

УДК: 821.111+82'06/31

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Robert Nye's *Falstaff* as Creative Reception of Shakespeare

Кляйн Хольгер. «Фальстаф» Роберта Ная як креативна рецепція Шекспіра.

Стаття присвячена історичному роману «Фальстаф», що належить перу Роберта Ная, відомого як автор творів історіографічної метапрози про Шекспіра. Цей роман стоїть осторонь основного корпусу творів Р. Ная, оскільки у ньому, на відміну від інших творів англійського постмодернізму, представлена біографія фікційного персонажа. У статті визначається та обговорюється особливе місце цього роману у літературному доробку письменника. Крім того, в ній окреслюються специфічні риси Фальстафа-наратора, головна з яких полягає у тому, що герой не сам записує свої спогади, а надиктовує їх. Роман аналізується з урахуванням наступних аспектів: сюжетно-структурної специфіки, інтертекстуального характеру та впливу шекспірознавчого компоненту на рецепцію цього постмодерного тексту. Глибокий текстовий аналіз дозволяє автору статті окреслити специфічні риси Найєвого Фальстафа та відокремити цього персонажа від створеного Шекспіром прототипу.

Ключові слова: Роберт Най, Вільям Шекспір, Фальстаф, інтертекстуальність, металітература, біографія.

I. Introduction

Nye's *Falstaff*¹ won the Hawthornden Prize and the *Guardian* Fiction Award in 1976 and shares with Brian

¹ A radio version by David Buck was broadcast on Radio 3 and later staged at The Fortune in 1981 and by the RSC in Stratford in 1994; see: Matcham, Robert. "Robert Nye". *Book and Magazine Collector* 180 (1999), 82, als Allen,

Moore's *The Doctor's Wife* the 1976 slot in Burgess's 99 *Novels* (112f.). It belongs to historical fiction like Nye's other novels for adults except the extremely 'experimental' *Doubtfire* (1967).² However, among these eight historical novels (which show, to varying degrees, elements discussed in Hutcheon's chapter "Historiographic Metafiction", cf. Valdivieso, 46) there are interesting differences of emphasis. Three are biographical accounts of the central characters, purporting to be written by persons who knew them well: *Faust* by his assistant, Wagner, *The Life and Death of My Lord Gilles de Rais* by Dom Eustache Blanchet, a priest serving de Rais' during the latter's last three years, and *The Late Mr Shakespeare* by John Reynolds, like John Mortimer's John Rice an (invented) boy actor remembering during the early Restoration (up to the Great Fire of 1666), from long personal observation and relationship, the dramatist, the theatrical world around him, and many plays and the parts he acted in them.³ Already in these accounts from the sidelines there is a great deal about the narrators themselves, particularly Dom Eustache. The same goes for another novel:

Elizabeth. "Robert Nye". In *British Novelists Since 1960, H-Z [Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 14,2]*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Detroit: Gale, 1983), 548.

² See: Maack, Annegret. *Der experimentelle Roman der Gegenwart*. Darmstadt: WBG, 1984., 64-66; generally she is rather generous with this term (see my review in N&Q 34 (1987), 107f.), here it is fully justified. Thematically, *Doubtfire* is linked to Nye's Rais novel, as is the equally 'experimental' early poem "The Mystery of the Siege of Orleans", concluding *Juvenilia* 1; and Joan of Arc as well as Rais figure in Ch. XCIII of *Falstaff* (407-11).

³ Thus in some respects this novel bears similarities to Tremain's *Restoration*, in which Charles II and the period play such important parts; the closest model is, however, Mortimer's *Will Shakespeare*, see: Rozett, Martha Tuck. *Constructing a World: Shakespeare and the New Historical Fiction*. New York: New York State UP, 2000. 41ff. For *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* and *Mrs. Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (also dramatised 23 April 1898 by BBC Radio, not published, see: Matcham, Robert. "Robert Nye"....78) see: Ruge, Enno. "The Disappearing Act: Zwei fiktionale Shakespeare-Biographien von Robert Nye". *SJ* 137 (2001), 50-65; Valdivieso, Sofia Munoz. "Postmodern Recreations of the Renaissance: Robert Nye's Fictional Biographies of Shakespeare". *Sederi* 15 (2005). 43-65.

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Mrs Shakespeare, 'The Complete Works' (which may roughly be aligned with Graves' *Marie Powell*): her tale is indeed about William, but just as much about Anne Shakespeare, née Hathaway, herself, focusing on a week she spent with him in London in April 1594 and may thus also figure under the heading of autobiography.⁴

This applies, of course, also to two novels using other types of autobiographical narrative: *The Voyage of the Destiny*, presented as Sir Walter Raleigh's diary of his last – doomed – voyage to the New World in 1618, culminating in his execution,⁵ and *The Memoirs of Lord Byron: A Novel*.⁶ The novel *Merlin* (1978) would, had Maack included it, richly have deserved her label 'experimental'. Along with *Falstaff*, *The Voyage*, and *Lord Byron* (and largely *Mrs Shakespeare*), *Merlin* squarely belongs to an as yet not fully recognized subgenre, of which Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (both 1934)⁷

⁴ As do Ch. 6 and sections I-V of the "Epilogue" in Burgess' *Nothing Like the Sun*.

⁵ See: Hassam, Andrew. "Literary Explorations of the Fictive Sea Journals of William Golding, Robert Nye, B.S. Johnson, and Malcolm Lowry". *Ariel* 19:3 (1988), 29-46. 34-36, developing Martens' work: Martens, Lorna. *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.; see also, briefly and rather adversely Maack, Annegret. "Das Leben der toten Dichter: fiktive Biographien". In *Radikalität und Mässigung: Der englische Roman seit 1960*, ed. Maack and Rüdiger Imhof (Darmstadt: WBG, 1993), 169-88, 172.

⁶ For this work see esp.: Breuer, Rolf. "Robert Nye: *The Memoirs of Lord Byron – a Novel*". *Athenäum: Jahrbuch für Romantik* 3(1993), 320-24, also briefly: Maack, Annegret. "Das Leben der toten Dichter: fiktive Biographien"..., 173, more detailed: Maack, Annegret. "The Life We Imagine: Byron's and Polidori's Memoirs as Character Construction". In Martin Middeke and Werner Huber, ed. *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer/ Camden House, 1999), 138-51, 145-49. Nye's *Byron* as well as the two Shakespeare novels fit to some extent into the useful scheme and definitions developed for a specific thematic kind by Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars, although they do not consider the subgenre exemplified by the central text discussed here.

⁷ Cf. Green, Peter. "Aspects of the Historical Novel". *Essays by Divers Hands*, n.s. 31 (1962), 35-60, esp. 46f., 52f., and 56-58; also Presley, John Woodrow. "Narrative Structure in Robert Graves' Novels of the 1930". In Ian Firla, ed.

have provided signal examples, as has Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (1951) followed, for instance, perhaps in the wake of Nye, by Giardina's *Good King Harry* (1984): that is, a novel pretending to be the autobiography of a known historical (or legendary viz. literary) personage, as opposed to the traditional autobiographical novel using an invented character, a genre well established at least since Defoe.⁸ While readily recognizing similarities and overlaps in procedure and technique with history and the novel, studies of Autobiography as a genre are, it seems, firmly anchored in the notion of an existing person writing his or her own life.⁹ On the other hand, studies of Biography as a genre tend to annex and submerge this subgenre,¹⁰ the most fitting label to

Robert Graves' Historical Novels (Frankfurt: Lang, 2000), 83-100, esp. 83-86, and – on aspects of style – Leonard, John. "At What Vantage Point? (Check Question Mark)": Cultural Relativism and the Novels of Robert Graves". In Ian Firly, ed. *Robert Graves' Historical Novels* (Frankfurt/Main: 2000), esp. 112f.

⁸ One might justifiably go back to Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*.

⁹ See e.g. Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, Ch. 1, 11-32 and XI "The Autobiographical Novel" (162-78), Fowlie, Wallace. "On Writing Autobiography". In James Olney, ed. *Studies in Autobiography*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988, esp. 165; Holdenried, Michaela. *Autobiographie*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000, esp. 42f. and 207f.; Hinck, Walter. *Selbstannäherungen: Autobiographien im 20. Jahrhundert*. Düsseldorf and Zürich: Patmos Verlag, 2004, esp. 1ff.; Lejeune, Ch.1 "Définition", 9-28, (esp. 10 and 16f.), and Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975, Ch 1, esp. p. 28.

¹⁰ See e.g. Maack, Annegret. "Das Leben der toten Dichter: fiktive Biographien"..., 170, similarly: Maack, Annegret. "Charakter als Echo: Zur Poetologie fiktiver Biographien". In Martin Brunkhorst et al., ed. *Klassiker-Renaissance: Modelle der Gegenwartsliteratur* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1991), 247-58, except 249 "(Auto-)Biographie" (plus 250) and notably Schabert, who includes under "fictional biography" Nye's *Voyage* (Schabert, Ina. *In Quest of the Other Person: Fiction as Biography*. Tübingen: Francke, 1990, 23, 61, 103) and Graves' *Claudius* novels (Graves, Robert. *I Claudius*. London: Arthur Baker, 1934. Repr. Penguin, 2006); only once *Claudius* and Marie Powell are granted a special status as "fictional historical autobiography" (103f.). By contrast, see the neat separation of autobiography from biography in Lejeune's (1975), 18 and 38f.

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give the sub-genre is indeed *fiktive* (Breuer, Schabert, Maack), that is, not fictional, but fictitious autobiography.¹¹

With regard to the autobiographical subject Falstaff as a literary character is in a class of its own, though to some extent Shakespeare's world-famous character resembles Merlin and Faust (whose historical existence is nebulous, while their literary credentials are strong). Another special characteristic is that Falstaff in the novel does not write, but *dictates* his life to various amanuenses. Thirdly, because of the density of direct and oblique references (which by far exceeds that in Nye's other novels, even *Mrs Shakespeare* and *The Late Mr Shakespeare*), this exciting work may be called 'the intertextual novel as such' (Neumeier, 151), exemplifying both the wider, more or less floating, ubiquitous, hence indeterminate Kristevian concept and the narrower, specifically demonstrable concept of intertextuality.¹² It is the latter, falling under Genette's (8f.) category (1), which is of immediate interest here. Connected with it is a fourth characteristic that is unique within the body of Nye's fictitious autobiographies: *Falstaff* is an outstanding example of the creative reception of a literary work in another literary work.¹³ And it represents, fifthly, an example of the criticism of a literary work in another, thus answering to Genette's category (3), metatextuality (10) – enriched by veiled use of

¹¹ This (the German *fiktiv* [e], is also the label that Neumeier attaches to Falstaff. It seems more precise than Rozett's terms "mock memoir" and "mock autobiography" (Rozett, Martha Tuck. *Constructing a World: Shakespeare and the New Historical Fiction*. ..., 144, 163).

¹² For this distinction see: Pfister, Manfred. "Konzepte der Intertextualität". In Broich/Pfister, 1-30, esp. 8ff. and 14-16.

¹³ For a survey of reception studies see notably Holub: Holub, Robert C. *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Methuen, 1984, and his more widely angled book: Holub, Robert C. *Border Crossing: Reception theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction*. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1992.

certain tendencies in criticism of Shakespeare's *Henry* plays – with strong elements of (4), hypertextuality (11f.).¹⁴

II. Relation to Hypotexts and Overall Structure; Text Type.

Although Shakespeare is only mentioned once: "Shake, spear!", as a humorous analogy to "*Fall Staff!*"(10),¹⁵ already the title points to a close relationship, reinforced by the dedication, by "R.N.", to the literary agent and writer Giles Gordon as a pastiche of the dedication of the *Sonnets* (1609) to "Mr W.H." as "the onlie begetter", etc. Sir John Falstaff, one remembers, figures in five of Shakespeare's Plays: he is a central character – indeed, many argue *the* central character¹⁶ – in *1Henry IV*, *2Henry IV*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; in *Henry V*, Falstaff's illness and death are reported (2.1.79-86, 114-24; 2.3.1-44) and Captain Fluellen comments on his treatment by the King (4.1.11-50); in *1Henry VI*, finally, Sir John Fastolf (whom Nye merges with Falstaff) is accused of cowardice in the battle of Patay (1.1.130-36), has his Garter ripped off by Talbot and is banished by the King in Paris (4.1.9-47; in history, this was proved unjust, and Fastolf was rehabilitated).¹⁷ Based on this material, Nye constructs a full,

¹⁴ In his weighty review of Falstaff,. Stewart uses a less erudite term: "elaborative literature", but Genette's terminology, though somewhat rebarbative, has distinct advantages.

¹⁵ However, see perhaps the mention of a certain "Nicholas Breakspear" (353) and "no great shakes" (162).

¹⁶ See e.g. Quiller-Couch, Arthur. *Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship*. New York: Holt, 1917, 115; Baker, George Pierce. *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*. New York and London: Macmillan, 1929, 157; 157; Trewin, J.C. *Going to Shakespeare*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1978, repr. 1979, 113; Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Roverhead Books; London: Fourth Estate, 1998, 272. This cannot convince, in all these plays there are several characters of central importance.

¹⁷ All line references in Shakespeare's plays are to Peter Alexanders edition.

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vivid, extremely funny and "raunchy"¹⁸ life of Falstaff, nearly wholly as seen by Falstaff himself, and presenting historical events from an unusual angle, in 100 chapters or "days",¹⁹ running – with calendar days jumped at times from New Year's Day (then 25th March) to Halloween, 31st October, 1459 (436).²⁰

50 of these 100 chapters, as Neumeier (153) points out (cf. Rozett, 158f.), are given to Falstaff's early life from his conception onwards,²¹ 25 to Falstaff's close relationship with Hal, the Prince of Wales, and 25 to the subsequent period up to Falstaff's death. Though not exactly borne out by the distribution by pages,²² this conveys a basic notion of the overall structure. At one point Falstaff remarks that the time with Hal was "one of the greatest and happiest periods of my life [...] and the most full of events and wisdoms" (246). Here the overlap in action with the two *Henry IV* plays is so substantial that one might speak of 'concurrence' between hypertext and hypotext, and the insertion of intertexts from these plays is especially consistent (cf. Neumeier, 153). Thus one might consider this part central not only in position, but in importance. What goes before and follows could then be termed 'complementation' by antecedent and subsequent

¹⁸ The term used in Publishers Weekly, also by Valdivieso, Sofia Munoz. "Postmodern Recreations of the Renaissance: Robert Nye's Fictional Biographies of Shakespeare". *Sederi* 15 (2005). 43-65, 53.

¹⁹ Cf. the 100 chapters of Robert Reynolds/Pickleherring's telling of *The Late Mr Shakespeare*. Falstaff keeps returning to the figure, see 41ff.

²⁰ The last two pieces are not of the same order: XCIX, notes towards Falstaff's confession, was found later and added under "Halloween, 31st October"; and like Graves' *Claudius*, Falstaff could not report his own death (whereas Giardina attempts also this, see the "Epilogue"), therefore Ch. C (significantly dated All Saints' Day, 1st November), is written by his nephew Scrope. (Graves, Robert. *I Claudius*. London: Arthur Baker, 1934. Repr. Penguin, 2006, 448-50)

²¹ How Falstaff came by any knowledge of the circumstances remains unexplained; cf. *Tristram Shandy*.

²² Early life: 1-249, more than half; association with Hal: 250-330, much less than a quarter, later life: 331-475, more than a quarter (in rough percentages: 55, 18, and 27).

events,²³ or, in current parlance, prequel and sequel. Yet such an scheme is too neat to do the book justice. There are so many side-glances, anticipations²⁴ and substantial digressions, all kinds of insets.²⁵ One needs to consider the type of text with which one may align Nye's *Falstaff*.

Lanham (18 *et passim*) distinguishes two "characteristic modes" in Western literature: "narrative and speech, or serious and rhetorical", as well as "two ranges of motive", i.e. "serious and purposive" versus "dramatic and playful". Similarly, but specifically concerned with prose fiction, Weinstein (4 *et passim*) discusses two types: "mimetic" and "generative". Clearly, the latter type in these binary oppositions applies to Nye's novel. It is a pity that in his weighty study of Rabelais Bakhtin mentions Falstaff only once in passing (143); but the affinity of Shakespeare's creation to Bakhtin's thinking, observations and theses is obvious – as recent Shakespeare criticism has not failed to notice.²⁶ And Falstaff's fictitious autobiography brings this out in heightened form.²⁷ In general, the impact of Rabelais'

²³ For these two terms see Klein (Klein, Holger. Hypotext-Hypertext Relations in fiction: The Example of Scott and Thackeray". *Swansea Review* 18 (1999), 1-22.), where they form part of a descriptive grid (1-7). Also the wording "pre-Hal Ireland" (228) and the phrase "to introduce HAL in the days when he was HAL" (250) underscore the central importance of the time with Hal.

²⁴ Cf. 13, 37, 39, 50f., 51-53, 54f., etc.

²⁵ See e.g. Ch., VI: summary of his mother's play about Pope Joan (29-31); Ch. XXII "The art of farting: an aside of Sir John Fastolf's" (109-14), which ends in Sternian squiggly drawings, Ch. L "About heroes" (248f.).

²⁶ See e.g. Macdonald (Macdonald, Ronald R. "Uses of Diversity: Bakhtin's Theory of Utterance and Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy". In Nigel Wood, ed. *Henry IV, Parts One and Two* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1995), 65-91, esp. 81-83: heteroglossia, dialogization, subversion) and Laroque (Laroque, François. "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered". In *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Ronald Knowles (London: Macmillan, 1998), 83-122, esp. 83, 89, 93f.: link to Rabelais, 'rebellion of the belly').

²⁷ For the link to Rabelais via Bakhtin see Neumeier, Beate. "Die Lust am Intertext: Robert Nye's Roman *Falstaff*". *SJW* 1988, 150-65, 160-61: carnivalesque physicality and emphasis on the bodily functions; also Angeles de

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Gargantua et Pantagruel (1532-34) is visible not only in the strong prominence of equally humorous and crass physicality (cf. already Burgess, also Stewart: "gargantuan romp")²⁸ embracing all orifices and external organs and their functions, but in such things as the chapter headings (the "How ..." and "About ..." exactly corresponding to the French *Comment ...* and *De ...*),²⁹ lists of all sorts, from the 69 variant spellings of Falstaff's name (11)³⁰ and the items of the truly Rabelaisian meal Falstaff's father consumed in Wells on the way to attend his wife in labour (15),³¹ to an "inventory" of Caister Castle (422-25), with many others in between.³² Furthermore, displaying a wide range of heteroglossia (i.e. additional to the heteroglossia in-built, according to Bakhtin, in all novels),

la Concha: Concha, Angeles de la. "El poder de lo excesivo frente a los excesos del poder: *Falstaff* de Robert Nye". In Concha, ed., *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea: revisiones y reescrituras de su obra* (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2004), 74f.: two chronotopes, court and low-life, 77-79: the carnivalesque, emphasis on the people.

²⁸ In a review mentioned by Allen (Allen, Elizabeth. "Robert Nye". In *British Novelists Since 1960, H-Z [Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 14,2]*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Detroit: Gale, 1983), 568), which I could not procure, Kenneth Tynan wrote of Nye that he "writes like Rabelais reborn".

²⁹ Cohen's translation tends to vary more.

³⁰ Cf. Concha, Angeles de la. "El poder de lo excesivo frente a los excesos del poder: *Falstaff* de Robert Nye". In Concha, ed., *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea: revisiones y reescrituras de su obra* (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2004), 71-88, 79 and Valdivieso, Sofia Munoz. "Postmodern Recreations of the Renaissance: Robert Nye's Fictional Biographies of Shakespeare". *Sederi* 15 (2005). 43-65,53; cf. also the 48 spelling variants of the Bard's name in *The Late Mr Shakespeare* (15f.).

³¹ Cf. three other listings of enormous meals in Falstaff, 18, 64-65 and 175.

³² E.g. a list of odd ways some famous people met their deaths (95), another of the children of King Brokenanus [sic!] and his wife Goneril (116f.), including most unlikely names, just like a list of giants toasted (320), where as a list of the Popes whose healths Falstaff once drank (225f.) only contains historic names. There are many such lists in Rabelais, see e.g. I.3 (medical authorities, 15/46), II.7 (books, 195-202/187-92) and II.30 (penitential occupations of famous people in Hell, 95-202/266-69), and IV.30-32 (detailed anatomy of Quaresmeprenant/Lent, 621-27/513-19)..

there are many insets, e.g. "Duncan's Tale" (88f.),³³ Lord Grey of Ruthin's letter to Prince Hal (XXI, 156f.), Mrs Quickly's account of Falstaff's and his wife Milicent's amazing "focative" activities on their wedding day (LXXVII, 333-36), and Nym's "jingle" about Joan of Arc (408).³⁴

With the exception of open (as opposed to oblique, implied or only alluded to) indecency such characteristics of a "dramatic and playful" or "generative" text are shared, as is well known, by Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), which is closer to *Falstaff* in that it is also told by an eponymous first-person narrator. And while Rabelais certainly keeps up a kind of dialogue by frequent addresses to the readers, Sterne intensifies this element, activating the reader even more (cf. Iser, 61ff.), and so does Nye. The novel is studded with appeals to the reader (cf. Valdivieso, p. 54) – as generally "you", or "Sir" (e.g. 70), or "Madam" (e.g. 71),³⁵ often with questions and interjections suggested, e.g. 38: "Reader, do you wonder how I managed it?"³⁶ The impression created is of speech, a conversation, and once this surfaces even explicitly: "The freedom I allow myself – those bright swifts mating! – extend it to you, and you, and you, my readers. Ideally, *my listeners*" (160). And this dialogic method includes the typical distance between the experiencing and the narrating (or, in Iser's terms, "reflecting") self.³⁷ notably in the following remark: "What you are hearing, Dear Guests,

³³ Cf. LXI, "Bardolph's Tale" (280-85) and LXXII, "Pistol's Tale" (355-58).

³⁴ See Stewart's review: Stewart, J.I.M. "Plump Jack Enlarged". *TLS* 3 Sept. 1976 (1069); however, Mrs Quickly's idiolect, familiar from the Henry IV plays, soon fades out.

³⁵ Often with adjectives, e.g. "pious" (82), "lewd" (120), "unbiassed" (257), "gentle" (300), "attentive" (365).

³⁶ Cf. e.g. 151 "If you don't believe me [...] go and see for yourself!"; 213: "Laugh, reader, if you can", 255 "Madam, I heard your mind. That was unworthy of your face, dear!", and: "And leave it to the reader to decide for himself ...".

³⁷ Franz Stanzel's 'narrating self' (erzählendes Ich), seems preferable (Stanzel, Franz K. *Typische Formen des Romans*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964).

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is Fastolf on the day at each Day's title, Fastolf *here* and *now*, remembering *then*." (367). The impression of speech is also accentuated by inter interruptions such as talking to his secretaries, e.g. "How are we for figs from Cerne Abbas?" (190),³⁸ and other events or remarks on the level of narrating time, e.g. "There's Miranda at the door. Enough for today. Amen" (45).³⁹

Sterne is also behind Falstaff's frequent reflections on his narrative, which render Nye's novel, like *Tristram Shandy*, markedly metafictional. These reflections may concern style, e.g. "the comparison is imperfect" (59) and "I'll give you more of the real King's English in due course, perhaps" (146):⁴⁰ or the nature of his narrative, e.g. "I am told that the tone and tenour and general temperature of these memorials is too low" (115);⁴¹ or they may interrupt the flow of narrative by a comment like "The business I am telling you about must have started ..." (180); or they are programmatic, as when, in an elaborate chapter on the figure of 100,⁴² he explains his project of telling his life in 100 chapters (40ff.)⁴³ and when he introduces the main characters frequenting The Boar's Head tavern "in the chapters now following" (251).⁴⁴

³⁸ Cf. e.g. 41 "Set it down, Snotbum. No bloody arguing. Brandy!" and 267: "Worcester is smiling. His one eye lights up: He has it!" [has understood the point]; similarly e.g. 192 and 229.

³⁹ Cf. e.g. "The mice [his secretaries] are away. The cat can play" (24), or "If I shut my eyes now, I can still hear her crying" (34).

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. 105 and 228, also 179 "This won't do. Let me attempt a more philosophico-political style".

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. "All my stories are moral stories" (237, cf. 82f. with even more tongue-in-cheek).

⁴² Ch. IX (38-45); cf. LXII "About the holy number 7" (286f.) and Swift, A Tale of a Tub, about the number 3 (44f. in Section I).

⁴³ Cf. e.g. 198 (warfare in France will come up): "This won't be for some Days yet [...] First, there is all my experience in Ireland to be gone into".

⁴⁴ For announcements of telling something later see e.g. 105, 263, and 123; cf. *Tristram Shandy*, e.g. III.35, ed. Petrie, 231 announcing Slawkenbergius (cf. Nye, Ch. XLV (223-31) on Falstaff's nose, a teasing non-starter, see Neumeier, 158).

Clearly unimpressed by Swift's satirical invective against disgressions,⁴⁵ Sterne, inspired by Locke, famously made a "strategy" of them that "structures the whole novel" (Iser, 71).⁴⁶ Nye does not go that far, but preserves a balance between what Burgess in 1984 called "the forward drive of modern fiction" and the "wordy divagations of a more monkish [i.e. Rabelaisian] tradition", but the playful and generative is strong enough to impede progression. As Falstaff observes about his life's story: "I may most be telling that story when I seem to wander away from it. You do not always take a castle by advancing in a straight line" (93).

III. Intertextuality and Anachronism

This Falstaff (whose Shakespearean model was chiefly firm in knowledge of the Bible) is amazingly well read. Among various kinds and functions of intertextuality, adaptation, relocation and burlesque are foremost in Nye's novel, and its function here is, apart from amusement, mostly subversion.⁴⁷ Many of the countless intertexts are incompletely marked, many more wholly unmarked.⁴⁸ This throws up the question of the target readership. Concha (83) asserts that the novel could not be read without its hypotexts. This would severely restrict the circle of potential readers and seems rather exaggerated; there is so much fabulation, adventure and fun in the book that anyone might enjoy it. The vast majority of readers would have heard of Shakespeare and

⁴⁵ See Swift's Tale (Section VII, 93-97).

⁴⁶ See particularly *Tristram Shandy*, Bk I, Ch. 22, p. 9 (in Petrie's edition); also e.g. the Introduction to Ross's edition, XVI-XIX and already A.A. Mendilov, esp. 100-04, more recently Rozett, 156ff.

⁴⁷ For a reasonably full scheme of intertextual relationships see Klein, Holger. "Narrative Technique and Reader Appeal in Dorothy Sayers' Fiction". *AAA* 19 (1994), 41-61, 50; there, Sayers' texts made me neglect subversion.

⁴⁸ On techniques of marking or veiling intertexts see Helbig, Jörg. *Intertextualität und Markierung*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1996., building notably on Broich's pioneering article.

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of Falstaff in any case. However, readers picking up everything will be very rare. And Shakespeare is the principal, but not the only point of reference.⁴⁹ Rather, one's amusement and enjoyment will increase the more spottings and placings one achieves of specific words, phrases, passages, or bare mentions and allusions, including those referring to historical figures and situations. Only in this sense is *Falstaff* a book for experienced students of (mainly anglophone) literature and general culture; they will get most out of it.

To begin with the wider field, some examples to illustrate the range. "Gurth Fastolf my ancestor fought for King Harold" (8) – in the context of an emphasis on his Saxon forbears joined to snide remarks about William and his Normans (8-10) the name 'Gurth' calls up the sturdy figure in Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). Falstaff's Uncle Hugh is (flouting chronology) said to have been a student of Paracelsus (1493-1543). Describing the "poeticule Skogan" (cf. *2 Henry IV*, 3.2), Falstaff opines "Hell hath no fury like a poet reviewed in public with a cudgel" (179, cf. Congreve, *The Mourning Bride*, 1697, 3.8). Falstaff asserts after Pascal: "I fart, therefore I am" (111), In the course of some complicated multiple 'nightwork' with the *bona roba* of that name (see *1 Henry IV*, 3.2) we read "Shallow rushed in where Fastolf [...] would have feared to tread", anticipating Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (III.65) by 350 years. Even more hilarious is to hear Mrs Quickly unwittingly combining Keats' final dictum in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* with T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* in reaction to a nursery-rhyme version (1872) of the folk-ballad *Sir Lancelot du Lac*⁵⁰ (a varied beginning of which Falstaff sings early in *2 Henry IV* 2.4):

⁴⁹ In Shakespeare, a vast field, one hesitates between assigning Nye's intertextual elements to either of Broich and Pfister's categories of 'individual reference' and 'system reference'; many are surely both.

⁵⁰ Of which the first extant version was printed in Thomas Deloney's *Garland of Good Will* (c. 1586).

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

"That's true poetry", said Mrs Quickly. "I always liked a bit of true poetry. Beauty is truth, truth beauty. I mean to say – it's an escape from your personalities, isn't it?. She belched. (304f.)

Replying to his own question of why he returned to the wars, Falstaff alludes to the famous 1914 poster showing Lord Kitchener: "First, because I am an Englishman, and my country needed me" (313), with savage irony followed by "Second, because I needed the money". And the aftermath of the battle of Shrewsbury (21 July 1403) includes "whole hillocks of corpses [...] awaiting the cart to Dead Men's Dump" (295, see Issaac Rosenberg's poem of 1917).⁵¹ Thus the anachronisms, while provoking smiles, can intensify attitudes to serious issues, as is also shown in Falstaff's evocation of Joyce during the siege of Kildare by a mob of "Boglanders" (to do with "Devolution" and "Home Rule", 220): "I recall [...] a young man rather like a question-mark in shape, whose battle-cry was something about History being a nightmare from which he was trying to awake. An Irish proverb, no doubt"⁵² (221).

Now to Shakespeare head-on. As John Skow's wittily inverting review of *Falstaff* highlights, the very fact that Falstaff makes abundant use of Shakespearean texts is in itself one huge anachronistic joke: "He is dictating in the year 1459, of course unaware that nearly a century and a half later an unscrupulous playwright [...] will ransack his memoirs for

⁵¹ Cf. the allusion to Ernest Raymond's World War I novel of 1922: "Thank you, Clio. Tell England, will you?".

⁵² See Joyce, *Ulysses*: Stephen Dedalus, near the end of episode II, 'Nestor' (p. 42).

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the better parts of three plays [...] Shakespeare stole from Falstaff in other dramas too [...] So much for the Borrower of Avon".⁵³ Regarding works other than the *Henriad*, the first thing that strikes one in Nye's *Falstaff* (apart from single words or phrases)⁵⁴ is the plethora of Shakespearean names, mostly female. And here subversion has a proper – or rather improper – beanfeast (cf. Neumeier, 159ff., Concha, 82). Falstaff has a pet rat called Desdemona (53 and later) who does curious things to his body; put into skirts at the behest of the Duchess of Norfolk, his maiden bed-fellows (whom he is too young to do much with) include Rosalind and Portia (62); joining forces with his step-sister Ophelia (97 and later) he loses his virginity; with his niece Miranda he has an ongoing, inventively passionate sex affair. It was not Iachimo, but Falstaff who played the trunk-trick on Imogen (202); and of course it was penetratingly successful. Indeed, there is hardly a woman character in Shakespeare who does not benefit from Falstaff's priapism.⁵⁵ To boot, in boyhood he dressed up a stick as a horse to play with and called it "Roan Barbary" (cf. RII 5.5.78), his cook is Macbeth (3 and later),⁵⁶ the name of a lecherous hermit in "Pistol's Tale" is Malvolio (357), and Falstaff knew "a dago called Iago" (367).

Humorous, subversion also manifests itself in reassignment and dislocation of passages. Thus e.g. Falstaff wonders at his social and financial success over the years (cf. also e.g. 39): "O brave old world, in which such things are possible. For an Englishman" (40, cf. *The Tempest* 5.1.183f.). The Duchess of Norfolk says of Falstaff the page "A woman's

⁵³ In Time 108, 11 August 1976, 118.

⁵⁴ E.g. 202: "your Pillicock" (cf. King Lear 3.4.75) and "your poperin pear" (cf. Romeo and Juliet 2.1.38), 344 "country matters" (cf. Hamlet 3.2.112), and 450, the novel's last words: "Remember me" (cf. Hamlet 1.5.91).

⁵⁵ E.g. Mrs Ford and Mrs Page (6f. and later), Juliet, Perdita, Titania, and Beatrice (202).

⁵⁶ Macbeth was sired on his mother by a papal legate, his father substituting for a couch (79f.).

face [...] with nature's own hand painted (60, cf. Sonnet XX). Thousands of Italian Flagellants run around "in the vast dead of night" (122, cf. *Hamlet* 1.2.198). Will Squele introduces his wife to Falstaff in a variation of Touchstone's words about Audrey. "A poor thing, Jack, but mine own", which she caps with "A poorer thing, Jack, but mine owner (145, cf. *As You Like It*, 5.4.56)⁵⁷. And Mrs Quickly, still describing Falstaff with Milicent, interestingly varies Cassius: "She was his Cleopatra. He her Antony, bestriding her like a Colossus" (cf. *Julius Caesar* 1.2.135f.)

IV. The *Henriad* as a *Falstaffiad* and Shakespearean Critics

Expressions and phrases from the four Shakespeare plays containing Falstaff material, from *1Henry IV* and even more *2Henry IV*, but also *Henry V* (not *1HVI*) are liberally strewn about in all parts of the novel.⁵⁸

References in the Shakespeare plays to past action are expanded to full-blown stories, notably *2HIV* 3.13-33: Shallow's reminiscences of his wild time at St Clement's Inn and of Falstaff form, inspired by Falstaff's soliloquy (3.2.290ff, in which he describes Shallow's boastings as a pack of lies) form Chapter XXVs "How Sir John Falstaff broke Skogan's Head", a resounding victory witnessed by Henry IV's four sons (128-35), XXVI: "A parallel adventure: Mr. Robert Shallow v. Mr. Sampson Stockfish", a mean ruse of Shallow's, who had bribed Stockfish to play the injured loser (136-42), and XXVI: "About swinge-bucklers & bona robas", describing the other early companions, who were to a man abler than wretched and impotent Shallow (136-42), followed – inspired by 3.2.136-42 – by XXXIV: "About Mrs Nightwork & the night at the windmill" (165-69), with XL: "About Sir John

⁵⁷ Cf. further e.g.190: "the milk (and fat) of human kindness" (*Macbeth* 1.5.192).

⁵⁸ Mere page references from three stretches must suffice: 7, 12, 14, 30, 37; 146, 147, 159, 162, 164, 166; 354, 358, 363, 364.

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Fastolf's Prick" not far off (199-206). Similarly, the brief report of the Messenger in 1HVI (1.1.30-36) is developed into Ch. XCVII: "About the reverse at Patay, & the fall of France" (427-35), which shows Falstaff as rational and competent, with Talbot wrong and obstinate, causing the defeat. Before that Falstaff's death, reported in HV (2.3.1ff.) is revealed as a trick, worked in collusion with Mrs Quickly, to evade debt collection (155, cf. 350, 395), which enables Nye to present Falstaff as participating – intermittently (cf. e.g. 360) at the required distance of 10 miles from Henry V (see 2HIV 5.5.64-66) – in the British campaigns in France under Henry V (Chs. LXXXIII-LXXXVI, 361-79), including Harfleur, Bardolph's Execution, and Agincourt (see HV 3.1, 3.2, 3.6.20-59, 96-109, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6), and the King's triumphant entry into London (Prologue to Act 5), with Meaux (not shown in Shakespeare) added. And under Henry VI (Chs. LXXXIX-XCIII, 361-411 and XCV, 416-20 and indeed XCVII, 427-35) we read of Orleans, Rouen, and Patay (see – loosely and at great distance – 1HVI 1.2, 1.4-6, 2.1, 3.2, 4.11-47), with the burning of Joan of Arc (not shown in Shakespeare) thrown in. All is seen from Falstaff's perspective, and mostly Falstaff achieves glory,⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Esp. two notable victories: At Agincourt, Falstaff put a French force to flight by a bombardment with baggage items, making Henry V revoke his order to kill all prisoners (374-75, cf. HV 4.6.35-38); in reality this order was not revoked either in historical fact (see Jacob, 155f.) nor in Shakespeare, who has been repeatedly criticised for his presentation (see e.g. Bromley, John C. *The Shakespearean Kings*. Boulder: Colorado Associated UP, 1971, 88f. and Sutherland, John. "Henry V, War Criminal?". In Sutherland and Cedric Watts, *Henry V, War Criminal? & Other Shakespeare Puzzles* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 108-16). And during the Siege of Orleans, Sir John Fastolf with a small detachment brought a convoy of 300 (rather than "400") waggons filled with munitions and much-needed provisions (mainly herrings), successfully defended them against a French-Scottish force. This "Battle of the Herrings" (Ch. XCV, 416-20, likened to the battles of Marathon, Chalons, Hastings, etc.), reads like a fantasy, but has a historic background (February 1429 near Rouvray – Wikipedia).

even at Agincourt Henry V shows that he has learnt something from Falstaff at Gadshill (372, cf. 257, 290, 312).⁶⁰

What Nye does in relation to *1 and 2HIV* in the novel's middle portion (250-330) is perhaps best described with Genette's as a palimpsest in which well-known scenes and passages are slanted *at maiorem Falstaffii gloriam* and the balance of Shakespeare's plays amusingly skewed as the Falstaff-action assumes pride of place while the large portions in which he is not concerned dwindle. In this process of rewriting (and converting the multiple point of view in drama to a single one in fiction), Shakespeare criticism played an interesting role (cf. Neumeier, 155). Scholarship is twice jokingly glanced at,⁶¹ but specifics must be deduced. A table of corresponding chapters /scenes will make the unfolding of the tale (and the shifted weights) clear:

Chapters	Scenes
LI (250)	Portrait of Hal
LII (251)	Portraits of Bardolph, Pistol, Peto, Gadshill, Nym, Poins
LIII (252-58)	1HIV 1.2
LIV-LVII (259-67)	1HIV 2.2
LVIII-LIX (268-75)	1HIV 2.4
LX (276-77)	1HIV 3.2, 3.1
LXIV (289-91)	1HIV 4.2
LXV-LXVI (292-300)	1HIV 4.3, 5.1, 5.3,5.4

⁶⁰ Also at Shrewsbury Hal benefited from "the tactics and strategy I had taught him" (290).

⁶¹ In Ch. L (250) Falstaff quotes the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* as by Thomas Elmham, called "a disinterested but well-instructed source" (cf. Kingsford, C.L. "The Early Biographies of Henry V". *EHR* 25 (1910), 59-92, 61); but Elmham's authorship is no longer accepted, see e.g. Jacob, E.F. *The Fifteenth Century: 1399-1485*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971, 122, also Roskell, J.S., and T. Taylor. "The Authorship and Purpose of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*". *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 53, No.2 (Spring 1971), 428-64.. About the night at The Boar's Head corresponding to 2HIV 2.4, Falstaff says that Pistol made "dirty jokes and puns "which nobody could have followed without footnotes" (307).

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LXVII (300-03)	2HIV 2.1
LXVIII-LXIX (304-11)	2HIV 2.4, 3.1
LXX (312-13)	Assessment of Hal
LXXI (314-16)	2HIV 3.2, 4.1, 3.2
LXXII (317-18)	2HIV 4.5
LXXIII (319-23)	2HIV 5.3
LXXIV-LXXV (324-330)	2HIV 5.5

Ch. LIII, refashioning 1HIV 1.2 is set, after Edmond Capell (1768) and others, in Westminster Palace, "in a private apartment of the Prince of Wales" (252).⁶² Hal deliberately drinks less than Falstaff, and shows malice (254); Poins is queer and Hal's "male varlet" (255, i.e. "masculine whore", 254), while Falstaff shows "superior wisdom and experience" (256) and realises, that Hal "was playing with me as he played with his father" (257). The robbery is amusingly given in three versions (Ch. LIV-LVI),⁶³ followed (LVII) by the revelation, put forward by Hudson (1848) and often taken up (notably by J.D. Wilson),⁶⁴ that Falstaff recognized his attackers in 2.2 and is (as already Bradley asserted in 1902), leading Hal on by his exaggerations during the dispute in 2.4⁶⁵: "It was my object all along to make the Prince of Wales believe himself to be a much finer fellow than he was" (267). LVIII continues with 2.4, the playlet climaxing in Hal's fateful words. "I do. I will" (273, cf. 274, 308), LIX narrating the picking of Falstaff's pocket. LX provides glimpses of Shakespeare's 3.1 and 3.2. After a transition about Falstaff's recruiting methods (LXIV), which deftly paraphrases 1HIV

⁶² Most unlikely; others, e.g. Wilson and Humphreys follow Theobald (1733) with setting it in London.

⁶³ Cf. the life and works of St George, 120-22.

⁶⁴ See II, 87; cf. Wilson, J.D. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1943, repr. 1979, 48-56.

⁶⁵ See Bradley, A.C. "The Rejection of Falstaff" (1902). Repr. in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909, repr. 1926), 247-73, 265; many agree with this view.

4.2, there follow two chapters about the battle of Shrewsbury (LXV and LXVI) with swipes about Hotspur's, Hal's and Clarence's concept of honour (292f.) which for Falstaff, following in the footsteps of Priestley (314f.), is just "CANT". Falstaff insists (300) that who killed Hotspur is an "Open Question" (which it is indeed in Shakespeare's sources, but not in his play),⁶⁶ that it might have been Hal or him, but that he blundered in contradicting Hal, for which he was never forgiven (300).

Ch. LXVII is based on 2HIV 2.1, Mrs Quickly's attempt at having Falstaff arrested, LXVIII and LXIX are a very skewed reworking of 2HIV 2.4, the last Boar's Head scene, with a hilarious send-up of Henry IV's soliloquy 3.1.1ff. worked in (311). LXXI briefly narrates 3.2, the recruiting scene and 4.1, the despicable trick by which in Shakespeare Westmorland and Prince John of Lancaster dupe and arrest the leaders of the 1405 rebellion in Gaultree Forest – with the symptomatic variation that, according to Falstaff, Prince Hal was there (which is historically untrue)⁶⁷ and was in charge. Hal, already characterised as an actor (e.g. 312, 313, 363),⁶⁸ in 4.5 only acts the contrite son before his dying father, the "Leper King" (Ch. LXXII), before the narrative jumps to the second Gloucestershire scene 5.3, Pistol's arrival with the news that Hal is now King setting in motion the hasty departure for London. The banishment scene 5.5 (Ch. LXXIV) is rendered very pathetically, Falstaff's hand being wounded by Henry V's spur (cf. Rozett, 161), in addition to the deeper

⁶⁶ See Bullough, Geoffrey, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare. Vol. IV: Later English History Plays*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, 191, Jacob, E.F. *The Fifteenth Century: 1399-1485*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971, 52f., and Priestley, J.E. *The Battle of Shrewsbury, 1403*. Shrewsbury: Lievesey for the Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, 1979, 14

⁶⁷ See Jacob, 61, and e.g. Black, James. "Counterfeits of Soldiership in *Henry IV*". *SQ* 24 (1973), 372-82, 380.

⁶⁸ Cf. Winny, James. *The Player King: A Theme in Shakespeare's Histories*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1968, esp. 45-47 and 131ff.

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wounds the harsh speech and "those cold eyes" (328)⁶⁹, cf. 273) inflict on his soul. "With the term "Harry the Prig" (a commonplace of criticism inimical to Henry V),⁷⁰ the retrospect: LXXV adds the last touch to the consistent anti-Hal bias,⁷¹ which extends, again like much criticism,⁷² to Hal's father and brothers⁷³ and is the reverse side of Falstaff's equally consistent self-aggrandizement. Like many modern critics, he obviously shares Hazlitt's opinion that "Falstaff is the better man of the two" (285).⁷⁴ This bias, understandable from his own point of view, remains unchanged. So does Falstaff's view of himself as essentially, indeed exemplarily,

⁶⁹ For Hal's coldness see also e.g. 273, 380; another commonplace of hostile critics, e.g. Masefield, John. *William Shakespeare*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1911, 112; Kernan, Alvin B. "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays". *YR* 59 (1969), 3-32, 24; Bloom, Harold, "The Analysis of Character". In Bloom, ed. *Falstaff* (New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1992), 1-4, 3.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Stoll, E.E. "Falstaff". *MP* 12 (1914), 65-108, 197-240. Rev. repr. in *Shakespeare Studies, Historical and Comparative in Method* (1927), repr. New York: Ungar, 1960, 489; Hemingway, S.B. "On Behalf of that Falstaff". *SQ* 3 (1952), 307-11, 310; Barber, C.L. "From Ritual to Comedy: An Examination of *Henry IV*". In *English Stage Comedy*, ed. W.K. Wimsatt (New York: Columbia UP, 1955, repr. AMS Press, 1964), 22-51, 48; intensified by Priestley, J.B. "What Happened to Falstaff? (1961). Repr. in *The Moments and Other Pieces* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 292-321, 297 to: "treacherous prig".

⁷¹ In addition to malice, coldness, and meanness, already mentioned, there is what Falstaff perceives as Hal's "base ingratitude" (300, cf. 447).

⁷² See e.g. Traversi, Derek A. "1 Henry IV", *Scrutiny* 15 (Dec. 1946), 24-35, 26; Calderwood, James L. *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad: 'Richard II' to 'Henry V'*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: California UP, 1979, 37; Willems, Michèle. "Misconstruction in 1 Henry IV". *CEL* 37 (1990), 43-57, 50.

⁷³ See e.g. XXVII (177-86), 216, 252, 298, 325, esp. 292: "They all spoke alike, these sons of Bolingbroke. Spoke alike and thought alike. [...] As for their philosophy of honour [...] Up your honourable arse, your honour!" and 325: "they were all so mean, those spawn of Gaunt's!".

⁷⁴ Taken up e.g. by Quiller-Couch (Quiller-Couch, Arthur. *Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship*. New York: Holt, 1917, 115), Goddard (Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1951, 186), Grady (Grady, Hugh. *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002, 144).

English⁷⁵ (though his Englishness differs from that of the establishment – 257– the "disestablishments" of which he loves to be shown up:189). Unchanged remains also his attitude to killing, war, and honour. As a "professional soldier" (69)⁷⁶ he does not gladly fight or kill,⁷⁷ dislikes war, and thinks little of glory and honour, see especially his silent game, during a talk with the Duke of Norfolk, of substituting 'onions' for 'honour' (XLVIII, 241-42),⁷⁸ a remarkable pendant to Falstaff's "catechism" *1Henry IV*, 5.1.127-40. However, like Shakespeare's character, Falstaff the autobiographer rejects all accusations of cowardice.⁷⁹

V. Coda: Language, Dictation, and Metafictionality

There are many other aspects of this exciting and amusing novel which cannot be one into here,⁸⁰ but three require at least a brief glance. Rozett observes that the innumerable intertexts "blend imperceptibly with Falstaff's eclectic diction" (158). One must add that Nye's discreet

⁷⁵ See esp. 13, 121, 123, 159, 230, 231, 257, 341, 429. In this assertion he resembles J.B. Priestley, also in that his kind of Englishness differs from that of the establishment (257).

⁷⁶ Cf. Knowlton, E.C. "Falstaff Redux". *JEGP* 25 (1926), 192-215, esp. 206f.

⁷⁷ See e.g. 135, 240, 294, 376.

⁷⁸ Cf. also e.g. 69, 73: "the idiots and valiants went first", 277 (Hotspur, cf. 292f.); for illustrations of the real horrors of war and battle see 293-95, 361, 373, 394.

⁷⁹ See e.g. 265, 430, 434; cf. generally Morgann, Maurice. *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777). Repr. in Daniel A. Fineman, ed. *Shakespeare Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972),. 143-215.

⁸⁰ Such as the descriptions of Boyhood (IV, 20-23), the Black Death (VIII, 32-37), May Day (XXXIII 162-164), recurrent motifs like "the chimes at midnight" (146, 159, 186, 233, 449) or the (implied) identification with the 'good thief' who was saved (Luke XXIII.40-43): 233, 316, 348; cf. Allen, Elizabeth. "Robert Nye". In *British Novelists Since 1960, H-Z [Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 14,2]*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Detroit: Gale, 1983), 564-71, 368), also the numerous cross-references and correspondences lending the book additional unity and strength.

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modernising contributes to this.⁸¹ And, like that of Graves in the *Claudius* novels, his diction as a whole is decidedly modern (cf. Cohen, 74f.); what sticks out most are specific turns of phrase that a fifteenth-century person is unlikely to have used, such as "the right rate for the job" (39), "forked out" (178), and "starting from scratch" (223), also words that apparently did not yet exist in English, like "prissy" (29, 158, 241), "punch-up" (179), "historicity" (197) "gamahuche" (384) "a nancy", and "sentimentalities" (449).

A few things Falstaff writes down himself (23, 193, 229), but mostly he uses one of his six "secretaries", who are sharply distinguished from one another: Worcester (loyal but squeamish), Bussard (imperturbable), Hanson and Nanton (a pair of bisexual lightweights), Friar Brackley (rarely used), and Stephen Scrope, Falstaff's nephew and the most unwilling and rebellious of them all.⁸² Falstaff teases and taunts them mercilessly, thus foregrounding the narrating present. Indeed, one reason for the whole enterprise, these "memorials" (e.g. 25), "annals" (e.g. 83), these "*Acta*" (e.g. 255) is that he can annoy his secretaries (192, 193). And they also give rise to much metafictionality, both local (e.g. 199, 234, 339) and general: "I am your author. Agreed. But I am also *their* author [...] Do you know for certain that any of them exists? [...] Do you know for certain that I exist? That I don't have an author?" (159, c. 119).⁸³

Like Falstaff in *1Henry IV* 2.4.222 "Is not the truth the truth?" (cf. 164, 185) Nye's Falstaff often insists on the truth of his tale,⁸⁴ yet early on doubts are planted. "Only now is

⁸¹ See e.g. LXVIII (304-09).

⁸² There is (or was) a seventh, Peter Basset, who wrote a Latin account of Falstaff's French campaigns (198, 366), but he is not present. If there were no one to write for Falstaff, his penis might do the job (206).

⁸³ Indeed, the whole of 159-60 is in this vein, the reader being offered a part in forming patterns; cf. also 170f. (comparison with the building of Chartres Cathedral, juxtaposing "fact and fiction") and 191.

⁸⁴ See 1,77, 121, 122, 190, 196, 198, 227, 228, 278f., 376.

ever true" (42); "Reader, truth is various" (265, cf. 268); it is linked to those in power (p. 83), and Clio, the muse of history, often invoked, is really a whore (64, cf. 77, 153, 154). Truth is also hard if not impossible to get at (190f.); Falstaff juxtaposes "fact and fiction" (171), and in once place proudly points to having imparted "that air of reality [...] verisimilitude, so necessary to belief" (p. 119).

This is where his nephew Scrope comes in. Shirking secretarial work for long, he eventually does some. And Nye gives him 7 "Notes" of his own – in which Scrope unleashes his hatred of, and contempt for, Falstaff and his "monstrous lies" (e.g. 337), branding the whole compilation as "a work of fiction" (387). And, as Falstaff is increasingly struck with blindness (340, 352, etc.), Scrope can get away with writing what he wants to, and even tamper with Falstaff's will (XCVIII, 444). And he has the last word (C, 448-50) because "the Devil is dead" (448). All through, Scrope has been presented in such a negative light: mean, pig-headed, narrow-minded, vicious, etc., that one is really sad to find out, in Falstaff's notes for his confession to Friar Brackley (XCIX, 445-47), that the account of his life was indeed mainly made up, amorous exploits and all. Obliquely alluding to the misunderstanding between Pistol and Silence about "greatest man" (2HIV 5.3.88-79), Falstaff sums up the book with "I always cared to picture myself as a great man. I was only ever a fat man" (447, cf. 446). Yeats' jolly "Fiddler of Dooney" (Stewart) and Thurber's Walter Mitty (*Publishers Weekly*) with dozens of others⁸⁵ rolled into one. A whale of a tale.

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⁸⁵ Among them perhaps J.B. Priestley's towering if sketchy Falstaff figure, the Town Major.

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