff’s cynicism, corruption, and self-interest become increasingly predatory and abusive as he takes on more responsibilities in part 2, see Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics* 331–45.

²⁸ The episode of Falstaff counterfeiting his own death appears to have been Shakespeare’s own contribution to the Oldcastle myth, but may have been inspired by the clown Strumbo in *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine* (Baeske 88), who likewise pretends to be dead and milks the comic potential of the situation for what it is worth: ‘Let me alone, I tell thee, for I am dead’ (2.6.95). Remarkably, *Locrine* was advertised on the title page of its first edition in 1595 as ‘Newly set fourth, ouerseene and corrected, By W. S.’. Lukas Erne interprets the note as a misattribution that may have been meant to cash in on Shakespeare’s reputation ‘as an author of “lamentable” tragedies in the mid-1590s’ (69). However, Peter Kirwan has reopened the case for the possibility of a Shakespearean revision of *Locrine* (127–38).

²⁹ Bale 46. ³⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments Online* 564–5.

asserted the authenticity of the abjuration. In *A treatise of three conuersions* (1603–4), the Jesuit Robert Parsons triumphantly points out that Foxe ‘setteth downe at length a very ample and earnest recantation of the said *Syr John Oldcastle* taken out of the records, as authentically made as can be deuised’.³¹ As Parson further remarks, Foxe ‘saith nothinge at all against it: but only that it was deuised by the Bishops without his consent. Alleaginge no one author, wittnes, wrytinge, record, reason, or probable coniecture for proofs therof’.³² Evidently, there was no cross-confessional consensus concerning Oldcastle’s constancy.

There are further ways in which Falstaff invokes rather unflattering accounts of Oldcastle’s martyrdom. The most compromising account of Oldcastle’s martyrdom was provided by Oldcastle’s contemporary Thomas Walsingham, whose *St Albans Chronicle* features an inventive but rather cowardly Oldcastle. Linguistic dexterity was also an integral part of the Oldcastle myth established in Bale’s *Brefe chronycle*.³³ Walsingham, however, reads it not in the sense of Christ’s promise to his future martyrs, ‘for it shal be giuen you in that houre, what ye shal say’ (Matt. 10:19), but as evidence for the Lollard’s cowardly tergiversations and attempts to escape martyrdom. The Elizabethan John Stow renders Walsingham as follows:³⁴

the question was asked how he would excuse himselfe, and shewe why he should not be deemed to die: but he seeking other talke began to preach of the mercies of God, and that all mortal men that would be folowers of God, ought to prefer mercy aboue iudgement, and that vengeance pertained onely to the Lorde, and ought not to be practised by them that worship God, but to be left to God alone: with many other words to detract the time, vntill the chiefe iustice admonished the regent not to suffer him to spende the time so vainely.³⁵

This Oldcastle has evidently little to do with an upright and honest confession of Christ, but much in common with Shakespeare’s Falstaff, who talks himself out of the fiasco of the Gadshill robbery, is able to change tactics on the spot, and spends time vainly indeed. Finally, Falstaff’s own resurrection may well have reminded some of Shakespeare’s audiences and readers of a prophecy that Oldcastle allegedly made before his death. Citing Walsingham, Stow writes: ‘the last words he spake, was to Sir

³¹ Parsons, *Three conuersions* Hh7v.

³² Ibid. Hh8r. However, the abjuration is solely documented in the *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, hence possibly a forgery indeed (Waugh 455–6).

³³ Tom McAlindon, in ‘Perfect Answers’, claims that Falstaff’s wit and linguistic skills go indeed back to Bale’s account.

³⁴ Compare with Walsingham, *St Albans Chronicle* 2:729. ³⁵ Stow 572.

Thomas of Erpingham, adiuring him, that if he saw him rise from death to life again, the third day, he would procure that his sect might be in peace & quiet'.³⁶ Oldcastle's defender John Speed accordingly complains in *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine* (1612) that Walsingham had turned Oldcastle into 'a false Christ in rising again the third day'.³⁷

Importantly, such denigrations of Oldcastle's martyrdom were by no means limited to a specifically Catholic perspective. Archbishop Parker had made Walsingham's chronicle available to a sixteenth-century readership with a new edition in 1574 as part of his antiquarian publishing programme, which served to provide the historiographical foundations for the English Reformation.³⁸ In his preface, Parker warns against old wives' tales and monkish fables,³⁹ but the account of Oldcastle, who plays a prominent role in the chronicle, remains unchallenged. In the following decades, Oldcastle's prophecy was gleefully cited by Catholic critics such as the Jesuit Parsons,⁴⁰ but also by the Protestant Stow, who had provided the manuscript for Parker's edition to begin with.⁴¹ The view of Oldcastle as a sectarian charlatan was thus not simply a Catholic fringe opinion but found expression even in works with which Parker strove to shape the historical memory of the English Reformation.

When Shakespeare alludes to such denigrations of Oldcastle's martyrdom in the cowardly Falstaff, he is therefore not necessarily expressing a Catholic point of view. However, it might be equally misleading to read his treatment of Falstaff simply as an attack on the Puritan movement, with which the Lollards allegedly came to be associated towards the end of the sixteenth century, as Kastan has suggested.⁴² In fact, there are crucial differences between Shakespeare on the one hand and Walsingham, Stow, or Parsons on the other. While the latter emphasise martyrdom as the touchstone of Oldcastle's character, which is accordingly found wanting, Shakespeare relativises the merits of martyrdom as such and offers a far more benevolent portrayal of Oldcastle's/Falstaff's dissimulation than any of the polemically invested and confessionalised takes on the Lollard's death. Falstaff is neither a traitor nor the religious maniac portrayed by Walsingham, Stow, or Parsons. Instead, he is a prudent survivor who

³⁶ Ibid. Compare with Walsingham, *St Albans Chronicle* 2:731. ³⁷ Speed 637.

³⁸ See Robinson, "Darke Speech". ³⁹ Walsingham, *Historia brevis* §3r.

⁴⁰ Parsons, *Three conuersions* 2Q6r.

⁴¹ Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* 188n.27. For the probability that Shakespeare used Stow's *Annales* and/or *Chronicles* (1580), although certainly not as his main source, see 1H4 339–44; Shakespeare, *Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. Humphreys xxxv.

⁴² Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* 89.

successfully avoids death on the battlefield and instead expires off-stage, in his own bed. Most importantly, Shakespeare elevates Falstaff's cowardice with a meta-theatrical vindication of dissimulation, which crystallises the religio-political implications of the medium of the theatre. Falstaff's dissimulation is thus inextricably tied up with the nature of theatricality as such.

Falstaff and the Theatre

The meta-theatrical implications of dissimulation are particularly pronounced at the Battle of Shrewsbury. After Hotspur's death, Falstaff is worried that the fearsome warrior may be merely playing dead, as he did himself when he found himself vis-à-vis Douglas: 'How if he should counterfeit too and rise? By my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit' (1H4 5.4.121–3). In a meta-theatrical sense, Falstaff's fears are obviously well-founded. The actor playing Hotspur is counterfeiting indeed and will rise from the dead once he is carried off-stage. Falstaff's suspicions remind the audience that any death – or martyrdom, for that matter – is always tainted with dissimulation when represented on stage.

As Baldo and Karremann further note,⁴³ Falstaff's own resurrection might likewise be read as a meta-theatrical reflection on the ability of the stage to bring the dead back to life or, at least, to lend them a voice and a face. In the history play, Thomas Nashe writes in *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592), 'our forefathers valiant acts (that haue line long buried in rustie brasse and worme-eaten bookes) are reuiued, and they themselues raised from the graue of Obliuion, and brought to pleade their aged Honours in open presence'.⁴⁴ However, while Nashe here ennobles the theatre as 'a rare exercise of virtue',⁴⁵ Shakespeare freely admits the theatre's kinship with 'counterfeiting' of a less than heroic scale. Rather than sidestepping the issue of the theatre's dependence on dissimulation, as Nashe does by touting its moral exemplarity, Falstaff's meta-theatricality deliberately taps into contemporary controversies surrounding theatrical 'counterfeiting' and its dubious moral status. Stephen Gosson, for instance, notes that stage players 'learne to counterfeit, and so to sinne'.⁴⁶ According to Philip Stubbes, the theatre is the right place to go 'if you will learne falshood; if you will learn cosenage; if you will learn to deceiue; if you will learn to play the Hipocrit, to cogge, lye, and falsifie'; even worse, 'if you will learne to

⁴³ Baldo 66; Karremann 86–7. ⁴⁴ Nashe 1:212. ⁴⁵ Ibid. ⁴⁶ Gosson E6r.

murther, slaie, kill, picke, steal, robbe, and roue' or 'to rebel against Princes' and to 'commit treasons'.⁴⁷ In short, the theatres are 'Schooles or Seminaries of pseudo christianitie',⁴⁸ that is, of religious dissimulation, where one may learn to cloak one's crimes with pious hypocrisy.

Many of these concerns are rehearsed in Shakespeare's early plays. In *Richard III*, for instance, Buckingham boasts that his histrionic abilities qualify him as the ideal partner in crime for the Machiavellian Richard:

Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
Speak and look back, and pry on every side,
Tremble and start at wagging of a straw,
Intending deep suspicion. Ghastly looks
Are at my service, like enforced smiles,
And both are ready in their offices,
At any time to grace my stratagems. (3.5.5–11)

Richard himself is, of course, likewise an accomplished actor who has mastered the high art of political theatre and internalised the Machiavellian maxim that '[o]ne must be a great feigner and dissembler'.⁴⁹ As he demonstrates in his hollow performance of piety before the Londoners (*Richard III* 3.7), the 'schools of pseudo-christianity' have served him well.

Yet, even at this stage, Shakespeare hardly subscribes to an unconditional ethos of sincerity. Rather, there seems to be a hint of parody when Richard styles himself early on as 'a plain man' whose 'simple truth must be abused' because he 'cannot flatter and look fair, / Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive and cog' (1.1.47–8). Evidently, the ideal of sincerity can itself be nothing but a pose, as becomes clear when Richard parrots the invectives of the likes of Stubbes against those who 'will learn to play the Hipocrit, to cogge, lye, and falsifie'. Of course, Richard claims to condemn such dissimulation only as a cover for his own murderous intents. As I have noted in the introduction of this book, the theatre frequently displayed such scepticism about sincerity in order to cut nonconformists down to size and to subvert their alleged case against the theatre. In the *Henry IV* plays, however, Shakespeare offers a more innocuous portrayal of dissimulation that considerably softens the edge of anti-theatrical polemics that Shakespeare still works through in *Richard III*.

Falstaff's use of dissimulation hardly amounts to Machiavellian manipulation and power-politics, but is more concerned with inventive forms of self-preservation. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, for instance, Falstaff

⁴⁷ Stubbes 1:145. ⁴⁸ Ibid. ⁴⁹ Machiavelli, *Prince*, ch. 18.

counterfeits in order to save himself as follows: 'I was like to be apprehended for the witch of Brentford. But that my admirable dexterity of wit, my counterfeiting the action of an old woman, delivered me, the knave constable had set me i'the stocks, i'the common stocks, for a witch' (4.5.108–13). In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff likewise justifies counterfeiting as a means of self-preservation, and this time his justification of dissimulation is simply too good to be rejected out of hand. After his brief run-in with Douglas, Falstaff says to himself:

'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me, scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man. But to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth is to be no counterfeit but the true and perfect image of life indeed. (5.4.113–18)

Falstaff's verbal dexterity and intellectual ingenuity are in full display in his metaphorical punning and in his vertiginous paradoxes. Falstaff playfully interweaves truthfulness with dissimulation with a version of the liar's paradox in his declaration 'I lie' – a strange way to insist that he is 'no counterfeit'. To make things even more convoluted, Falstaff is not 'lying' – and therefore lying by claiming to 'lie' – in an additional sense, namely, by punning on the verb's homonym. Falstaff 'lie[s]' next to 'noble Percy' a few lines earlier, but the stage directions inform us that '*Falstaff riseth up*' (5.4.109) immediately after Hal has left, so he no longer lies on the ground by the time he declares that he lies.⁵⁰ Falstaff's ingenious wordplay is an insistent onslaught on the categories of 'truth', 'lying', and 'fiction' and culminates in his take on the counterfeiting metaphor, which confounds any distinction between authenticity and dissimulation. Falstaff does not simply justify dissimulation as a means of self-preservation; he also justifies it as a positively life-giving principle and performs a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of counterfeiting as a mere copy, a second-grade form of reality. If death is a counterfeit of life, Falstaff suggests, life-preserving dissimulation cannot possibly be dismissed as reprehensible counterfeiting.

Falstaff's justification of dissimulation as a means of self-preservation is also closely aligned to a revaluation of theatrical dissimulation. Shakespeare carefully guides readers and audiences towards a meta-theatrical interpretation of Falstaff's 'counterfeiting' when Falstaff suspects that Hotspur may be counterfeiting, which the actor who plays Hotspur is indeed doing.

⁵⁰ On Shakespeare's habit of punning on 'lying', frequently with sexual innuendo, see Ewbank 137–8.

Unlike in the period's anti-theatrical pamphlets, however, counterfeiting does not debase the currency of reality. It preserves 'the true and perfect image of life', a puzzling self-description on Falstaff's part. How can an image be not only 'true' but even 'perfect', without being the thing itself? Falstaff arguably draws attention to his ontological status as a dramatic character when he calls himself an 'image of life', but, again, he does not establish a clear hierarchy between reality and representation when he characterises this image as 'true' and 'perfect'.

Like the protagonist of *Richard III*, Falstaff invokes the imperative of truthfulness, as a correspondence between essence and appearance, only to subvert it ironically. Thus, Falstaff protests that he is 'not a double man' (5.4.138) shortly after, when the prince, surprised by Falstaff's appearance, seems not to trust his own eyes: 'Thou art not what thou seem'st' (5.4.137). However, Falstaff's insistence that he is what he seems to be is of course belied by the many senses in which he is indeed a 'double man'. Falstaff might be considered a 'double man' because he is carrying Hotspur's corpse on his back, but also because Hal may believe him to be a ghost, who is 'double' in the sense of having returned from the dead. Baldo points out numerous additional ways in which Falstaff might be considered a 'double man',⁵¹ for instance with regard to the tension between the historical Oldcastle and the fictional character Falstaff, or the different and mutually exclusive assessments of the Lollard martyr in Tudor historiography. And once more Baldo notes that Falstaff's reflections on duplicity are also legible meta-theatrically in the sense that he is both a character and an actor, perhaps even an actor who doubles roles, as was so often necessitated by the large cast of history plays.⁵² Falstaff's playful disavowal of not being what he seems to be amounts to a dizzying proliferation of meanings and ambiguous explorations of his own irreducible multiplicity, which confounds any simple essentialism. Arguably no other character from Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre straddles the divide between reality and representation, life and theatre, with such virtuosity as Falstaff.

Not only in Shrewsbury but throughout the whole play, pretence, role-play, and reinvention on the spot are not just manoeuvres of deception; they are at the core of Falstaff's character and his vitality. Falstaff is a notorious liar, but his lies and performances are, for the most part, not meant to deceive and could therefore be characterised as what

⁵¹ Baldo 55–61. ⁵² Ibid.

Augustine called 'jocose lies'.⁵³ Falstaff's lies primarily serve to demonstrate his quick wit and to amuse, rather than deceive, his listeners. When Falstaff tries to talk himself out of the fiasco of the Gadshill robbery, Prince Hal remarks: 'These lies are like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable' (1H4 2.4.118–19). This transparency and artificiality of Falstaff's lies make him a thoroughly literary and theatrical figure, and it is only natural that after his virtuoso performance after the Gadshill robbery, he and Hal intend to spin his fantastic tale into 'a play extempore' (2.4.271).⁵⁴ Nonetheless, we are also told that Falstaff and his fictions are not simply a form of insubstantial escapism for a young prince who is reluctant to take on his dynastic responsibilities, but the very fabric of reality: 'Banish plump Jack and banish all the world' (2.4.466–7).

With his insistent paradoxes and contradictions, Falstaff questions not only the distinction between truth and lying but also the distinction between life and mimesis. He is the dramatic equivalent of the baroque *trompe l'oeil*. With Falstaff, the transition from real life to dramatic fiction is always seamless. He anticipates what Anne Righter described as the conception of theatricality in Shakespeare's late romances, a conflation of art and life, which both 'restores the dignity of the play metaphor, and, at the same time, destroys it'.⁵⁵ As with Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale*, the distinction between life and art, between authenticity and dissimulation, ultimately founders. Falstaff is an ontological provocation, which not only amounts to a justification of dissimulation as a means of self-preservation but also subverts the imperative of sincerity that undergirded the case against theatrical dissimulation.

However, Falstaff's dissimulation in Shrewsbury does not end with merely playing dead; it quickly morphs into something more sinister when he suspects that Hotspur may be doing the same. As a consequence, he stabs the corpse in order to make sure that he is truly dead and claims that he was the one who killed Hotspur, 'look[ing] to be either earl or duke' (5.4.142) as a reward for his heroic deed. And not only is Falstaff brazen enough to protest that he is no 'double man' but he also complains 'how this world is given to lying' (5.4.145–6) when Hal points out that 'I killed [Percy] myself, and saw thee dead' (5.4.144). Remarkably, however, the young prince eventually blesses Falstaff's fabulous account of his

⁵³ See ch. 2 of *On Lying* (Augustine, *Treatises* 54).

⁵⁴ For a reading of Falstaff, especially in 1 *Henry IV*, as an embodiment and celebration of theatricality, see also Ghose 148–63.

⁵⁵ Righter 192.

supposed duel with Hotspur in provocatively religious language: 'For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have' (5.4.157–8). Especially in the light of the contrast between Falstaff's dissimulation and Oldcastle's martyrdom, the fact that the prince 'graces' not a martyr but a dissembler is significant. However, Hal's behaviour at this moment is oddly incongruous with the chivalric ethos that he displays elsewhere in the play. After all, he is not only relinquishing his claim to Hotspur's 'glorious deeds' (3.2.146) and 'budding honours' (5.4.71); he is also conniving at Falstaff's desecration of Hotspur's corpse, whose 'great heart' (5.4.86) he claims to admire even in death and to whose body he shortly before administered 'fair rites of tenderness' (5.4.97). Even moments after his most heroic exploits, Hal surprisingly endorses Falstaff's usurping claim to martial prowess.

It is worth recalling that the prince has just been equally tolerant of Hotspur's sins, whose 'ignominy' he is willing to let rest 'in the grave, / But not remembered in thy epitaph' (5.4.99–100). However, Hal's 'rites of oblivion', as Karremann calls them,⁵⁶ are not simply to be taken as a sign of benevolence on the part of the young prince. On the contrary, his covering of Hotspur's face with his own 'favours' (5.4.95) and his refusal to remember Hotspur's rebellion buries the latter's challenge to the doubtful legitimacy of the Lancaster dynasty in oblivion and ultimately 'serves to commemorate the victor's identity rather than that of the deceased'.⁵⁷ When Falstaff distorts the memory of Hotspur even more drastically by claiming to have killed him, Karremann further suggests, Falstaff 'asserts the efficacy of Lancastrian memory politics and simultaneously repudiates it through parody', although the subversive potential of this parodic repetition seems to be contained, at least within the play-world, by Hal's acceptance of Falstaff's false claim.⁵⁸ At any rate, calculated acts of forgetting are an essential aspect of the Lancasters' political style, which goes hand in hand with their penchant for duplicity and manipulation.

Falstaff's counterfeiting mirrors, of course, that of Bolingbroke in the main plot. Bolingbroke counterfeits his own royal persona in Shrewsbury and 'hath many marching in his coats' (5.3.25), with no less significant but somewhat different meta-theatrical implications than Falstaff. Even though Bolingbroke's counterfeiting equally serves to preserve life, it seems to backfire and to debase, rather than preserve, the currency of kingship by reducing it to the trappings of a mere

⁵⁶ Karremann 83. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.* ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 88.

theatrical role from which the real thing can no longer be distinguished.⁵⁹ His son, however, is more successful in turning his duplicitous performances into effective political realities, as when he calculatingly appropriates the persona of the prodigal son so that his 'reformation' may 'show more goodly' (1.2.203–4). Prince John, who is likewise present when Hal turns a blind eye to Falstaff's claim to have slain Hotspur, eventually emulates his brother's manipulation of appearances in an even more problematic register in 2 *Henry IV*, when he tricks the rebels into surrendering with ambiguous promises. Hal's tolerance for Falstaff's lies may be seen to betray a remnant of sympathy for an old boon companion, but this tolerance is also one of a piece with his own readiness to dissemble and to forget the past, when it is convenient to so, which will continue to coexist with his chivalric heroism even in *Henry V*, a play that in Greenblatt's words 'deftly registers every nuance of royal hypocrisy, ruthlessness, and bad faith'.⁶⁰ The dangerously seductive theatricality of a dissembling tyrant like *Richard III* is thus not entirely left behind in the *Henry IV* and *Henry V* plays. However, it is incorporated into a more comprehensive and nuanced vision of dissimulation and of its place in life. As Ewbank has pointed out, it makes little sense to speak of a unified 'concept of the liar in Shakespeare',⁶¹ and this is also true for dissimulation. Unlike contemporary anti-theatrical writers, Shakespeare canvasses a broad and ambivalent spectrum of dissimulation as an integral aspect of life, ranging from harmless entertainment and theatrical vitality over legitimate self-preservation and debasing self-multiplication to ruthless self-advancement.

Jeffrey Knapp has argued for 'a protheatrical tradition that depicted acting as the key to church conformity, and church conformity as the key to acting'.⁶² Falstaff, who rejects the martyrdom of his historical model in favour of theatrical self-invention, could be seen to embody this tradition like few other characters on the Elizabethan stage. In this light, Kristen Poole's assessment that Falstaff is also to be considered a blueprint of the stage Puritan raises questions. Hypocrisy is indeed a typical trait of the stage Puritan, but Shakespeare largely refrains from externalising and projecting unease with dissimulation on a Puritan scapegoat, as some of his contemporaries did.⁶³ While there are many dissemblers in the *Henry*

⁵⁹ Compare with Kastan's insightful discussion of royal counterfeiting in his introduction to *1H4* 62–9.

⁶⁰ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 56. ⁶¹ Ewbank 146. ⁶² Knapp 17.

⁶³ See Introduction.

IV plays, Falstaff is arguably not only the most harmless but also the most attractive of them. To be clear, Shakespeare's portrayal of Falstaff's dissimulation hardly suggests any sympathy for Puritan nonconformity. However, if Falstaff is indeed a stereotypically hypocritical stage Puritan, Shakespeare's recognition of the aesthetic potential of such stereotypes inevitably blunts the edge of the confessional polemics that had given birth to them. Instead of condemning Falstaff's dissimulation, Shakespeare even integrates it into a justification of theatricality that does not aim to refute the charge of dissimulation but acknowledges it, not only as a source of entertainment but also as a life-giving principle, an indispensable thread in the very fabric of reality.

Turning Insurrection to Religion

Shakespeare's defence of the theatre and its concomitant transformation of a traitor/martyr into a hypocritical *bon vivant* are not without political implications. Time and again, Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre raises the question of whether those in power have any claim to the inner life of their subjects and whether the latter are obliged to align their inward thoughts with their outward words. A critical attitude towards the category of the thought crime is evident as early as in *Richard III*, when King Edward regrets the execution of his brother Clarence: 'My brother killed no man; his fault was thought, / and yet his punishment was bitter death' (2.1.105–6). Similarly, Isabella in *Measure for Measure* insists that '[t]houghts are no subjects, / Intent but merely thoughts' (5.1.454–44). Finally, *King Lear* too can be read as a parable about what happens when kings force their subjects to wear their hearts on their sleeve.

Such critical observations on the intrusion of overreaching magistrates into the consciences of their subjects may tempt modern readers to recognise in Shakespeare a fellow-liberal *avant la lettre*. However, it is important to remember that martyrdom, as an uncompromising alignment of inward convictions and outward actions, was always a potential act of political disobedience in the pre-secular early modern state. Especially in the case of the English model of royal supremacy, defying the Church was tantamount to defying the monarchy. Hence, the alternative of outward conformity on the dissenter's part was not only seen as a right to privacy but also conceived as a political duty by *politiques* such as Jean Bodin: 'when we may not publicly vse the true religion . . . least by contemning of the religion which is publicly

receiued, we should seeme to allure or stirre the subjects vnto impietie or sedition, it is better to come vnto the publike seruice'.⁶⁴ In turn, political authorities had good reasons to leave the inner life of their subjects alone, so as to avoid a conflict of conscience between spiritual and political allegiance that was liable to subvert political authority. As I argue in the remainder of this chapter, Shakespeare explores this relationship between secular and religious obedience and the political status of dissimulation in the contrast between the politically quietist Falstaff and the rebellious Richard Scrope, Archbishop of Canterbury. Even though the 'real' Oldcastle is absent from Shakespeare's plays, the nexus of martyrdom and treason, which he embodied in Elizabethan historiography and confessional polemics, is thus present in the person of Scrope and his fellow-rebels, whose insurrection is likewise cloaked in the language of religious resistance. Whereas *The Famous Victories*, Shakespeare's dramatic predecessor, simply neutralises the delicate political questions raised by the historical Oldcastle, Shakespeare displaces them on other characters in the play.

Scrope's actual reasons for joining the rebellion remain rather opaque in Shakespeare's plays.⁶⁵ In his *Civile Wars*,⁶⁶ Samuel Daniel suggests that the Archbishop's purpose was to take revenge for his cousin William Scrope (mistaken for a brother in Shakespeare's main sources, Holinshed and Daniel, as well as by Shakespeare himself), Earl of Wiltshire, who was executed in the political turmoil of Richard II's deposition. Shakespeare mentions the execution in *Richard II* (3.2.141–2) and briefly alludes to it in *1 Henry IV* when Worcester tells Hotspur that the Archbishop 'bears hard / His brother's death at Bristol, the Lord Scrope' (1.3.265–6).⁶⁷ However, the execution is not mentioned as a motive for rebellion in *2 Henry IV*. Instead, the rebels and Scrope in particular repeatedly invoke Richard's deposition and Henry Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne. In doing so, they resume an argument that the historical Oldcastle, according to some sources, had made in a similar form. Quoting from Walsingham, Stow records that Oldcastle refused to be judged by the representatives of the Lancastrian monarchy 'so long as his liege lord king Richard was alieue, and in the realme of Scotlande'.⁶⁸ What is at stake in

⁶⁴ Bodin, *Of the lawes and customes [République]* 539–40.

⁶⁵ On the historical Archbishop Scrope, see McNiven. ⁶⁶ Daniel, *Civile Wars* 4.79.

⁶⁷ Holinshed writes that 'to make their part seem good', the Percys had enlisted 'Richard Scroope, archbishop of Yorke, brother to the lord Scroope, whome king Henrie had caused to be beheaded at Bristow' (3.23). The motive is thus suggested, but not spelled out explicitly as by Daniel or Shakespeare.

⁶⁸ Stow 572.

the chronicles as well as in the play is the legitimacy of the Lancastrian dynasty.⁶⁹ Just as Oldcastle's challenge to authority was political as well as religious, Scrope's participation in the rebellion marks the venture as both political and religious. This dynastic as well as spiritual challenge to authority cuts to the heart of the historical Lancastrians' efforts to cement their doubtful legitimacy by touting their commitment to promoting true religion,⁷⁰ which is reflected in Shakespeare's plays, for instance in Bolingbroke's commitment to a crusade.

Again, there is precedent in the sources for Shakespeare's treatment of Scrope. Holinshed, for instance, reports that Scrope promised 'forgiuenesse of sinnes to all them, whose hap it was to die in the quarrell' (3:36), and after the venture went awry, '[t]he archbishop suffered death verie constantlie, insomuch as the common people tooke it he died a martyr' (3:38). In Daniel's version, the Archbishop too uses his religious authority in order to support the uprising:

And euen as *Canterburie* did produce
 A Pardon to aduance him to the Crown;
 The like now *Yorke* pronounces, to induce
 His faction for the pulling of him [i.e. Henry IV] down.
(*Civile Wars* 4.76)

Such religious components also play an important role in *2 Henry IV*. During the negotiations between the rebels and the royal party, Prince John confronts the Archbishop in the following terms:

. . . You have ta'en up,
 Under the counterfeited zeal of God
 The subjects of his substitute, my father,
 And both against the peace of heaven and him
 Have here upswarmèd them.
(4.1.252–6)

As critics have noted,⁷¹ the prince confronts the Archbishop in perfectly orthodox terms. His argument closely echoes the 'Homilee agaynst disobedience and wylful rebellion', which had been added to the second edition of the second tome of *The Book of Homilies* (1571) after the

⁶⁹ Notably, the play's explicit references to Richard are almost completely absent from the 1600 quarto edition of *2 Henry IV*, possibly as a result of censorship. With the rising tensions between the Earl of Essex and Queen Elizabeth around the time of publication, the political legacy of Richard's deposition seems to have become a difficult topic. The passages in question are 1.1.189–209; 1.3.85–108; 4.1.55–79; 4.1.101–37. For the censorship theory, see *Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. Humphreys lxx–lxxiii; Clare, *'Art Made Tongue-Tied'* 68–70; Dutton, *Mastering the Revels* 262n.41.

⁷⁰ Rex 82–4. ⁷¹ Groves, *Texts and Traditions* 139–40.

Northern Rising. According to the homily, rebels 'would pretende sundry causes, as the redresse of the common wealth . . . or reformation of religion (whereas rebellion is most agaynst all true religion)' and make a 'great shewe of holy meanyng by begynnyng their rebellions with a counterfet seruice of God'.⁷² In *2 Henry IV*, Westmoreland accordingly accuses the Archbishop of 'seal[ing] this lawless bloody book / Of forged rebellion with a seal divine' (4.1.91–2). Even Morton, one of the rebels in *2 Henry IV*, observes that the Archbishop, '[s]uppos'd sincere and holy in his thoughts' (1.1.202), '[t]urns insurrection to religion' (1.1.201). Religious justifications for resistance are necessarily counterfeit, as the homily as well as Prince John point out (and Morton freely admits), because true religion demands obedience to the secular magistrate, God's substitute on earth.

By introducing the argument that religious resistance is a mere pretext for ulterior motives, Shakespeare invites us to revisit the ethical and political implications of Falstaff's dissimulation. The verbal parallel between Scrope's 'counterfeited zeal of God' and the homily's condemnation of 'a counterfet seruice of God' on the one hand and Falstaff's counterfeiting in Shrewsbury on the other troubles any simple opposition between a supposedly authentic martyrdom and dissimulation as a duplicitous means of self-preservation. As *2 Henry IV* suggests in line with the 'Homilee agaynst disobedience and wylful rebellion', any claim that one's rebellion is divinely sanctioned amounts to a hypocritical instrumentalisation of religion. Such hypocrisy is much more reprehensible than outward conformity with the Established Church, which is not only tolerable but falls under the scope of the political duties of the subject. Accordingly, Shakespeare presents the 'constant martyr', Archbishop Scrope, as the *real* hypocrite, whereas the temporising anti-martyr Falstaff emerges as the unsung hero of the Elizabethan settlement.

In his version of the Scrope rebellion, Shakespeare may reproduce the conservatism of official Tudor political theology, but, as already mentioned, the royal party in the play does not cut a very good figure either. Prince John and Westmoreland succeed in persuading the rebels to surrender only by means of an equivocating promise that their demands will be met, tricking them into believing that they may escape without punishment. While Daniel excuses this Machiavellian ruse by pointing out that Westmoreland's 'wit did ouerthrowe, / Without

⁷² *The second Tome of Homilees* 588.

a sword, all these great feares' and thus prevented a bloody battle,⁷³ Shakespeare does not paint over the sordid nature of the whole business. What is more, the treachery at Gaultree Forest mars the dream of unifying a wide range of political and religious positions under the newly established Lancastrian dynasty. As Shakespeare suggests, a pardon might have been more prudent. When discussing a possible truce before the negotiations with the royal party, the rebel Mowbray rightly suspects that the offer of reconciliation 'proceeds from policy, not love' (4.1.146). Hence he objects to the offer because he fears retaliation on the least occasion:

... were our royal faiths martyrs in love,
 We shall be winnowed with so rough a wind
 That even our corn shall seem as light as chaff,
 And good from bad find no partition. (4.1.191–4)

That is to say, Mowbray does not believe in forgiveness but expects an indiscriminating purge, regardless of the sincerity of their submission. Mowbray's religious language at this point ('martyrs in love') anticipates the Biblical argumentation of Scrope's reply, as does his reference to corn and the partition of good from bad. Taking up Mowbray's cereal imagery, Scrope rejects Mowbray's fears with an allusion to the Biblical parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24–30). According to the Archbishop, the King

... cannot so precisely weed this land
 As his misdoubts present occasion.
 His foes are so enrooted with his friends
 That plucking to unfix an enemy,
 He doth unfasten so and shake a friend. (4.1.203–7)

Whereas Mowbray fears that indiscriminate royal retaliation will uproot them even if they mean to remain loyal, the Archbishop trusts that the King will heed the Gospel's warning, 'lest while ye go about to gather the tares, ye plucke vp also with them the wheat' (Matt. 13.29). Scrope thus argues that precisely because of this difficulty of distinguishing between wheat and tares, that is, traitors and loyal subjects, the King will refrain from settling all his scores.

With his reference to the Biblical parable of the wheat and the tares, Archbishop Scrope might be said to secularise a prominent ecclesiological argument for tolerating hypocrisy. Heinrich Bullinger, for instance,

⁷³ Daniel, *Civile Wars* 4.78.

deduces the imperative not to weed out hypocrites from the *ecclesia visibilis* in his sermon ‘Of the holie Catholique Church’ from the same proof text: ‘We saie that the wicked or hypocrites, be in like sorte in the Church, as chaffe is in the corne’, which God nonetheless ‘forbiddeth to bee plucked vp, least that therewith the corne be plucked vp also’. Hence, they are to be ‘suffered, least some woorse mischief happen to the whole bodie of the Church’.⁷⁴ Richard Hooker too recommends tolerating hypocrisy with reference to ‘those parables which our Savior in the gospel hath concerning mixture of vice with virtue, light with darknes, truth with error’.⁷⁵

Shakespeare’s play reiterates in a political register Bullinger’s and Hooker’s concern that being excessively precise about hypocrisy might lead to ‘some worse mischief’ than accepting the intermixture of wheat and tares. Thus, Archbishop Scrope builds his case for abandoning armed conflict in favour of negotiations on the hope that the Lancastrians will wisely refrain from a general purge. Notably, Peter Lake points out that the rebels’ serious consideration of negotiations, both in Shrewsbury and at Gaultree, suggests that they never meant to dislodge Henry IV in the first place.⁷⁶ The talk of Richard’s deposition only begins to swell in part 2, when the stakes are raised after their initial defeat.⁷⁷ The rebels’ political radicalism thus stands in a proportionate relationship to the Lancastrians’ reassertion of political dominance.

Judging by the *Henry IV* plays, the New Historicist dictum that power produces its own subversion is perhaps better understood in a less totalitarian and more literal sense than its Foucauldian roots intimate. The economic exercise of power advocated by *politiques* may offer a more suitable point of reference for Shakespeare’s analysis of power politics: ‘the lesse the power of the soueraigntie is’, Bodin observes, ‘the more it is assured’.⁷⁸ Notably, Bodin applies the same logic to the question of toleration when he argues that harsh measures of persecution will not simply uproot religious dissenters for good but rather reduce them to such desperate straits that they will ‘tread also

⁷⁴ Bullinger, *Decades* 818.

⁷⁵ Hooker 2:352. For the parable of the tares as an argument for tolerating hypocrisy, see also Hooker 1:199. For the central place of Bullinger’s *Decades* in English Protestantism, especially in the first half of Elizabeth’s reign, when they clearly outshone Calvin’s *Institutes*, see MacCulloch, *Later Reformation* 71; for the Augustinian roots of Bullinger’s and Hooker’s toleration for hypocrites (specifically those Nicodemites who denied Christ during the Diocletianic Persecution) on the grounds of Matt. 13, see Bainton 69–71.

⁷⁶ Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics* 296. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Bodin, *Of the lawes and customes [République]* 517.

under foot both the lawes and magistrats, and so inure themselues to all kinds of impieties and villanies, such as is impossible by mans lawes to be redressed'.⁷⁹ In contrast, restraint can serve to defuse conflict, as is also suggested when Scrope persuades his fellow-rebels to abandon resistance and argues for a peaceful settlement with the Lancastrians because he believes that they will exercise restraint in weeding out the tares. Like Bodin, Shakespeare seems to suggest that the deliberate self-restriction of one's claim to power might be employed as a technology of power that is not simply a renunciation of authority but rather serves to consolidate authority against the challenge of religio-political dissent in the long run.

The Lancastrians, however, are too short-sighted to see that. Instead, they follow Machiavelli's precept in *The Prince* that an enemy should be crushed for good if the occasion offers itself and that any means, even perjury, are legitimate in the process.⁸⁰ With their equivocating promise of a pardon, Prince John and Westmoreland want to have it both ways, that is, to avoid a military confrontation but also to finish off the rebels for good. However, while this trick can be pulled off only once, rebellion is a hydra. As Hastings prophesies to Prince John, even before his perjury, 'success of mischief shall be born, / And heir from heir shall hold this quarrel up / Whiles England shall have generation' (4.1.273–5). And next time, nobody will be so foolish as to trust the Lancastrians' word.⁸¹

As I have argued in this chapter, Shakespeare's transformation of the Lollard martyr John Oldcastle into the cowardly Falstaff has both political and theatrical significance. Shakespeare's portrayal of the Scrope rebellion expresses a deep distrust in martyrdom, its politically subversive nature, and the possibility of instrumentalising the rhetoric of martyrdom for ulterior purposes. Hence, the parodic traits in his continuous contrast between Oldcastle's martyrdom and Falstaff's habits of lying and dissimulation are hardly as malevolent as they have often been assumed to be. On the contrary, Falstaff is free from the taint of treason, which had made Oldcastle such a problematic figure for the sixteenth century. Even as a stage Puritan who habitually resorts to lying and dissimulation, Falstaff is a remarkably benevolent figure and lacks, especially in *1 Henry IV*, the more sinister traits of his Marlovian and Jonsonian equivalents, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7. Rather than distantiating

⁷⁹ Ibid. 539C. ⁸⁰ Compare with Machiavelli, *Prince*, chs. 3 and 18.

⁸¹ As McAlindon has shown in 'Swearing and Forswearing', perjury lies at the root of the process of political, social, and moral disintegration which Shakespeare portrays in his account of the War of the Roses.

the theatre from Falstaff's lies, Shakespeare puts a formidable justification of dissimulation into Falstaff's mouth, which also amounts to a defence of the theatre. Shakespeare thus aligns outward conformity with theatricality. However, such a whole-hearted endorsement of outward conformity was by no means the rule on the early modern stage, as I will show in the following chapters.