



# Henry IV: Parts 1 & 2 (Wordsworth Classics)

*William Shakespeare*

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## **Henry IV: Parts 1 & 2 (Wordsworth Classics)** William Shakespeare

In Henry IV, Part 1, the King is in a doubly ironic position. His rebellion against Richard II was successful, but now he himself is beset by rebels, led by the charismatic Harry Hotspur. The King's son, Prince Hal, seems to be more concerned with the pleasures of the tavern world and the company of the fat rogue, Falstaff, than with concerns of state. Eventually, however, Hal proves a courageous foe of the rebels. This history play is lively in its interplay of political intrigue and boisterous comedy, subtle in the connections between high statecraft and low craftiness, exuberant in its range of vivid characters, and memorable in its thematic concern with honour, loyalty and the quest for power. In Henry IV, Part 2, the King is ailing, Falstaff is ageing, and the kingdom itself, where rebellion is still rife, seems diseased or debilitated. The comedy has a melancholy undertone, and the politics verge on the Machiavellian. Eventually, the resourceful Hal, inheriting the crown as Henry V, must prove that he can uphold justice in the realm. Here Shakespeare demonstrates a mastery of thematic complexity and subtlety, and shows the price in human terms that may be exacted by political success.

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