

Mortimer Handout  
ENGL 640  
Dr. Fike

Jo McMurtry, *Understanding Shakespeare's England: A Companion for the American Reader*, pages 38-39:

“First, the Elizabeth who is married to Hotspur goes in *Henry IV* by the name of Kate—apparently a favorite name with Shakespeare. Second, her brother, Edmund Mortimer, is entangled in a confusion which Shakespeare found in his source, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. This Edmund had an older brother, Roger, not shown in the diagram as he is not mentioned in the play. Roger Mortimer inherited his father’s title as earl of March and also had a son, confusingly named Edmund, who was twelve years old in 1403. It was this younger Edmund Mortimer whom Richard II, before his death in 1400, had named as his rightful heir.

“The Edmund Mortimer of Shakespeare’s play, then, was not in fact the earl of March and had not been named heir. He was, however, the brother of Hotspur’s wife; he did marry the daughter of the earl of Glendower, as occurs in the play, after having been captured in battle by Glendower; and he certainly did plot against Henry IV, switching sides as he did so, for the king had sent him out to do battle against Glendower and his Welsh rebels. This mutinous element then joined with the Percies, along with some of the rebellious Scots whom the Percies, while still on the King’s side, had conveniently captured.”

Notes:

- The Edmund Mortimer in our play is NOT the one who is named heir by the historical R2.
- But the Edmund Mortimer in R2—the brother of Hotspur’s wife—does do historically accurate things.
- In history: The heir to the throne is Roger Mortimer’s son Edmund.
- In our play: The brother of Hotspur’s wife is also Edmund Mortimer, and Shakespeare evidently wanted us to see the heir and Kate’s brother as the same person.
- **POINT: Shakespeare is conflating two historical Mortimers.**

See also *Bedford Companion* 185-86.

Assignments for next time:

1. Rumor—How does it function? Whom does it influence?
2. First and second tavern scenes—What is different here?
3. Shallow and Silence—What does their presence tell us?
4. Prince Hal—how is he different in *2H4*?
5. Confrontation between Hal and H4—How is it different from the corresponding scene in *1H4*?
6. Rejection of Falstaff—How do you read this scene?

- I.i           The king mentions "the meteors of a troubled heaven" (line 10).
- II.iv:       Bardolph's face parallels disorder in the heavens (line 317).
- III.i:       Glendower claims that "The heavens were all on fire; the earth did tremble" when he was born (line 22).
- V.i          Mention of "an exhaled meteor" is a bad omen (line 19).
- I.i:         About wars and disputes among the great (theft of Holy Land, withholding of prisoners).
- I.ii:        Highway robbery (theft of purses).
- I.ii:        The scene ends with Hal's soliloquy about intending to reform his behavior.
- I.iii:       The scene begins with Hotspur saying, "I will from henceforth rather be myself" (line 5).
- I.iii:       The Percies' conspiracy takes shape ("plot," line 277; cf. II.iii.1-34).
- II.i:        The plan for the robbery takes shape ("plot," l. 53).
- I.iii:       Hotspur's notion of war is "sport" (line 300).
- II.i.77:     Gadshill talks of the Prince robbing "for sport's sake" (line 71).
- II.ii:       The scene ends with the Prince laughing at the nervous fears of his fellow thieves.
- II.iii:      The scene starts with Hotspur growling about the cowardice of a timid friend unwilling to join in his adventure.
- II.ii:       Falstaff's horse mentioned at line 11.
- II.iii:      Hotspur mentions horses at line 67.
- II.iii:      Line 85 mentions "paraquito," little parrot.
- II.iv:       A "parrot" is mentioned at line 99.
- II.iii:      Hotspur speaks to Lady Percy.
- II.iv:       The Prince makes fun of Hotspur and Lady Percy (line 100ff.).
- II.iv:       Falstaff says, "A plague of all cowards!" (lines 116-17). His pretense to valor.
- III.i:       Hotspur makes fun of Glendower's even more preposterous assertions.
- III.i:       Worcester is critical of Hotspur (lines 173-185).
- III.ii:      The King is critical of Hal.
- III.ii:      Hal promises his father to turn over a new leaf.
- III.iii:     The next scene opens with Falstaff wanting to do the same ("I'll repent and that suddenly, while I am in some liking," lines 4-5).
- IV.i:        The rebels organize their forces.
- IV.ii:       Falstaff recruits his charge of foot.

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Fig. 2: The martyrdom of Sir John Oldcastle as depicted in *The First Volume of the Ecclesiasticall history containyng the Actes and Monumentes of thynges passed in every kynges tyme . . . Newly recognised and enlarged by the Author John Foxe*, 2 vols. (London, 1570), 1:762. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.

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 Library Collection.

A Biefe Chronycle concernynge the  
 Examynacyon and death of the blessed  
 martyrz of Christ syr Johan Oldeca-  
 stell the lorde Cobham/collected to-  
 gyther by Johan Bale.

¶ Syr. Johan. Oldecastel. the. worthy. ¶  
 ¶ Lorde. Cobham. and. moſte. valyaunt. ¶



¶ Waryoure. of. Ielus. Chriſt. ¶

¶ In the latter tyme ſhall manye be  
 choſen / proued / and purſyed by fyze/  
 yet ſhall the vngodly lyue wyckedly ſtyll  
 and haue no vnderſtandyng. Dan. 12.

Fig. 1: The frontispiece of John Bale's *Biefe Chronycle concernynge the Examynacyon and death of the blessed martyrz of Christ syr Johan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (Antwerp, 1544). From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.

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Fig. 2: The martyrdom of ...  
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Fame (Rumor) leading the chariot of Mars. From Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagines Deorum*, tr. Antonio Verderius (Lyons, 1581), p. 264. (See n. 8 of this article.)