

# Digesting Falstaff: Food and Nation in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays

Joshua B. Fisher

**Abstract:** This article examines Falstaff's culinary excesses in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays in terms of *quality* instead of *quantity*. Rather than viewing Falstaff simply as a figure of gluttonous vice, the article argues that Sir John can be understood as embodying an expansive metaphorical significance *as* food and, in particular, as overwhelmingly native English foodstuffs that both appeal to and threaten to upset Hal's humoral balance and his capacity to govern both self and nation. As such, embracing Falstaff potentially undermines one's proximity to proper bodily decorum and self-rule, but rejecting Falstaff potentially dissociates both Hal and audiences from a cohesive national community.



Digressing from an account of the infamous supper hosted by Sir Fulke Greville that sets the stage for the key cosmological dialogues in his *Ash Wednesday Supper* (1584), Giordano Bruno (through his alter-ego Teofilo) describes the traditional English "ceremony of the cup," noting with relief that this will not be part of the present festivities:

Usually, the goblet or chalice passes from hand to hand all round the table, from top to bottom, from left to right, in all directions with no order but that dictated by rough politeness and courtesy. After the leader of this dance has detached his lips, leaving a layer of grease which could easily be used as glue, another drinks and leaves you a crumb of bread, another drinks and leaves a bit of meat on the rim, still another drinks and deposits a hair of his beard and, in this way, with a great mess, no one is so ill-mannered, tasting the drink, as to omit leaving you some favor of the relics stuck to his moustache. If

one does not want to drink, either because he has not the stomach or because he considers himself above it, he need merely touch the cup to his mouth so that he too can imprint on it the morsels of his lips. The meaning of all this is that, since all of them come together to make themselves into a flesh-eating wolf to eat as with one body the lamb or kid or *Grunnio Corocotta* [suckling pig]; thus, by applying each one his mouth to the selfsame tankard, they come to form themselves into one selfsame leech, in token of one community, one brotherhood, one plague, one heart, one stomach, one gullet, and one mouth. And this is achieved through certain courtesies and trifles which are the funniest things in the world to see; but it is a most cruel and irksome tragedy if you are a gentleman who finds himself in the midst of it, since you feel obliged to do as the others, for fear of being considered impolite or discourteous; because this constitutes the very height of politeness and courtesy.<sup>1</sup>

At this juncture in the text, Bruno and his companions have just completed a perilous journey from their London lodgings to Greville's Brook House residence, having endured rude Thames watermen, knee-deep mud, a labyrinth of misleading roads, and the confusion of under-lit streets. Thus, the "ceremony of the cup" provides an ideal space to criticize English incivility and inhospitality.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Bruno uses the description to translate English courtesy and decorum into an unsettling vision of communal excess, thereby transforming the collective English body into a monstrous and uncivil feeder. In this vision, community becomes contamination and those that refrain from partaking out of disgust paradoxically become impolite and uncivil. Failing to wipe their mouths before drinking from the communal cup, participants in the ceremony neglect key prescriptions set forth by Erasmus in his highly influential *De civilitate morum puerilium* and by other sixteenth century authors concerning bodily comportment and carriage.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the absence of the ceremony at this particular supper is doubly ironic. Without the cup, a central register of English civility is absent. Yet the presence of the ceremony would only reinforce English distance from true measures of civility and hospitality. This paradox, remarked upon here by an outsider, elucidates anxieties about English civility in relation to the broader world. That the cup ceremony description integrates images of gluttonous feeding (the "flesh-eating wolf," "the leech," the communal "stomach," "gullet," and "mouth") is particularly telling, since conspicuous consumption of foodstuffs is at the heart of English anxieties about civility during this period.

Indeed, England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries exhibited a conflicted attitude toward the presentation and consumption of foodstuffs in relation to notions of English civility and national identity.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, English subjects embraced the conspicuous consumption of luxurious and often imported foods to substantiate England's emerging position as a wealthy and powerful player on the international stage. The influx of staples, spices, and beverages from abroad, along with the increasing availability of regionally produced foodstuffs throughout England, fostered an emerging awareness of a distinctly national culinary culture. On the other hand, persistent xenophobia and the association between culinary decadence and foreign corruption led many to condemn excessive eating practices. Bruno's assessment of the cup ceremony inadvertently exposes these anxieties, but it is within the space of English literary representation, particularly plays and masques, that these concerns are most compellingly expressed. Broadly speaking, codes of social behavior and decorum including those dictating gastronomic consumption can be seen as themselves a kind of theatrical presentation, as scholars such as Norbert Elias have argued. More specifically, opponents of the dramatic arts dating back to the classical period have emphasized the connection between theater and excessive gormandizing as central to their objections against plays. As Philip Stubbes identifies in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), early Christian commentators such as Tertullian directly equate plays with unbridled Bacchanalian excess, while others such as Chrysostom refer to dramatic performances as "*feſta Sathani*, feasts of the devil." Stubbes himself claims that plays "*nouriſh idleneſſ*" and serve as "*plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chaſtity.*"<sup>5</sup> In the context of anti-theatrical discourses that equate play going with excessive and indecorous feeding, a number of early modern plays thematize the interrelationship between culinary and dramatic consumption. From the insatiable appetites of Jonsonian characters including Sir Epicure Mammon in *The Alchemist*, Rabbi Busy in *Bartholomew Fair*, and the belly god Comus in the masque *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, to representations of excessive and unruly eating in Shakespeare's corpus (including *Titus Andronicus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and a number of other plays), consuming food and consuming theatrical spectacle becomes intertwined.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I explore how representations of foodstuffs and culinary consumption on stage specifically disclose English anxieties about cultural inferiority while embracing unsettled attitudes toward eating as a distinct marker of Englishness for both individual subjects and the nation at large. While Bruno's description of the cup ceremony stands outside the realm of theatrical representation, his insistence that the spectacle is both "the funniest thing in the world to see" and "the most cruel and irksome

tragedy” for those participating underscores how displays of culinary civility are always bound up in the presentational dynamics of performance. In turn, numerous masques and plays dramatize conflicting attitudes toward culinary consumption while revealing anxieties about the power of food to shape and transform identities. Long associated with gluttony and excessive eating by the central presence of Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays provide a useful site to investigate how acts of culinary consumption register deep-seated anxieties about the power of food to shape bodies both individual and national. Specifically, the regulation and balance of one’s bodily humors (so central to early modern physio-social ideology) directly links the consumption of foodstuffs to matters of civility and governance at once personal, political, and even environmental.<sup>7</sup> It is of course a commonplace to associate Falstaff with gluttony as well as with the medieval vice figure that threatens to lead both Hal and audiences astray. Such critical attention has focused almost exclusively on the *quantity* of food with which Falstaff is associated in the plays. Shifting the emphasis from the *quantity* to the *quality* of foodstuffs, I want to suggest that Falstaff can be understood as embodying a more expansive metaphorical significance *as* food and, in particular, as overwhelmingly native English foodstuffs that both appeal to and threaten to upset Hal’s humoral balance and his capacity to govern both self and nation.<sup>8</sup> Much recent criticism has called attention to the ways in which Shakespeare’s *Henriad* and particularly the *Henry IV* plays “tell the story of an emerging nation.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the very idea of a cohesive English nation is predicated upon proper humoral balance in the plays as Hal negotiates his own temperate rule between humoral extremes that include both Hotspur’s cholera and Falstaff’s sanguinity. The focus of the present essay on the qualitative rather than quantitative register of Falstaff’s food associations invigorates this discussion by complicating Falstaff’s corporeal significance in relation to notions of a healthy English body both individual and politic.

Learning how to assimilate Falstaff’s theatricality and deftness with figurative language proves key to Hal’s political self-image, including his transformation into an effective monarch. To a certain extent, Hal figuratively digests Falstaff by embracing the abundance of verbal and conceptual matter that Falstaff not only consumes but also produces. However, while Hal’s famous rejection of Falstaff in *II Henry IV* involves espousing temperance and proper self/state government at the expense of bodily excess, the shift in focus from quantity to quality of food hugely complicates the otherwise easy trajectory toward kingship, self-discipline, and national unification that Hal is supposed to trace by purging Falstaff and his sensual license. Simply put, Hal dismisses Falstaff’s model of

national cohesion predicated upon a culinary amalgam of regional and local identities in favor of a political model in which a singular and autonomous monarchic body becomes synonymous with the body of the nation.

While this reading resonates with those critics who trace Hal's path from carnival excess to Lenten restraint and from a populist to a Machiavellian model of kingship and rule, the metaphoric emphasis on consuming and digesting English foodstuffs keys the plays to a distinct concern with the very formation of nationhood in relation to Hal/Henry V's political choices.<sup>10</sup> Embracing Falstaff, much like drinking from Bruno's cup, potentially undermines one's proximity to proper bodily decorum and self-rule, but rejecting Falstaff (or refusing to drink from the cup) dissociates one from a cohesive national community.<sup>11</sup> While Hal opts for the latter, audiences are left with the problematic question of how to digest Falstaff in a productive fashion. Potentially surfeited with an overabundance of Falstaff by the end of *II Henry IV* (which incidentally paves the way for Falstaff's absence in *Henry V* in conjunction with Will Kemp's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's Men), audiences face the challenge of digesting competing notions of Englishness.

### English Appetites

In his seminal exploration of the history of manners in *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias demonstrates how the regulation of diet through the consumption, digestion, and purging of foodstuffs could be understood as a method of constituting not only the political subject but also the body politic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Building on Elias's work, Ken Albala describes the relationship between bodily and political governance this way:

As one among many forms of self-government, the dietary regimens and their attempts to control and rationalize eating behavior also, logically, flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries... That the authors of [dietary] works considered the government of the body as analogous to that of states is quite clear. It is no coincidence that the word *regime* and *regimen* share a common root in the Latin *regere*, to rule, and are still sometimes used interchangeably for ruling both the body and the state.<sup>12</sup>

For early modern individuals, the consuming, digesting, and purging of food was intractably linked to the Galenic model of the bodily humors.

Rather than simply a conduit for physical nourishment, eating and drinking played key roles in shaping cognitive, emotive, and even spiritual dispositions governed by the body's humors. The four humoral personality types or *temperaments* (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic) were determined by a complex amalgam of physical and mental qualities that could be directly impacted by the consumption of particular foods. In Nicholas Culpepper's 1653 translation of Galen's *Art of Physick*, for example, the following prescription outlines food and especially drink to be avoided by individuals of a sanguine disposition:

They need not be very scrupulous in the quality of their Diet, provided they exceed not in quantity, because the Digestive Vertue is so strong. Excess in small Beer engendreth clammy and sweet Flegm in such Complexions, which by stopping the pores of the Body, engenders Quotidian Agues, the Chollick and stone, and pains in the Back. Inordinate drinking of strong Beer, Ale and Wine, breeds hot Rhewms, Scabs and Itch, St. Anthonies fire...<sup>13</sup>

Early modern dietaries, conduct manuals, and recipe books attest to this understanding of eating and drinking, as foodstuffs and their humoral implications interlink cookbook recipes, medical cures, cosmetic procedures, and even prescriptions for poisons. While the Galenic excerpt above illustrates the detrimental impact of excessive drinking on the body's humoral balance, early modern dietaries and cookbooks frequently emphasize the curative capacity of foodstuffs to strengthen or restore an individual's humoral equilibrium. Take, for example, the following description of cloves in *The Gentlewoman's Companion*:

*Cloves* is an excellent *Spice* for the *Head, Heart, Stomack, and the Eyes*, which are much benefited thereby, and *Nature* strengthened. In *Swoonings* and *Fainting-fits* they are very good, or against the *Plague*, or any other infectious disease whatsoever, or fluxes of the *belly* proceeding from *cold Humours*. They are good against strengthening the *retentive faculty*, and *sweetning* the *breath*; but let young *Sanguine* and *Cholerick Complexions* use them and all other *Spices* very sparingly.<sup>14</sup>

Highly representative of cookeries and dietary books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the author's assessment of cloves underscores the intrinsic relationship between the culinary and the medicinal in the governing of one's humoral balance.

At the same time, over-eating or partaking in the consumption of overly decadent and luxurious “dainty fare” (including increasingly available imported foods from abroad) could undermine an individual’s ability to govern the self as a result of humoral imbalance, and this inability in turn threatens the stability of the body politic. Characteristically denouncing England’s increasing appetite for culinary abundance and exotic foodstuffs in the late sixteenth century, Philip Stubbes underscores the dangers that such consumption poses to the physical body and to the body of the English state: “I cannot persware myself otherwise, but that our niceness and curiousness in dyet, hath altered our nature, distempered our bodies, and made us more subject to millions of...diseases, *then ever weare our forefathers subject unto*, and consequently of shorter life than they.”<sup>15</sup> Contrasting contemporary eating habits with those of England’s forefathers, Stubbes articulates how decadent and self-indulgent consumption has degraded the very social fabric of English heritage and identity.<sup>16</sup>

Such anxieties about the generational deterioration of Englishness as a result of increasingly excessive eating and drinking are directly voiced in the *Henry IV* plays. From both King Henry’s and the audience’s perspective, Hal’s potential to govern effectively as England’s future king is cast into serious doubt as a result of his riotous associations with Falstaffian gluttony. As he wonders at Hal’s “affections, which do hold a wing / Quite from the flight of all thy ancestors,” Henry sounds a bit like Stubbes since he identifies a clear rift between the temperate rule of his predecessors and Hal’s own immoderate inclinations (*I Henry IV*, 3.2.30-31).<sup>17</sup> In fact, Henry’s ensuing advice to his son is strikingly concerned with the idea of excessively frequent consumption, extending the idea of frequent over-indulgence from personal behavior to misguided political strategy. Henry’s description of exceedingly populist strategy is fraught with the imagery of constant excessive feeding whereby an overly familiar king

“...being daily swallowed by men’s eyes,  
They surfeited with honey and began  
To loathe the taste of sweetness, whereof a little  
More than a little is by much too much.” (3.2.70-3)

Where excessive familiarity here leads from over-satiation to distaste and revulsion, Henry’s secluded and reserved leadership emphasizes a more restrained but nevertheless satisfying kind of feeding: “So my state, / Seldom but sumptuous, showed like a feast and won by rareness such solemnity” (3.2.57-9). Unlike Hal, whose associations with Falstaff

underscore intemperance in terms of both personal and political rule, the king's comparison of his statecraft to a lavish but infrequent feast emphasizes temperance both for himself and his subjects. At the same time, Henry IV's insistence on the importance of infrequent but nevertheless "sumptuous" feasting underscores the relationship between feeding the political subject and nurturing the body politic.

Despite the detrimental associations between over-consumption of foodstuffs and the failure to regulate individual and state bodies, English cultural prowess was increasingly defined by an ability to consume an abundance of luxurious foods and beverages, and this development complicates the associative significance of over-eating in the *Henry IV* plays. Throughout the medieval period and into the early sixteenth century, conspicuous consumption had become an important signifier of social distinction.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the spectacle of overabundance and decadence at royal feasts increasingly came to define emerging English cultural might. The following excerpt from the Venetian Ambassador's description of a feast held in honor of Emperor Maximilian at Henry VIII's court in 1517 emphasizes the wealth of Henry's court *and* the wealth and strength of the English nation:

Every imaginable sort of meat known in the kingdom was served, and fish, too, including prawn pasties of perhaps twenty different kinds, made in the shapes of castles, and of animals of different kinds, as beautiful as can be imagined. In short, *the wealth and civilization of the world are here*, and those who call the English barbarians seem to me to make themselves barbarians.<sup>19</sup>

In this assessment, the lavish display on the table confirms England's position as a significant civilized power on the world stage.

Even more striking are cases of English over-eaters and other instances of culinary excess such as food-fights described in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century ballads and pamphlets. These include a fascinating poem describing a debtors' prison food-fight between a captain, a lawyer, and other London citizens entitled "The Counter-Scuffle," a libelous pamphlet chronicling the alleged gormandizing excesses of a London lawyer entitled "The Great Eater of Grayes-Inne, or the Life of Mr. Marriot the Cormorant," and the anonymous ballad "A Wonder in Kent" about another famous over-eater.<sup>20</sup> In "The Great Eater of Kent," John Taylor celebrates the wondrous gastronomic feats of his title hero, Nicholas Wood, who was famously capable of engorging massive quantities of food. Tellingly, Taylor emphasizes Wood's identity as a distinctly English hero to rival great figures from the classical past as well as celebrated

contemporary individuals from Europe and the Far East. To this end, Taylor reassures readers that Wood only consumes familiar English foodstuffs:

He is an Englishman and English dyet will serve his turne. If the *Norfolk Dumplin* and the *Devonshire white-pot* be at variance, he will atone them, the *Bag-pudding* of *Gloucestershire*, the *Black-pudding* of *Worcestershire*, the *Pan-puddings* of *Shaepshire*, the *white puddings* of *Somersetshire*, the *Hasty-puddings* of *Hampshire*, and the *Pudding-pyes* of any shire, all is one to him, nothing comes amiss...<sup>21</sup>

Notable here is the way in which Wood's gastronomic exploits foster a cohesive nationalism comprised of provincial and regional dishes. Yet even as distinctly regional puddings are celebrated and catalogued, the emphasis here is on unity since Wood's stomach never discriminates so long as the puddings come from decidedly English points of origin. This idea of national cohesion through culinary consumption underscores both the power of domestically produced foodstuffs to promote English identity and the transformation of homegrown gluttony from a vice to a virtue in the service of nationalism. Furthermore, the fact that Taylor unsuccessfully attempted to bring Wood to the London stage for a series of eating "performances" at the London Bear Garden reiterates how theater and eating intersect within the realm of gastronomic spectacle.<sup>22</sup>

### Feasting On Falstaff

Returning to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, it is striking to note the frequency with which Falstaff is likened through metaphoric associations to a rich array of domestic English foodstuffs. Even as Falstaff's excessive consumption stands as a temptation that Hal must turn from in order to become an effective ruler of both himself and the state, Falstaff's associative resonance with foodstuffs that feed familiar notions of Englishness and nationalism complicate Hal's trajectory toward monarch. Furthermore, the allure of Falstaff as a richly nourishing entity for audiences undermines our own capacity to reject the fat knight.

Even when we first encounter Falstaff in the second scene of *I Henry IV*, the associative power of metaphors is brought to the forefront as Hal berates the fat knight for asking what time it is:

"What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack and minutes capons and clocks the tongues of

bawds and dials the signs of leaping-houses and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.” (1.2.5-10)

Falstaff's excessive gluttony is emphasized from the start. According to Hal, why would Falstaff care about the time unless time was somehow a commodity that could be consumed to satisfy a hunger? The lines are of course played for laughs, but more importantly anticipate the associative power of metaphoric language throughout these plays—a force that transforms Falstaff (like the clock, hours, and minutes) into consumable properties while underscoring how absolute systems of order (including time) break down within Falstaff's linguistic and imaginative economy. Capons, butter, sugar, regional puddings and roast meats, sauce, beef, stockfish, and even imported beverages such as sack and Madeira wine: all are increasingly associated with the indigenous English diet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and all are likened metaphorically to Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. Even as foodstuffs both domestically produced and imported were increasingly available across a broader range of localities and social classes by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, this factor (along with severe regional food shortages in the last decades of the sixteenth century) in some ways heightened attention to culinary differences based on particular regions and localities, as Joan Thirsk has recently shown.<sup>23</sup> While it may seem an easy task to reject excessive drinking and copious eating, the hearty fare both coursing through and written upon Falstaff's body nourishes English cultural might while feeding the audience's hunger for a cohesive model of nationalism founded upon an amalgam of distinct regional and social identities. It is this model that Hal seemingly embraces and then rejects in his trajectory toward monarchic rule. While codes of civility in early modern England would dictate that Falstaffian excess be shunned in favor of gastronomic restraint, to do so arguably would be to shun a distinctly heterogeneous version of English nationalism predicated upon culinary, regional, and social diversity.

Indeed, Falstaff is likened to numerous foodstuffs that comprise an emerging English culinary culture. Hal refers to the fat knight as “my sweet beef,” and even though the idea of beef as the exemplary English meat does not crystallize until the eighteenth century, the association here anticipates this development and also might serve as a reminder to audiences that Falstaff's Eastcheap locale was the site of a major cattle market.<sup>24</sup> Poins's reference to Falstaff as “the Martlemas your master” (*II Henry IV*, 2.2.87) also underscores this connection, since “Martlemas” here

refers to the fatted cattle slaughtered on the November 11<sup>th</sup> feast of St. Martin.

In *II Henry IV*, the rebel Lord Bardolph identifies Falstaff as “Harry Monmouth’s brawn, the hulk Sir John” (1.1.19).<sup>25</sup> Brawn arguably precedes beef as the ubiquitous English meat dish in the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Brawn was made from the trimmings of pig’s head, trotters, tail, and tongue. These were boiled for hours along with onions, spices, and herbs. After the liquid was reduced, the mixture was left to cool until the meats were set in jelly. Although brawn appears in the cuisine of numerous countries (often called “head cheese” today), it was identified as an indigenous English dish in the early modern period.

Even more particular to English locality is Hal’s description of Falstaff as “that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly” (*I Henry IV*, 2.5.412). This reference, along with other regional culinary references to Falstaff such as “Bartholomew Boar-Pig,” is particularly striking since it associates Falstaff with provincial and local specialties (*II Henry IV*, 2.4.205).<sup>26</sup> In addition, the Manningtree ox reference links Falstaff to the perennial English favorite, puddings.<sup>27</sup> According to Joan Thirsk (and as the quote from John Taylor above testifies), puddings

...could have a variety of forms and flavours. They could be savoury with meat, vegetables, and herbs, or sweet with fruit and sugar or honey, or with spices. They could be fried, steamed, or boiled, and if no eggs were to hand, the flour and fat mixture was lightened with yeast.<sup>28</sup>

Discussing puddings and brawn as distinctly English cuisine, the seventeenth century traveler John Ray remarks, “not in any place we traveled beyond sea [were any] puddings...either not knowing the goodness of the dish, or not having skill to make them: puddings and brawn are dishes proper to England.”<sup>29</sup>

Although usually more closely identified with the Low Countries than with England during the time period, butter is frequently associated with Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays along with animal fat, grease, gravy, and drippings. In Act 2, scene 5 of *I Henry IV*, the Sheriff and Carrier seeking Falstaff describe him as “a gross man,” “as fat as butter” (2.5.465-6). Incidentally, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff likens his own humoral disposition to butter as he describes himself as “a man of my kidney...that am as subject to heat as butter, a man of continual dissolution and thaw...” (3.5.98-100). While these and other associative references underscore Falstaff’s overwhelmingly corpulent body as well as his cowardice, as when Prince Hal exclaims that “thy theft has already made thee butter,”

butter in particular takes on significance as an increasingly English staple during the period since it became both more accessible across regions and more desirable among the middle and upper classes within England (*I Henry IV*, 4.2.53-4). According to Thirsk, butter was not widely used in well-to-do households in the late Middle Ages, but became increasingly popular by the sixteenth century as middle and upper class English people began to embrace the fashionable Flemish custom of spreading butter on bread. The rising popularity of vegetables among the gentry and nobility by the early seventeenth century brought with it the practice of using butter as a sauce. Finally, improved techniques for preserving butter were finding their way from the Low Countries during this time, making butter transport and distribution across England more widespread.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Falstaff is metaphorically associated with such nationally emblematic foodstuff transforms the knight into a mouth-watering culinary display, feeding the audience's appetite for rich comedic fare while celebrating the richness of England's emerging culinary prowess.

Along with a veritable feast of culinary associations (sauce, anchovies, stockfish, soused gurnet, roasted capons, bacon, deer, apple-johns, peppercorns, blackberries, gooseberries, and at least a bit of bread), Falstaff consumes *and* is constructed by way of beverages that further distinguish a distinctive English national identity. Foremost among these is sack, fortified wine known today as sherry. According to the early modern dietary writer William Vaughan, drinking sack excessively on a full stomach "doth more harm than good" and "doth make men fatte and foggy."<sup>31</sup> Falstaff certainly fits this assessment, but less self-evident is the way in which Falstaff's associations with sack would promote a distinctly English culinary identity. After all, sack was imported from Spain and the Canary Islands and the various types of sack including Malaga, Palm, and Jerez (or Sherry) take their names from their foreign points of origin. However, sack was viewed as a distinctly nationalistic beverage after 1587 when Sir Francis Drake raided the Spanish fleet at Cadiz, captured 2,900 pipes of sherry intended for the Armada, and made drinking sack an act of patriotism. The defeat of the Spanish Armada the following year further solidified the nationalistic association between sack and English might.<sup>32</sup> While this identification of sack with England does not necessarily eradicate a long tradition of English hostility toward foreign imports including wine,<sup>33</sup> Falstaff's eulogy to sack in *II Henry IV* underscores the drink's invigorating nature, both for individuals including Hal and arguably for the strength of the English nation:

"Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father, he hath, like lean, sterile and bare

land, manured, husbanded and tilled with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant. If I had a thousand sons, the first humane principle I would teach them should be, to forswear thin potations and to addict themselves to sack." (4.2.81-111)

Excessive drinking is transformed from an indecorous vice into a dignified virtue for both self and nation. Falstaff's plentiful associations with sack thus quench England's thirst for national self-assertion while satisfying audiences' desire for a feast of comedic spectacle here realized by turning the conventional discourse about the dangers of intemperate drinking squarely on its head. At the same time, sack becomes part of a wider nexus of culinary associations in the plays that underscores the close proximity between Falstaff and a cohesive Englishness predicated on an amalgam of regional and diverse foodstuffs and beverages.

### Devouring Language

In light of metaphoric associations between Falstaff and English foodstuffs, it is quite telling that Prince Hal's own trajectory toward kingship places him squarely within the gustatory space of the tavern as he digests and then purges Falstaff. When he boasts in *I Henry IV* that he can "drink with any tinker in his own language," Hal underscores how his political strategy involves digesting the diverse gastronomic and linguistic foodstuffs that the nation has to offer (2.5.16-7). That he conflates political subjects with consumables as he describes his whereabouts to Poins ("With three or four loggerheads amongst three or fourscore hogsheads") is equally telling (2.5.4-5). In Hal's assessment, foolish drinking companions ("loggerheads") and the casks that hold drink ("hogsheads") are interchangeable: both will nourish his progress toward kingship and accentuate his apparent transformation from unruly gormandizer to the temperate ruler of both his own body and the body politic.

Nowhere are such strategies more evident than in Act 2, scene 5 of *I Henry IV* as Hal and Falstaff rehearse the prince's upcoming meeting with his father. As Barbara Hodgdon has argued, Falstaff's theatricality is at the heart of his comedic ability to undermine stable notions of order and subject-definition in the plays: "A creature who draws his own authenticity from the suspect realm of theatrical shadow, [Falstaff] more than any other, is well aware that the counterfeit—the reproduced image of the authentic—has no value until it is put into circulation and exchanged."<sup>34</sup> By first playing the prince to Falstaff's Henry IV and then taking on the role of the

king himself, Hal feeds on Falstaff's theatricality and deft use of language as a counterfeit diet to nourish and rehearse his own political ambitions. This culminates with Hal's acting out of the mock-rejection that powerfully ends the exchange and previews the dramatic purging of Falstaff in the ensuing play. However, it also resonates with Hal's appropriation of theatricality in *I Henry IV* more broadly as he plays the part of "the king of courtesy" among tapsters and tavern folk and as he acknowledges the self-consciously theatrical nature of his role-playing in his soliloquy explaining how "My reformation, glittering o'er my fault, / Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off" (1.2.191-93).

Significantly, Hal's ability to digest the collective language of the commonwealth also marks his difference from Hotspur. The latter detests poetry, music, and other forms of linguistic utterance on the grounds that these undermine the integrity of a martial body both individual and collective. Take, for example, Hotspur's description of the court popinjay whose "many holiday and lady terms" feed Hotspur's rage and compromise his willingness to return Henry IV's prisoners (*I Henry IV*, 1.3.32-49). Similarly, in one of a number of diatribes against poetry and song, Hotspur memorably exclaims, "I had rather be a kitten and cry 'mew' / Than one of these same metre ballad-mongers" (3.1.125-26). Where associative language feeds Hal's project of self-definition as an effective future monarch, Hotspur's rejection of such language prevents him from nourishing a similarly invigorated identity. For Hotspur, language can only "nourish agues," and it is his distrust in the power of words, as well as his own inability to control speech, that marks his distance from a well-ordered and temperate body both individual and politic (4.1.113). Where Hal devours language to feed his political motivations, Hotspur is devoured by it. Consistently interrupted by his father and uncle, Hotspur finds himself swallowing his words mid-sentence. Perhaps most telling is Hotspur's final line. Initially and characteristically trying to say too much ("O, I could prophesy") after Hal mortally wounds him, Hotspur's truncated exclamation "And food for—" is answered by Hal's "For worms" (*I Henry IV*, 5.4.85-6). The lines emphasize Hotspur's failure to digest language and more importantly draws a contrast between Hotspur *as* food to be devoured and Hal as a feeder (a "Monmouth" no less) who capably consumes language to nourish the body of the kingdom.

Similarly telling is Hal's subsequent response to the specter of Falstaff apparently lying dead on the ground: "Death hath not struck so fat a deer today, / Though many dearer in this bloody fray. / Embowelled will I see thee by and by" (*I Henry IV* 5.4.106-8). Through a predictable

pun, Hal transforms Falstaff into venison, but it is Falstaff's own response following his sudden resurrection that is most significant here: "If thou embowel me today, I'll give you leave to powder me, and eat me too, tomorrow" (110-11). Hal has indeed digested Falstaff by appropriating the fat knight's theatricality and deftness for wordplay, but Falstaff's joke about Hal's appetite also foreshadows more serious matters. Even as Falstaff promises to purge his own excessive feeding practices in favor of moderation just a few lines later, Hal will go on to purge himself of Falstaff in the succeeding play and then demonstrate an unrelenting appetite for monarchic authority as he hungers to become not just king of England but also king of France in *Henry V*.

### Conclusion: To Purge or Not To Purge?

Given the complex associations between culinary consumption and the ruling of bodies, how are we to understand the broader implications of Hal's rejection of Falstaff at the end of *II Henry IV*? In keeping with the conventional idea that Falstaff's gluttony stands as a temptation that Hal must overcome, the rejection seems the culmination of the newly crowned king's transformation. Such a transformation certainly puts to rest the lingering doubts that Henry IV has expressed on his deathbed, reprimanding the prince for his perceived hunger for the throne and imagining the future king as feeding England's vices and corruption by embracing an English body politic predicated upon regional diversity and disarray instead of upon the singular authority of the "royal state":

"...Up, vanity!  
 Down, royal state! All you sage counsellors, hence!  
 And to the English court assemble now  
 From every region, apes of idleness!  
 Now, neighbor confines, purge you of your scum!  
 Have you a ruffian that will swear, drink, dance,  
 Revel the night, rob, murder, and commit  
 The oldest sins the newest kind of ways?  
 Be happy; he will trouble you no more.  
 England shall double gild his treble guilt,  
 England shall give him offence, honour, might;  
 For the fifth Harry from curb'd licence plucks  
 The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog  
 Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent." (4.3.249-60)

The newly crowned king's unwillingness to recognize Falstaff and his insistence that Falstaff and his festive, corpulent body have been only a dream would seem to crystallize the transformation from intemperate self-governance to the proper regulation of both self and state. Yet the culinary metaphors that we have been tracing complicate such an easy resolution, reminding audiences that Hal's promise of banishing Falstaff involves purging a conception of English nation predicated upon a diverse amalgam of culinary riches in favor of a restrained and singular monarchic body.

Even as audiences face the question of whether to digest or purge Falstaff by either sympathizing with or condemning him, the epilogue of the play further exploits culinary language to highlight the interpretive choices that audiences can still make:

"One word more, I beseech you. If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Catherine of France: where, for any thing I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a' be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." (Epilogue 23-28)

As an apology for the play's placeholder status in the second tetralogy, the epilogue to *II Henry IV* makes clear that audiences have potentially experienced an over-abundance of Falstaff. Now "'too much cloyed with fat meat,'" audiences would be in a position to sympathize with Hal in his rejection of Falstaff and also be more likely to accept the news that Falstaff's death in the succeeding play will be imminent. Yet, as I have been arguing, Falstaff's culinary associations throughout the *Henry IV* plays complicate any kind of easy denunciation even here. In rejecting Falstaff, the newly crowned Henry V has defined himself in contrast to an English body composed of diverse regional identities and flavors and thus in contrast to the cultural amalgam that made up Elizabethan audiences themselves (comprising different social classes as well as provincial localities). Moreover, if as David Wiles and others have suggested, the epilogue is presented by Falstaff himself in the person of the comic actor Will Kemp, then the lines continue to nourish the audience's hunger for Falstaff and suggest that his comedic pleasures have endured in spite of the king's rejection.<sup>35</sup> The promise of an entertaining jig ("'if my tongue cannot entreat you to acquit me, will you command me to use my legs?'" ) along with the wryly-ironic Oldcastle joke that ends the play would keep the audiences laughing, thus satisfying a hunger for Falstaff and his nourishing presence that proves persistent and overshadows the pessimistic words about Falstaff's death in the next play (Epilogue 16-7, 27).

Falstaff does indeed die in *Henry V*, but his legacy lives on in ways that further complicate the idea of purging the fat knight and his immoderate influences. It is instructive to focus briefly on one such incarnation, namely Falstaff's appearance in the late seventeenth century dramatic compendium, *The Wits*. The famous frontispiece illustration certainly testifies to Falstaff's enduring legacy, and his association with excess lives on as he proudly displays the massive wine cup before the protesting Hostess. The play's longer title, "The Wits, or Sport upon Sport, in select pieces of drollery digested into scenes by way of dialogue" further underscores the associations with eating. Once again, Falstaff is offered up—along with a number of other well-known characters from earlier seventeenth century plays—as a delectable morsel to be consumed. At the same time, the image of Falstaff and his huge goblet returns us to Bruno's description of the cup ceremony with which this essay opens. In line with the associative metaphors that I have been tracing, it is fruitful to think of Falstaff himself as an iteration of the cup, its greasy and potentially off-putting form passed around festively to comprise a collective community at once defining English national identity *and* (at least from an outsider's view) undermining the very strictures of civility and decorum on which that identity would stand.

*Joshua B. Fisher is Associate Professor of English at Wingate University. He has published articles on broadside ballads, English domestic travel writing, and other topics pertaining to early modern literature and culture. He is presently working on a book about the development of familiar English space in the early modern period.*



<sup>1</sup> Giordano Bruno, "Second Dialogue" from *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (1584), trans. Lawrence S. Lerner and Edward A. Gosselin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 126-27.

<sup>2</sup> The hazardous journey to Brook House also anticipates Bruno's hostile reception during the post-dinner debate where he presents certain Copernican suppositions that are rudely and summarily dismissed by his English hosts and audience.

<sup>3</sup> See Erasmus, *De civilitate morum puerillum* (Rotterdam, 1530); see also Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*. trans. Thomas Hoby (London, 1561). For a range of continental conduct books from the late medieval and early modern periods, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process Volume One: The History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> For recent studies on food and eating in early modern England, see especially Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions, 1500-1760* (New York: Continuum Press, 2007); Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); and Joan Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Diaries and the Plays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). On early modern civility, see especially Elias, *The Civilizing Process Volume One: The History of Manners*; see also Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (London, 1583) 141. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>6</sup> A number of Shakespeare's plays dramatize excessive culinary consumption as well as other acts of "eating amiss" ranging from the unruly festivities in *Twelfth Night* and lavishly decadent feasting in *Antony and Cleopatra* to cannibalism in *Titus Andronicus* and threats of forced feeding in *The Tempest*.

<sup>7</sup> On early modern humoral theory, see Albala, *Eating Right*; see also Gail K. Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Discourses of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Michael Schoenfeldt, "Fables of the Belly in Early Modern England" in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the plays register in relation to humoral imbalances ranging from Hotspur's choleric outbursts and Glendower's concern about the portentous significance of violent (and imbalanced) environmental phenomena at the time of his birth to Hal's conflicted position between his father's apparent temperance and Falstaff's excesses (not to mention the designation of Falstaff and his tavern friends in *II Henry IV* as "irregular humorists.")

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Hodgdon (ed.), *The First Part of Henry the Fourth: Texts and Contexts*, (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997) 2. On the broader implications of the *Henriad* in relation to topographical space, see David Read, "Losing the Map: Topographical Understanding in the *Henriad*," *Modern Philology* 94, no. 4 (1997): 475-95.

<sup>10</sup> For recent explorations of Hal's trajectory from carnival excess to Lenten restraint, see especially Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) as well as Hugh Grady, "Falstaff: Subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic," *Modern Language Review* 96, no. 3 (2001): 609-23. Hodgdon's description of Falstaff exemplifies this conventional dichotomy: "...His fat belly is the masculine counterpart of the pregnant woman; his Rabelaisian excesses of food and drink make him the carnival antithesis to Henry IV's ascetic Lenten identity and his world of religious penance, bent as Henry IV is on personal as well as national guilt with a crusade" (Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 156).

<sup>11</sup> Describing Falstaff as an "experiment in a kind of imagined autonomous autotelic subjectivity," Hugh Grady argues that he is "designed as a refuge from (and possibly as an alternative to) the Machiavellian logic of power slowly unfolding between the high jinks of the tavern scenes" ("Falstaff," 610). While I share Grady's view of Falstaff as an alternative, I am particularly interested here in the way that Falstaff's body represents a competing form of national identity, and this may complicate the dialectic of power relationships that Grady—along with other critics following in the New Historicist framework—traces.

<sup>12</sup> Albala, *Eating Right*, 218.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (London, 1673) 222. Recent scholarship on Hannah Woolley, author of several important seventeenth century household management books, has demonstrated that this text was not actually written by Woolley (as previously attributed) but by an anonymous writer who wished to capitalize on Woolley's name. Woolley herself mentions the forgery in her later text, *Supplement to the Queen-Like Closet* (1674). See Elaine Hobby, "A Woman's Best Setting Out is Silence: The Writings of Hannah Woolley." *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration*. Ed. Gerald MacLean. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, J1r. (my italics).

<sup>16</sup> In his anti-theatrical tract *The School of Abuse* (1579), Stephen Gosson similarly celebrates earlier (albeit more rugged) eating habits as he looks to the virtues of the ancient Britons:

“mark what we were before and what we are now...[Dio Cassius, the Roman historian] saith that Englishmen could suffer watching and labor, hunger and thirst, and bear of all storms with head and shoulders. They used slender weapons, went naked, and were good soldiers. They fed upon roots and barks of trees, they would stand up to the chin many days in the marshes without victuals...” (qtd. in Roy Lamson and Hallet Smith, *The Golden Hind: An Anthology of Elizabethan Poetry and Prose*, New York: Norton, 1942. 228).

<sup>17</sup> All citations for the *Henry IV* plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> The description of a 1527 meal for Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond (the six-year-old illegitimate son of Henry VIII) is quite illuminating in this regard: “...a first course of soup, supplemented with beef or mutton, goose or swan, veal, capons, and biscuit. The second course consisted of more soup, four roasted rabbits, fourteen pigeons, four partridges, and pheasants, fruit and biscuits, as well as copious amounts of wine and ale. This menu was for the young Duke alone; the rest of his household had its own smaller allotments that were determined according to the individual’s position within the household’s hierarchy.” (qtd. in Jasper Ridley, *The Tudor Age*, London: Constable, 1988. 216).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Ridley, 216 (my emphasis).

<sup>20</sup> See *The Counter-Scuffle* (London, 1621), *The Great Eater of Grayes-Inne, or The Life of Mr. Marriot the Cormorant* (London, 1652), and “A Wonder in Kent” (London, 1630?). The feats of great eaters and other champions of culinary excess have been celebrated since classical times. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the widespread commercial appeal of over-eaters became realized both in printed materials chronicling their exploits and in highly publicized eating demonstrations. Into the eighteenth century, famous eaters including Thomas Eclin, Francis Battalia, Siderophagus, and Sarah Salamander rose to prominence as celebrity over-eaters. See Jan Bondeson, “The Cat Eaters,” *Fortean Times* Oct. 2001, [www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/260/the\\_cat\\_eaters.html](http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/260/the_cat_eaters.html); see also Bondeson, *The Two-Headed Boy and other Medical Marvels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). For insightful discussions of gluttony and over-eaters in relation to early modern food scarcity, see Mark Thornton Burnett, “Full Gut and Pinch Belly: Writing Famine in the English Renaissance,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 21 (1995): 21-44 and Nate Eastman, *Shakespeare and the Great Dearth*, (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> John Taylor, *All the Works of John Taylor the Water-Poet* (1630) Facsimile Edition (New York, Scholar Press, 1973) 146.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor's plan was to showcase Wood's skills before live audiences and profit from the wagers that audience members made on how much Wood could eat. However, the arrangement fell through when Wood backed out at the last minute as Taylor describes: "He fearing that which his merits would amount unto, brake off the match, saying that perhaps when his Grace (I guesse who he meant) should heare of one that ate so much, and could worke so little, he doubted there would come a command to hang him..." (Taylor, *All the Works*, 147). Evidently, Wood did not have the stomach for it after all! See also B. S. Capp, *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) for a description of the episode.

<sup>23</sup> See Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England*, especially ch. 8, "Regional and Social Patterns of Diet." On regional food shortages, see also ch. 3, "The Widening World of Food, 1550-1600."

<sup>24</sup> As Barbara Hodgdon and others have pointed out, the Eastcheap cattle market was memorialized in Hugh Alley's *A Caveat for the City of London* (1598). The volume includes thirteen illustrations of London area food markets and notes various offences committed against consumers at the markets. The Eastcheap illustration includes a pillar with the word "Engrossing" on it, designating this market's most notorious offence. Engrossing involves buying goods with the intention of reselling—an offense that Falstaff is arguably guilty of in Act Four scene two of *I Henry IV* as he gets "in exchange of one hundred and fifty soldiers three hundred and odd pounds" by purchasing foot soldiers only to allow them to buy out their services at a higher rate (4.2.11-12). The idea that contemporary audiences would have recognized this parallel between Falstaff's practices and engrossing at Eastcheap market is of course open to speculation.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that the Norton editors gloss "brawn" as "fattened pig," thereby overlooking the culinary significance of the term as an important early modern English dish.

<sup>26</sup> Beyond specific associations treating Falstaff *as* local and regional dishes, the plays also identify Falstaff in relation to provincial foodstuffs in other ways. In *II Henry IV*, for example, Falstaff calls Poin's wit "'as thick as Tewkesbury mustard'" (referring to a market town in Gloucestershire noted for its mustard) and later in the same play, Falstaff dines with Shallow on locally produced foodstuffs: "Nay, you shall see my orchard, where, in an arbour, we will eat a last year's pippin of mine own grafting, with a dish of caraways, and so forth..." (2.4.214-5, 5.3.1-3)

<sup>27</sup> In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Page also links Falstaff to pudding as she exclaims that she will be revenged on him “as sure as his guts are made of puddings” (2.1.27).

<sup>28</sup> Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England*, 201.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Anna Suryani, *The Genius of the English Nation* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) 88.

<sup>30</sup> Although butter consumption became more widespread in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Thirsk has found that it was still less common among Northern households during the period. See especially Thirsk’s discussion of dairy foods including cream and butter in ch. 9 of *Food in Early Modern England* (270-78).

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Jancis Robinson (ed), “Sack,” *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Take for example the Pardoner’s reflections on Spanish wine as he begins his tale in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*:

“Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede,  
 And namely, fro the white wyn of lepe,  
 That is to selle in fysshstrete or in chepe,  
 This wyn of spaigne crepeth subtilly  
 In othere wyne, growyng faste by,  
 Of which ther ryseth swich fumositee,  
 That whan a man hath drunken draughtes thre,  
 And weneth that he be at hoom in chepe,  
 He is in spaigne, right at the toune of lepe...” (562-570) “The Pardoner’s Tale,” *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. ed. F. N. Robinson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957. Electronic edition <http://www.hti.umich.edu/c/cme/>.

In his hypocritical denunciation of drink, the Pardoner here fulminates in particular against foreign wine, arguing not (as one might expect) that one who consumes Spanish wine *thinks* he is in Spain when really he is in London, but rather that the tippler *thinks* he is in London when really he is *in* Spain. It is also interesting to note that Chaucer’s lines specify Eastcheap as the location of such illicit consumption of foreign wine.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 160.

<sup>35</sup> In *Shakespeare’s Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), David Wiles hypothesizes that Falstaff was a role written for Will Kemp in the *Henry IV* plays and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He bases this on several pieces of evidence including the first performance date of *The Merry*

---

*Wives of Windsor* for the Garter Feast in 1597 (much earlier than the 1602 date of the Quarto text) as well as the disappearance of Falstaff from *Henry V* after Kemp's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's Men in autumn 1599. Many scholars, including the editors of the Norton Shakespeare, Barbara Hodgdon, Hugh Grady, and Douglas Brooks, have accepted Wiles' hypothesis as likely. Take as representative Douglas Brooks's assessment in his essay, "Sir John Oldcastle and the Construction of Shakespeare's Authorship": "Didn't we already know that banishing Falstaff meant dragging out the author to speak about Oldcastle? Isn't that exactly what happens in the epilogue of *II Henry IV* when the clown who played the fat knight reappears on stage speaking as the author about his Oldcastle problem?" (Brooks 355). Kemp would also be appropriate as the speaker of the epilogue in *II Henry IV* because of his own associations with jig dancing both at the end of plays and, most famously, in his 1599 long-distance jig from London to Norwich memorialized in *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1600). On the Oldcastle issue in relation to Kemp playing Falstaff, see Douglas Brooks, "Sir John Oldcastle and the Construction of Authorship," *SEL* 38, no. 2 (1998): 333-61.