

# FALSTAFF'S BELLY, BERTIE'S KILT, ROSALIND'S LEGS: SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE

ADRIAN POOLE

---

We can all see ourselves in Shakespeare. But if you were the Prince of Wales you'd be bound to take a particular interest in Hal – and therefore in Falstaff. Imagine therefore that you're Albert Edward Prince of Wales, familiarly known as Bertie, that you're eleven years old, that it's the Christmas holidays of 1852, that Charles Kean and his troupe are giving a command performance of *Henry IV, Part I* at Windsor Castle for your mum and the rest of the family. And that Falstaff makes you laugh. Many years later the actor playing Prince Hal will recall your reaction to 'the scene where Falstaff boasts of his bravery with his shield and buckler'. Like this:

The Royal heir to the throne of England became so engrossed with the comicality of the scene (admirably played by Bartley) that he was carried away completely. He wore a tartan dress, and as tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks in his ecstasy, he rolled up his tartan and at the same time rubbed his knees with great gusto. His sister, the Princess Royal, saw with horror the innocent impropriety, and never shall I forget her terrified glance round the room. However, finding that all were intent upon the scene, she gave one vigorous tug at the tartan, which restored propriety and brought the happy boy to a sense of the situation.<sup>1</sup>

What futures lay ahead of them. The Princess Royal would marry the Crown Prince of Prussia and give birth to a boy called Willy, the future Kaiser. Her brother Bertie would wait and wait as Prince of Wales for almost fifty years before ascending the throne for a mere nine-year stint as King Edward VII. His mother had dreamed he might be the first King Albert. But as Henry James noted,

he was bluntly known as 'fat Edward', and, with slightly more wit, as Edward the Caresser.<sup>2</sup>

But back to the shameless boy and his kilt. I take the anecdote to symbolize all sorts of strife in Victorian culture. Keeping the body at bay is hard work. It's a constant battle to stop happy boys getting engrossed, feeling ecstasy, lifting up their dresses and rubbing their knees with gusto. You'll need more than one vigorous tug at the tartan. Like other Victorian boys intent on happiness and prone to impropriety, poor Bertie's whole upbringing consisted of tugs at the tartan from his father and mother and their surrogates, plus the odd birching. No wonder he became addicted to the pleasures of the flesh, especially after his father Prince Albert's death in 1861 when his mother renounced the world and committed her eldest son to a state of permanent freezing reproof. She had never much cared for Bertie, and now the shock of his first sexual transgression had killed his father, so she liked to believe. This Prince of Wales found himself cast as a Hal who could never be forgiven. So why not just carry on misbehaving?

To understand the Victorian Falstaff we need to go back to the Regency years and an earlier Prince of Wales. Or to be less exact, we need to consider the whole turbulent era marked by Uncle George. That is, the period of nearly fifty years marked by the coming of age of the future George IV in 1783,

---

<sup>1</sup> Fred Belton, *Random Recollections of an Old Actor* (London, 1880), pp. 159–60.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Weintraub, *The Importance of Being Edward: King in Waiting 1841–1901* (London, 2000), p. 390.

## SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE

his accession to the Regency in 1811 and to the throne in 1820, and his death in 1830. In a sense this era was continued up to the young Victoria's coronation by his brother's brief intervention as William IV. When someone suggested to Queen Victoria that she might be bringing up her son and heir too strictly she answered: 'Remember, there is only my life between his and the lives of his Wicked Uncles'.<sup>3</sup> It was not only his mother who was troubled by the comparison, especially with Wicked Uncle George. It was clearly implied in the prayer uttered by Canon Sydney Smith in the Sunday sermon at St Paul's just after his birth, and explicitly voiced by the anonymous author of the pamphlet *Who Should Educate the Prince of Wales?* two years later in 1843.<sup>4</sup> As he neared the age of thirty, the satirical magazine *Tomahawk* had a cartoon of him as Hamlet swearing to the ghost of Uncle George, 'I'll follow thee'.<sup>5</sup> In 1867 readers of *The English Constitution* would have thought of their own Prince of Wales as Walter Bagehot reflected on the moral to be drawn from his predecessor the Prince Regent's example, that 'All the world and all the glory of it, whatever is most attractive, whatever is most seductive, has always been offered to the Prince of Wales of the day, and always will be. It is not rational to expect the best virtue where temptation is applied in the most trying form at the frailest time of human life'.<sup>6</sup> Which is rational and generous.

For the Victorians Falstaff is associated with the Regency era in two main ways. Both are dominated by images of 'liberty', but one is menacing, libidinous and libertine, while the other is comforting, regressive and luxurious. One is overtly political in its attendance on royalty and the idea of the monarch-in-waiting, the great expectations invested in him and the threat of privilege abused. The other is more ostensibly personal in its memories of childhood and good times, especially of eating and drinking and rubbing your knees with gusto. This is notably true for writers of the generation of Thackeray and Dickens, born respectively in 1811 and 1812, for whom the Regency and post-war years were profoundly associated with Shakespeare's great figure of conviviality. The shade of

Falstaff presides over the eating and drinking essential to the conduct of most (male) literary life in the middle decades of the century. The young Tennyson and his Cambridge friends regularly swapped Falstaffian banter, accusing each other of being 'gross and fatwitted', and so on.<sup>7</sup> It's no coincidence that one of the founders of *Punch* (in 1841) and its long-serving editor, Mark Lemon, should have played Falstaff in Dickens's uproarious production of *The Merry Wives* in 1848. (The cast included Dickens as Shallow and Mary Cowden Clarke as Mistress Quickly.)

The role played by Falstaff in Dickens's imagination is a rich and complex one.<sup>8</sup> There is the obsession with Gadshill. There are the chimes at midnight that gave him the title of his second Christmas book. There is the stimulus provided by Mistress Quickly and Falstaff to the Trial of Bardell against Pickwick (specifically the scene in *2 Henry IV*, Act 2, scene 1), and the more diffused associations between Pickwick and the Windsor Falstaff.<sup>9</sup> For at least one reviewer however it was not Pickwick but Sam Weller who 'made old England more

<sup>3</sup> Weintraub, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Weintraub, pp. 4, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Reproduced by Allen Andrews, *The Follies of King Edward VII* (London, 1975), p. 101. *Tomahawk* was the pseudonym of Arthur à Beckett, son of one of the original staff of *Punch*. The magazine ran for three years from 1867, and featured some mild anti-royal satire. On 7 March 1868, under the title 'A Princely Programme', it contrasted the Shakespeare once played at Windsor with the vulgar fare now sponsored by the Prince of Wales at Sandringham, including can-cans, *poses plastiques* and choruses such as 'Rumti-tiddyti-bow-wow-wow' by the Jolly Dogs' Choir and a Finale consisting of 'Grand Steeple-chase over the Furniture by the Entire Company (Lady riders up)' (vol. 11, p. 96).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Miles Taylor (Oxford, 2001), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, eds. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1982), pp. 70, 96, 145.

<sup>8</sup> See Valerie L. Gager, *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> See John Glavin, 'Pickwick on the Wrong Side of the Door', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 22 (1993), 1–20. Glavin has a suggestive line of thought about the way Pickwick 'miscarries from Falstaff...' and offers to 'misread the entire novel along a template of *The Merry Wives*' (pp. 3, 4).

‘herrie’ than it had ever been since Falstaff drank, and roared, and punned, at the Globe Theatre’.<sup>10</sup> For another, Falstaff provided a model for the immortality to which the Wellers and the Pecksniffs, the Swivellers and the Micawbers had soared, ‘immortals of lesser note, and more of mortal mixture, but still of the same lineage with Falstaff’.<sup>11</sup> To Dickens himself Falstaff was a name for the power of performance to melt the world around him. Like the grim person who entered the theatre, so he told an audience in 1863, ‘a mere figure of snow, but who gradually softens and mellows’ until his face ‘realizes Falstaff’s wonderful simile of being like a wet cloak ill laid up’.<sup>12</sup>

Falstaff was no less important to Dickens’s great rival, the creator of ‘that fat *gourmand*’ Jos Sedley.<sup>13</sup> One of Thackeray’s illustrations to *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) shows Jos as a Falstaff entertained by Becky Sharp’s Doll Tearsheet. In his ‘Memorials of Gormandising’ Thackeray muses approvingly on the legend that Shakespeare died of a surfeit brought on by carousing with a literary friend from London: ‘And wherefore not? Better to die of good wine and good company than of slow disease and doctor’s doses’.<sup>14</sup> Recall that the new King Henry advises Falstaff to ‘Leave gormandizing’.<sup>15</sup> As for Hal and his father, ‘Tom Eaves’ is credited with these sardonic reflections in *Vanity Fair*, à propos Lord Steyne and Gaunt House: ‘Take it as a rule . . . the fathers and elder sons of all great families hate each other. The crown prince is always in opposition to the crown or hankering after it. Shakespeare knew the world, my good sir, and when he describes Prince Hal . . . trying on his father’s coronet, he gives you a natural description of all heirs-apparent’.<sup>16</sup> Thackeray’s full treatment of the Hal–Falstaff relationship however is in *Pendennis* (1848–50), where the Major plays Falstaff to his nephew’s Prince. The Major yearns for the days ‘of the wild Prince and Poyns’, a phrase which recurs in *The Newcomes* (1853–5) and *The Adventures of Philip* (1861–2).<sup>17</sup> The Major is the bad mentor who promotes all Pen’s shallowest ambitions, until the climactic chapter LXX (‘Fiat Justitia’) in which Pen turns on his uncle and says in effect ‘I know thee not old man’.

Perhaps the most poignant celebration of this early Victorian nostalgia for the roistering Regency comes from a man lampooned by Thackeray in this same novel as Captain Shandon. Some twenty years older than Thackeray and Dickens, William Maginn was a prodigally gifted and fatally dissipated contributor to *Blackwood’s* and to the *Fraser’s Magazine* he helped to found in 1830. ‘Barring drink and the girls, I ne’er heard of a sin:/Many worse, better few, than bright, broken Maginn’. Thus the kindly epitaph from John Gibson Lockhart after his death in 1842.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1830s Dickens extracted from Maginn a series of eight papers on Shakespeare.<sup>19</sup> The first of these is an extraordinary elegy to a Falstaff that is also a painful self-portrait. Falstaff’s deep hidden melancholy is not to be confused with Jaques’s shallow posturing, says Maginn, for the iron has not entered into Jaques’s soul, as it has into Falstaff’s. And the resemblance between Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch is merely superficial: ‘they are as distinct as Prospero and Polonius’ (505). Falstaff’s real affinity is with the Macbeth who despairs at the thought of the things that should accompany old age and will never do so for him. ‘The comic Falstaff says nothing on the subject’: and yet, ‘neglect, forgotten friendships, services overlooked,

<sup>10</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine* (December 1850), in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London, 1971), p. 245.

<sup>11</sup> Mowbray Morris, *Fortnightly Review* (1 December 1882), in *Dickens: Critical Heritage*, p. 611.

<sup>12</sup> Speech to the Royal General Theatrical Fund (4 April 1863), quoted by Gager, *Shakespeare and Dickens*, p. 300.

<sup>13</sup> *Vanity Fair*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford, 1983), p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Memorials of Gormandising. In a Letter to Oliver Yorke, Esq. By M. A. Titmarsh’, *Fraser’s Magazine* (June 1841), 724.

<sup>15</sup> 2 *Henry IV*, 5.5.53 (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn (Boston, 1997)).

<sup>16</sup> *Vanity Fair*, p. 592.

<sup>17</sup> In *The Newcomes*, vol. 1, chs. 10 and 28, and *The Adventures of Philip*, vol. 1, ch. 7.

<sup>18</sup> William Maginn, *Miscellanies* (London, 1885), vol. 1, p. xviii.

<sup>19</sup> First published as ‘Shakespeare Papers. – No. I: Sir John Falstaff’, and ‘No. II: Jaques’, *Bentley’s Miscellany*, 1 (May 1837), 494–508, and (June 1837), 550–60. Reprinted, along with papers on ‘Romeo’, ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream – Bottom the Weaver’, ‘His Ladies – Lady Macbeth’, ‘Timon of Athens’, ‘Polonius’ and ‘Iago’, in *Shakespeare Papers: Pictures Grave and Gay* (1859).

## SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE

shared pleasures unremembered, and fair occasions gone for ever by, haunt him, no doubt, as sharply as the consciousness of deserving universal hatred galls the soul of Macbeth' (501). Yet it is not only Falstaff's melancholy with which Maginn identifies. He conceives of a Hal who is truly spellbound by Falstaff, and in the great scene of repudiation he imagines that it is only by the skin of his teeth that the young King manages to turn 'the old master-spirit' away.<sup>20</sup> He mustn't let Falstaff get a word in edgeways. One lightning repartee and Falstaff would not have been packed off to prison but invited to the coronation dinner. Hence for the King, 'His only safety was in utter separation . . . He was emancipated by violent effort'. And yet – 'did he never regret the ancient thralldom?' (497) It takes violence, it seems, or a vigorous tug at the tartan, to escape from being a happy prince, enthralled and engrossed, and become a sad grown-up monarch.

Only a lonely brooding reader could turn Falstaff into Macbeth, and Maginn was predictably cutting about the crudity of theatrical Falstaffs. For the sharpest possible contrast we could turn to the leading American exponent of the role in mid-century, James H. Hackett. Hackett was thoroughly provoked by the lofty reception accorded his Falstaff at Drury Lane in 1840. The *Times* reviewer particularly got his goat by opining of Falstaff that 'With all the bold outline and full-facedness of a coarsely painted Dutch clock, he has all the delicate organization of a Geneva watch; and hard is it for the actor to avoid marring some part of the fine machinery'.<sup>21</sup> Rubbish, said Hackett. Why all the palaver about Falstaff's inner workings? He's not Hamlet for God's sake. And as for all this English deference to his gentility . . . The man is just a rogue, 'with no amiable or tolerable quality to gloss or cover his moral deformity, except a surpassingly brilliant and charming wit, and a spontaneous and irresistible flow of humour'. The nub of the matter is that 'the character was designed for stage-effect';<sup>22</sup> you just have to do the lines.

Nothing could be further from Maginn's impassioned reading, and I'd suggest that the difference between them marks something more than the usual rivalry between performer and reader.

The quality of the rift anticipates the receding of Falstaff as a powerful imaginative source and resource, from about 1860 onwards. It's as if Falstaff's body and spirit become too sharply dissociated from each other, or his belly and his wit, or the public performance and the private reading. Up until 1860 Falstaff has enjoyed an almost unchallenged supremacy as the most imaginatively vital of Shakespeare's comic creations. But for the last forty years of the century he is superseded by a figure in whom the body and spirit seem to be less sharply, more intriguingly and hence desirably at odds with each other. The kind of liberty that Falstaff promises (or threatens) now seems to belong to the past; Rosalind's belongs to the future.<sup>23</sup>

By the time Thackeray died in 1863 Falstaff was suffering a comparative eclipse. In 1857 a writer

---

<sup>20</sup> Maginn writes: ' . . . if the thing be not done on the heat, – if the old master-spirit be allowed one moment's ground of vantage, – the game is up, the good resolutions dissipated into thin air, the grave rebuke turned all into laughter . . . The king saw his danger: had he allowed a word, he was undone. Hastily, therefore, does he check that word; Reply not to me with a fool-born jest;' 'forbidding, by an act of eager authority, – what he must also have felt to be an act of self-control, – the outpouring of those magic sounds which, if uttered, would, instead of a prison becoming the lot of Falstaff, have conducted him to the coronation dinner, and established him as chief depository of what in after days was known by the name of backstairs influence' (496–7).

<sup>21</sup> James H. Hackett, *Falstaff: A Shakespearian [sic] Tract* (London, 1840), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Hackett, *Falstaff*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> The story I'm sketching about the subsidence of Falstaff and ascendancy of Rosalind corresponds to some extent with the fortunes of 'humour' and 'wit' in the Victorian period, as described by Robert Bernard Martin in *The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory* (Oxford, 1974). Martin contends that 'As a general pattern, it might be said that comedy during the reign of Queen Victoria changed from sentimental comedy to the comedy of wit and paradox' (p. 3). He sees a key point of transition in the late 1860s, 'when we find the reviewers and critics becoming increasingly restive about the state of comic writing. Wit and intellectual comedy had been universally agreed upon as arrogant, cold, and unpoetic, but when they had almost disappeared in practice, the suspicion grew that they might be a cool refreshment from the sticky and unrelieved sentimentality of what had been passing as comedy' (p. 38).

in the *Athenaeum* commented disparagingly on a painting of 'Falstaff promising to marry Dame Quickly' exhibited at the Royal Exhibition, that Falstaff 'is not a mere walking stomach with just soul enough to suit his flesh and keep it from turning to carrion before its time; but an Epicurean gentleman, shrewd, careless, witty, suspicious of too much virtue, and a moral cosmopolite, sociable from his birth, – a character grown impossible since taverns have become extinct'.<sup>24</sup> But by 1857 many were beginning to suspect that it might be impossible to have too much virtue. Richard Altick notes a sharp falling off after 1860 in visual representations of the Falstaff plays.<sup>25</sup> The London theatres had seen a plethora of performances through the 1840s and 1850s of *1 Henry IV* and the *Merry Wives* (*2 Henry IV* being always of course more of a rarity). Falstaff was a role particularly associated with Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells, from 1846 (*1 Henry IV*) and 1848 (*Merry Wives*) onwards. Witty, intelligent, perhaps lacking in exuberance, but widely acclaimed. Theodore Fontane thought the Eastcheap Falstaff his greatest role.<sup>26</sup> Phelps was still playing the Windsor Falstaff in 1874, but productions of all the Falstaff plays dwindle markedly after 1860, and it is only with the advent of Beerbohm Tree at the end of the century that they pick up again. Tree started his association with the *Merry Wives* in 1888 and with *1 Henry IV* in 1896 (both at the Haymarket), though he had notably more success with the former.

Of course the popularity of the Windsor Falstaff has always been confined to the theatre and to performance. From the 1890s through to the Great War, the Englishness of the figure and the play become more marked. It's symptomatic that Tree should have mounted a revival starring Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal as Mistress Page and Mistress Ford to coincide with the new King's coronation in the summer of 1902.<sup>27</sup> And in 1911 Reginald Buckley's alarmingly racist account of 'the Stratford movement' hailed the *Merry Wives* as 'a fair picture of what England was and might well become again without deterioration'.<sup>28</sup> Outside the theatre the Windsor Falstaff had attracted the scorn of critics

and scholars through the nineteenth century from Hazlitt to Dowden and beyond.<sup>29</sup> He was simply not the same man as his 'immortal' namesake. This trend culminates in Bradley's rapturous essay, where he hails the 'immortal' Falstaff as 'a character almost purely humorous', for whom 'happiness' is too weak a word: 'he is in bliss, and we share his glory', and clinchingly: 'The bliss of freedom gained in humour is the essence of Falstaff'.<sup>30</sup> But like many influential literary critics Bradley is out of date and touch with the creative writers and visual artists for whom Falstaff had subsided as an imaginative source and resource from about 1860 onwards. From that time on his true creative afterlife will be, thanks to Verdi, Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams, not in words and images so much as in music.<sup>31</sup>

However through the later decades of the nineteenth century there is a continuing interest in the model provided by Falstaff and Hal. It belongs to a theatre with which we have now become all too

<sup>24</sup> *Athenaeum* (23 May 1857), 667.

<sup>25</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature, in Britain, 1760–1900* (Columbus, Ohio, 1985), p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> Shirley S. Allen, *Samuel Phelps and Sadler's Wells Theatre* (Middletown, Conn., 1971), pp. 181–2.

<sup>27</sup> Hesketh Pearson notes that Terry was then fifty-five, Kendal fifty-three and Tree himself in his fiftieth year 'but they romped through the play like children' (*Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter* (London, 1956), p. 130).

<sup>28</sup> Reginald R. Buckley, *The Shakespeare Revival and the Stratford-upon-Avon Movement* (London, 1911), p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> See Jeanne Addison Roberts, 'The Windsor Falstaff', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 9 (1973), 202–30. Note that she identifies, in distinction from this dominant trend, a group of critics who reunite the two Falstoffs: they acknowledge 'a decline' in *The Merry Wives* but believe it to be dictated by the exigencies of plot or setting or by moral imperatives' (214).

<sup>30</sup> A. C. Bradley, 'The Rejection of Falstaff', in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London, 1909), pp. 260, 261, 262.

<sup>31</sup> Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Falstaff* (1893); Edward Elgar's symphonic poem *Falstaff* (1913); Gustav Holst's one-act musical interlude *At the Boar's Head* (1925); Ralph Vaughan Williams' opera *Sir John in Love* (1929). Lyric Falstoffs based on *The Merry Wives* that precede Verdi's masterpiece include operas by M. Balfe (London, 1838), O. Nicolai (Berlin, 1849) and A. Adam (Paris, 1856). Mention should also be made of Robert Nye's uproariously 'Rabelaisian' novel *Falstaff* (London, 1976).

## SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE

familiar – a theatre of ‘celebrity’ created by the ‘media’. Here the comparison and contrast with the Regency period is instructive. There were the real perceived connections, especially in the early years of Victoria’s reign, with the bad old Prince of Wales, and the traditions of political satire and caricature about which Jonathan Bate has written so well.<sup>32</sup> From the mid-1780s on that Prince had mixed with a group of dissolute prominent Whigs including Fox, Sheridan and Hanger, and the caricaturists lost no time in identifying them with Falstaff, Bardolph and Pistol – and Mrs Fitzherbert with Doll Tearsheet. In 1788 Gillray gives to an enormous Falstaff-Fox the lines, for example, ‘The Laws of England are at my commandment’. When the Prince broke with the Whigs in the 1790s there were hopes that he would turn into a King Henry V. In 1853 the parallel with Prince Hal was still vivid for the writer in *Blackwood’s* who commented that Shakespeare had foreseen it all, and that ‘The scene between Henry the Fifth and Falstaff has been acted in every court of Europe, where the acquaintance began in the tavern’.<sup>33</sup>

But there is always the fear (and desire), touched on by Maginn, that King Henry may *not* repudiate Falstaff. Even worse, that the Prince may simply *become* Falstaff. This had been one way of lampooning the Prince Regent, and in the later decades of the nineteenth century, as Bertie’s girth started to emulate that of his wicked uncle, the Shakespearean parallels return with their question: will this prince rise to become King Henry or degenerate into Falstaff?<sup>34</sup> Disraeli was not the only one to think of him as ‘our young Hal’.<sup>35</sup> In 1876 Samuel Beeton and some henchmen published an enormous verse drama entitled *Edward the Seventh*.<sup>36</sup> This was the last of a series of satires beginning with *The Coming King*— in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* for 1872. Modelled on Tennyson’s *Idylls*, this featured the amorous exploits of ‘Guelpho the Gay’ (that is, the Prince of Wales, drawing on the family name of Guelph). The Beeton’s biographer rightly judges it ‘much too topical to be comprehensible in the twentieth century’.<sup>37</sup> It was followed in 1873 by *The Siliad* which included characters such as Gladimennon and Dudizy and conversa-

tions between Victoria and Guelpho: it sold like hot cakes. *Edward VII* is much the most substantial of the three, and deserves Weintraub’s praise of it as ‘a remarkable *tour de force* of foreshadowing and fancy’.<sup>38</sup> It takes as its guiding motif the parallel with Shakespeare’s Hal, providing Prince Guelpho with dubious cronies called Hardolph, Quoins and Palstaff. (A *Key* was published as a sixpenny pamphlet which identifies the real persons concerned.) There’s a scene in Act II which parodies the one in *2 Henry IV* when Hal takes the crown from his sleeping father. Here the Prince sees the sleeping Queen’s account books and is appalled to discover how much money she’s hoarding to spend on yet more memorials to her idolized ‘Albor’. The whole drama is hostile to ‘Queen Victa’ and sympathetic to her son and heir. This becomes particularly blatant in the later Acts (there are no less than seven) which project the narrative into the future. These send the Prince and his bohemian friends to war in India and Egypt against the Russians and the Germans, providing Bertie with the military career he had always craved in reality and been denied by his mother. The Prince becomes King Henry before Agincourt; a defeated Russian general is made to shout ‘A horse, a horse, Siberia for a horse!’ (p. 86); on receiving news of the death of a friend, the Prince starts playing Hamlet in the graveyard, ‘Alas, poor Charlie! A most genial soul, / The king of jokers, infinite in jest; / . . . How we shall miss him at the Malborrow, / And sigh to see his pipes, his cues, his chair –’ (p. 89). He is also given a more

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 75–84.

<sup>33</sup> *Blackwood’s Magazine* (January 1853), 105.

<sup>34</sup> Recalling the new King Henry’s great speech about turning away his former self, Weintraub notes that this was just what the Victorian Prince failed to do, and that his biography of Edward is about ‘his former self’ (p. xiv).

<sup>35</sup> Weintraub, *The Importance of Being Edward*, p. 209.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel was the husband of the famous Mrs Beeton (née Isabella Mary Mayson), who died in 1865 at the age of twenty-eight, having bequeathed to posterity her phenomenally best-selling *Book of Household Management*.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Spain, *Mrs Beeton and Her Husband* (London, 1948), p. 233.

<sup>38</sup> Weintraub, *The Importance of Being Edward*, pp. 251–2.

chilling speech about how the ills of contemporary England have all been caused by idleness, opulence and Jews, and what we all need is a damned good war. Most striking of all is the news at the end that the Queen has abdicated, leaving her son to a clinching identification with Shakespeare's King Henry and a close mimicking of his 'reformation' speech. As if.

One more Shakespearian reference before we leave the Prince. On his fiftieth birthday in 1891, *Punch* offered an obsequious testimony to the distance between this Prince of Wales and Wicked Uncle George. A cartoon and brief dramatic sketch depict the Prince visiting with Mr Punch the Old Boar's Head tavern. The Shade of Falstaff enters from behind the Arras and starts bantering with them. He's impressed. Punch seems to be his heir: 'If to be old and merry be a sin, then thou, PUNCH, art but a latter-day JACK thyself'. The Prince gives his seal of approval: 'Bating the grossness, and retaining the humour without the humours, thy comparison is not so wholly unapt, Sir JOHN'. How times have changed, and Princes with the times, old Falstaff exclaims: 'No marvel i' faith, that heirs-apparent are so improved, when such a Momus and Mentor in one as PUNCH supersedeth such a Silenus-Mercury as poor old tun-bellied, pottle-pot-loving, though loyal, jocund and jape-enjoying JACK FALSTAFF!' And so on, with unction. The cartoon that heads this scene clinches the double identification of Falstaff not only with Punch but also with a Prince of Wales who is clearly Falstaff's upright, regal descendant. This is Falstaff Reformed: forget about Hal.

So by 1891 the threat has been rebuffed that this Prince of Wales would indeed follow Uncle George and plunge the monarchy back into the turbulent Regency past. Britain had seen some spasms of republican fervour, especially around 1870 with the violent turmoil across the Channel. But by the end of Victoria's reign the British monarchy was morphing into a new kind of 'show' to which the Prince of Wales's frankly hedonistic life made a powerful contribution. A Hal who turns into a Falstaff? Well let him, why not? For the laws of England are *not* under his commandment. They

are not his business. The business of monarchy is now simply to represent some collective ideas of wealth and prestige, their pleasures and their pains, even or especially if around 1901, it meant looking fat and being known as Edward the Caresser.

Let me turn now briefly to Rosalind's legs – and the Forest of Arden. The Victorians took a vast and varied interest in all Shakespeare's women and Rosalind was by no means their unchallenged favourite. Anna Jameson includes her as the least and in some ways the least of her four 'Characters of Intellect', after Portia, Isabella and Beatrice.<sup>39</sup> Fanny Kemble called Portia her 'favourite of all Shakespeare's women',<sup>40</sup> and amongst women readers from 1830 to 1900 Portia would probably have topped the poll, as she did quite literally in 1887 when the *Girl's Own Paper* ran a contest among its readers for essays on 'My Favourite Heroine from Shakespeare'.<sup>41</sup> But in width of appeal to readers and theatre-goers both male and female throughout the period, and to creative writers and artists in its later decades, so I'd hazard, Rosalind emerges as the most vital, complex and inspiring female figure, Juliet's comic counterpart – and Falstaff's successor.

Why? Because Rosalind offers a new dream of liberty. In terms of performance the role poses a challenge comparable to that posed by Falstaff, in that it seems to require and certainly invites a physical exuberance, a showiness, a zest for effect. Thus Hackett's Falstaff, and also at much the same time, Louisa Nisbett's Rosalind at Drury Lane in 1842, admired for her 'exhilarating animal spirits',<sup>42</sup> in the tradition of the saucy lackey and romping hoyden popularized by Dora Jordan. One of Nisbett's best roles was Lady Gay Spanker in Boucicault's

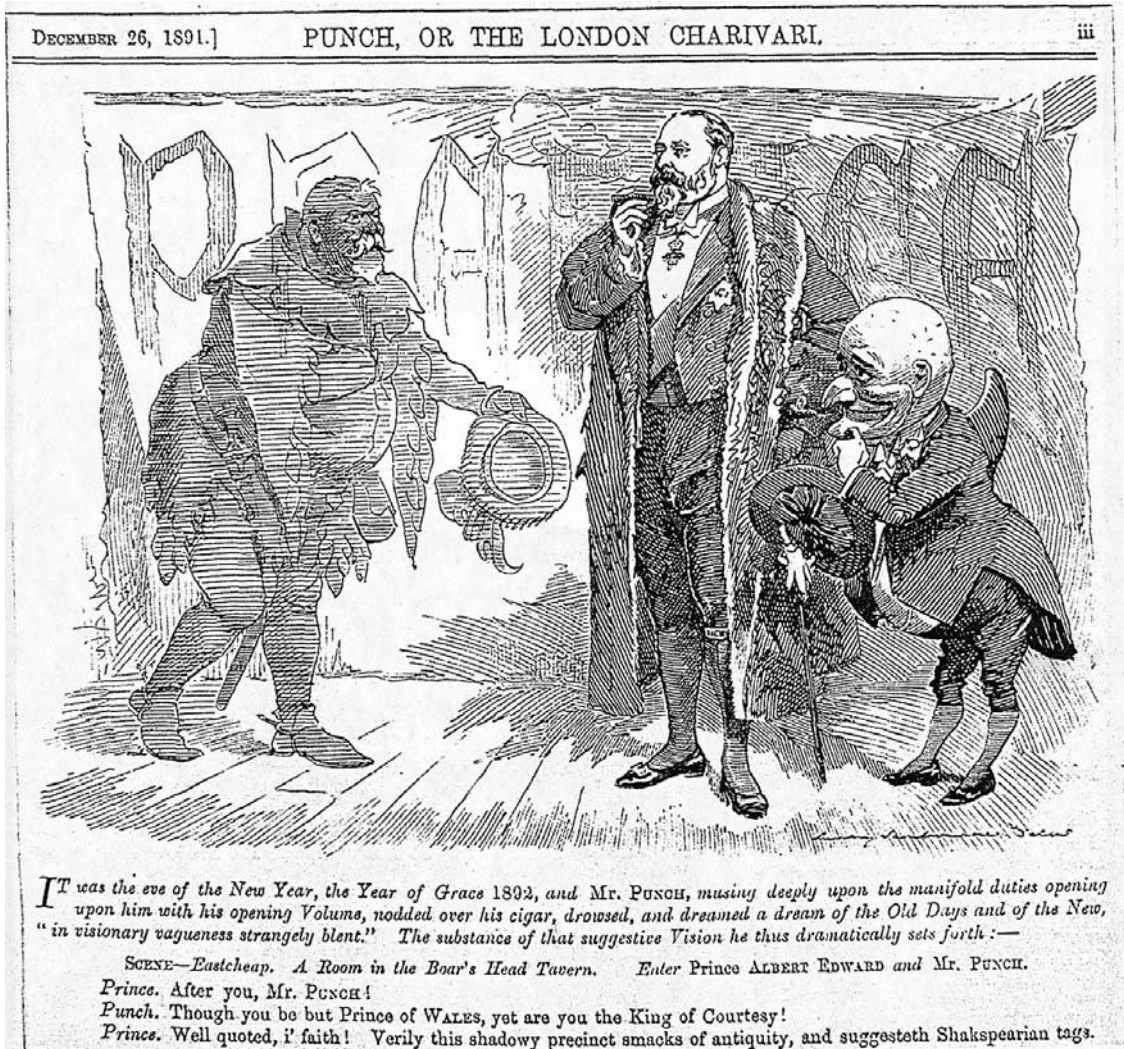
<sup>39</sup> Anna Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, 2 vols., 4th edn (London, 1846), 1, pp. 143–54.

<sup>40</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood*, quoted in Julie Hankey, 'Victorian Portias: Shakespeare's Borderline Heroine', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45.4 (Winter 1994), 435.

<sup>41</sup> Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville and London, 1996), p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> Westland Marston, *Our Recent Actors* (1890), quoted in Donald Mullin, *Victorian Actors and Actresses in Review* (Westport, Conn. and London, 1983), p. 356.

# SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE



18 Punch, the Prince, and the Ghost of Falstaff (26 December 1891).

*London Assurance*. But in 1842 Nisbett epitomized an old Regency spirit that was no longer to everyone's taste. When she fell ill Macready replaced her with Helen Faucit, who offered a new kind of inwardness – pensive, modest, sensitive – something closer to the Rosalind a reader might imagine in private.<sup>43</sup> It became her signature role. Whereas the Falstaff imagined by Maginn was barely compatible with performance, the Rosalind provided by Faucit

<sup>43</sup> See Charles H. Shattuck's note on 'Two Rosalinds' in *Mr Macready produces 'As You Like It': A Prompt-Book Study* (Urbana, Ill., 1962), pp. 54–7. Shattuck writes: 'The fact was that the character of Rosalind was just at this point passing through the final stage of metamorphosis from an eighteenth-century hoyden, a comic breeches part, into the sentimental 'womanly woman' so cherished throughout Victorian times. One might pinpoint the transition as occurring in this very season and production . . .' (p. 54).



could hold together the rival demands for 'show' and for 'inwardness'. An 1845 reviewer of her Rosalind uses terms that decisively distinguish her from that coarse old extrovert Regency past: 'This softness and delicacy we never saw more beautifully represented... the caprice of the part never more ethereally embodied'.<sup>44</sup> 'Ethereally' is the key word, one that no Falstaff will ever attract (except perhaps through music). Faucit became a good friend of George Eliot's, and when she retired from the stage she committed to print her images of the Shakespearian women she had played – Rosalind, Portia, Juliet, Imogen and others.<sup>45</sup>

But Faucit was not happy about showing her legs, and she argued with Macready over the costume he wanted her to wear for Imogen. Other Victorian actresses had much less compunction, especially towards the end of the century. The flamboyant Ada Rehan for example, who realized 'as no other actress can', said one reviewer in 1890, 'the humour of Rosalind, the bubbling, effervescing frolic and fun'.<sup>46</sup> In fact one is struck by the sheer diversity of successful Rosalinds on both sides of the Atlantic, from Faucit and Nisbett and Ellen Tree and Charlotte Cushman to the Mary Scott-Siddons who provoked from the young Thomas Hardy in 1867 his poem 'To an Impersonator of Rosalind', to Madge Kendal, Helena Modjeska, Mary Anderson, Ada Rehan (who also excited Hardy in the 1890s), Julia Marlowe and Julia Neilson.<sup>47</sup> And let us not forget the Lillie Langtry who made Rosalind her favourite role when she took to the stage in 1882 after her affair with – the Prince of Wales.

His big belly and her lovely legs: Falstaff and Rosalind. In the theatre Rosalind shares with Falstaff a tension between 'physique' and 'wit', the outward, fleshed, spectacular show, and the spirit, the *esprit* that keeps winning through it. As Falstaff's belly is the sign of his corporeality, so are Rosalind/Ganymede's legs of his or hers. Both Falstaff's body and Rosalind's are a mystery – what is your substance, whereof are you made? – but Rosalind's is crescent and Falstaff's senescent. Falstaff's wit seeks in vain to resist or deny the degeneration of his body, while Rosalind's generates

new uses for hers. Where Falstaff's belly is a sign of unbridled appetite, Rosalind's legs are a sign of sexual independence, of indeterminacy, of performativity, of promise.

For theatre-goers and readers alike from the 1870s onwards Rosalind embodied the best of dreams. In 1885 W. E. Henley waxed lyrical about the heroine of George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*. It was of Rosalind she most reminded him: 'For such a union as she presents of capacity of heart and capacity of brain, of generous nature and fine intelligence, of natural womanhood and more than womanly wit and apprehensiveness, we know not where to look save among Shakespeare's ladies, nor with whom to equal her save the genius of Arden'.<sup>48</sup> A casual phrase, that last, but the space of which Rosalind is the 'genius' is an essential part of her allure. The period in which the play has sustained a special ascendancy in the British theatre can be dated fairly precisely to the forty years from 1871 to 1911.<sup>49</sup> Joseph Knight was excited by the Haymarket production of 1876 to this rapturous vision of Rosalind's domain:

Nowhere else in literature are the real and the Arcadian so harmoniously united. That enchanted ground of Arden is at once fairyland and home. Its denizens are influenced by passions such as our own. They yield to joys and sorrows with which we sympathise, and are, in all respects, our counterparts. Yet the world is one in which the baser part of our nature falls off or is purified... The world is

<sup>44</sup> *Athenaeum* (8 November, 1845), quoted in Mullin, *Victorian Actors*, p. 182.

<sup>45</sup> Helen Faucit, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (London, 1885). More generally, see Carol Jones Carlisle, *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage* (London, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> A. B. Walkley, quoted in Mullin, *Victorian Actors*, p. 377.

<sup>47</sup> See Patty S. Derrick, 'Rosalind and the Nineteenth-Century Woman: Four Stage Interpretations', *Theatre Survey*, 26.1 (May 1985), 143–62.

<sup>48</sup> Meredith: *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ioan Williams (London, 1971), p. 259.

<sup>49</sup> I am indebted to Richard Foulkes, 'Touchstone for the Time: Victorians in the Forest of Arden', in *Victorian Shakespeare: Theatre, Drama, Performance*, eds. Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole (Basingstoke, forthcoming).

## SHAKESPEARE AND THE VICTORIAN PRINCE

Love's world, and Love is lord of all. In the presence of that great potentate, prince and peasant are equal.<sup>50</sup>

Few peasants are likely to have been in the audience for Lady Archibald Campbell's celebrated *al fresco* production at Coombe House in 1884 (and again, 1885).<sup>51</sup> But who would not wish to be a 'denizen' of such a realm, where all differences are magically resolved? No wonder Shaw hated the play.

Both fairyland and home. The differences between the Victorian Falstaff and the Victorian Rosalind can be focused in the contrast between the forests of Windsor and Arden, between Herne's Oak and the Greenwood tree. One is the site of old Falstaff's shame, the other of young Rosalind's game. As the century progressed the 'greenwood' or 'wildwood' became an increasingly attractive and complex image for artists of all kinds. Not that it is a simple space, any more than it is in Shakespeare's own play (or plays – the wood of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well, of course). Think of the way George Eliot lures Gwendolen Harleth into imagining herself as Rosalind, and then punishes her narcissistic fantasy.<sup>52</sup> Think of the way the greenwood is shadowed by darker woods and more fatal trees in Thomas Hardy's fiction.

Or compare Tennyson and Wilde in the 1890s. In Tennyson's late play *The Foresters* (written 1881, published and performed 1892) Shakespeare's wild woods support a staging of the Robin Hood story infused with all sorts of fantasies of loss, Englishness and patriarchy restored.<sup>53</sup> There is some curious cross-dressing: Robin Hood disguises himself as an Old Woman to escape from Prince John, and Maid Marian dresses up as her brother in the armour of the Redcross Knight. She is also crowned Queen of the Wood. Ada Rehan told the author that she felt the 'beauty and simplicity and sweetness' of the role, 'which makes me feel for the time a happier and a better woman'.<sup>54</sup> But she must have had far more fun as Rosalind/Ganymede. *The Foresters* belongs very firmly to the men, to Robin himself (who turns into Prospero in his farewell speech to the woods),<sup>55</sup> and to the returning King Richard (who at one point bursts in on the scene like the famished Orlando). The closing song begins: 'Now

the King is home again, and nevermore to roam again, . . . '.

These are not exactly the fantasies explored by Oscar Wilde, whose enthusiastic review of the Coombe House production recalled the transvestite performance in Théophile Gautier's 1835 novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.<sup>56</sup> Rosalind is one of the several identities with which Wilde's own Dorian Gray falls in love. Or is it the costume?

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Knight, *Theatrical Notes* (London, 1893), pp. 95–6, cited by Foulkes.

<sup>51</sup> Lady Archibald played Orlando to Eleanor Calhoun's Rosalind; the production was directed by E. W. Godwin. See John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres: Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 47–50. Foulkes points out that Lady Campbell's inspired many subsequent outdoor productions.

<sup>52</sup> *Daniel Deronda* (1876), vol. 1, bk 2, ch. 14.

<sup>53</sup> The play is sub-titled 'Robin Hood and Maid Marian'. Tennyson said that as in his other plays he had 'sketched the state of the people in another great transition period in the making of England' (*Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, 2 vols. (London, 1897), vol. 2, p. 173).

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1990), p. 441.

<sup>55</sup> Thus Robin Hood:

Our forest games are ended, our free life,  
And we must hence to the King's court. I trust  
We shall return to the wood. Meanwhile, farewell  
Old friends, old patriarch oaks. A thousand winters  
Will strip you bare as death, a thousand summers  
Robe you life-green again. *You* seem, as it were,  
Immortal, and we mortal. How few Junes  
Will heat our pulses quicker! How few frosts  
Will chill the hearts that beat for Robin Hood!

Marian responds with this more optimistic note:

And yet I think these oaks at dawn and even,  
Or in the balmy breathings of the night,  
Will whisper evermore of Robin Hood.  
We leave but happy memories to the forest.  
We dealt in the wild justice of the woods.

(*The Works of Tennyson*, ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson (London, 1913), p. 840)

<sup>56</sup> Wilde's review is in the *Dramatic Review* (6 June 1885); see John Stokes, 'Shopping in Byzantium?' Oscar Wilde as Shakespeare Critic', forthcoming in *Victorian Shakespeare*, eds. Marshall and Poole.

When she came on in her boy's clothes she was perfectly wonderful. She wore a moss-coloured velvet jerkin with cinnamon sleeves, slim brown cross-gartered hose, a dainty little green cap with a hawk's feather caught in a jewel, and a hooded cloak lined with dull red. She had never seemed to me more exquisite.<sup>57</sup>

More dangerously, in 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' Erskine confides in the narrator that Cyril Graham 'was the only perfect Rosalind I have ever seen'.<sup>58</sup> Nina Auerbach suggests that 'for England's homosexual elite', the bold cross-dressing heroine became 'a symbol of visionary liberties their own country forbade'.<sup>59</sup>

As for princes, finally, and the dream of liberty. No one dreams of being Hal, but Hal is not Shakespeare's only prince, thank God. There's a Danish one, and there's one in effect in the Forest of Arden. If you have to be a prince, or want to be a prince, then Rosalind/Ganymede might be the one to go for. At least that's the blithe view of it. I said that Falstaff's liberty belonged to the past and Rosalind's to the future. But depending where we stand we can look forward to the Falstaff we might still become and we can look back to the Rosalind we'll now never be. Let's look back with regret then at two late-Victorian Rosalinds that might have been. As you contemplate Lord Ronald Gower's Shakespeare Monument in the Memorial Gardens in Stratford-upon-Avon, it strikes you that Lady Macbeth, Falstaff and Hamlet could do with another figure of youthful promise to complete their dysfunctional family quartet. It seems a pity that for his aspiring prince Gower chose a boyish Hal rather than an androgynous Rosalind.<sup>60</sup> Secondly: Ellen Terry counted it one of the great disappointments of her life that Irving never let her loose in the Forest of Arden. In her old age she

confessed that she went on studying Rosalind, 'rather wistfully'.<sup>61</sup> What a shame that she never got to show off her legs and her wit in the role she was made for – and make *everyone* rub their knees with gusto.

<sup>57</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, Centenary Edition, ed. Merlin Holland (Glasgow, 1999), p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> *Collins Complete Works*, p. 305. First published in *Blackwood's* in 1889, the tale was expanded by Wilde into a longer version that was not printed until 1923. I am indebted to a forthcoming paper by Russell Jackson, 'Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare's Secrets'.

<sup>59</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (London, 1987), p. 232. Did anyone think of comparing Wilde and Bosie to Falstaff and Hal – the young man's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, for instance? I note the relevance of Robert Sawyer's discussion of Swinburne's interest in the relations between Falstaff and Hal in his unpublished PhD dissertation, 'Mid-Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare: George Eliot, A. C. Swinburne, and Robert Browning' (University of Georgia, 1997), in the abstract of which he writes: 'Chapter three examines A. C. Swinburne's Shakespearean criticism, arguing that Swinburne's critique anticipates by one hundred years the recent homoerotic reading of *1 Henry 4*; at the same time that masculine identities were being refashioned in England, Swinburne's criticism opens a space for a re-examination of the relationship between Falstaff and Hal. Thus Swinburne escalates the queering of Shakespeare, a significant contribution that is overlooked in the recent discussion of emerging notions of masculinity in the Victorian period'.

<sup>60</sup> Some have thought Gower the model for Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This is uncertain, but Wilde certainly delivered the eulogy at the unveiling of the Stratford monument (originally sited behind the Memorial Theatre) in 1888. See M. Kimberley, *Lord Ronald Gower's Monument to Shakespeare*, Stratford-upon-Avon Papers, 111 (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> See Auerbach, *Ellen Terry*, pp. 230–7.