

2 *Henry IV* background:

Date:

2 *Henry IV* was first registered with the Stationers in 1600, but the fact that the action of 2*Henry IV* picks up at a point even before the end of the action of 1 *Henry IV* suggests an expectation that the audience would have had the first play more or less in mind.

Additionally, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, another 'Falstaff' play, is thought to have been first performed in 1597

In Act 5, scene 2 the newly minted King Henry V refers to "the Turkish court" and assures the Lord Chief Justice that "Not Amurah, an Amurah succeeds, / But Harry, Harry" (5.2. 2933 - 5). This has been accepted as a topical reference to the January 1596 accession of Muhammad III to the Turkish throne previously occupied by Amurath III. Muhammad, like his father before him, had all his brothers slain.

The best that can be said, then, is that 2 *Henry IV* dates from no earlier than some time after January 1596, and no later than its 23 August 1600 entry in the Stationers' Register.

Sources:

Holinshed's *Chronicles*

An anonymous play entitled *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*

Samuel Daniel's *First Fowre Bookes of the Civile Wars*

Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*

John Stow's *Chronicles of England*

Thomas Elyot's *The Booke of the Governour*

(probably also) *A Mirrour for Magistrates*

Current criticism most relevant to us: See website.

Style:

Predominantly iambic pentameter.

Themes or topics of interest:

Rumour – starts the play, literally

– gives false hope to the rebels

– keeps Falstaff out of jail

– Hal can't shake the rumours of his misspent youth

Honour – Northumberland's removal to Scotland

The ascension of a king portrayed as being worthy of the name

A political “how-to” manual: e.g. Avoid internal strife (& thereby solidify your own power) by  
“busie[-ing] giddy Mindes / With Forraigne Quarrels” (2750 - 1)

justice – Prince John’s treatment of the rebel leaders  
– Hal’s treatment of his former friends

Maturation – perhaps Falstaff’s scene at 5.3 strikes us as tedious because Shakespeare mimicks  
for his audience the experience of Hal’s maturation: what was once fun becomes simply tedious