

The Cobham Judgment and the Shaping of Falstaff: A Report About the Misapplication of the Proverbs in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, I*

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Abstract

Few would now deny that, as the essence of Shakespeare's dramatic art (Bloom, 1998, p.299), the immortal Falstaff (Goddard, 1951, p.180) in *Henry IV* constitutes a backhanded picture of an audacious Protestant hero, the 14th-century champion of Wycliffe's doctrines, Lord Cobham. Shakespeare in effect took the Catholic side in a sectarian dispute about the character of the nobleman burned as a heretic shortly after his friend, the prince of Wales, became Henry V. Based on the trial account of Cobham, a historic archetypal figure of Falstaff in *Henry IV*, the thesis serves as an attempt for the characterization of Falstaff and his proverbial misapplication in particular.

Key word: Cobham; Falstaff; Trial; Language Witticism; Proverb; Misapplication

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INTRODUCTION

Henry IV, I enjoy an outstanding reputation among all of the history plays of Shakespeare, who created the two most excellent characters in his dramatic world: Hamlet and Falstaff, the latter's characteristics run parallel to those of his archetype, Cobham. Cobham

is convicted and sentenced to death by hanging and burning for heresy but his judgment is taken as a spiritual triumph over Archbishop Arundel of Canterbury and his jury, representatives of the Holy Church. An addict to Wycliffe's doctrine, the martyr defends himself, counterattacks and wins the triumph over the whole body of the Holy Church inquisitors with his remarkable capacity of language and his masterful knowledge of the Bible and his loyalty to the Creator.

Falstaff, Prince Henry's friend in *Henry IV* and an eloquent drinker and waylayer, shares things in common with Cobham. Apart from being the wrathful, gluttonous and lecherous, Falstaff, a seeming clown, is recognized as a language master with wit and witticism and an expert in Puritan idioms and biblical stories, who outdoes any other character in Shakespeare's plays. He plunges himself into the laughter he makes out of his audience and the fun of his getting out of the trap and prank the prince and Poins sets and makes. All of this results from his abundant allusions to and his misapplication of English proverbs, which catches inadequate notice from the critics.

1. WYCLIFFE AND COBHAM: PRECURSORS OF RELIGIOUS REFORMATION

Shakespeare, as a dramatist, produced 38 plays, many of which are concerning to historical events. However, all of them cannot be categorized as history plays, such as *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth*, which have something to do with historical events but whose focuses fall on the dramatic endings of the protagonists rather than the true stories of the past. His history plays or plays with obvious history tendency amount to one the third of his all dramatic works, which is a testimony of the fact that Shakespeare was strongly influenced by the current ideology and cultural trends, or keenly sensitive to politics of Elizabeth and James I as well as the political and historical events on the European Continent.

Among Shakespeare's history plays are the Henriad: *Richard II* (1595), *Henry IV I* and *Henry IV II* (1596-1598), and *Henry V* (1598-1599), and the Falstaffiad in the middle stands in the forefront, especially the first part, published as Quarto respectively in 1598, 1599, 1604, 1608, 1613 and 1622 before it appeared in *The First Folio* (1623). The number of its Quarto editions is a match to that of *Richard III* (1592-1593), which turns out to be the favorite of the theatergoers and the dramatist's commercial hit.

The main reference sources of *Henry IV* includes *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland Vol. III* (Holinshed, 1808), *The Wars of the Roses or Stories of the Struggle of York and Lancaster* (Edgar, 1870), *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* (Hall, 1548), *The Annals of England* (Stowe, 1592) and *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (Praetorius, 1587). These works share the legend of Sir John Oldcastle, familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As a protestant hero and an advocate of Wycliffe's doctrine of the 14th-century England, Oldcastle joined the army as young and was famous for his bravery of military adventures. A knight of John of Gaunt in the reign of Edward III and from Herefordshire, he had done good service to the King in the Welsh marches and in the Scottish war. Allegedly, Oldcastle, with whom Prince Henry made friends when he was young, had had two marriages before his union with Joan in 1408, the last heiress of the Earl of Cobham. So was he often called Lord Cobham as in right of his wife, who brought him a considerable amount of estate and manors in Kent, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Wiltshire as well as London. Upon his wife's account he had the honor of summons to parliament 11, 12, 14 of Henry IV and 1 of Henry V (Bale, 1849, p.4).

The 14th century saw the rise of the European nationalism. The ruling of Roman Church was confronted with dissatisfaction from Britain, France and Germany, whose kings rose against the Holy Church for power. In the current turned out reformers who complained about the corruption of the Catholic Church. The most famous was John Wycliffe, theologian consultant of the royal court and crown of Parish Lutterworth, whose translation of the Bible into the English tongue was getting more and more popular among the civilians. He advocated his theological views of civil right, that is, church should center on common disciples rather than the pope, and secular affairs should be governed by god-appointed governments without the interference of the pope. What he advocated was endorsed by the English royal court and he enlisted the protection of John of Gaunt and the support of the nobles and the civilians as well, so that he was free from apprehension of church. However, peasant revolutions broke out at Wycliffe's last years, with the nobles and the civilians involved in joint attacks on church, which resulted in its hatred.

The reign of Henry IV was the time when the conflict between Wycliffian sect and the Catholic Church tended to incandescence. Wycliffe firmly advocated caring not to become great men of the earth and seekers after power and riches. He earnestly contended against the pride and false teaching of church. His views were warmly welcomed and supported by the civilians. Poor preachers moved from village to village with his translation of the Bible, and so powerful was the number of his followers that the bishops and clergy became alarmed, and demanded that the king should take steps to put an end to these things. They gave the name of "Lollards" to these followers, calling them the weeds or the tares sown by Satan, which infested the true vineyard of the Lord; and they hoped by vigorous persecution and punishment, if necessary even by death itself, that the men who spread these views could easily be wiped. Protected by political forces, Wycliffe was free from the persecution in his lifetime, but after his death, the church imposed heresy upon him. He was excavated and burned, his followers were persecuted, sent into the Tower of London and some were sentenced to burn in Smithfield. Shortly after he came into power, Henry IV, just because he knew that his right to the kingdom was not strong enough without the support of the Parliament and the bishops, was almost obliged to yield to the clergy, and pass the *De Heretico Comburendo* they desired for the punishment of the Lollards¹.

Cobham, a keen follower of Wycliffe and a leader of the Lollards, opened his castle to his Lollard fellows for sermon, and declared to the Archbishop Arundel of Canterbury that his policy of burning men alive for no offence was a devilish device. No sooner Henry V succeeded the throne after Henry IV died of illness in 1403 than Arundel convened a synod, in which the clergy complained that Cobham maintained and armed preachers to the dioceses of London, Rochester, and Hereford, against the ordinances of the church. One day, a book in sheets not bound belonging to Cobham was accidentally discovered among the treatises to be burnt, which was thought to be of a most dangerous kind tending to the subversion of the faith. Arundel at once drew up a charge against Cobham, declaring him to be untrue to the Holy Church, and this he laid before the king, who undertook to talk with his friend on the subject and convince him of the mistake he was making and offer him a union with church. Just at this time there was a rising among the Lollards, who posted notices on the church doors, saying that they were ready to rise in defense of their faith if the king still continued to persecute them. Certainly Cobham had nothing to do with this, but his enemies eagerly seized the chance, prevailed upon the king, and had him taken to the Tower as a traitor to the church and State.

¹ David, R. (Ed.) *De Heretico Comburendo* Enacted 1401. Retrieved from <http://www.britainexpress.com/History/medieval/de-heretico.htm>

In the Tower was he visited by numbers of monks and friars, who endeavored to confound him or make him deny the truths he held. At last he was led to his trial before a jury of priests, over whom presided the Archbishop. Owing to his intimacy with the King and an immediate death sentence which would bring about the civilians' uprising, the jury made a decision that he be taken back to the Tower. On a dark October night, William Fisher, a dealer in skins, with others, managed to get into the Beauchamp Tower without being detected, and took away with them the prisoner they loved. The king at heart was glad when he heard this, for he knew his favorite subject and friend was a good man, he would willingly have let him altogether go free. But Arundel feared that the king would hesitate to proceed further against this brave soldier, thinking always how Henry might be so alarmed as to force him into action.

One day the Lollards, through their very devotion to Cobham, held a meeting, in which they spoke of him as their general and leader, just as though they were making ready for war. All of this Arundel reported, with many additions, to Henry, who, infuriated, rode with his subjects and guards into St. Giles in the Fields², where the Lollards were assembled. Unprepared for combat or resistance, they fell easily into the king's hands, numbers of them killed, others taken prisoners and committed to the Tower dungeons. But Cobham was not found. A thousand marks reward was offered for his apprehension, with exemption from taxes and other privileges to any city or town in which he might be captured. At last, after being on the run for four years, Cobham was arrested for a Welshman's betrayal. The king was in France, and, for fear that he might be willing to spare the life of his friend, the church party acted on the former sentence of death which had been passed, and ordered that as a traitor he should be hanged in chains and on fire as a heretic.

2. COBHAM ON INQUISITION AND TRIAL AS A HERETIC

The charge from the church against Cobham was recorded in the following: *The Life and Times of the Good Lord Cobham* (Gaspey, 1843), *The Life of Sir John Oldcastle* (Greg, 1908), *The Acts and Monuments* (Fuxe, 1837), *English Martyrology* (Elizabeth, 1843) and *Select Works of John Bale*. In his *Select Works*, Bale referred briefly in the *Preface* to Cobham's career as a distinguished servant of the crown in Wales: "In all adventurous acts of worldly manhood was he ever bold, strong, fortunate, doughty, noble, and valiant" (Bale, p.7) and paid tribute to the great fortitude with which he met his cruel death. But his

purpose was not to exalt the passive heroism of the martyr over the active courage of the soldier. In his interpretation, Oldcastle's great triumph was oral, rhetorical, and intellectual. Cobham, he said, was "never so worthy a conqueror as in this present conflict with the cruel and furious frantic kingdom of antichrist" (Bale, p.7); and by this present conflict he meant primarily the inquisition in which Cobham stood alone against a team of theologians led by the Archbishop of Canterbury: four bishops and twelve doctors of the church in all from Canterbury, London, Rochester and Hereford: "The most godly-wise and learned men" (Bale, p.22). In the end, Cobham let his interrogators prove him a heretic; but he triumphantly demonstrated in his responses that what they called heresy was the true Christian faith as grounded in the scriptures. "His courage was of such value that it gave him the victory over them by the clear judgment of the scriptures." (Bale, p.13) In a nutshell, Cobham's surprising victory in this ostensibly one-sided battle of wits was exactly what the scriptures led him to. Here was a hint of a central significance to the topos of Christian hagiography, the wisdom derived from sanctity. The most famous example of this topos occurred in the legend of the virgin martyr, St Katherine of Alexandria. Her spectacular triumph over the physical torments with which pagans sought to break her faith in Christ was preceded by a display of divinely inspired eloquence in response to the arguments of a team of philosophers aiming at getting her to renounce her faith.

Even before Cobham was brought to examination, the Archbishop publicly denounced him as "an apostate, schismatic, heretic, troubler of the public peace, enemy of the realm and great adversary of all Holy Church" (Elizabeth, 1843, p.37). But he was undeterred by these hateful names and, like St Katherine, answered his inquisitors with an air of serene and often disdainful self-confidence. His first response was a written exposition of what he believed, in reply to the official accusation of heresy. Cobham retorted the attack on him as a heretic and presented to the king a written document of his position on the eucharist, penance, pilgrimages, and the power of Rome. At the end of the first examination he was dispatched to the Tower, the frustrated bishops having determined to pin him down by giving him a precise list of the church's teaching on the disputed matters and requiring him to affirm or deny belief in each of them.

On September 25, 1413, sir Robert Morley, knight, and lieutenant of the Tower, brought with him Cobham, there leaving him among the jury, as a lamb among wolves, to his examination and answer. The Archbishop claimed that Cobham had been accursed just for his contumacy and disobedience to the Holy Church, but he would humbly desire his absolution in due form and manner as the Holy Church ordained. Holding up his hands towards heaven, he kneeled down on the pavement, and said,

I shrive me here unto thee, my eternal living God, that in my frail youth I offended thee, Lord, most grievously in pride,

² During the reign of Henry V, in 1414, it was the village where was located a chapel, the headquarters of an abortive Lollard rebellion and the site of Oldcastle's execution in 1417.

wrath, and gluttony, in covetousness and in lechery³. Many men have I hurt in mine anger, and done many other horrible sins; good Lord, I ask thee mercy. (Bale, p.30)

He followed his speech with his answers to the questions on the list proffered by the jury. On the altar of the sacrament was the co-existence of the body of Christ and bread, the latter was what the eye could see and the former was what the eye failed to. A man ought to confess to the God, who knew the root of illness and only who could help, and confession should be made before father, a man of intelligence and moral; Rome was the headquarters of the great antichrist, of which the Pope was the great head, bishops, priests, prelates and monks the body and the begging friars the tail, for they covered the filthiness with their subtle sophistry (Bale, p. 38). Every man on this earth was a pilgrim, if only he knew the holy commandments of God, and kept them to the end. He would surely be saved, even though he never went to Canterbury for pilgrimage, or to Rome, or to any other place.

3. FALSTAFF, JOVIAL LEADER IN EASTCHEAP

The year 1597 witnessed the initial performance of *Henry IV I* and the play succeeded immediately, but Oldcastle in the play gave offence in Shakespeare's own time to Cobham's distinguished titular descendants who were not pleased to see him as a wicked glutton and walking vice. For some political reason, Shakespeare was compelled to rechristen the knight, and added an epilogue to *Henry IV II* that the Falstaff and Oldcastle were two different men, "for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." (Shakespeare, 1806, p.286)

Hegel observed that Shakespeare had made his best characters "free artists of themselves" (Bloom, 2004, p.56), and Hamlet and Falstaff were the freest ones, the most intelligent of Shakespeare's roles (Bloom, 1998, p.271). *Henry IV* is the play with peculiarity that Shakespeare paralleled a tavern and its people with a royal conflict. The people in Boar's Head of Eastcheap constituted a "Falstaffian Background" (Beiner, 1993, p.170), and their jovial leader was the very Falstaff, Hamlet's greatest rival, whom only a few characters in

³ Church doctrine in Dante's time holds that Hell's function is to punish for eternity human souls of mortal sin without a sincere confession of their faults that expresses repentance for their misdeeds. In Divine Comedy, guided by Virgil, the poet travels around the Inferno. He witnesses the human souls of the carnal sinners suffer in the second circle of Hell, who are tossed about ceaselessly in the dark air by the most furious winds (Canto V). In the third circle, the gluttonous are punished. Their torment is, to lie in the mire, under a continual and heavy storm of hail, snow, and discolored water (Canto VI). The fourth circle follows, where the prodigal and the avaricious, in direful conflict, are rolling great weights against each other with mutual upbraiding. In the fifth circle are found the wrathful and gloomy tormented in the Stygian Lake (Canto VII).

the world literature can match. "He is not properly one humor, but a miscellany of humors or images, drawn from so many several men: that wherein he is singular is his wit, or those things he says unexpected by the audience; his quick evasions, when, you imagine him surprised" (Dryden, 1918, p.73). Henry Hudson emphasized the immense self-confidence with which Sir John handled himself when cornered by the prince and Poin. Indeed, Hudson inferred from Falstaff's incomprehensible lies that he deliberately invited being cornered, "partly for the pleasure he takes in the excited play of his faculties, partly for the surprise he causes by his still more incomprehensible feats of dodging." (Shakespeare, 1901, p.172) E. E. Stoll distinguished Falstaff's evasions from those of other braggart soldiers such as Bobadill⁴, noting but "mere excuses and subterfuges" whereas Falstaff "carries things with a high hand, and expects to bear down all before him." (McAlindon, 2004, p.78) Falstaff courted the immense self-confidence and triumphs over the threat of censorious entrapment. "Fundamentally, it is his infinite capacity for extricating himself from predicaments ... So adept is he in this art of extrication that he revels in creating dilemmas for himself to enjoy the zest of coming triumphantly out of them." (Charlton, 2013, p.178) It has been variously and correctly noted that there was something in him of the mythical buffoon, the picaro, the braggart soldier, and the Elizabethan clown, all of whom were adept in evasive trickeries of one kind or another. Nevertheless, there was no discrepancy between the extremely quick witted and intelligent Falstaff and Cobham equipped with a sumptuous store of biblical, theological, mythological, and literary knowledge, who alone defeated the jury with confidence.

4. WITTICISM: CARRIER OF FALSTAFF'S WISDOM

It goes without saying that Falstaff should be taken as a protagonist rather than a foil, whose discourse outnumbers that of the prince in both parts with the exception of the paragraphs in the first part⁵. His leading role shows itself in the title of the first part of the play: *The History of Henrie the Fourth; with the battell at Shrewsburie, between the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the conceits of Sir*

⁴ Bobadil, a figure in *Every Man in His Humour* by Ben Jonson, which originates from *Miles Gloriosus* by Plutus, an ancient Roman dramatist. Braggart soldiers of this sort can be seen in subsequent European comedies. Also please see: John M. Manly. *Modern Philology* (Vol. XII). Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1915, p.211.
⁵ <http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=henry4p1>

| Role | Words | | Paragraphs | | Lines | |
|----------|-------|------|------------|-----|-------|-----|
| | I | II | I | II | I | II |
| Falstaff | 5566 | 5366 | 151 | 185 | 1188 | 559 |
| Prince | 4423 | 2403 | 170 | 60 | 1060 | 274 |

John Falstaffe registered on February 25, 1598, and in the title of the second of the *Quarto* published in 1600: *The Second part of Henrie the fourth. With the humours of Sir John Falstaffe, and swaggering Pistoll*. The plays have established Falstaff's outstanding position with his wit and witticism:

Fal. Indeed, you come near me now, Hal, for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not "by Phoebus, he, that wand'ring knight so fair": And I prithee sweet wag, when thou art king, as God save thy Grace—Majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have none—

Prince. What, none?

Fal. No, by my troth, not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter.

Prince. Well, how then? Come, roundly, roundly.

Fal. Marry then sweet wag, when thou art king let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's Foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the Moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal. (Shakespeare, 1960, pp.10-12)

In Scene II, Act II, the prince and Gadshill played prank and ensnared Falstaff on the robbery, and later in Scene IV of the same act, they compelled the knight to admit he was a coward and a liar, who counterattacked and frustrated the conviction of the prince and his peers expecting his abject confession of guilt:

Prince. What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

Poins. Come, let's hear, Jack, what trick hast thou now?

Fal. By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct—the lion will not touch the true prince; instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct: I shall think the better of myself, and thee, during my life—I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. (Shakespeare, 1960, p.71)

In the impersonation of the same scene, the prince as King rebuked Falstaff as Prince:

Prince. Swearst thou, ungracious boy? Henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace, there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man, a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villany? wherein villanous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing? (Shakespeare, 1960, pp.80-81)

Impersonating Prince, Falstaff found it inconvenient to talk back but was forced to eulogize himself as if the real prince stood on his side:

Fal. But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know. That he is old, the more the pity, his

white hairs do witness it, but that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God helps the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins—but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being, as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world. (Shakespeare, 1960, p. 82)

5. FALSTAFF: MASTER OF PROVERBIAL MISAPPLICATION

Of the various verbal folklore genres like fairy tales, legends, tall tales, jokes, and riddles, proverbs belong to the genre of oral folklore, which are anything but mundane matters in human communication, fulfilling the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made comments on personal relationships and social affairs. They are a significant rhetorical force in various modes of communication: from friendly chats, powerful political speeches, and religious sermons on to lyrical poetry, best-seller novels, and the influential mass media (Mieder, 2008, p.9). Boys who studied in Elizabethan schools memorized hundreds of proverbs and maxims, in English and in Latin (Berman, 1997, p.xix). When Shakespeare was in school, in all probability he, like every other Elizabethan schoolboy, was taught to keep a commonplace book of sayings drawn from his reading. There is no denying that he came under the influence of many classical writers: Cato, Cicero, Horace, Ovid, Plautus, Seneca, Terence, and Vergil (Smith, 1963, p.4). In a sense, Shakespeare's affluent employment of proverbs proves a reflection of this cultural attitude and his plays are so rich in proverbs, proverb allusions, and proverb jokes.

Falstaff's linguistic skill rests upon his familiarity with proverbs, which does not reach the critics' attention. Katherine Lever, in her early article on Shakespeare's use of proverbs (Lever, 1938, pp.173-183, 224-239), remarks surprisingly that Falstaff "speaks few generalisations" while G. L. Brook (1976, p.37) describes Falstaff's habitual style of utterance without exploring the proverbs to which Falstaff alludes at all. Actually, Falstaff adopts proverbs in a way beyond critical expectation. Shakespeare's contemporary playgoers knew and loved proverbs and they were catered for by Shakespeare through his characters' proverbial speeches and Falstaff is one of them.

Falstaff's instinct for life came from a proverb in *Henry IV I*, which Paul Jorgensen (1976, pp.141-158) described as most difficult of Shakespeare: "The better part of valour is discretion". His valor was not discounted for his witty discretion, for the cynical Falstaff was

accepted by the public for the very misapplication of the proverb, almost invariably quoted today as "Discretion is the better part of valor." Falstaff's phrase elegantly redeemed a cowardly act. The bragging, bulbous knight just rose from his feigned death; he had played the corpse in order to escape real death at the hands of Hotspur. Claiming that abstractions like "honor" and "valor" would get one nothing if he was dead, Falstaff excused his counterfeiting as the kind of "discretion" that kept a man from foolishly running into swords in order to cultivate a reputation for heroism. If counterfeiting could keep one alive, it was not counterfeiting, but an authentic "image of life." Falstaff confused "image" with "reality," but as far as he was concerned, "valor" was an image too, and one had to stay alive in order to find more opportunities to cultivate that image. The proverb finds its partner from Tilley "He that fights and runs away may live to fight another day." (Tilley, 1950, D79)

During the tavern scenes, Falstaff was frequently given jocular dexterity with proverbial idiom. One scene is where the prince would make a judge or hangman out of Falstaff after he mounted the throne, but was fought back:

Fal. Well, Hal, well; and in some sort it jumps with my humour, as well as waiting in the court, I can tell you.

Prince. For obtaining of suits?

Fal. Yea, for obtaining of suits, whereof the hangman hath no lean wardrobe. (Shakespeare, 1960, pp.13-14)

Two allegorical puns are included in the dialogue. "suit" and "hang" come from "suits hang half a year in Westminster Hall, at Tyburn half an hour's hanging ends all" (Heywood, 1906, p.241), a satire on the endless lawsuit in the English court. For centuries, Tyburn was an apposite for death sentence, where London felons, traitors and martyrs were executed, while Westminster Hall meant for jurisdiction, three courts of which mingled as the Supreme Court. The Court moved to the Royal Court, a place where major cases were examined. It is universally acknowledged that a trial would last long before the final death sentence, which was closely followed by hanging. The hanged used to be hung an hour, whose wardrobe would belong to the hangman. This seems to denote a change of practice in regard to condemn criminals, whose remains were now left to hang a full hour after execution.

Scene III of Act III starts with Falstaff who lauded himself for his virtue as a gentleman in a humorous irony of the proverb "He is a gentleman that has gentle conditions." (Tilley, 1950, G71), and whose principle in life was "dicing, drabbing and drinking" (Tilley, 1950, D324):

Fal. I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be; virtuous enough; swore little; diced not above seven times—a week; went to a bawdy-house once in a quarter—of an hour; paid money that I borrowed—three of four times; lived well,

and in good compass; and now I live out of all order, out of all compass. (Shakespeare, 1960, p.110)

The predilection of Falstaff rested on his propensity for proverbial misapplication, a traditional way employed in early drama and a conventional, persuasive and authoritative tactic based upon their putative good sense of the proverbs resulting from biblical, learned, or popular inspiration. Vice characters frequently misapplied proverbs to satirize and seduce the good, or, colored his insight of life.

No sooner he entered the tavern after the waylaying prank at Gad's Hill in Scene II, Act II than Falstaff denounced cowardice and cried for sack. Kept waiting, he repeated his thirsty demand with the first of several outrageous applications of proverb idiom:

Fal. A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too, marry and amen! Give me a cup of sack, boy. Ere I lead this life long, I'll sew nether-stocks, and mend them and foot them too. A plague of all cowards! Give me a cup of sack, rogue; is there no virtue extant? (Shakespeare, 1960, p.62)

His angry censure on man's fallibility is based on the proverb "There is no faith in man" (Massinger, 1616, p.28) just as Juliet's nurse, in the romantic but tragic play, exclaims "There is no trust, No faith, no honesty in men, all perjured." (Shakespeare, 2003, p.148) This idiom was used in the works of John Marston (1887, p.285), and had its variants of "there is no trust in any man" (Edgeworth, 1841, p.448), and "all men be not true". (Tilley, 1950, M503). However, Falstaff exploited the proverb idiom to suggest that the delay in the service at the tavern was a sign comparable to one reflecting man's spiritual inadequacies. It is possible to argue that, as well as suggesting the unstoppable nature of Falstaff's love for drink and the denunciation which poor service at the tavern must consequently earn, Falstaff alluded to the proverb to back up his hints about man's cowardice, as a consequence of his version of the Gad's Hill incident. What followed closely was his continuous denunciation of the poor service and slow response to his demand. Upon the chance of the prince's humorous speech of him as "pitiful hearted Titan", the fat knight again remarked,

Fal. You rogue, here's lime in this sack too: there is nothing but roguery to be found in villanous man, yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with lime in it. A villanous coward! (Shakespeare, 1960, p.63)

A moment later, Falstaff supported his tone of blustering self-righteousness with another formulation:

Fal. Go thy ways, old Jack, die when thou wilt—if manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring. (Shakespeare, 1960, p.63)

The proverbial phrase "As lean (lank) as a shotten herring" occurs in Greene's *Never Too Late*: Thou hadst alate ... a louely fat paire of cheekes, and now thou

lookest like a shotten herring (Grosart, 1590, p.187)⁶. Falstaff's conditional hypothesis enables him to assert his size as factual evidence of the prince's cowardice. Ironically, his hypothesis stands, but it was his own size, talent for lying and cowardice that bore out its truth in reality. The proverbial image had particular aptness on Falstaff's lips, for the consumption of "shotten herrings" no doubt encouraged thirst in Elizabethan taverns.

Falstaff seemed to hope that proverbial authority would substantiate his accusations about the deficiencies of man whilst concealing the truth about Gad's Hill. When his braggadocio inspired his inventive powers again during his detailed account of his adventures, he punctuated his ever more fantastic boasts with the authority of proverbial idiom in what may already have been a current sally he claims:

Fal. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like a handsaw—*ecce signum!* (Shakespeare, 1960, p.65)

Benham defines "*ecce signum*" as "behold the sign" (1914, p.525), and the University Wits such as Marlowe (1592, p.53) and Greene (1905, p.196, 210) had it in their works. Falstaff may here be pointing in a traditional way to the style of the sermonizers.

Part of the delight for the contemporary Elizabethan audience must have been to hear Falstaff taking well-known tags asserting truth as ammunition to bolster his lies. Asseverating his "honesty" more directly, Falstaff added:

Fal. A plague of all cowards! Let them speak—if they speak more or less than truth, they are villains and the sons of darkness. (Shakespeare, 1960, pp.65-66)

Here, in order to substantiate his lies, Falstaff misapplies "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." (Tilley, 1950, T590) Finally, when the prince accused him of lies "like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (Shakespeare, 1960, p.68), Falstaff replied in a loud voice to apply the formulation "Truth is truth" (Tilley, 1950, T581) to the service of his "veracity": What, art thou mad? art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth? (Shakespeare, 1960, pp.68-69)

In these applications, Falstaff in a sense achieved what Kaiser called a "transvaluation of values" (Kaiser, 1963, p.204). Proverbs concerned with truth and virtue become, in his application of them, the handmaidens of vice. Interestingly, in contrast to Falstaff, the medieval vice characters, when misapplying proverbs, operated in a predominantly religious context. But in the whole of *Henry IV I*, when Falstaff drew on proverbial idiom for his own purposes, he was located in the tavern, at Gad's Hill, or in the battlefield. Although his implicit

struggle for influence over Hal may still be said to echo the traditional attempts by the vice characters to win the soul of the good, the emphasis shifted as Kaiser also observed:

Falstaff is a protagonist not in the cosmic war between heaven and hell, but in the mundane conflict between government and anarchy, his temptations affect the salvation of the throne rather than that of the soul (Kaiser, p.207).

CONCLUSION

Obviously and teasingly, some characteristics which Cobham and Falstaff shared are running parallel. Cobham was proud, wrathful, gluttonous, covetous, and lecherous. Falstaff, "Monsieur Remorse", was a lecherous glutton and thief. Cobham had a masterful knowledge of the Bible. Falstaff was a specialist in Puritan idioms and outdoes any other character of Shakespeare. As a Lollard, Cobham did not put the value of pilgrimage to Rome and Canterbury, but Falstaff waylaid pilgrims with offerings going to Canterbury. Henry V expostulated with Cobham for his Lollard doctrine but in vain; Falstaff protested to the prince that "by the Lord, and I do not I be a villain, I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom." (Shakespeare, 1960, p.15) Convicted guilty, Cobham escaped and was on the run for four years; Falstaff, through the whole postwar play, engaged in a similar relation with the law janissaries. Cobham was hanged and burnt for treason as well as heresy; the prince teased Falstaff of being hanged and finally he was rejected and plunged into Fleet.

Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a great age of English proverbs, a critical part of rhetorical education and material for dramatists with Shakespeare at the top, a close observer of the court, cities, towns and suburbs, churches and taverns. He fully exposed Falstaff to comic performance and humorous discourse in which the charisma and vitality of proverbs, a cultural fossil, found their manifestation. The compelling attraction of Falstaff emerges in his allusions to proverbs, a weapon in a language arsenal. The matador stood the temptation through a hundred plays and produced equal sport, whether or not he was the goat of Prince Henry's vicious prank.

His proverbial misapplications did make sense when Falstaff attempted to impose his values of anarchic government upon the world of order to which finally both he and the prince belonged. His audience was made to laugh at his actions with the proverbial idioms, and his distortions of the insight of the honor conception exposed the reality of natural appetite and demands as strong as the laws and government that controlled them.

A man at the button of the social ladder, Falstaff really instructed his very temporary disciples. The appeal he exerted over the prince rested upon his ability to give

⁶"shotten" (Middle English), past participle of "shoot", means "spawned", "discharged". "shotten herring" alludes to "thin meanger fellow".

expression to the unconscious desires of the appetite which worked disruptively to overthrow the conscious goals of the human personality. The reality of this darker world balances the reality of the everyday world. Falstaff's proverbial wit turned out fun and endeared himself to his audience. Indeed, even when the duty of the prince became decisive, our sympathies usually remain with him, who saw the bitter reality that often accompanied the search for glory rather than the prince's youth and idealism. With humor and sarcasm, Falstaff took honor as nothingness. For him saving his own life remained the very first instinct, a doctrine of Jehovah's original significance of life: keeping more lives alive. His complicated personality frequently contradicted itself but was going around the instinct for life. A freest artist as acclaimed Hegel, he enjoyed an absolute freedom under the royal reign. An artist needed an audience, so did Falstaff, who "never fails to find it. We need Falstaff because we have so few images of authentic vitalism, and even fewer persuasive images of human freedom" (Bloom, 1998, p.314).

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