

**A Guide to
HENRY IV, PART 2**

by William Shakespeare



Alistair McCallum

“The Shakespeare Handbooks open the plays up admirably. Excellent for all levels of reader – everybody will get something from them.” Simon Callow

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- The Winter's Tale

Further titles in preparation.

Setting the scene

Henry IV, Part 2 was written during the period 1596–8, when Shakespeare was in his early thirties. Having started his career as an actor in his twenties, he was by now a member of one of London's leading theatre companies, and had already made a name for himself as an outstanding playwright. He had produced hugely successful works in the fields of comedy, tragedy and history: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II* had all been created within the previous few years.

Whether Shakespeare initially planned to write *Henry IV* in two parts is not known. The character of Falstaff introduced in *Henry IV, Part 1* – known simply as *Henry IV* when first produced – was tremendously popular with audiences, and may have prompted Shakespeare to write a sequel; or he may have decided at an early stage in *Part 1* that he had too much material for a single play.

Henry IV, Part 2, however, does not present us with a wealth of historical detail: instead, it offers a panoramic view of the nation, taking us between locations as diverse as the court, the city streets, the tavern, the battlefield and the country estate. The play teems with characters ranging from royalty to rebels, from ageing rural magistrate to genteel brothel-keeper; and at its heart is the inimitable Falstaff, gluttonous, hedonistic, impoverished and dishonest, yet always captivating.

When the *Henry IV* plays were first performed, the ageing Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne for nearly forty years, and there was growing unease over the question of who should succeed her. The figure of Falstaff provided the perfect antidote to this anxiety, and remains irresistible to this day:

“Falstaff’s appeal is not difficult to see. There was an atmosphere of stasis and disillusionment at the end of the old Queen’s reign, and the plays hit the spot psychologically: corrupt politicians, bloodless princes and puritanical judges were contrasted with the full-blooded life of a true-hearted Englishman. It was an image of themselves that audiences loved, whether high-born or low-born. There was much nostalgic harking back in Shakespeare’s day, and in a time of anxiety and change the show magically conjured up Old England.”

Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare*, 2005

Troubled times

Throughout his short reign, King Henry IV has never felt fully secure in his possession of the English crown. He became king when an opportunity arose to depose his cousin, King Richard II; ever since, he has been beset by conspiracies and rebellions.

Some powerful individuals are still resentful at the overthrow of King Richard; some support a rival claimant to the crown; and others, who initially supported Henry in his quest for the throne, have turned against him. To add to Henry's woes, there have been uprisings in Wales and conflicts on the Scottish borders.

An ailing monarch

King Henry is in poor health, exacerbated by continual military and political struggles. He is still suffering, too, from an inescapable sense of guilt since the death of King Richard. After his downfall, Richard was put to death by one of Henry's supporters; and although Henry had not ordered the killing, he cannot escape the fact that he had wanted the previous king out of the way.

One day, when the current rebellions are over and the country is at peace, Henry has promised himself that he will go on a crusade to the Holy Land as penance for Richard's death.

The king's oldest son, Harry, is also a source of anxiety. Although the young man is heir to the throne, his behaviour is wild and unruly, and he keeps company with several dissolute, lawless characters. The worst of these is the notoriously gross, drunken, impoverished knight, Sir John Falstaff.

The conflict continues

Different rebel groups eventually brought their forces together to form a united army, assembled near the city of Shrewsbury. It is there that a major battle between the king's forces and the rebels has just taken place, and the royal army has been victorious. The leader of the rebels, Henry Percy – nicknamed 'Hotspur' – has been killed by none other than the king's wayward son, Prince Harry.

The king is aware, despite this success, that the rebellion is not over: in the north, there are a few powerful noblemen, including the Archbishop of York, who are determined to fight on. Even though the bloody battle of Shrewsbury is fresh in everyone's memory, military preparations are already under way on both sides: another confrontation seems inevitable.

Curtain up

False news

A lone figure appears on stage, wearing a strange costume covered with countless images of tongues. He introduces himself as the personification of Rumour, and is confident that we will listen. Everyone, after all, is keen to hear the latest news, even if it is no more than hearsay or speculation:

Rumour: Open your ears; for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing¹ when loud Rumour speaks?
I, from the Orient to the drooping West,²
Making the wind my post-horse,³ still unfold⁴
The acts commenced on this ball of Earth.

¹ *block your ears*

² *from east to west; from sunrise to sunset*

³ *travelling as swiftly as the wind*

⁴ *continually report*

Rumour claims proudly that he helps to spread distortion and deliberate lies, often with disastrous results:

Rumour: Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.
I speak of peace, while covert enmity
Under the smile of safety wounds the world ...

He has just reached the Earl of Northumberland's castle, Rumour tells us. The earl's son, Hotspur, has been leading a rebellion against King Henry, and there has been fierce fighting at Shrewsbury between the king's forces and the rebels. In reality, Hotspur has been killed in battle by the king's son, Prince Harry, and the rebellion has failed.

Rumour, however, is not interested in the truth:

Rumour: I run before King Harry's victory,¹
Who in a bloody field by Shrewsbury
Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,
Quenching the flame of bold rebellion
Even with the rebels' blood. But what mean I
To speak so true at first? My office² is
To noise abroad that Harry Monmouth fell³
Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword ...

¹ *King Henry's victory has driven me on*

² *job, task*

³ *to spread the word that Harry, the king's son, has
been killed*

Several messengers are now on their way to the castle, bringing good news for Northumberland. However, each one of them, believing the false reports put about by Rumour, is misinformed:

Rumour: The posts come tiring on,¹
And not a man of them brings other news
Than they have learnt of me. From Rumour's tongues
They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true
wrongs.²

¹ *riding until they are exhausted*

² *soothing, comforting falsehoods which will prove
more painful than the harsh truth*

“The play's focus on political turmoil is sharpened by several secondary themes, the most important of which is the unreliability of human knowledge. This motif is repeatedly stressed from the play's outset.”

Charles Boyce, *Shakespeare A to Z*, 1990

The truth emerges

I, i

Lord Bardolph, the first of the messengers mentioned by Rumour, now arrives at the castle and calls out urgently for the Earl of Northumberland. The earl comes out to greet him, anxious for news of the battle and of his son Hotspur. War, by its very nature, is violent and unpredictable:

Northumberland: The times are wild; contention,¹ like a horse
Full of high feeding,² madly hath broke loose,
And bears down all before him.³

¹ *combat, strife*

² *stimulated by a rich diet, unruly*

³ *devastates everything in its path*

The news is good, Lord Bardolph assures him; the rebels have defeated the royal forces utterly, and Northumberland's son himself has killed Prince Harry, heir to the throne. The earl is keen to establish that the report is true:

Lord Bardolph: The king is almost wounded to the death;
And, in the fortune of my lord your son,¹
Prince Harry slain outright ...

Northumberland: How is this derived?²
Saw you the field?³ Came you from Shrewsbury?

Lord Bardolph: I spake with one, my lord, that came from thence,
A gentleman well bred, and of good name,
That freely rendered me⁴ these news for true.

¹ *through the success of your son Hotspur*

² *how did you learn this news?*

³ *battlefield*

⁴ *willingly told me*

Another messenger, Northumberland's servant Travers, now arrives. He has heard conflicting reports of the battle; like Lord Bardolph, he has been told of the rebels' victory, but a hurried conversation with a passing rider suggested that the rebels had failed, and that Hotspur was dead.

Lord Bardolph insists that his own report, coming from a trustworthy gentleman, is true: Travers has clearly been misled by an unreliable passer-by. Northumberland, unsure what to

believe, suspects the worst. His fears are confirmed when a third messenger, Morton, comes to the castle. The man has seen the outcome of the battle with his own eyes:

Northumberland: Yea, this man's brow, like to a title-leaf,¹
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume ...
Say, Morton, didst thou come from Shrewsbury?
Morton: I ran from Shrewsbury, my noble lord,
Where hateful death put on his ugliest mask
To fright our party.²

¹ *front cover of a book*

² *our cause; the rebellion*

Before Morton can say any more, Northumberland, aware of the visitor's troubled expression and his cautious manner, concludes at once that his son Hotspur is dead. He hopes desperately that his suspicion is mistaken, but urges Morton to tell the truth. Lord Bardolph remains convinced that the version of events that he heard is true, but Morton contradicts him. Not only is Hotspur dead, but his adversary was none other than the king's son Harry. He saw the fatal encounter with his own eyes:

Northumberland: I see a strange confession¹ in thine eye;
Thou shak'st thy head, and hold'st it fear or sin
To speak a truth. If he be slain, say so ...
Lord Bardolph: I cannot think, my lord, your son is dead.
Morton: I am sorry I should force you to believe
That which I would² to God I had not seen;
But these mine eyes saw him in bloody state,
Rend'ring faint quittance, wearied and out-breathed,
To Harry Monmouth³ ...

¹ *reluctance to admit the truth*

² *wish*

³ *bloody, weary and breathless, attempting in vain
to trade blows with Prince Harry*

Following the death of Hotspur, Morton reveals, the rebel army lost its impetus, and soldiers began to desert in droves. The two other principal leaders of the rebellion, the earl's brother Worcester and the Scottish general Douglas, were quickly taken prisoner.

The defeat at Shrewsbury is a setback, Lord Bardolph admits, but the fight must go on. He compares their struggle to a long, dangerous voyage:

Lord Bardolph: We all that are engaged to¹ this loss
Knew that we ventured on such dangerous seas
That if we wrought out life² 'twas ten to one;
And yet we ventured for the gain proposed,
Choked the respect of likely peril feared,³
And since we are o'erset, venture again.⁴
Come, we will all put forth, body and goods.⁵

¹ *involved in*

² *the chance of surviving to the end*

³ *refused to contemplate the dangers that we would inevitably face*

⁴ *since we have been capsized, we must try again*

⁵ *we will set out once more, investing everything we own in this enterprise*

Morton reminds Northumberland that they have a powerful ally: the Archbishop of York, whose brother was executed by King Henry, is now assembling an army to confront the king. He has inspired his followers with religious fervour, reminding them that Henry gained the throne by deposing King Richard II; Richard was imprisoned, and later murdered by one of Henry's loyal followers.

Northumberland, regaining his composure, agrees that they must unite and prepare a decisive response to Henry's victory. He orders his followers to gather their supporters urgently. To oppose the king's might, they will need all the soldiers they can muster:

Northumberland: ... counsel every man
The aptest way¹ for safety and revenge.
Get posts² and letters, and make friends³ with speed;
Never so few, and never yet more need.⁴

¹ *let us all consider the most fitting course*

² *swift riders, messengers*

³ *assemble your allies*

⁴ *our numbers are small, but our need for support has never been greater*

A disgruntled knight

I, ii

Sir John Falstaff now appears, followed by his little pageboy who is carrying the knight's sword and shield. Concerned about his health, Sir John has sent a bottle of his urine to the doctor for inspection. The boy reports that the doctor's diagnosis of his notoriously gluttonous patient is ambiguous:

Falstaff: Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?¹
Page: He said, sir, the water itself was a good healthy water, but for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for.²

¹ *about my urine*

² *the person it belonged to was so unhealthy that he probably had diseases the doctor had not even heard of*

Falstaff dismisses the doctor's jibe, reflecting that he is constantly the butt of other people's jokes. It only goes to demonstrate his own superior sense of humour, he reasons:

Falstaff: Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at¹ me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay,² man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me.³ I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.⁴

¹ *taunt, mock*

² *creature composed of folly*

³ *no one can provoke laughter as successfully as me, unless they are talking about me*

⁴ *I inspire others to be funny*

Falstaff is aware that he cuts an absurd figure, obese and sluggish as he is, in the company of his diminutive page. The boy was previously a servant to the king's son Harry, and Falstaff is convinced that the prince has given him the boy to make him look ridiculous:

“Falstaff has been seducing audiences for more than four hundred years. Fat, old, dissipated and given to lying, Falstaff is a knight – Sir John – who, like many on the margins of the Elizabethan court, is impecunious and preys on others. He cheats, he whores and he eats and drinks to excess; but he does so with such joyful abandon and defends himself with such shameless brio that he has acquired a stature beyond that of any other comic character in Shakespeare.”

James C. Bulman, Introduction to the Arden
Shakespeare edition of *Henry IV, Part 2*, 2016

Falstaff: I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed¹ all her litter but one. If the prince put thee into my service for any other reason than to set me off,² why then I have no judgement.

¹ *crushed, suffocated*

² *show me up, make me stand out*

The prince himself, Falstaff remarks, is scarcely more than a boy:

Falstaff: ... the juvenal, the prince your master, whose chin is not yet fledged.¹ I will sooner have a beard grow in the palm of my hand than he shall get one off his cheek, and yet he will not stick² to say his face is a face royal.

¹ *covered with down; growing a beard*

² *hesitate*

At the recent battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff claimed that he had killed the rebel Hotspur; in fact, Prince Harry had killed him and Falstaff had merely discovered the body. However, the prince indulged his companion's fraudulent claim, and Falstaff now intends to make the most of his enhanced reputation as a military hero. He has ordered a large amount of expensive fabric for some fashionable new clothing; his pageboy reports, however, that the tailor will not accept Falstaff's word as security for the purchase.

Falstaff is furious with the tailor, and launches into an angry rant against the merchant class in general. They are all puritans, he claims, who take pleasure in making life difficult for true noblemen like himself:

Falstaff: ... to bear a gentleman in hand¹ and then stand upon² 'security'! The whoreson smoothy-pates do now wear nothing but high shoes and bunches of keys at their girdles;³ and if a man is through with them in honest taking up,⁴ then they must stand upon 'security'! ... I looked⁵ he should have sent me two and twenty yards of satin, as I am a true knight, and he sends me 'security'!

¹ *lead a man on with false expectations*

² *insist on, demand*

³ *Falstaff portrays shopkeepers as short-haired puritans who make themselves look important by wearing high-soled shoes and carrying large bunches of keys*

⁴ *has agreed an honest, straightforward purchase*

⁵ *expected*

Why 'smoothy-pates'?

In Shakespeare's time, the Puritans – who believed in a strict, austere, religious way of life – were becoming increasingly influential. They were generally opposed to the theatre and similar entertainments, and disliked the extravagances of the monarchy and the nobility. Puritans often had short hair and simple clothing to demonstrate their disdain for superficial, worldly values.

The influence of Falstaff's 'smoothy-pates' would continue to grow, extending from trade and business to education, the church and politics. Thirty years after Shakespeare's death, when war between Parliament and the King broke out, the close-cropped Puritans fighting on the Parliamentary side were nicknamed 'roundheads'. If he had been alive, the cavalier Sir John would have been horrified to find that the country eventually came under the rule of the most famous Puritan of them all, Oliver Cromwell.

The long arm of the law

Falstaff's bad-tempered reflections are interrupted as his page warns him that the Lord Chief Justice, the country's senior judge, is nearby. Falstaff immediately tries to hide, as he is wanted for taking part in a highway robbery. He has so far managed to escape punishment by his involvement in the war against the rebels, and does not want the matter re-examined.

Fortunately for Falstaff, however, word has already spread of his supposed valour in defeating Hotspur in the recent conflict. The justice's servant mentions it to his master, and remarks that Falstaff will soon be seeing action again in the north of England:

Lord Chief Justice: What's¹ he that goes there?

Servant: Falstaff, an't² please your lordship.

Lord Chief Justice: He that was in question³ for the robbery?

Servant: He, my lord; but he hath since done good service at Shrewsbury and, as I hear, is now going with some charge to the Lord John of Lancaster.⁴

Lord Chief Justice: What, to York? Call him back again.

¹ *who's*

² *if it*

³ *under investigation*

⁴ *taking some troops to join forces with the king's son John*

Anxious to avoid the justice, Falstaff at first pretends to be deaf, but to no avail. The justice orders his servant to bring him over, but when the man tries to grab him Falstaff responds by claiming that he is being accosted by a beggar. Instead of begging, the man should be working, Falstaff tells him indignantly, or fighting in the current wars, either for the king or for the rebels:

Servant: Sir John!

Falstaff: What, a young knave and begging? Is there not wars? Is there not employment? Doth not the king lack subjects?¹ Do not the rebels need soldiers?

¹ *isn't the king short of manpower?*

The servant takes offence at the accusation of begging, and Falstaff continues to quarrel with him. While the two men argue about which of them is telling the truth, the Lord Chief Justice loses patience and comes over to talk to Falstaff himself. In an attempt to distract him, Falstaff asks him about his health at great length, but the judge refuses to be diverted:

Falstaff: I heard say your lordship was sick: I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice.¹ Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, have yet some smack² of age in you, some relish of the saltness of time³ in you, and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverend care of your health.

Lord Chief Justice: Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.⁴

¹ *you have had your doctor's permission to be out and about*

² *hint, indication*

³ *sign of the passing years, trace of maturity*

⁴ *before your military adventure began*

Falstaff tries to change the subject, giving a long-winded description of King Henry's current state of health, but the justice persists with his line of questioning. The charge of highway robbery is very serious, and Falstaff could face execution if convicted. Sir John claims that, according to his erudite legal advisers, his involvement in the campaign against the rebels meant he was immune from prosecution:

Lord Chief Justice: I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life,¹ to come speak with me.

Falstaff: As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service,² I did not come.

¹ *charges against you that could lead to the death penalty*

² *laws relating to military service*

It soon becomes clear that the Lord Chief Justice is not going to take action against Falstaff. However, he does not hide the fact that he considers the knight a disreputable, deceitful spendthrift, and an entirely unsuitable companion for young Prince Harry, the heir to the throne:

Lord Chief Justice: Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy.¹

Falstaff: He that buckles himself in my belt cannot live in less.²

Lord Chief Justice: Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

Falstaff: I would it were otherwise; I would my means were greater and my waist slender.

¹ *you have a huge reputation for corruption*

² *considering my size, it could not be anything other than huge*

Although Falstaff is much older than his companion Prince Harry, he likes to think of himself as a young, adventurous gallant, and he explains that his attempted highway robbery was the result of youthful high spirits. The justice rejects his claim as laughable, and berates the ageing knight mercilessly:

Falstaff: You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young. You do measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls;¹ and we that are in the vanguard of our youth, I must confess, are wags² too.

Lord Chief Justice: Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age?³ Have you not a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity? And will you yet call yourself young?

¹ *the liver was believed to be the source of love and passion, while excessive gall (or bile) was thought to lead to anger and resentment*

² *mischievous fellows, tearaways*

³ *do you class yourself as young, even though you have age written all over you?*

Shrugging off the justice's criticism, Falstaff cheerfully insists that he is still a young man, though admittedly mature in his character and judgement. The justice realises that his attempts to rebuke the old knight are futile, and eventually wishes him well in the forthcoming encounter with the rebels. He refuses Falstaff's optimistic request for a loan of a thousand pounds, but the two men finally part company on amicable terms.

The problems of age

Alone with his pageboy, Falstaff complains about his chronic shortage of funds. His need for money is growing as he gets older, he reflects. He mentions, too, that despite his earlier claims he is indeed suffering the pangs of ageing. In particular, he is afflicted by gout:

Falstaff: A man can no more separate age and covetousness¹ than he can part young limbs and lechery; but the gout galls the one, and the pox pinches the other² ...

¹ *age and the desire for money are as inseparable as youth and lust*

² *one is plagued by gout, the other by syphilis*

The truth about Falstaff's poverty is laid bare when his pageboy reveals that he possesses only a handful of coins:

Falstaff: Boy!

Page: Sir?

Falstaff: What money is in my purse?

Page: Seven groats¹ and two pence.

Falstaff: I can get no remedy against this consumption² of the purse. Borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable.

¹ *fourpenny pieces*

² *a wasting, degenerative disease*

It occurs to Falstaff that his gout, though painful, may prove lucrative in the impending conflict. He will allege that his limp has been caused by a war wound, and with luck will be generously rewarded:

Henry IV, Part 2 was written during a particularly fruitful and busy period of Shakespeare's creative life, when he was combining the roles of writer, actor and shareholder in London's leading theatre company:

"In London he was in the thick of things, at the beck and call of busy colleagues ... Interrupted or not, the author-actor-manager was not slow in authorship. Between the beginning of 1597 and the end of 1601, Shakespeare, amid all his other duties of the playhouse, wrote The Merchant of Venice, the two parts of Henry IV, Love's Labour's Lost, Henry V, Much Ado about Nothing, Julius Caesar, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Troilus and Cressida, As You Like It, Twelfth Night and Hamlet, supreme achievements in all three modes of the time, historical, comical, tragical. Never again was there to be such a marriage of abundance with excellence."

Ivor Brown, *How Shakespeare Spent the Day*, 1963

Falstaff: 'Tis no matter if I do halt:¹ I have the wars for my colour,² and my pension shall seem the more reasonable.³ A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity.⁴

¹ *it doesn't matter if I limp*

² *pretext, excuse*

³ *my request for a military pension will be more likely to succeed*

⁴ *profit, advantage*

A decision is made

I, iii

The Archbishop of York, whose brother was executed on King Henry's orders, is a staunch supporter of the rebellion against the king. Following the rebels' defeat at Shrewsbury, the archbishop has brought together a group of three noblemen opposed to the king – Thomas Mowbray, Lord Bardolph and Lord Hastings – to discuss their next move.

Mowbray speaks first. Like the others, he believes that the king must be defeated, but he wants assurance that the rebel forces will be strong enough to face the might of King Henry's army. Lord Hastings asserts that they already have twenty-five thousand men ready to fight, and expected reinforcements from the Earl of Northumberland will swell that number. The earl is incensed at the death of his son Hotspur, says Hastings, and is sure to join their cause.

Lord Bardolph urges caution; they should not take action, he believes, until Northumberland's involvement is certain. Their rebellion is a dangerous enterprise, and they cannot proceed on the basis of hopes or guesses:

Lord Bardolph: ... if without him¹ we be thought too feeble,
My judgement is we should not step too far
Till we had his assistance by the hand;²
For in a theme so bloody-faced³ as this,
Conjecture, expectation and surmise
Of aids incertain should not be admitted.⁴

¹ *Northumberland and his supporters*

² *at hand, readily available*

³ *likely to lead to bloodshed, violent*

⁴ *we should not allow ourselves to be influenced by guesswork or by the anticipation of help that may not materialise*

The archbishop agrees, pointing out that it was false hope and overconfidence that led to Hotspur's defeat and death at Shrewsbury. The reinforcements he had hoped for did not arrive, but he rushed headlong into battle nevertheless:

Archbishop: ... And so, with great imagination
Proper to madmen,¹ led his powers to death
And, winking,² leapt into destruction.

¹ *imagining himself, like a madman, to be much more powerful than he really was*

² *closing his eyes to the truth*

Hastings insists, impatiently, that they must at least be aware that Northumberland is likely to provide reinforcements, and should take a hopeful view of their prospects. Hope is not

enough, retorts Lord Bardolph; they must produce a thorough, considered plan, just as an architect would when designing a house. After all, what they have in mind is virtually demolishing a kingdom and then rebuilding it. If they fail to prepare fully, the consequences will be disastrous:

Lord Bardolph: ... or else
We fortify in paper and in figures,
Using the names of men instead of men,¹
Like one that draws the model of an house
Beyond his power to build it, who, half through,
Gives o'er² and leaves his part-created cost
A naked subject to the weeping clouds
And waste for churlish winter's tyranny.³

¹ *our strength will lie merely on paper, consisting of theoretical numbers and lists of names*

² *like an architect whose design is unrealistic, and who gives up halfway through building*

³ *leaves his half-built house, on which so much money has been spent, exposed to the rain and the violent assaults of winter*

Like one that draws the model of an house ...

Property was undoubtedly on Shakespeare's mind at this time. In May 1597 he bought New Place, an imposing house with extensive grounds in the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon. It was one of the largest houses in the town, but was over a hundred years old and, according to contemporary documents, 'in great ruine and decay and unrepayred'.

Considerable rebuilding and renovation was clearly necessary, and Shakespeare, despite his demanding life in the London theatre world, must have travelled back to Stratford from time to time to monitor progress. His family soon moved into the property; Shakespeare himself continued to work in London, but his visits to Stratford seem to have become increasingly frequent as he got older, and he spent the last years of his life with his family in New Place.