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Falstaff. Inside every fat man there is supposed to be a thin man screaming to get free. Inside Orson Welles there is just another fat man. At the age of 51, the onetime *enfant terrible* of cinema has finally allowed the swollen stranger in him to break loose. The stranger's name is Falstaff.

This film is a conglomeration of five Shakespeare plays, principally *Henry*



WELLES IN "FALSTAFF"
Hello, stranger.

IV, Parts 1 and 2, in which the character of Sir John Falstaff, "that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts," dominates the stage. Welles is probably the first actor in the history of the theater to appear too fat for the role. Immense, waddling, jowly, pantomiming with a great theatrical strawberry nose and crafty, porcine eyes, he takes command of scenes less with spoken English than with body English. In whatever he does Welles is never entirely bad—or entirely excellent. In this film there flickers the glitter of authentic genius, along with great stony stretches of dullness and incoherence.

The trouble with Welles's eleventh film is partly economic. For his epic project, Welles could gather only a sonnet-size bankroll of \$1,500,000—presumably because few of the pictures he has directed were ever commercial successes. To stretch the dollars, he shot the film in Spain with Spanish extras. The corner cutting shows in nearly every scene. Dubbing has made Shakespeare's words fit badly in the mouths of the supporting players and sometimes of the principals (Sir John Gielgud as Henry IV, Jeanne Moreau as Doll Tearsheet). The background of Avila sits oddly with the Elizabethan drama. ~~By~~ having Sir Ralph Richardson narrate the film with quotations from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Welles evidently hoped to sew his fragmentary film together; instead, he has exposed its patches.

The film's most serious failure lies with the director, who also played the star. The reckless, feckless knight who personifies the pragmatic common man, a cross between barfly and gadfly, is one of Shakespeare's most captivating creatures. Falstaff's dark side is delineated believably and well by Welles, who frosts the screen with the chill of death when he stands shunned by his former companion, Prince Hal, become King Henry V. But the tragic moment of repudiation lacks substance and significance because the Prince and Falstaff have never been Shakespeare's "sworn brothers" in the early part of the film. In all their scenes, neither the two friends—nor the audience—have ever really laughed together.

To underline the fat knight's tragedy, Welles has ignored the light side of the pun-prone, fun-filled roisterer. Falstaff describes himself as "not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." Not, apparently, in Welles. What ultimately makes this *Falstaff* ring false is a lack of comedy in the Bard's most comic creation.