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### King Henry IV: Sociopath or Cry for Help

In *King Henry IV*, Henry's firstborn son and heir apparent, Hal, states to his father that he will, "...hereafter, my thrice gracious lord, be more myself" (3.2.1928-29). Throughout the entirety of *King Henry IV*, we find Hal becoming perpetrator and penitent prince, deceiver and acquiescent son. Hal plays both criminal and dedicated servant of the king, hardly someone who is mentally adjusted and stable. Is Prince Hal a devious sociopath driven by his own needs, or is he simply trying his best to find the attention and help he needs but incapable of articulating his feelings outright? There is no doubt that Hal knows exactly what he is doing in manipulating people and faking a robbery—that much is clear during his exchange with Falstaff where he takes on the role of his father in jest. But is this action driven by pure sociopathic tendencies or is there something more to his actions, a desire and cry for help to his father and those around?

Early in the play, we find Hal engaging with Falstaff in a tavern. As the rightful heir to the throne and the firstborn of King Henry, Hal should be representing his father, nation, and future role well. Yet his first appearance is in a tavern, scheming with the rotund Falstaff. This first introduction is not one of royal pageantry or nobility. It is instead a lengthy denouncement of Sir Falstaff, "Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou has forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil has thou to do with the time of day?" (1.2.109-114). Falstaff is portrayed as a comedic and bumbling individual, so taking a jab at such a person is hardly unusual (or indeed, unwarranted, for they are in a tavern after all).

But for a prince, this carries extra weight. This is the first glimpse of Hal and only the beginning of his wholly inappropriate behavior.

Scene two continues with Hal and Falstaff planning a robbery of some hapless travelers. One who would be king is found, at his first appearance, in a tavern plotting a robbery with a fat oaf. Hardly the kingly introduction and portrayal of royal authority.

But Hal's faults run deeper than debauchery at a pub. Not only is he planning on robbing unwitting travelers, but he is also planning to trick his friend Falstaff and in turn rob *him* of his goods after the initial robbery. To rob Falstaff, Hal will don a mask and hide his appearance so that the witless Falstaff only thinks he is being robbed by true highwaymen. The purpose of this venture is to trick Falstaff into boasting of his exploits and then come clean to reveal Falstaff as a coward and thief. The entire venture is for amusement and trickery.

That Hal is willing to terrorize local travelers, individuals who are part of his realm and will be under his rule in the future, to use them as tools of amusement speaks highly of his flawed character. This act itself shows sociopathic tendencies in the young man. He knows it's wrong, doesn't care about the moral implications, and is doing it all for his amusement.

It isn't just among his group of friends and cohorts that Hal exhibits his socially perverse demeanor. Indeed, his behavior is known kingdom-wide to be mischievous, base, and completely against what a prince and future king should do. In the same scene, we hear Falstaff indicating how Hal is perceived throughout the land. "But, Hal, I prithee trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. An old lord of the council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not, and yet he talked very wisely, and in the street, too" (1.2.193-200). Hal's reply is proof that his misdeeds are in no way an act of involuntary or ignorant passion: "Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it."

(1.2.201-202). Shortly thereafter we hear Falstaff's assessment of Hal's personality, "O thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal..."

(1.2.202-205). The duo then continue discussing robbing as though it is their calling or "vocation"

(1.2.217).

Hal can revel in the very real misfortune of others (the robbing was real at the time, though he eventually returns the goods) all for a joke. He is not ashamed to reach the depths of human behavior just for a laugh.

During his revelry, Hal is summoned to court to help his father with an imminent battle. What does he do after being summoned for the following morning? He and Falstaff take turns playing the king and Hal to guess or portray how the meeting might go. With the demented thoughts of someone suffering from a personality disorder, when it comes to his turn to play his father, Hal utterly denounces Falstaff, who has for some time been like a second father to Hal. First, the denouncement is of pretend Hal, "Ungracious boy, henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace."

(2.4.1449-51). Though in jest, Hal is fully aware of his father's perception of him, the country's perception of him, and most importantly Hal acknowledges his actions. But his opinion of Falstaff, who is up to this point a rock that Hal can depend on, gets a lashing that is even worse, "That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan." (2.4.1467-68). That Hal denounces both himself and Falstaff as "Satan" can hardly be mere hyperbole. It is as much blame as it is an admission of his thoughts and actions.

Were the play left here, Hal's persona would be clear: sociopath. But what makes his case so interesting is that he does indeed answer the summons of his father and returns to court. When he arrives at court with his father in Act 3, Scene 2, the king unleashes a torrent of rebuke on the young prince, "But thou dost in thy passages of life make me believe that thou art only marked for the hot

vengeance and the rod of heaven to punish my mistreadings. Tell me else, could such inordinate and low desires, such poor, such bare, such lewd, such mean attempts, such barren pleasures, rude society as thou art matched withal, and grafted to, accompany the greatness of thy blood and hold their level with thy princely heart?" (3.2.1843-53). King Henry succinctly states that Hal seems to be a curse from heaven on his father's life and ruins the "blood" of his family in the presence of the tavern filth.

Towards the end of the same act, we find Hal, after his father's rebuke, uttering these words, "I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord, be more myself." (3.2.1928-29). And it is this response that puts all other actions and intents into perspective. Hal goes on to save his father's life in the battle, clearly showing he has a connection to his family, duty, and blood. Yet the young prince who is capable of answering his father's summons and saving his life in battle is also capable of using innocent citizens as tools for a mere joke and spends his time in taverns up to no good.

Hal's actions are not simply the musings of a sociopath, but a deeply flawed and needy child who is looking for help but unable to articulate his feelings appropriately. His encounter with Falstaff where they take turns becoming the king shows he is all too aware of his behaviors and knows how his father views such actions (as is then fulfilled in Act 3, Scene 2 as his father chastises him). But he performs those base acts nonetheless. Why? Why would the heir to the throne find himself with thieves and drunkards and plan his glorious return to goodness if not mentally unstable? Hal plots his return to glory from the beginning, spending time with Falstaff and company to make his triumphant change more powerful. The answer rests in two places-in Falstaff and his quote to be his true self-he is seeking attention and approval but cannot articulate his needs through words, only actions.

Hal is unsettled. He is unhappy with his family situation. But he does not know how to manage those feelings and emotions. Henry is busy running a nation and does not have the time his son needs. Hal develops and finds friends in the underbelly of society and latches onto a friend (Falstaff) as a stand-

in parent. He finds joy in their company and revels in a bit of youthful rebellion as we see above. All the while he wants to be accepted of his father and be the ruler he is supposed to be. When he states he shall be more himself, the statement suggests he not only knows what he has been doing but has been doing so to appeal to his father-this statement is both an admission of knowing what he will do and is planning (to triumphantly turn his actions around and become princely and the very person his father expects him to be) as well as an appeal to his father's graces. He saves his father's life and admits his deeds are poor. What other reason would he do such than to express his feelings of discontent with his father?

From lowly peasants in the countryside to nobility, the family was a crucial part of the kingdom. We can see that his relationship with his father is strained, but that does not mean it was insignificant. Martin Ingram tells us that, "The long-cherished notion that family relations were for the most part cold and severely authoritarian has now been discarded by historians. Letters, diaries, wills, and legal records provide abundant evidence of warm and loving sentiments both between husbands and wives and parents and children..." (123). Like today, family matters were complicated affairs. Hal wanted so much to be a part of his family, *a* family, but could not find proper ways to articulate his needs.

For whatever reason Hal is unable to articulate his feelings. We see in his relation to Falstaff that he craves a father-figure, and for whatever reason (or reasons), Henry is not providing. But bold as he is, he lacks the means or ability to communicate his needs to his father. It's only through acting with Falstaff that he gives voice to his feelings to any degree.

After Part 1, we find Henry and Hal reconciled to a degree and preparing to head to Wales. In some small part, battle had wrought a change in Hal. He might not have had a voice to express his feelings, but he was able to show them instead of simply saying them. And it is at this conclusion that we realize Hal is deeply flawed indeed; but those actions are born out of a cry for help, not pure evil.

Works Cited

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