

# **Falstaff: The Tavern Scene**

Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice

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Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

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FALSTAFF  
The Tavern Scene

By Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice  
"after W. Shakespeare"

Translated and adapted by

Frank J. Morlock  
C 2000

## CHARACTERS

FALSTAFF

HENRY, PRINCE OF WALES

POINS

GADSHILL

PETO

BARDOLPH

FRANCIS, The Waiter

THE HOSTESS

SCENE

A room in a tavern

Tables, crockery, glasses

NIGHT

AT RISE, the Hostess and Francis are on stage. Gales of laughter outside.

## Falstaff: The Tavern Scene

**HOSTESS:** Finally! God be praised! There are my good apostles. (Enter the Prince and Poins laughing. They are half masked. Poins is carrying a little box which seems heavy enough.) The Prince and Poins! Masked and alone! Where are the others?

**POINS:** They are coming.

**HOSTESS:** But why these masks?

**POINS:** A little joke.

**HOSTESS:** One day, one of those jokes will get their man hanged. Pillaging travelers!

**PRINCE:** Not so, my good woman. No, pillaging pillagers!

**HOSTESS:** (to Poins) Really?

**POINS:** Yes, on my soul! We left Jack with his three robbers to attack travelers without us at night. But hardly had he stolen off with the fat sum, then we fell on him and robbed the fat man.

**PRINCE:** Poins, hide the coffer. That gold, you know, will be restored without it being missed. (Poins leaves for a moment with the box and the masks.)

**HOSTESS:** But Falstaff?

**PRINCE:** (laughing) You should have seen him in his delirium, running away and cursing. Ah! God! How he made me laugh.

**POINS:** (returning) And when we listen to the poltroon, the braggart, trumpeting the exploits of his valor to us, (shouts of distress outside) It's them.

**BARDOLPH:** (running in impetuously) Help! Oh! The Prince!

**GADSHILL:** (also running in) Worthy hostess, hide me! God! Milord!

**PETO:** (also running in) Robbers! His Highness!

**BARDOLPH:** (to the hostess, low, pointing to the Prince) Was he laughing when he came in?

**HOSTESS:** He was laughing, brave Henry!

**BARDOLPH:** (to Gadshill) The Prince laughed.

**GADSHILL:** (to Peto) The Prince laughed.

**PETO:** (looking for a fourth that he doesn't find, to himself) The Prince laughed.

**HOSTESS:** But Sir John? Where did you leave him?

**GADSHILL:** In the field, sweating, roaring, wheezing.

**PETO:** He's not long winded.

## Falstaff: The Tavern Scene

**VOICE OF FALSTAFF:** (outside) Massacre!

**POINS:** (low to Prince) There he is! Some self control. We're going to laugh.

(Enter Falstaff. He arrives running and all out of breath. Stops short seeing the Prince, places his sword and buckler on the table, then falls into a chair, breathing hard.)

**POINS:** Good evening, Jack! Where are you coming from?

**FALSTAFF:** (without looking at him, fuming and grumbling) Curse the cowards! Let them all go to the Devil! Amen! Waiter, my glass of sherry.

(Francis takes a huge goblet from a counter and pours a whole bottle into it. Falstaff takes it and empties it.)

**FALSTAFF:** Infamous life! Oh, if I were to persevere in it! No, rather stick it up, resole it, or even mend it. Eh! Didn't you hear me, my clown? Cursed be all cowards! A glass of sherry.

(Francis hurriedly brings a second bottle, pours it in the goblet and Falstaff drinks again.)

**FALSTAFF:** Is there no manhood left on earth?

**PRINCE:** (to Poins) Have you ever seen a cask like that?

**FALSTAFF:** (to Francis, drinking this time in a gulp) Ah, I taste the lime in this wine. This corrupted century is only a knavish trick. All the more, I hate cowardice that adulterates the wine. The cowards, the rogues. Go your ways, old Jack, and die when you like. If valor hasn't left the earth, I'm a kippered herring! Are there three brave men in England spared by the envious gibbet? No, and one of those three is fat and growing old. God help us. Down here one only sees baseness. Cursed be cowards. I say it without cease. (drinking)

**PRINCE:** Hey! Old bowling ball! Ah, indeed! What's making you croak?

**FALSTAFF:** (rising) Who? You, the son of a king! But I intend to expel you from your estates, my dear fellow, with no more than a broadsword! Why, I pretend to hunt, under your eyes, with my staff or until my last hair of my head is shorn, like a flock of geese, all your people ruined! Prince of Wales, you!

**PRINCE:** Say what, fat paunch!

**FALSTAFF:** Coward! Aren't you? And this Poins?

**POINS:** (hand on his dagger) Sack of wool! You call me coward! I'm going to exterminate you!

**FALSTAFF:** (jumping back) Me, call you coward? I will be damned before I call you coward! Only, wise guys, you shove people aside to show them your shoulders. That's very witty. (to Francis) Some sherry, then. If I've drunk today, I am a rogue.

(The waiter brings a third bottle.)

**PRINCE:** Two empty bottles, and your chin is all running, goose.

**FALSTAFF:** Bah! Bah! (drinking) Again, I say, cursed be all cowards.

## Falstaff: The Tavern Scene

**PRINCE:** Why, what's it all about?

**FALSTAFF:** (excitedly) What's it about? I, Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, Gadshill, we had in our hands a thousand guineas tonight.

**PRINCE:** Where are they, Falstaff?

**FALSTAFF:** Alas! Re-stolen. A hundred bandits came

PRINCE A hundred ?

**FALSTAFF:** May I be hanged if I didn't fence, myself, alone, with a dozen at least, for two hours. I escaped by a miracle or I intend that you die. Count. (pointing to his breeches) Here! Four blows, twelve in my doublet. My breeches crushed. See, I'm not lying to you. (pointing to his sword all notched) My sword, a saw. Ecce signum. In short, I never did better since I became a man. Wasted heroism! Cursed be all cowards. (pointing to his companions) Hal, question them! If those thieves lie, they are all children of Hell! traitors

**PRINCE:** (to Bardolph and the others) Yes, my masters, tell us about the carrying off, a little.

**BARDOLPH:** (with embarrassment, consulting Falstaff with a glance) The four of us, being fallen on a dozen horsemen

**FALSTAFF:** Sixteen at least, milord!

**GADSHILL:** We tied them up

**PETO:** Heavens! I didn't see all that!

**FALSTAFF:** Brute! Will you shut up! All were gagged, all tied to the ground. All! All! or I am no more than a Jew! A Hebrew Jew.

**BARDOLPH:** Then, as we were sharing the loot, six or seven came

**FALSTAFF:** (warming up) Who let loose the others. Still others came. They fell on us.

**PRINCE:** Eh! What! They all charged you in a cowardly way

**FALSTAFF:** All! Hal, I don't understand what you mean by all? I had, for my part, fifty of the bravest. Fifty! Or I'm only a boot of turnips! Yes, surely, they were really fifty-two or three who attacked your old Jack at one time, and slashed at him until he let them have it. If I lie to you, I am I am nothing but a biped!

**POINS:** God grant that he didn't kill one of them.

**FALSTAFF:** That wish comes too late, for I peppered two. Alas! Yes, I am afraid two of them got their pay. Two rogues in, Buckram. If I am telling you a tale, spit on me, call me your horse. You know my parry, in which I am without rival. Well, there I was, holding my blade thus, when four rascals in Buckram

**PRINCE:** Four? By our lady, you only said two?

**FALSTAFF:** Four Hal, no offense.

## Falstaff: The Tavern Scene

**POINS:** Yes, four, he said four.

**FALSTAFF:** (acting it out) Then, from the front, then. But, without troubling myself by their joint attacks, I had blocked their seven points with my buckler

**PRINCE:** Seven? No, four.

**FALSTAFF:** In Buckram I say.

**POINS:** Yes, four in Buckram?

**FALSTAFF:** Seven! Seven! With my sword!

**PRINCE:** (low to Poin) Eh! The courage of a coward. You will see the seven will gradually grow in number.

**FALSTAFF:** Are you with me, Hal?

**PRINCE:** Very much so.

**FALSTAFF:** The thing is worth the trouble. Then, these nine in Buckram

**PRINCE:** (to Poin) Good! Two more already.

**FALSTAFF:** (miming a ferocious fight) They began to break, yelling Jesus! But as for me, I hacked them to pieces. Implacable as bronze. How many dead? Let's count? Horrible. Seven to eleven!

**PRINCE:** Eleven grown from two! You see us astounded.

**FALSTAFF:** But the Devil was in it! Three dirty dogs, dressed in light green, traitorously took me from behind. For it was dead failure, this murderous night. One couldn't see one's belly.

**PRINCE:** (rising) Oh, the brazen liar! Tell me, how could you clearly prove that these men were in light or dark color, if you couldn't see your belly in this shadow? Huh! Answer! What can you tell us now?

**POINS:** Your proofs,! your proofs!

**FALSTAFF:** (majestic) What! By force? Never! Go, threaten me with irons, with torture. Force can get nothing from me. That's my nature. Give you my reasons, by force? Proofs in number equal to the mulberry bushes. But, nothing will tear proofs from me by constraint!

**PRINCE:** (rising) Ah, my patience encourages impudent tales much too long. This boastful coward, who everywhere breaks beds and horses, this mass of flesh

**FALSTAFF:** Avaunt! Eel skin! Scourge! Bow string! Perch! Stockfish! Needle! (stops, coughing) But for this damned asthma, I would speak to my hearts content. Alder tree! Spindle! Scabbard! Tax collector's measure!

**PRINCE:** There! Very well! Breathe a bit, then start again. March to the end of the ignoble litany. But first of all, a single word.

**POINS:** Jack, hear this.

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**PRINCE:** Yes, we saw you, Poins and I, you four, fall on two old travelers, scoundrels, then steal their gold. Now see, in a breath, your lies crumble before the truth. At that moment, I threw myself on you four, together with Poins, and that in your drunken face, without striking a blow, we took back the loot. And we have it still. What's more, it is here. And you, Falstaff, running and shouting. Oh, oh. With the bellows of an enchained bull, you saved your paunch. Mustn't you be a fat rascal, to have broken your sword coming here, so as to support the story of your glory? Well, lie again! Find a way out. Piece together, if you can, your tattered honor!

**POINS:** Yes; get yourself out of that, my old friend, Sir Jack. Let's see you do it!

**FALSTAFF:** (shrugging his shoulders) Then you think I don't know how to recognize you? As well as he who engendered you, my master! Would you like to see the heir apparent killed, my legitimate Prince? Oh! Fie! By me, puny one? You know quite well, I am as valiant as Hercules. But instinct was there, whispering to me: recoil! Lions always respect royal blood. I was afraid, but from honest and fair instinct, wanted to cover us forever with praise and esteem. For myself, a generous lion. For you, legitimate Prince. Ah, indeed! You've really recovered their ransom, my dear boys, my chums, hearts of gold, brave lads? Let's amuse ourselves, have a blast. Oh! Harebrained youth. Would you improvise a comedy!

**PRINCE:** Title: save yourself if you can! Right, heart of stone?

**FALSTAFF:** Henry, do you want to shame me? Let's leave that. You know, my son, that a reprimand by the King awaits you tomorrow. Is your response prepared?

**PRINCE:** My word, no! But here, catechise me. I am the scolded, you the scolder. Be the King.

**FALSTAFF:** The King? Me! That's easy. (he makes a sign, they put an armchair on the table and help him to mount it) This chair is my throne. This spit, my scepter. And here's my crown.

(They pass him the spit and a round holder used for holding bottles)

(All laugh.)

**FALSTAFF:** Yes, laugh. If grace has some spark left in you yet, you will all be moved. There! Some sherry! (Francis brings a fourth bottle and pours it in the goblet.) Needed to light my eyes and put a paternal tremor in my voice. (he drinks)

**PRINCE:** Here's my bow.

**FALSTAFF:** And here's my oration.

**HOSTESS:** How funny he is.

**FALSTAFF:** (softly) My Queen, come moan lower. (on a signal, Francis has improvised a banner from a dish cloth) Form ranks, my nobility, around my banner.

**HOSTESS:** A true monarch.

**FALSTAFF:** Silence, beer bottle! And the rest of you, silence, also! I am speaking here as the father, as the King.

My son, you are my son, at least I hope so, and believe it. Besides, for proof of conjugal fidelity, I have your horrible tic and your beastly underlip. My son, then, you live ill, surrounded by good for nothings, tramps and ruffians.

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**PRINCE:** Father, I admit it.

**FALSTAFF:** Still, it struck me, at your side, I've seen a virtuous man whose name escapes me.

**PRINCE:** (stupefied) A virtuous man, father! Really? What man is that, if it please Your Majesty?

**FALSTAFF:** Why, an imposing man, my word, of firmness, bright eyes, gracious manner, noble bearing! About fifty thereabouts. My God, perhaps, indeed, sixty. To hide nothing from you. Ah, I have it now, he's named Falstaff. Well, yes, if debauchery has fallen on this man. But, no, no, virtue speaks and shines in his eye. And if the tree is recognized by its fruit, my son, as the fruit by the tree, then I repeat, the skin of this Falstaff contains an honest man. Kick out all your bandits, but cherish him always. Now, what have you been doing these last five days?

**PRINCE:** A King speak like this! This vulgar fellow exasperates me! Come down from there. I shall take the role of my father.

**FALSTAFF:** You dethrone me! So be it! (they help him down) Loan to royalty the quarter of my amplitude and my majesty, and you can later hang me by my paws like a gutted rabbit.

**PRINCE:** The humble heart!

**FALSTAFF:** Are you ready?

**PRINCE:** I am ready.

(The Prince easily clambers into the chair.)

**FALSTAFF:** Everyone judge, my masters.

**PRINCE:** Ah, there you are, Henry. Where are you coming from?

**FALSTAFF:** From the cabaret, Milord.

**PRINCE:** There are terrible grievances laid on your account.

**FALSTAFF:** God's blood! They're telling you tales. The young prince go go, he's fine and able to defend himself.

**PRINCE:** What! You swear, impious child! In the future don't raise your eyes to me. I renounce you. You are going straight to Hell. You take for your companion a demon in the features of a fat old man. Your friend, your Pylades is an ambulatory hogshead. How can you suffer that warped horror, that debauchee with grey hair, that toothless infamy? What's he know? To puke and drink sherry. To cut a slice of bread and swallow it down. What is his only talent? Trickery. What trickery? That does ill and abuses all good. Perverse in what? In everything. Laudable in what? In nothing.

**FALSTAFF:** Not so fast, Milord! I'm not following you very well. Of whom is Your Grace speaking?

**PRINCE:** Of that old libertine, of that voracious hog, of that Falstaff.

**FALSTAFF:** (as if stupefied) Falstaff! I know the man, yes.

## Falstaff: The Tavern Scene

**PRINCE:** Really?

**FALSTAFF:** But to add that I know in him more faults than in myself, that I reject. That he is old his greyness perhaps accuses him, and I pity him. But that he is either a greedyguts or briber, I boldly say no before all, Milord. If to sugar Spanish wine is a crime, God save sinners! If he tumbles into the abyss to be jovial, who will pardon? If because one is fat, one is condemned, then we must, to demonstrate integrity like Lord Pharo, boast of thin cows. No, no. Kick out Bardolph, Peto, the insolent Poins. But leave me with Falstaff, the loveable, excellent, pure, sweet, great hero that all admire, And much more than a hero, he is what he is, Sire. My good Jack, exiled by your perverse son, would be the Sun banished from the universe.

**PRINCE:** (coming down from the chair bowing and laughing) Conclusion. Sun, must you be adored?

**FALSTAFF:** (rising modestly) Oh, I only call myself the Sun by a simple metaphor. First of all, the Sun itself is not divine. For that reason, my boys, he needs wine for his divinity. Ah, wine! I'm very thirsty. Come on. Have 'em pour me some. (The waiter brings a fifth bottle and the goblet. Falstaff rejects the goblet and drinks from the bottle.) Yes, this is the other Sun, whose gleam bowls us over, which one mustn't worship by half. There it is wine, friend and saviour. Young, I languished liver arid and pale, that as is known only denotes the male. Wine revived me with its foaming philter. It's to wine that I owe all this charming wit which pours from my mouth where the salt of Greece abounds. A cup of the most sparkling words in the world. Hal, you haven't let stagnate in you the frozen blood transmitted by your father, the King. But like terrain that's sterile and dull, you warm yourself up with our huge bumpers. And you leave, refreshed by emptied flagons. Ah, if I had a thousand sons I would think to do enough for them, and I would hold their souls sufficiently instructed if, as a rule of conduct, I inculcated into them on this earth, where no step is safe, the horror of colored water, and the love of pure wine! For wine will make man passionate, proud and brave. Everything in this world is only filthy, and it's wine that cleanses. (drinking from the bottle in great gulps)

**PRINCE:** (laughing) Good! Drink, it's clear that after this hymn to wine, that, the better to cleanse yourself, you're going to drink without end.

**FALSTAFF:** (pulling the bottle from his mouth.) I don't drink! I believe Epicitus said "Wine is milk for the old." I don't drink, I nurse." (he takes his feeding bottle and suckles greedily.)

CURTAIN