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Falstaff: A Signifier Above and Beyond

WEI Dianke
Nanhu Vocational and Technological College, Shanghai, China

This paper investigates the character of Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* and *Henry IV Part II*, using philosophical concepts drawn from the thought of Jacques Lacan. Here, Falstaff is treated as signifying the complete satisfaction of desire for eating, drinking, love-making, and the primitive and ideal states of the ego. Thus, Falstaff is beyond the pleasure principle. To satisfy his desire and become the ideal ego, Falstaff manipulates signifiers, facts, time, and common logic. Falstaff is above signifying chains, in that he uses others around him and disobeys the others (God, the king, and the Chief Justice). However, Falstaff cannot be reduced to nothing because he represents the primitive nature and existential desire of human beings. To allow people to enjoy Falstaff's pleasures is a task in social development. Due to the excesses he reaches in satisfying his desires, Falstaff can only be allowed to exist in fantasy. Falstaff is thus a signifier haunted above and beyond.

Keywords: Falstaff, Shakespeare, signifier, Lacan

Introduction

Falstaff on stage is always criticised as a figure who commits all kinds of vices. However, Falstaff only does what most people desire. The desire for luxurious food, more drink, and greater pleasure is nearly universal. We all desire to be ourselves and not be limited by others, and Falstaff is the ideal state of the ego. This may be why Falstaff is so widely acclaimed. However, his egoism harms others. To maintain order and peace, social rules require that Falstaff be bitterly rebuked. This article analyses the ambivalence of Falstaff using Jacques Lacan's work, by holding that Falstaff is more a signifier than a common comic character.

A Signifier of Complete Satisfaction

For Lacan (2006), a signifier is not a sign, which is a symbol that bears a one-to-one correspondence, enabling its usefulness in scientific and mathematical applications. A signifier is "the symbol of but an absence" (Lacan, 2006, p. 17). It does not signify anything present or particular. As a result of its symbolic function, a signifier can allow for a double play of metaphor and metonymy. These are, respectively, the effect of the combination of one signifier with another in a diachronic dimension and the effect of the substitution of one signifier for another in a signifying chain in a synchronic dimension. However, a combined or substituted signifier never disappears completely, and it "falls to the rank of the signified, and as a latent signifier perpetuates there the interval by which another signifying chain can be grafted onto it" (Lacan, 2006, p. 594). Thus, a present signifier implies many other absent, but not inert, signifiers that are ready to be animated in certain particular cases. A signifier has "a number, not even of meanings, but of series of meanings" (Lacan, 1997a, p. 594).

WEI Dianke, Ph.D., associate professor, English Department, Nanhu Vocational and Technological College, Shanghai, China.

Falstaff on stage is a signifier formed metaphorically and metonymically. Falstaff was first named after the historical Sir John Oldcastle, and certain events of Oldcastle's life were incorporated into the character's biography, but then the name was changed to that of another historical figure, Sir John Falstaff. In Falstaff, Shakespeare also combined the traits of comic characters from the long history of drama: obese, drunkard, coward, liar, and others. Falstaff, with these traits, towers above the full field of meanings of personal desire. Falstaff does not equal any actually existing beings, neither the historical characters of Sir John Falstaff or Sir John Oldcastle nor any preceding flat comic stereotype. All of those signifiers have been integrated into Falstaff. However, these signifiers and their signified aspects are available for resurrection and being recognised again whenever Falstaff is appreciated or criticised in any particular case. In essence, Falstaff is merely a signifier created from the most refined signifiers, a creation *ex nihilo*, as is evident in the fact that no actors who have played Falstaff on the stage can match the character depicted in the play. It is because Falstaff is a signifier that he is indestructible, and it is because Falstaff is a signifier of signifiers that he is universal.

Within the double play of metaphor and metonymy, Falstaff, as a signifier, can express the infinite and insatiable desire of human beings to its maximum. Falstaff signifies the entire capacity for pursuing complete satisfaction. First, Falstaff embodies hearty eating and deep drinking, excessive in both quantity and quality. Quantitatively, Falstaff's appetites are more enormous than that of others. Whenever Falstaff wants to eat, he overcomes all barriers to obtain a great feast like the one shown in the bill found in Falstaff's pocket (Shakespeare, 2008a). This bill reflects that Falstaff can attain a better quality meal than his contemporaries. Falstaff's meals include capon, butter and pudding. The bill also exposes that the lion's share of the charge is for alcohol. Falstaff loves drinking, and his "lips are scarce wiped since last" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922). Falstaff reasons that strong alcohol promotes the imaginative power: "It ascends me into the brain, dries me there all the foolish and dull and curdy vapours which environ it, makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1006). Therefore, alcoholic drinking can prompt the mind to break away from any consciousness of the remarks or regard of others. In Shakespeare's time, England had little domestic winemaking due to its climate, producing mainly thin ale. This does not meet with Falstaff's satisfaction, and he prefers to consume good wines imported from foreign countries. The names of high-quality wines that Falstaff commonly mentions include Madeira, bastard, brown bastard, old sack (Shakespeare, 2008a) and sherry-sack (Shakespeare, 2008b). Falstaff's stomach is so often filled with wine from France that "there's a whole merchant's venture of Bordeaux stuff in him" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 984). Even high-quality and imported wines cannot satisfy Falstaff. He flavours his wine, adding sugar, which was usually imported from Africa in Elizabethan times. Falstaff is thus called "Sir John Sack and Sugar" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 905). His consumption of imported goods indicates that Falstaff's desires transcend spatial barriers. At a time when many were facing the threat of starvation, when "the price of oats rose" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 914), Falstaff's satisfaction in eating and drinking suggests that his desire exceeds the limits of his own time.

Falstaff signifies the unrestrained satisfaction of sex. The excessive energy he has accumulated needs a place to discharge. Although he is old, Falstaff retains a strong sexual desire, which "should so many years outlive performance" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 988). Falstaff, a "bed-presser" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 924), does not restrain his sexual desire. For him, the body means the bawdy. Whenever he is responding to his instinctual impulses, Falstaff always requires that his desire be immediately satisfied. However, desire is

metonymic, always for something other. When Falstaff's sexual desire is satisfied, the woman loses her desirability. As a consequence, Falstaff's desire is promiscuous lust, and his sexual partners are not fixed. Auden (1988) noted that with Falstaff "no woman is safe alone" (p. 175). Acknowledging the frequent mention of prostitution, Falstaff is called a "whoremaster" (Auden, 1988, p. 927). Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly are only two explicit examples from the many who could not be presented due to the limitations of the stage. There is also a Mistress Ursula mentioned with whom Falstaff also has relations (Shakespeare, 2008b).

A Signifier of the Ideal Ego

Falstaff signifies the ideal ego who has an idealised image of himself and regards himself as the exclusive object of love. In speech, the *I* is "nothing but the shifter or indicative that, qua grammatical subject of the statement, designates the subject insofar as he is currently speaking" (Lacan, 2006, p. 677). For Falstaff, the *I* stands for his real ego, and what he says is "I am that I am."In Falstaff's speech, first of all, his immediate emotions are present. Falstaff has a "trunk of humours" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 927) and "a whole school of tongues" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1005), meaning that his speech is not confined by any one style. Second, a misrecognition of himself appears in Falstaff's speech. He calls himself one of the "three good men … in England" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922) and "a virtuous man" (p. 926); he also claims that "there is virtue in that Falstaff" (p. 927). Falstaff describes himself as "sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff". He always finds a good reason to explain his lifestyle away and to rationalise his weakness and shortcomings wittily. For example, Falstaff claims that his satisfaction of his appetite and his obesity is signs of God's plenty.

To maintain his ideal ego, Falstaff benefits from the metaphoric and metonymic nature of signifiers to protect his desires. As he says, "A good wit will make use of any thing" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 973). Falstaff twists and turns the meaning of signifiers, and those signifiers become the mere bearers of his desire. The signifiers are even re-organised to satisfy his infinite desire. Falstaff's speech belongs to what Lacan (1991a) called full speech, which expresses "the truth of the subject" (p. 50). Falstaff's puns are metaphorical deployments of signifiers. We will take "son/sun" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 926) for an example. From a visual perspective, we can see "son" written in the text. However, on the auditory plane, the pronunciation will easily remind us of "sun". Therefore, rich meanings flash out of the combination of "sun" and "son". In his metaphoric play, Falstaff satirises both the son (Prince Hal, who has stolen money) and the sun of England (Henry IV, who has seized the throne) as thieves. When facing criticism or accusation, Falstaff is prone to respond with metonymy. First, he utilises laughter: He laughs off all criticisms and embarrassments when he has no better words to reply with. Secondly, Falstaff twists adeptly the original meanings of his adversaries. He exploits the ambiguity of the signifier, choosing the signified for himself, as with his shift of the Chief Justice's threat to become his "physician" (to punish him) to the another meaning of physician (one who can cure his physical disease) by his use of the word "patient" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 971). Third, Falstaff is a master diverter. When the Chief Justice criticises Falstaff, saying that "Your means are very slender, and your waste is great", Falstaff replies that "I would my means were greater and my waist slenderer". He changes "waste" into "waist", diverting the object of the attack from his morals to a part of his body.

An ideal ego, Falstaff freely turns objective facts into subjective opinions. His speech is full of lies and boasts. An affinity exists between lying and boasting. Falstaff's lies are enormous, "like the father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 923). Falstaff uses lying and boasting to

release himself from embarrassing circumstances, without considering credit, truth or logic. The obvious case is his continual exaggeration of the number of robbers that he killed at Gad's Hill. When he is caught in a lie, he never apologises or expresses frustration, but immediately modifies his lies at once so that his ideal ego is maintained at no cost. Falstaff denies not only the facts that he has done in the past, but also what he promises to realise in the future. Keeping a promise means that, at a later time, one must restrain one's ego and forego pleasure to deliver on the promise. Falstaff's promises, however, are either responses to the exigency of the circumstances or assurances of what he desires here and now. When the future arrives, refusing to be restricted by duties and responsibilities to others, not wanting to compromise his ideal ego or present pleasures, Falstaff breaks promises easily. Bradley (1909) found that Falstaff "abandons a statement or contradicts it the moment it is made" (p. 91).

An ideal ego, Falstaff manipulates time at will. In Pyle's (1998) words, Falstaff is "doing things at the wrong time and spirit with the wrong emphasis" (p. 183). All of his time is employed in satisfying his appetite for eating and drinking, sexual pleasure and other bodily pleasures. Falstaff conceives of "hours", "minutes", "clocks", and "dials", in terms of "cups of sack", "capons", "bawds", and "leaping-houses" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904). His emphasis upon the specific bodily pleasures determines that his time is divided into "minutiae" (Hart, 1992, p. 121), which repetitively circle. Without bodily pleasures, Falstaff's life is "out of all order, out of all compass" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 939). When these corporeal pleasures are satisfied, Falstaff sleeps happily to prepare for his next encounter, even in the day. The first words from Falstaff's mouth reveal his insensitivity to the time: "Now Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904). Falstaff does not feel guilty for "sleeping upon benches after noon" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904), but at night, he is one of the "squires of the night's body … Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904). The moon goddess Diana is regarded as the guardian of thieves. Falstaff belongs to the night and not a knight, happy to "go by the moon and the seven stars, and not by Phoebus" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904).

Falstaff is sensitive to the immediate satisfaction of his desires. Closely concerned with his ideal ego, Falstaff cannot stomach lack or unease, and he urges that his desires be satisfied now and here. He only concerns himself with the present time, and never considers the future or the past. Falstaff refuses to reflect his past. The slightest self-reflection would bring Falstaff's present into comparison with his past, would link effects with causes, would compare him with others, and would make him uncomfortable. Falstaff's neglect of the past may be connected with his disregard of the future. His concern about future and the afterlife would overshadow his present pleasures. Falstaff does not plan for the future and takes no thought for the next day: "do not bid me remember mine end" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 987). When the unknown future is not cared for, the past, or experiences that can be used to guide the future, is unnecessary, not useful for Falstaff at all. Without any consideration for the past or the future, Falstaff remains within the present, living a life in which he shows no fear of time. For Falstaff, today is the same as yesterday, and tomorrow also will be a repetition of today. As Swinden (1985) pointed out, Falstaff "loses all sense of time and age" (p. 86). Falstaff feels eternally young: "they hate us youth" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 917), and "You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 972). Falstaff asserts that he has not aged: "My lord, I was born … with a white head and something a round belly" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 972). A reason for this may be that society is often more permissive of youth. Falstaff pays close attention to his bodily pleasures and neglects his responsibilities, making it inevitable for him to take refuge in an imaginary youth.

Falstaff's emphasis on immediacy contradicts common logic and reasoning in society, which is generally based on categorical syllogisms. Falstaff's mind is filled with his interests and sensual pleasures: He relates to no other categories but his ideal ego: "there's no room for faith, truth, nor honesty in this bosom of thine: it is all filled up with guts and midriff" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 941). For Falstaff, reason does not exist: "If reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 924). The only premise for Falstaff's reasoning is whether his desire is satisfied here and now. Auden (1988) said that, for and to Falstaff, "fact is subjective fact, what I am actually feeling and thinking at this moment" (p. 167). The emphasis on the here and now prevents his reasoning from ever attaining the categorical syllogism. For example, Falstaff says "I am a rogue if I drunk today" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922). However, Hal remarks that Falstaff's "lips are scarce wiped since thou drunk'st last" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922). The common syllogistic inductions are based on categorical terms: (1) if he is drunk, then he is a rogue; (2) Falstaff drinks a great deal, he is usually drunk and therefore; and (3) Falstaff is a rogue. However, Falstaff's logic is the following: (1) if he is drunk, then he is a rogue; (2) here and now, Falstaff is not drunk and therefore; and (3) Falstaff is not a rogue. It is Falstaff's emphasis upon the immediacy of satisfaction that has transformed the categorical syllogism for him into egoistic logic.

A Signifier Above Others

The above discussion illustrates that Falstaff is not a common signifier. For Lacan (1998a; 1998b; 2006; 2007), a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier. The function of a signifier is to reduce a subject to no more than an element in a signifying chain. The subject is placed in signifying chains in which it is determined and defined by others, who always impose mortification and frustration on the subject's desire for complete satisfaction and the ideal ego.

Falstaff on the stage is not a subject in real society but a signifier that signifies the ideal ego and complete satisfaction. He is thus an isolated signifier beyond the signifying chains. First, Falstaff seems autonomous and beyond any relations by blood or marriage. In the plays, Falstaff's family is not mentioned at all. He is so old that his parents and siblings might have died. Moreover, no Falstaff's descendants have been mentioned. For pursuing corporeal pleasures, Falstaff does not intend to marry. Marriage is the combination of a man and a woman into a couple, which requires responsibility and fidelity. After children are born, responsibility grows. Therefore, marriage and its consequences imply restrictions of infinite desire and the ideal ego. Falstaff follows unlimited desire, and he is not interested in marital bondage. Falstaff seems to have no home. Skura (1993) stated that "Falstaff is most at home in a tavern" (p. 115), where he can obtain many pleasures by simply squandering his money. Particularly, in this chaotic environment, Falstaff can enjoy his "unproductive sensual pleasures" (Bertram, 2009, p. 297) and practice sadomasochism as well, as will be shown in the following.

Falstaff, the ideal ego, is tainted by an imaginary degradation of others. Others are not recognised or respected as equal subjects, but as objects to satisfy his desire. Therefore, the entire satisfaction of Falstaff's desires must be at the expense of others. If others satisfy his desire or are willing to yield to it, this establishes a sadomasochistic relationship. Expressed differently, Falstaff is a sadist, and the others around him are willing to be masochists. This sadomasochism is well practised and maintained in the world of the tavern. Until the end of *Henry IV*, Falstaff fascinates his victims. He cheats and exploits Mistress Quickly and owes her money, but she appears to enjoy it, even devoting herself to his well-being. Doll Tearsheet loves Falstaff "better than I love e'er a scurvy young boy of them all" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 988). Bardolph is content to be the butt of Falstaff's

wit. Master Shallow is so delighted with Falstaff's company that he does not allow Falstaff to part with him. The "easy-yielding spirit" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 978) of these characters allows Falstaff to satisfy his desire and establish an ideal ego.

However, it is only temporarily possible to maintain harmonious sadomasochism in reality. Most people, as independent subjects, are reluctant to be reduced to objects. Additionally, the nature of desire is to be infinite, as Falstaff's desire is. If others do not satisfy his demand, if their attitudes and manners do not respond to his desire, Falstaff's ideal ego brings him to maltreat and insult others. Therefore, Falstaff's speeches feature backbiting, cursing, and sarcasm. As Pyle (1998) noted, the way Falstaff speaks is "a sin of the tongue, it represents unrestrained speaking" (p. 189). Moreover, Falstaff freely expresses his emotions whenever he has them, with no concealment. He may be trying to express a clear, discernible truth, but his words can be sharp enough to hurt. This is why it is not always polite to speak the truth directly in social life. White lies are often told to save others' face, as well as one's own. Further, Falstaff is ready to steal others' belongings. Falstaff "will foin like any devil; he will spare neither man, woman, nor child" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 976), and he generates victims of those within his reach. Falstaff is not ashamed to ask Bardolph to frequently pay for his sack (Shakespeare, 2008a). He takes advantage of Justice Shallow for a thousand pounds, but he does not feel any regrets because Shallow has "land and beefs" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 997). According to Skura (1993), by the end of *Henry IV*, *Part I*, Falstaff has already bullied most people who were available.

A Signifier Against the Other

Doing without the respect or recognition of others, Falstaff is against the other. The other here means a locus of otherness that exists not as a particular person but as a social function. It can be embodied by a God, who signifies the moral good; by a King, who signifies the social order; or by the Chief Justice, who signifies legal justice.

In God, the good of all others is known (Lacan, 1998b). Therefore, God represents the perfect condition of goodness, that is, the Good, "the repository of good will and divine good manners" (Lacan, 1997a, p. 106). As a social being, it expresses wisdom to pay homage to God, to fear God and to follow God: "The subject's world will essentially consist of the relationship with … God" (Lacan, 1997a, p. 87). Falstaff is a "globe of sinful continents" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 988), and he is deaf "to the hearing of anything good" (p. 970). Thus, God is beyond Falstaff's consciousness. Falstaff has not gone to church for a long time, and he has "forgotten what the inside of a church is made of" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 939). Falstaff says, "I would I were a weaver. I could sing all manner of songs" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922). Weavers were known for psalm-singing, thus Falstaff cannot or does not sing the songs in praise of God. Falstaff frequently quotes from the Bible, but his purpose is not to profit from the verses to guide his own actions but to explain away his wrongdoing. For example, Falstaff exonerates himself through Paul's dictum that each person should remain where God calls him or her (1 Corinthians 7:20). By brazenly treating his role as a thief as a profession, Falstaff justifies himself: "tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 905). Falstaff may believe that God does not exist because he does not fear Him in that he lacks any real intention to repent. He repents at certain times when he feels funny to do so and when he is in fear of the imperious dangers. Because it is founded in self-interest (Avery, 2013), Falstaff's repentance is easily reversible: "from praying to purse-taking" in an instant (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 905).

Falstaff's disrespect brings him to challenge the social order, beyond the king (the greatest other in reality). The king was invested with the most powerful authority within his kingdom to maintain social order among all

his subjects. The king also determined the rules and regulations to maintain social order. A good social order was an indication that all subjects were together under the king. However, an ideal ego, Falstaff defies anyone in authority over him. Playing on the homophones "son" and "sun" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 926), Falstaff satirically claims that the sun of England (the king) is a thief who has usurped the crown. Falstaff calls the legitimacy of the kingship into question and thus the king's authority. As an ideal ego, Falstaff would rather believe himself a king. For example, in the tavern he compares himself to "a valiant lion" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 924). Soon thereafter, Falstaff holds a court, where he mimics the king, parodies kingly speech, and mocks the real monarchy (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 926). Falstaff's subversive impulses are also exhibited through the admiration he expresses for Hotspur after he learns of his insurrection: "Well, God be thanked for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous. I laud them, I praise them" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 942). During wartime, Falstaff is hesitant to sacrifice himself for the king's causes, as indicated by his cowardly actions and disregard of honour. Falstaff has nothing to do with honour because it involves self-sacrifice or death (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 953). Falstaff declares that "I was a coward by instinct" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 924), and he always manages to come "To the latter end of a fray" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 946). During the war, Falstaff is prepared to play dead on the battlefield to save himself. He rationalises his counterfeit action by saying that "the better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 959). Falstaff takes advantage of the war for his own benefit. Falstaff supplies the king with the most incompetent soldiers, which enriches him, both with the money he receives from the king and the bribes he takes from the competent soldiers. Falstaff himself confesses to having "misused the king's press damnably" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 945). The poor performance of the incompetent soldiers in battle might directly endanger the king. Finally, Falstaff nearly succeeds in destroying the king's future by seducing the prince and making him a prodigal.

A signifier against God and the king, Falstaff represents the comprehensive violation of the Law. For Lacan, the Law with a capital L "refers not to a particular piece of legislation, but to the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations" (Evans, 2006, p. 101). It is essentially considered to promote respect for others' desires and maintain the social order. The Law is the necessary result of human desire, and "law originates in desire" (Lacan, 2006, p. 689). The infinite desire of such men as Falstaff provokes the laws that restrain them, meaning that social and communal interests are protected. Although Falstaff is continuously put in the position of answering for his way of life, although he is frequently reminded of the "gallows", "buff jerkin", and "hanging" that await him (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 904-5), he embodies a constant resistance to "the rusty curb of old father antic the law" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 905). Taking advantage of "the unquiet time" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 972), Falstaff repeatedly succeeds in denigrating the authority of the law and eluding its punishment. The relationship between Falstaff and the law is best seen in his relationship with the Lord Chief Justice. Falstaff continues to avoid meeting the Chief Justice. Therefore, it is not until *Henry IV*, *Part Two* that Falstaff meets the Chief Justice for the first time. From that point on, with the exception of the scene of Henry IV's death, wherever Falstaff appears on stage, the Chief Justice must be present. At their meetings, Falstaff acts blind to the Chief Justice or pretends to be sick and deaf. Falstaff hates the Chief Justice, who rebukes him and separates him from the Prince. At the end of *Henry IV*, *Part Two*, when he is ready to leave Gloucestershire to greet his new king, Falstaff never forgets to speak ill of his chief enemy: "woe unto my Lord Chief Justice" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1021). Finally, it is the Chief Justice who arrests Falstaff and has him committed.

A Signifier of Destruction

Although Falstaff works to satisfy all his desires, his world is no paradise. Lacan (2007) held that complete satisfaction is a "path toward death" (p. 18). Here lies the paradox of the satisfaction of desire; its consequence is pain and even death. Therefore, Falstaff is also a signifier of destruction. He is against law, the king and God, and these results, directly or indirectly, not only in the pain and death of others, but also his own pain and death. After society has regained peace and order, to maintain all social relations, individuals like Falstaff who desire complete satisfaction and ideal ego are doomed to be prohibited. It is necessary for the intervention of the law into every aspect of life to ensure others are recognised and respected. Even if other parties are willing to join the sadomasochistic display, the law forbids it in order to prevent mutual destruction.

Falstaff's pain also comes from the disastrous consequences of his satisfaction in eating and drinking. He is "thrice wider than for other men" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1023), and he himself says that "if I were sawed into quantities, I should make four dozen of such bearded hermits' staves as Master Shallow" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1015). In his height too, Falstaff is a "Titan", "a mountain", and "huge hill of flesh" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922-3). In his figure, Falstaff is a "round man" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 922) with "a round belly" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 972). Mathematics informs us that when surface is limited, the sphere has the largest volume. Falstaff's weight must have reached the limit for his height, in a way that violates the logic of the well-being of the physical organs. First, Falstaff's weight must produce great pressure on his weak feet. After all, Falstaff must carry his huge body himself. Falstaff admits that it is very difficult for him to walk: "Eight yards of uneven ground is threescore and ten miles afoot with me" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 916). Second, Falstaff's weight and weakness make him perspire. Therefore, Falstaff "sweats to death, And lards the lean earth, as he walks along" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 917). Thirdly, being as large as he is, his heart cannot pump enough blood to supply his body, making him short of breath (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 928). Falstaff himself confesses that "if I travel but four foot by the square further afoot, I shall break my wind" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 916). Beyond these external symptoms, Falstaff's obesity sets him up for a number of potential diseases that are not directly perceived. However, in Falstaff's urinalysis report, "for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 969).

Pain also results for Falstaff from his promiscuity. His unrestrained lust dominates his immune system, and he is punished by various venereal diseases. He is tormented by "a pox of this gout, or a gout of this pox" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 973). The pox is a symptom of syphilis. Falstaff clearly sees the close relation between prostitution and venereal disease, but he nevertheless enjoys deadly pleasures, saying, "a man can no more separate age and covetousness than he can part young limbs and lechery" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 973). Falstaff suffers from venereal diseases and passes them on to prostitutes, or, as he says, the prostitutes spread disease to him (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 984). These lethal diseases will finally destroy all of them, and that mutual destruction reflects the end consequences of sadomasochism, which cannot be forever maintained. For one thing, few are willing to be in a sadomasochistic relationship at all times; for another, desire is insatiable, always resulting in something other and better. If desire is not satisfied here and now, harmonious sadomasochism can be broken, and love will become hatred. Thus, there are many ways that Falstaff's heart can be broken. In the end, of course, Falstaff is reported to have died of a broken heart in *Henry V*.

A Signifier Beyond

As shown above, Falstaff is set in opposition against others and the other, but he is far from evil. In fact, Falstaff represents the primitive nature of humanity and existential desire. What Falstaff indulges in and what causes him to express aggression towards others are his excessive desires for food, drink and pleasure. While perhaps his excess is unique, the same desires are what everyone seeks: this is man's nature. Satisfying those desires gives life value. Furthermore, Falstaff succeeds in guarding himself from being considered disgusting, despicable, odious and tiresome (Morris, 1986). Falstaff's deception, theft and robbery are "within benign limits" (Bloom, 2000, p. 130), and his goal is only for instant satisfaction. He is far from any evil intention or malignant design. Nor does he have any intention to hurt another. Furthermore, he has positive merits. He is "not a double man" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 960). Falstaff's immediacy of expression takes the form of a frankness that contrasts with others' hypocrisy. Falstaff's genuine emotions and earnest devotion, although they quickly change, are still valuable. What Falstaff does is what everyone has experienced in childhood but cannot continue after submitting to social laws as part of growing up. Falstaff represents the ideal ego and complete satisfaction, which are lost outwardly, but still haunt everyone's inmost heart. It is easy for everyone to be seduced by Falstaff. McCleary (2012) wrote, "both Elizabethan and modern audiences would find comfort in the return of Falstaff" (p. 150). Falstaff himself reminds us that it is impossible to prohibit him: "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (Shakespeare, 2008a, p. 927). At the end of *Henry IV*, *Part II*, the Epilogue tentatively promises that Falstaff will reappear in the next play of the cycle: "If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it" (Shakespeare, 2008b, p. 1024). If Falstaff dies, as in *Henry V*, he only dies temporarily. Tradition holds that Queen Elizabeth I was not offended by Falstaff, and enjoyed him so heartily that he was brought back on stage for the *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Falstaff cannot be removed from life. If Falstaff were to be banned completely, all that would be left would be the rigid, iron world of social law, and people would revolt: "repression and the return of the repressed are the same thing" (Lacan, 1991a, p. 191). Falstaff, as a signifier of the primitive nature and existential desire of human beings, represents the eternal imaginary world of complete satisfaction and the ideal ego that we desire but that cannot be completely achieved. In the long view, one purpose of social development is to allow everyone to satisfy their desires more. As society develops, more pleasures are sanctioned to the individual's desire, and more people enjoy the right to these pleasures. That is, more people are to become more like Falstaff. Many people in many countries of the modern world can eat and drink better than Falstaff. The freedom of marriage and divorce allows us to pursue the metonymic satisfaction of our sexual desire. In some parts of the world, prostitution is legal and regarded as a profession. On the other hand, as a signifier of destruction, Falstaff can only be allowed onstage, in our fantasy, or in other fantastic places. Therefore, Falstaff exists as a presence of absence. He is a presence because society does not exist meaningfully without him. However, he is also an absence for individuals because he is only above and beyond.

Conclusion

In summary, Falstaff is a signifier; he is created metaphorically and metonymically, and represents a complete satisfaction of the desires for eating, drinking and lovemaking. He also signifies the ideal ego, who manipulates signifiers, facts, time and common logic and reasoning. Emphasising his complete satisfaction and the ideal ego, Falstaff is a signifier above others in the community, against others in society. However, he

cannot be reduced to a non-entity, in that he represents the primitive nature and existential desire of human beings. Due to his excessive satisfaction of desires, he cannot be allowed to exist in reality. He is merely a signifier of the beyond in fantasy.

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