

## **The Structure of Laughter in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV***

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Received: 08 /31 /2022

Accepted: 10/04 /2022

Published: 10/24/2022

### **Abstract**

Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* (c.1597) is the second play in a group of four that deals with the first two Lancastrian kings of England, Henry IV and his son Henry V. This loosely connected series is known as the Second Tetralogy because even though the events portrayed precede the four plays that deal with Henry VI and Richard III, Shakespeare wrote those set earlier in English history a little later in his career. The main aim of this study is to investigate the carnivalesque in *1 Henry IV*, understood as a layer of unofficial or popular culture that plays against and undercuts or inverts the official world of the court, high politics, and chivalry. The significance of this study lies in its analysis of how this interaction structures the play; these are not just surface features. The main question is how the carnivalesque affects the level of high politics in the play. The context for the study derives from critical approaches to the play that have been influenced by critical theory, especially in the carnivalesque; the procedure is a detailed qualitative analysis using techniques of textual criticism. The main finding is that the play is not only structured along these lines but also that the level of high official culture is itself put in question by a full awareness of the historical events mentioned in the play.

*Keywords:* Aristotle, carnivalesque, chivalry, grotesque, ideology, laughter, performance, Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, structure

**Cite as:** Innes, P. (2022). The Structure of Laughter in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies* 6 4)2-14.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol6no4.1>

## Introduction

A full appreciation of the carnivalesque is necessary when commenting upon the range of Renaissance culture. It needs conceptualizing as a popular alternative to official, hierarchically privileged world views. Accordingly, an understanding of how the drama of the period allows for some questioning of the dominant ideology. In the case of *1 Henry IV*, analysis often takes the form of a comparison of the grotesque world of Falstaff with the figure of the king, via the formation of the young Prince Hal. The critical perspective is then usually taken forward through *2 Henry IV* and onwards into *Henry V*, which is postulated as the end point of a consistent form of character development, as though these plays constitute a fully realized series. Shakespeare's company did perform them in sequence, which the term 'Second Tetralogy' implicitly recognizes; still, the question needs asking whether the late modern insistence on the centrality of characterization is helpful when it comes to an understanding of the theatre of a much earlier period.

Rather than simply take a characterological progression through the plays for granted, it may be more fruitful to disperse attention away from a simple focus on the figure of the prince. There are some correspondences between the plays, and these associations move through each of them. Still, it is undoubtedly a genuine possibility that too much attention to the man who will become Henry V retrospectively imposes a character-based organizing principle on plays that can achieve so much more than this, even in modern performance interpretations. Indeed, such an emphasis may well obscure this play's urgent dramatization of the conflict between the requirements of high chivalric culture as phrased by the nobility and the principle of comedic inversion applied to this ideology by the inclusion of Falstaff and his friends. Their energy can often contrast on stage with the cold, stiff, formal world of the court of the Lancastrian usurper. The play ahistorically mirrors Prince Hal and Hotspur, which leads to further questions about the legitimacy of the new regime. Hotspur may often be produce some laughs in performance, but the point is that laughter in this period has a serious function as it produces alternatives to the official ideology of a king under constant pressure. Like Hal and Falstaff, Hotspur has the energy that King Henry IV lacks since all he can do is react to events such as the Percy rebellion. He is not a proactive ruler. Or, to pose the issue differently, the dramatic function of these stage fictions is carefully structured by the carnivalesque inversion of courtly and chivalric ideology.

Although these are not new ideas, they nevertheless need further investigation regarding the play's structural composition. They are central in ways previously used to describe the prince's character, and the emphasis on his importance can obscure how the laughter of the carnivalesque challenges the official viewpoint. The rationale and significance of the present study lie in the way it relates the carnivalesque and its opposing high culture to the very structure of the play and a recognition that the layer of political history is problematized in performance. It is essential to reinvigorate the carnivalesque by stressing its crucial function in Renaissance culture and its manifestation in this play. The question is what happens when a character is decentralized and replaced with a rigorous insistence on the cultural principle of carnivalesque laughter. The underlying research objective is to challenge the ahistorical imposition of later modern categories of character upon this much earlier play. In other words, the intention is to remove the power of subsequent individualism by returning the play to its socially charged context. The paper is

structured in sections, with a Literature Review covering material on Shakespeare and the carnivalesque, especially concerning *1 Henry IV*; some commentary on the methodology; textual analysis; discussion of the findings; and an overall concluding section. There is also an appendix containing a table that details the relationship between the play's two main discursive layers in visual terms.

## Literature Review

### *Shakespeare and The Carnavalesque*

The work of the Russian theorist M.M. Bakhtin on the carnivalesque remains foundational (Bakhtin, 2009). He makes extensive use of the early novels of Rabelais as a means to recover medieval and Renaissance popular culture. In this respect, the book, first published in English in 1968, is an essential corrective or supplement to studies of humanism and official culture, which is usually much easier to access in the manuscript or later print forms. Bakhtin reinvigorates the study of folk traditions as a result and his work has influenced much literary and cultural analysis and theory.

It is not surprising to find that Bakhtin's work has influenced Shakespearean scholars who seek to re-imagine the more immediately popular aspects of English Renaissance theatregoing in its context. This kind of work started to appear during the 1980s as part of the exponential growth in theoretically informed criticism. An essential full treatment is Michael D. Bristol's book on carnival and theatre (Bristol, 1985). Shakespearean criticism is exceptionally well known for its propensity to adapt to new areas of inquiry. Bristol's work demonstrates that it can also reopen older avenues such as Bakhtin's conceptualization of the carnivalesque. It may be a result of the central prominence accorded Shakespearean drama as a result of his canonization as the Bard but in any case, the re-injection of some sort of awareness of Renaissance popular culture into his plays has been fruitful. To some extent, this has come about due to how a Bakhtinian analysis can dovetail neatly with other aspects of the field, such as its openness to folk culture, as evidenced in previous decades by the work of C.L. Barber on comedy (Barber, 2011), first published in 1959. Another important congruent area is that explored by Robert Weimann in a book that is the first seriously to theorize how performance would have been managed on the Renaissance stage by and for its own culture, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Weimann, 1978).

The cross-currents produced by these significant interventions have also produced other works on Shakespeare's relationship with Renaissance popular culture, such as Francois Laroque's re-imagining of the terrain covered by C.L. Barber (Laroque, 1993). Terms such as festivity and ritual have long since become staples of work in Shakespeare's plays, as the logic of popular and carnivalesque culture has been refined and extended. Naomi Liebler's *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy* is a case in point; this book knowingly reworks Barber's earlier title by developing the meanings associated with popular ritual to tragedy, which has traditionally and erroneously related ritual theater to the province of high culture only (Liebler, 1995). Her book also has the distinction of being the first to recognize the source material for *Titus Andronicus* in the works of the later Roman historian Herodian (Liebler, 1995).

These significant works represent a field of forces within which analysis of individual plays takes place. Accordingly, carnivalesque and folk culture influenced criticism of many of Shakespeare's plays. A short overview of some of the most well-known should suffice here, and it is essential to note that these works cover a range of Shakespeare's plays, not just comedies. Many comprise edited collections that provide valuable essays on similar subjects close to one another. One example is Ivo Kamps' *Materialist Shakespeare* (Kamps, 1995), such as the essays by Louis Montrose on *As You Like It*; Stephen Greenblatt on the folklore of the Land of Cockaigne; and Michael Bristol on the comedic elements of *Othello*. This collection contains several essays that pick up on popular associations because of their materialist or historicist positions. Other examples would be Richard Wilson's essay on holiday in *Julius Caesar* (Wilson, 2002) and Catherine Belsey on how Shakespeare's comedies play with disguise in the significant collection *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985). The intensely qualitative nature of literary and dramatic critical work gives it a longevity that permits long-term associations to emerge between various niche elements of work in Shakespeare's plays; cross-fertilization of ideas is crucial in this field.

### *The Carnavalesque in 1 Henry IV*

Within the context of theorized work on carnival and folk culture sketched above, it becomes easy to see how many of Shakespeare's plays incorporate these elements into the action. Stock character types such as the Fool (in almost all of the plays, including the tragedies), the Unruly Woman, the Old Father, the Young Lover, and the Braggart Soldier all make their appearance. Correspondences between English drama and the *Commedia dell'arte* derive from folk tradition – for a fuller analysis see Bristol (1985). Other stock types, such as those based on the psychology of the humors, or the Machiavel, come from different areas of cultural production and work across the folk elements in fascinating ways. Tracing these correspondences is well beyond the purview of the present essay, but it is possible to see how *1 Henry IV* incorporates some of them at the structural level. The most crucial aspect of this play is the principle of comic inversion, as the laughter associated with the world of Falstaff and his friends contests the official ideology of warfare and high politics.

Scholarly editions of the play note how the figure of Prince Hal mediates the oppositional relationship between the world of the king and the world of the fat knight in ways that often complicate the supposed categorization of *1 Henry IV* as a history play. David Scott Kastan's Introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Arden edition (the edition the remainder of this essay uses for reference) serves as a case in point (Kastan, 2002). Indeed, he entitles this section of his Introduction as "Mingling Kings and Clowns: History, Comedy, and Dramatic Unity" (Kastan, 2002, p. 7). Kastan then explicitly refers to the carnivalesque elements of the play with the term "Rabelaisian" (p. 51). Such a move demonstrates that a contemporary editor feels the need to address the Bakhtinian logic of the play directly. However, he relates the figure of Falstaff to controversy over the proto-protestant Sir John Oldcastle. He tutored Henry V before he became king (Kastan, 2002). This section serves to introduce the fat knight to the reader of his Introduction, and Kastan then builds upon this in the following sections on counterfeiting kings and interpretations of "honor" in the play (Kastan, 2002). Kastan's whole discussion interestingly starts from a structural question about the function of Shakespeare's outstanding comic creation.

Barbara Hodgdon follows a different route in her play edition (Hodgdon, 1997). She picks up on many of the same associations as Kastan in his slightly later edition. Still, provides a much shorter Introduction supplemented by contextual information. Part Two of her volume is entitled "Early Modern Documents and Controversies" (Hodgdon, 1997, p. 119) and includes material on the Oldcastle issue (Hodgdon, 1997). Unlike Kastan, however, she does not engage directly with the carnivalesque in the play. Instead, she concentrates on the characterization of the Prince and Falstaff. She produces a standard way of approaching the play, a comment that bears comparison with the Folger's online version at [https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/henry-iv-part-1/?\\_ga=2.268166990.134128628.1661673339-1309922915.1647851351](https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/henry-iv-part-1/?_ga=2.268166990.134128628.1661673339-1309922915.1647851351).

The accompanying summary concentrates not only on how the play characterizes its leading figures; it relates them entirely to the motif of the family:

Family relationships are at the center of *Henry IV, Part 1*. King Henry IV and Prince Hal form one major father-son pair, with Henry in despair because Hal lives a dissolute life. The father-son pair of Hotspur (Lord Henry Percy) and his father, the Earl of Northumberland, is in seeming contrast; the king envies Northumberland "his Harry," wishing he could claim the gallant Hotspur as his own. Meanwhile, Hal has entered into a quasi-father-son relationship with a disreputable but amusing knight, Sir John Falstaff. Another strand of action centers on still more family relationships. Hotspur's stand against Henry focuses on Hotspur's brother-in-law, Mortimer. Mortimer, who fought against the Welsh magician Owen Glendower, was defeated and captured and married Glendower's daughter. King Henry pronounces Mortimer a traitor whom he will not ransom. Hotspur, in declaring war on Henry, sees himself as fighting for Mortimer, his wife's brother. (Folger online text, eds. Mowat and Werstine, 2020, last accessed 28 August 2022)

There is no mention of the fundamental logic of the carnivalesque in the play; instead, everything is seen in purely interpersonal terms, as if these are real people as opposed to dramatic fiction. Indeed, the text describes Falstaff as "a disreputable but amusing knight," (Mowat & Werstine, 2020), which marginalizes his crucial inversion of royal authority, to put it mildly. The accompanying critical material on the website is much more sophisticated than this but the example serves as a helpful reminder of the continuing power of modern ideas of individualistic characterization and how they are often retrospectively and ahistorically imposed on plays from a much earlier period. The point is that society produces the carnivalesque, and to reduce the meanings generated by the play to personal interaction alone is to miss out on a whole range of possibilities.

It is possible to be even more precise about the passage from the online Folger version. The issue centers on its use of the term "family," which in modern English is often accompanied subconsciously by the modifier "nuclear," even if only invisibly, because of the crucial importance of family to modern Western sensibilities, especially in the middle classes. However, the period in which Shakespeare was writing – and the period he writes about in this play – has no single overarching conception of this nature. Instead, "family" must be understood as "dynasty," and emphasizing familial relationships with all their modern connotations will ultimately ignore the

social and political dimension of *1 Henry IV*. The modern family is personal, while the dynastic has broader social ramifications, and the behaviors pertinent to one will be irrelevant to the other.

Accordingly, Falstaff is not simply disreputable but amusing. He figures forth a counter-discourse to the official world of the king, a comic inversion structured in exact social terms based on the logic of the carnivalesque. This idea can be identified as the central research question when analyzing the play: to what extent is it possible to uncover this broader social realm of meaning? Secondary criticism has circulated endlessly around these interrelated issues. That which concentrates on the personal, usually employing the characterization of the knight and the prince, often fails to account for the social production of sense. The modern preoccupation with meaning as inherent to the individual becomes deeply problematic when it assumes that *1 Henry IV* is part of a series. There may be a recognition that there are slight variations between its component elements but these are often through the psychological development of Prince Hal as though he is a real person.

An excellent example of this propensity towards centralized, monolithic meaning occurs in Leon Harold Craig's book (Craig 2015). The book's subtitle refers to the *Henriad* and Craig reads the character of Prince Henry as the central component of a unified whole, from *1 Henry IV* through *2 Henry IV* to *Henry V*. He does so in terms of Hobbesian philosophy and does an excellent job of it indeed – if one accepts its accompanying assumptions. His book raises essential questions: can it be assumed that these three plays constitute a tightly knit coherent whole? Is the developing identity of the heroic king central in this way? Can Shakespeare's populist drama, with its attendant *ethos* of the carnivalesque, be taken to exemplify a philosophical position that appears well after Shakespeare's death? Craig's book may be an excellent example of philosophical analysis. Still, substantial questions remain, not the least of which is the challenge posed by the popular performance culture of Shakespeare's period, embedded as it is firmly within the realm of the carnivalesque. To put it briefly: is Shakespeare a philosopher or a popular dramatist?

Accordingly, not all criticism published after the initial wave of critical theory accepts its findings concerning the carnivalesque. There is still often a tendency in critical work to privilege some form of central coherence. This unifying factor is something that firmly goes against the multiplicity produced by carnival. The whole point is that the carnivalesque laughs at the arrogance of official culture and its discourses, especially political philosophy and the arguments it proposes for war and other favorite pastimes of the aristocracy. The importance of lineage is one such target, especially for Falstaff in this play, as indeed Kastan suggests with his section on honor mentioned previously. English Renaissance drama is interested not only in a multiplicity of meaning but in dynamic discursive relations. That is the whole point of theatre, especially on the popular stages of Shakespeare's London.

The present paper is, therefore, in the vein of work associated with the materialist and historicist critics produced in the wave of critical theory beginning in the 1980s. Simon Barker undoes any simplistic assumption about the centrality of the ideology of war across the so-called *Henriad* when he writes:

However, it might also be said that Shakespeare invites as much scepticism about heroic militarism in *Henry V* as in earlier plays. If the figure of Henry has traditionally been regarded as an embodiment of heroic militarism, or at worst a pragmatic leader, it has taken the earlier plays to get him to either position. In the *Henry IV* plays Prince Harry was more bound to codes of drinking and civilian licence than warlike pursuits. (Barker, 2007, p. 134)

Although he does not use the term carnivalesque here, Barker nevertheless suggests that the world of the drinking den has its own “codes,” which detracts from any assumed coherence in Henry’s character development across the plays. The more historically inflected critics have tended to underscore this kind of multiplicity, from Stephen Greenblatt’s famous essay “Invisible bullets” in *Political Shakespeare* (Greenblatt, 1996), first published in 1985, through much of the work of Graham Holderness (Holderness, 1986; 1992a; 1992b), to feminist accounts of masculinity and warfare in the histories such as Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin’s *Engendering A Nation* (Howard & Rackin, 1997). Accordingly, a massive amount of work exists on Shakespeare’s history plays, including *1 Henry IV*, in the wake of the explosion of critical theory onto the scene in the 1980s. Harold Craig’s book, however, proves the persistent longevity of longstanding assumptions about character coherence across the “Henriad,” a term with concomitant echoes of monolithic epic centralized meaning. It is, therefore, well worth investigating how laughter structures *1 Henry IV* with the logic of folk culture and its comedic contestation of the official. It does seem paradoxical, but more work of this kind still needs doing because, after the initial burst of enthusiasm occasioned by theorized criticism, relatively little has appeared on the play in the last few years. The situation may well be due to the current theoretical debates regarding the intersectionality of gender and race, which has for some time been the main growth area in the field. The historical plays do not lend themselves to this vital aspect of English Renaissance culture so well as plays like *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice*. Work on state power, together with its containment strategies and subversions, is still needed. The present essay seeks to restate some of the terrain associated with these issues.

While recent critical material on the play often refers to the carnivalesque, it does so in relatively limited terms. The structural importance of the term can go unrecognized even in essays that include some commentary on the play’s carnivalesque elements. For example, Dipak Sarkar’s article on aging in the two *Henry IV* plays notes the inversion of rational norms that takes place in both plays but does not deal directly with the carnivalesque itself, even in relation to Falstaff (Sarkar, 2020). A similar issue occurs in another relatively recent carnivalesque element of the play, the figure of Mistress Quickly, who is closely associated with Falstaff in the tavern scenes (Raby et. al., 2019). The carnivalesque as the subject of inquiry in and of itself is, therefore, mostly missing from relatively recent criticism. The present paper intends to meet this gap in the literature.

## Method

The methodology and techniques adopted in this paper follow best practices in the Arts and Humanities. Literary, dramatic, and cultural studies use detailed qualitative analysis. The literature search above notes the theoretical framework that situates this paper while simultaneously describing the persistence of traditional viewpoints that concentrate meaning on characterization and relations between individuals. It also mentions the relative absence of recent writing on the

play. The time is, therefore, ripe for a complete analysis that reworks the play following prior theorized work by discussing specific scenes. The crucial confluence of textual, contextual, and performance elements provides a basis for further work by subsequent researchers. The emphasis is on the centrality of the play's structure, a focus that permits a theorized movement away from rather simplistic assumptions about characterization. Additionally, a further maneuver takes place that moves the debate on from the opposition between the official discourse of the court and its inversion in the taverns. The courtly and chivalric ideology is itself shown to be contradictory.

The essay has no participants; it is not a Social Science paper and does not claim any form of quantitative analysis. Again, this is well in keeping with the techniques of cultural analysis in the domain of the Humanities. The instruments adopted are the time-honored ones of textual scrutiny and theorized debate; there is no data collection in the quantitative sense. The procedure is accordingly one that is entirely appropriate to this kind of subject.

### Analysis

The table in Appendix A visualizes the play's organization of the two main competing discourses. More importantly, however, it also demonstrates that while the main body of the play, from the beginning to the end of Act Three, functions by interspersing the carnivalesque world of Falstaff with the official world of the court, the end of the play brings the two layers together. Accordingly, *1 Henry IV* lays out a conflicted relationship between courtly ideology and its opposite, but then as the play moves towards its climax, the two come together on the stage. The counterpoint maneuver integrates the comic inversion of courtliness with its opposite at the end of the play – the two layers become wholly intertwined.

The schematic view of the play shows how this operation takes place at a fundamental structural level. In performance, the famous double inversion of the king's court in 2.4 is often played as the central moment in the play, for laughs initially and then much more seriously. After the revelation of the truth of the Gadshill robbery, Falstaff plays the part of the king in a precise rendering of the principle of comic inversion:

Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time but also how thou art accompanied. For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on the faster it grows, so youth, the more it is wasted the sooner it wears. The thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me [...] And yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name. (2.4.388-409)

The use of prose emphasizes the comedy. Falstaff uses various inversions as part of his rhetoric: the symbolic relevance of camomile; the villainous appearance of the prince; and the final



reference to his own virtue, which the next section of the conversation continues. None of this is historically accurate and the point seems to be a comic performance for its own sake.

However, the two then switch sides, and Prince Hal takes the place of his father, while Falstaff stands for the prince:

Swearst thou, ungracious boy? Henceforth ne'er  
look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace.  
there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat  
man; a tun of man is thy companion. (2.3. 433-436)

The prince continues in this vein for some time, and Falstaff tries to play along with it. Eventually, he replies:

No, my good lord,  
banish Peto, banish Bardoll, banish Poins, but for sweet  
Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff,  
Valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being  
As he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company. Banish  
Plump Jack and banish all the world.

*[Loud knocking within. Exeunt Bardoll and Hostess]*

PRINCE: I do; I will. (4.2.461-469)

Although there is no warrant for it in the stage directions, this moment is often played with a hanging silence for effect, even as a form of tableau, the point being that here the machinations of the prince become apparent. The carnivalesque inversion of the king's position is itself inverted. It is possible to see Hal as a manipulator, someone who is using his time amongst the lower orders to get to know his people well, all the better to govern them when his time comes.

This interpretation makes perfect sense, especially in modern performance, with its inevitable emphasis on the primary importance of the individual. The relationship between the prince and Falstaff smoothly plays off against that between the two Henries, father and son. A form of criticism that inevitably valorizes characters as individuals, as real people and the relationships between them, can easily produce a familial discourse. However, the moment does not relegate Falstaff to the margins, as can easily be seen in the tabulated schematic overview of the play's structure provided in Appendix A. After this scene, the play brings the two layers onto the stage together. Falstaff has such an important role during the battle scenes at the end of the play that his function seems inadequately explained in purely familial terms.

Indeed, the useless knight turns into a mouthpiece for a powerful piece of anti-war rhetoric after the parley between the two sides in the civil war. His speech is rendered in soliloquy, which underlines its importance, and comes just as the prince reminds Falstaff that he owes God his death and then leaves:

'Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay him  
before his day. What need I be so forward with him that

calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter, honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? Ho then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism. (5.1.127-140)

Shakespeare is careful to stage this extraordinary materialist assault on conceptions of high honor immediately after the dealings of the high aristocracy and royalty, just before the battle takes place. Falstaff reminds the audience that a battle is bloody, but more than that, he reckons that honor is incapable of helping those wounded, maimed, and killed in its name. The scene is a precise staging of the alternative view posed by the carnivalesque use of terms of the material body, the domain of folk culture. Eventually, Falstaff derides honor as "a mere scutcheon", attacking the outward signs usually associated with it. The coat of arms, the badge, and the blazon are all visual emblems of hierarchy, but for Falstaff, they are built on empty concepts compared with the death and destruction they bring; here, laughter is at its most satirical and serious.

The remainder of the play goes on to show what Falstaff means as, amongst other events, he pretends to be the one who kills Percy when he finds the body after Prince Hal has done the deed (5.4.73). However, the performance of this lie is not only in keeping with his actions throughout the play, as a sort of reprise of the Gadshill episode, and it draws attention to problems within the noble ideology of chivalric warfare itself.

## Discussion

The preceding textual analysis demonstrates that by the end of the play there is no longer simply a contest between two discourses; instead, the official worldview appears deeply flawed in and of itself. Falstaff could not possibly pretend to have defeated Percy after his emblematic conflict with the prince because this did not happen. The Battle of Shrewsbury almost saw the demise of Prince Henry when an arrow grievously wounded him in the face, penetrating threateningly close to his spine at the back of his neck:

The prince would, of course, have been in full plate armour with a visored helmet, but at some point, he must have raised the visor, either to breathe easier on a hot day, to obtain a better vision of the action around him, or simply to show his face to rally his troops. Whatever the reason, the action could have cost his life for he was struck full in the face by an arrow.

An expert has assessed that it must have been deflected, or possibly it was only half-drawn or at the limit of its range, for a fully drawn arrow would surely have killed him. Instead,

this smashed through the facial bone below his eye, missed both the brain and spinal cord, and lodged in the thicker bone at the back of the skull (Cole 2016, p. 45).

There is no glorious personal combat between Hotspur and Prince Hal, nor indeed that shown on stage as taking place at the same time between Falstaff and Douglas, from which the former only escapes by the expedient of playing dead. The wounding of Prince Henry is so well-known that it renders the dramatic version spurious at best. Of course, this is entirely in keeping with the Shakespearean dramatization of events, especially given the play's constant emphasis on the rivalry between the prince and Hotspur. Such a situation is at best a half-truth since the Northern lord was, in fact, in his mid-thirties, so the play's insistence on them as competing and being of similar age is not historically accurate.

The footnotes in scholarly editions often make these aspects of the play's emblematic staging into a secondary concern. Still, they demonstrate that the representation of the official ideology of the Lancastrian court is knowingly mistaken. The carnivalesque layer gets the last laugh because the history of the nobility and royalty in the play is so suspect. Shakespeare's representation of historical events, therefore, plays with its own moves as a result. His play openly dramatizes its misrepresentations.

### Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to investigate the carnivalesque in *1 Henry IV*, understood as a layer of unofficial or popular culture that plays against and undercuts or inverts the official world of the court, high politics, and chivalry. *1 Henry IV* stages a less heroic vision of chivalric combat as it moves towards its climax, and there is much more to the play than layering effects. The carnivalesque plays with official courtly ideology. The analysis here shows that the play manages a supposedly superior layer of official ideology in ways that are not at all straightforward or even truthful. Many in Shakespeare's audiences would be aware of these issues because they would know the history in some detail – at least enough to be able to question how the play presents the conflict between Hal and Hotspur. A more detailed analysis of the play's events will support this view, such as how the northern lords challenge the Lancastrian version; after all, they placed the upstart Duke on the throne in the first place. It would also be possible to undermine this king's conduct in the Battle of Shrewsbury by further investigating how he used body doubles (such as Sir Walter Blount in the play) to lessen the chances of his demise. This battle was a rather desperate affair, as the severe wounding of his son and heir demonstrates. Shakespeare chooses to omit such a crucial moment in favor of an emblematic version of personal combat between Hal and Hotspur. The carnivalesque wins the contest between the competing layers of discourse and the official version undoes itself. Either way, it is pretty much Falstaff who gets the last laugh.

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**Appendices**  
**Appendix A**  
**Structural organisation of 1 Henry IV**

Table 1.

Official Courtly Ideology	Carnavalesque Inversion	Confluence of both
1.1 The king’s court		
	1.2 Prince Hal, Falstaff and Poins	
1.3 The king and the northern lords		
	2.1 The tavern-house	
	2.2 The Gadshill robbery	
2.3 Hotspur at home		
	2.4 The tavern. Famous double inversion of the royal court	
3.1 The conspirators		
3.2 The royal court. Interplay between the king and his son		
	3.3 The tavern	
4.1 The conspirators		
		4.2 Falstaff and Bardoll; the Prince and Westmoreland
4.3 The conspirators		
4.4 York		
5.1		Parley. Falstaff on honour
5.2 The conspirators		
		5.3 Hotspur and Douglas. The Prince and Falstaff
		5.4 Falstaff and Douglas; the Prince and Hotspur
5.5 Aftermath of the battle		