

Henry IV Part 1

SYNOPSIS

The First Part of Henry the Fourth

After deposing Richard II, Henry Bolingbroke has become king as Henry IV. He has a guilty conscience about how he took the throne and his position is threatened by rebellions, particularly of Northumberland and his son Henry Percy, nicknamed Hotspur for his brave and impetuous character. They support the claim to the throne of Hotspur's brother-in-law Edmund Mortimer, who is also supported by the Welsh Owen Glendower. These political scenes alternate with others showing the dissolute life led by Henry's son, known as Harry or Hal. Hal spends his time in the ale-houses and brothels of Eastcheap in London, where his closest companions are a group of rogues and thieves around a fat drunkard called Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff organizes a highway robbery, but when he and his companions have stolen the money, Hal and another companion steal it from them in turn. Afterwards Falstaff, who has not recognized Hal, claims that they have been robbed by a far larger gang. When Hal is summoned by his father, he and Falstaff play the scene they think might happen when his father asks about his way of life, and Falstaff hopes that Hal will never repudiate their friendship.

Under the threat from the rebels, Hal returns to his father and joins him in the fighting, while Falstaff recruits a ragged troop of soldiers. In the battle of Shrewsbury, the King defeats his enemies, and Hal kills Hotspur. The less heroic side of the fighting is shown by Falstaff and his friends.

Media:

DVD:

An Age of Kings (BBC TV 1960), dir. Michael Hayes (a fusion of all the history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*)

Chimes at Midnight (1966), dir. Orson Welles (centred round the Falstaff scenes in *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2)

Henry IV Part 1 (BBC TV Shakespeare 1979), dir. David Giles

My Own Private Idaho (1991), dir. Gus Van Sant, with River Phoenix (the story, about rent boys in modern America, and characters make references to *Henry IV*)

Henry IV Part 1 (Shakespeare's Globe 2012), dir. Dominic Dromgoole, with Roger Allam

Henry IV Part 1 (BBC TV 2012), dir. Richard Eyre (part of mini-series *The Hollow Crown*)

Not commercially available:

The Wars of the Roses (1990), dir. Michael Bogdanov (a filming of the 1987 English Shakespeare Company stage production, uploaded to YouTube)

CD Audio:

Henry IV Part 1 (Marlowe Society)

Henry IV Part 1 (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]