



## “I cannot tell wat is dat”: Linguistic Conflict in Shakespeare’s *King Henry v*

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Shakespeare’s *King Henry v* is often portrayed and staged as a play not only about the glory, but also about the tragedy of war. That such conflicting interpretations came to be so repeatedly attached to the story of how the second English monarch of the House of Lancaster invaded France and won the battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years’ War in 1415 can be explained especially in the light of the play’s textual and linguistic make-up. Indeed, and as I shall argue, Shakespeare’s history play is unique in the way that it is a linguistically troubled and conflicted piece of writing. As one of its most recent editors put it, “No play of Shakespeare’s makes so much use of differences in language and has more language barriers”.<sup>1</sup> As I aim to demonstrate, the play is much more than an Anglo-French confrontation seen from an English angle. It anatomises the concept of nationhood: it is slippery, ambivalent, and fluid on the one hand, jingoistic and rigid on the other. *Henry v* is ideal when it comes to studying scenes in the Other’s language, as well as otherness and alterity. In his book on *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English*, Michael Saenger writes cogently that “Nationalism cannot exist without a sense of alterity, so translation and citation become crucial battlegrounds where essentialist notions of nationhood are both fixed and eroded”.<sup>2</sup> The two scenes on which I shall mainly focus – the scene almost entirely in French (III.iv), during which Princess Katherine of France tries to learn a few rudiments of English from her servant Alice, and the wooing scene between Henry v and the Princess where Alice acts partly as an interpreter between the two (v.ii) – exploit and expose linguistic and cultural faultlines. The two scenes encapsulate many of the issues of the play at large. Moreover, while questioning the idea of foreignness through specific linguistic interplay, they challenge the very notion of Shakespearean scenic division in theatrically productive ways, as we shall see.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry v*, ed. Andrew Gurr, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 34. All quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Saenger, *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 55.

### Scenic Divisions and Textual Fluidity in *Henry v*

None of the three quarto editions of *Henry v* (published respectively in 1600, 1602 and 1619) contained act or scene divisions. This was the case of all Shakespearean quarto playbooks (with the exception of the 1622 quarto edition of *Othello*, which had act breaks and was marketed differently by its publisher).<sup>3</sup> Most plays connected to the public theatres reached print during Shakespeare's lifetime without scene divisions other than *exit-exeunt* indications for clearing the stage. By 1623, when the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published, conventions had changed and "readers might have expected five-act division in printed play texts" and thus found "twenty-eight of the thirty-six Folio plays divided into five acts and two others partly divided".<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, scholars have pointed out that these divisions were superimposed to make the book conform more to classical standards and lend it literary *cachet*, especially in the light of the publication in 1616 of Ben Jonson's *Works*, whose plays were not only printed with act and scene divisions, but were also composed with the five-act structure in mind. The result, as far as Shakespeare's First Folio is concerned, is that, "Although the Folio publishers may have made their volume marginally more marketable by inserting act divisions, their intervention has led to an enduring misrepresentation of the dramatic structures of Shakespeare's plays".<sup>5</sup>

This does not mean that early Shakespeare was actually performed with no scene breaks, but that other factors apart from exits and entrances played a part. Serving the needs of a play such as *Henry v*, with an abundance of characters and a necessarily limited cast of actors, probably had an influence on how the play was divided. Nonetheless, there were additional factors, as Alan Dessen suggested: "a concern for imagery or patterning or economy" may have presided over theatrical choices and the shaping of scenes.<sup>6</sup> We shall try to bear these factors in mind when exploring the English lesson scene and the wooing scene in *Henry v*, all the more so as the textual history of the play indicates that its scenic divisions remained very fluid until the mid-eighteenth century at least.

Divided artificially into five acts from the First to the Fourth Folio (1685), the play was not split into scenes in collected editions of Shakespeare until Lewis Theobald's 1733 edition. However, Theobald did not formally number the scenes: he only divided them using introductory and situational comments. He also appended a note to the English lesson scene indicating that the sudden use of French for an entire scene appeared to him incongruous and aesthetically displeasing.<sup>7</sup> A decade later, *Henry v* is divided in numbered acts and scenes in Thomas Hanmer's 1743 edition (see Figures 1 & 2). The English lesson scene is numbered, but relegated to the bottom margin without any further comment. As for the wooing scene, it is considered as a completely separate scene and becomes act v, scene iii of the play.<sup>8</sup> In modern editions of *Henry v*, though, the wooing scene is not a stand-alone scene – it is a mere parenthesis in the middle of the larger concluding scene of the play.

<sup>3</sup> See James Hirsh, "Act Divisions in the Shakespeare First Folio", *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America* 96:2, 2002, pp. 219–256, p. 254.

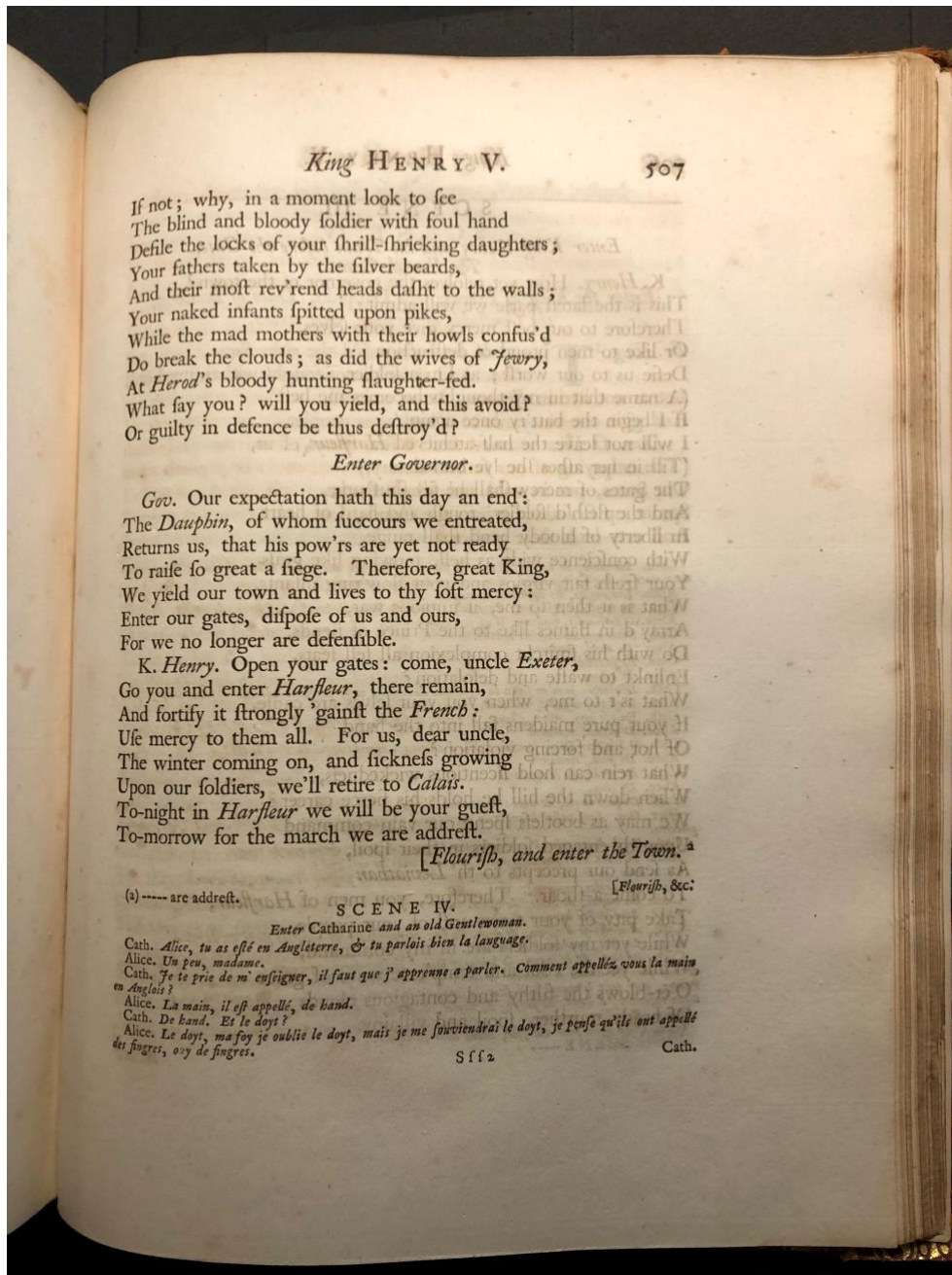
<sup>4</sup> Alan C. Dessen, "Divided Shakespeare: Configuring Acts and Scenes", in Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai (eds), *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 332–41, p. 332.

<sup>5</sup> Hirsh, "Act Divisions in the Shakespeare First Folio", p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Dessen, "Divided Shakespeare: Configuring Acts and Scenes", p. 339.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Theobald (ed.), *The works of Shakespeare: in seven volumes*, London, printed for A. Bettesworth et alia, 1733, vol. 4, pp. 45–46. ESTC: T138606.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hanmer (ed.), *The works of Shakespear. In six volumes*, Oxford, printed at the Theatre, 1743–44, vol. 3 (1743). ESTC: T138604.



King HENRY V.

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If not; why, in a moment look to see  
 The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
 Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;  
 Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
 And their most rev'rend heads dash'd to the walls;  
 While the mad mothers with their howls confus'd  
 Do break the clouds; as did the wives of Jewry,  
 At Herod's bloody hunting slaughter-fed.  
 What say you? will you yield, and this avoid?  
 Or guilty in defence be thus destroy'd?

Enter Governor.

Gov. Our expectation hath this day an end:  
 The Dauphin, of whom succours we entreated,  
 Returns us, that his pow'rs are yet not ready  
 To raise so great a siege. Therefore, great King,  
 We yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy:  
 Enter our gates, dispose of us and ours,  
 For we no longer are defensible.

K. Henry. Open your gates: come, uncle Exeter,  
 Go you and enter Harfleur, there remain,  
 And fortify it strongly 'gainst the French:  
 Use mercy to them all. For us, dear uncle,  
 The winter coming on, and sickness growing  
 Upon our soldiers, we'll retire to Calais.  
 To-night in Harfleur we will be your guest,  
 To-morrow for the march we are address'd.

[Flourish, and enter the Town.]<sup>a</sup>

(a) ----- are address'd.

[Flourish, &c.]

SCENE IV.

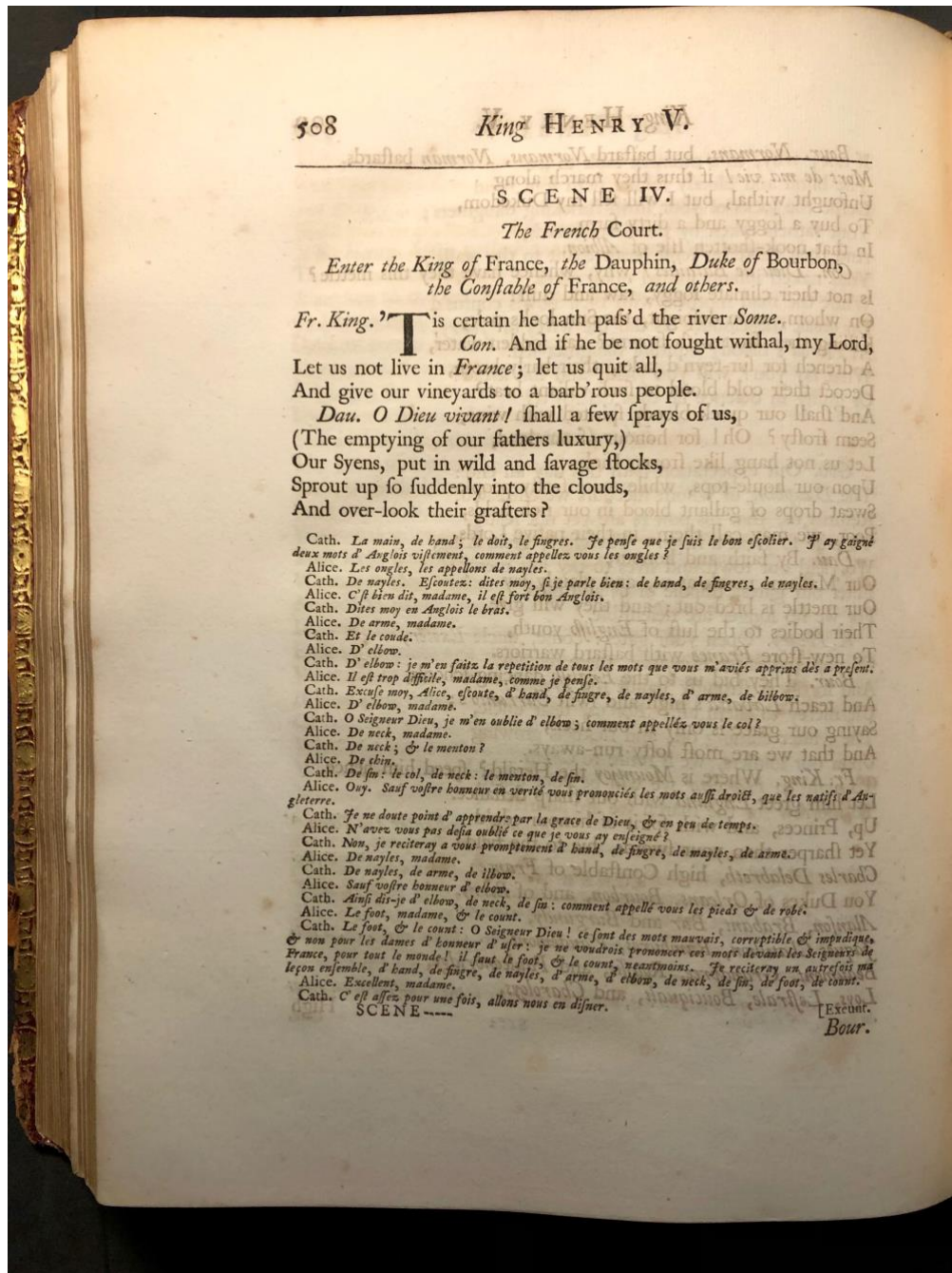
Enter Catharine and an old Gentlewoman.

Cath. Alice, tu as esté en Angleterre, & tu parlois bien la language.  
 Alice. Un peu, madame.  
 Cath. Fe te prie de m'enseigner, il faut que j'apprenne a parler. Comment appellez vous la main  
 en Anglois?  
 Alice. La main, il est appelle, de hand.  
 Cath. De hand. Et le doigt?  
 Alice. Le doigt, ma soy je oublie le doigt, mais je me souviendrais le doigt, je pense qu'ils ont appelle  
 des fingers, o'y de fingers.

5112

Cath.





1 & 2. The language-lesson printed as a footnote in Hanmer's edition, British Library General Reference Collection 79.I.6-11, sigs. 3Sr-v, pp. 507–508. Photo credit: Daniel Yabut.

To go back to the English lesson, this scene does not make a reappearance in the main text of major eighteenth-century multi-volume editions of Shakespeare until Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition, in which – incidentally – the wooing scene still remains separate, as act v, scene iv of the play this time. In a footnote, Johnson acknowledges the ill-reputation of the first scene (the English lesson) among his predecessors and justifies his reasons for reinstating it with this back-handed compliment: "It may be observed, that there is in it not

only the *French* language, but the *French* spirit. [...] Throughout the whole scene there may be found *French* servility, and *French* vanity".<sup>9</sup> Samuel Johnson – the man who had done so much to establish the English language on firm ground with the publication in 1755 of his *Dictionary of the English Language* – had sensed the potential for satire of the French and for comedy in the context of eighteenth-century cross-Channel cultural and political warfare. At all events, the scene (almost entirely in French) had been construed as a linguistic oddity, so much so that the publishers of Shakespeare's First Folio had set the whole passage in italics, visually signalling its difference to the reader – a feature that has almost completely disappeared from modern editions of the play.

### Linguistic Conflict

Despite their apparent linguistic oddities, the English lesson scene (spoken in Shakespeare's French and replete with partly deformed English words for comic effect), as well as the laborious Anglo-French dialogue between Henry V and Princess Katherine in the wooing scene, are perfectly in keeping with the wider linguistic din and true Babel – or babble – of languages found elsewhere in the play. The linguistic confusion might be seen as intentional in some regards. Michael Saenger, for instance, surmises that in *Henry V* "Shakespeare uses the idea of France to explore language and identity".<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, on the face of it, the English conquerors seem to impose their language on the French. On closer examination, however, it appears that a fair proportion of those involved in Henry's military project simply do not speak the same language.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, while the majority of French nobles speak perfect English (interspersed here and there with a few French words for local colour), Henry's own troops have trouble understanding one another – whether they are Welsh, Scottish, Irish or simply English. The French in the play sound almost as if they could be teaching the English their own language.

Nym's use of the Latin *solus* [alone] at the beginning of the play (II.i.39–40) is a source of comic misunderstanding and argument between him and Pistol, who takes it as an insult. Pistol throws false French words back at Nym: "Couple a gorge!" [cut the throat] (II.i.58) and also some Latin: "*pauca*" [few] (63), which of course only worsens matters between them. In act III the clash of accents and points of view between the four captains – Gower the Englishman, Llewellyn the Welshman, Jamy the Scotsman and Macmorris the Irishman – is blatant. In the course of the scene, Macmorris is accused of incompetence by Llewellyn. Macmorris responds indignantly: "Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal? What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?" (III.iii.61–63). Macmorris's hypersensitivity shows how close Henry's so-called united army is to

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Johnson (ed.), *The plays of William Shakespeare, in eight volumes*, London, printed for J. and R. Tonson et alia, 1765, vol. 4, p. 414. ESTC: N012071.

<sup>10</sup> Saenger, *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English*, p. 6. On language and identity, see also in this volume see in this volume Amina Askar, "he could not speak English in the native garb': Scenes of Linguistic Conflict in Shakespeare's *Henry V*", and Mylène Lacroix, "Leçons de langues dans *Henry V*", *Arrêt sur Scène/Scene Focus*, 10, 2021, *Scènes dans la langue de l'Autre/Scenes in the Other's Language*, ed. Sujata Iyengar and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.

<sup>11</sup> This is of course ironical from a historical point of view as Henry V wanted English to become the kingdom's official language. He himself used the vernacular in his correspondence. His promotion of English, nonetheless, was largely tied to propaganda purposes at a time when the country was at war with France. See Malcolm Richardson, "Henry V, the English Chancery, and Chancery English", *Speculum*, 55:4 (1980), p. 726–750, esp. p. 740.

fragmentation.<sup>12</sup> It is precisely the plurivocal language spoken by these characters which prevents Henry's epic measures from taking over completely.

When Henry's common soldiers encounter the French, the linguistic confusion which arises furthers this disruptive work, as the meaning of Henry's mission in France is turned around and twisted by the plurivocal din. In act IV, scene iv of the play Shakespeare stages a bilingual encounter between Pistol and a French soldier, Monsieur Le Fer. Pistol, who understands no French, turns Le Fer's French words into English puns and even answers with the Irish refrain of a popular song: "Quality? 'Colin o custure me'" (4).<sup>13</sup> The French words are thus "translated", transformed by the money-grabbing Pistol who loves the sound of jingling coins (cf. "moi" [I] / "moys" [10-11] and "bras" [arm] / "brass" [13-14]). Rather than attempting to speak French, Pistol also mimics French words which he assembles almost meaninglessly: "Oui, coupe la gorge, par ma foi" [yes, cut the throat, by my faith] (29).

Through this consciously organised Babel of a play, Shakespeare opens up numerous spaces of enunciation and explores an in-betweenness which allows him to hold a mirror up to the intimate workings of culture. Henry's narrative of conquest is not negated, it is put in perspective, anatomised even, as the dramatist invites us to consider the linguistic fractures of the play as meaningful.

From a general perspective, it is useful to bear in mind that Babel had of course become a symbol of the general religious and linguistic crisis which had affected most European nations since the Reformation. Christian truth was divided and England as a Protestant nation was left to pick up the pieces of a theological edifice it had helped to bring down. This left the nation in a peculiar position – not only nostalgic for its former place within a united Christendom but also living in the hope of a new Babel – one which it might either have to fight for or work at. The latter solution (work at) was the one chosen by Renaissance humanists for whom translation and the study of ancient and modern languages were the keys to a more profound understanding among Christian nations. As Claude-Gilbert Dubois writes, "There is clearly a will to get over the linguistic divisions of Babel not by searching for a *lingua humana* [a human language] that is forever lost, but by conquering existing languages".<sup>14</sup>

Yet there are signs in Shakespeare that this conquest was a problematic and conflicted one. Fractures had already run deep during the reign of Henry's father – Henry IV. A few years before, Shakespeare had shown how the man who deposed King Richard II had trouble reasserting the unity of the nation. "*Painted full of tongues*", Rumour had appeared like an image of Babel in the prologue to *2 Henry IV*, asking the audience to "open your ears",

<sup>12</sup> For George Puttenham, a tongue can only be called a language after some kind of social consent: "after a speech is fully fashioned to the common understanding, and accepted by consent of a whole country and nation, it is called a language". Interestingly, in *Henry V*, language is far from consensual if we bear in mind the numerous misunderstandings and the plurivocality of the British soldiers. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1936, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> The refrain is a distorted version of the Irish "cailin og a' stor" [young maiden, my treasure]. See Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, London, Bloomsbury Press, 2020 [1995], p. 297n4.

<sup>14</sup> Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Mythe et langage au seizième siècle*, Bordeaux, Ducros, 1970, p. 27 (translation mine). On Renaissance theories of language and how these were affected by the fissures in the theological edifice, see, in particular: Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, esp. chap. 5 and also Marie-Luce Demonet, *Les voix du signe: Nature et origine du langage à la Renaissance, 1480-1580*, Paris, Champion, 1992, p. 474 et passim.

as "Upon my tongues continual slanders ride, / The which in every language I pronounce".<sup>15</sup> It is not surprising that the Babylonian theme should serve as a kind of intertext to these plays, as the story of Babel is the point of juncture of nation and language.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, even if the theme of Babel is never far from the concerns of the play, there are more traditional and profound phenomena at work, which, on the one hand, set in motion the linguistic conflicts of the play and, on the other, make us reflect on their wider meanings. The co-presence of different languages in the same scene, or in the same play – languages which are often only partly translated – does call our attention to the fact that when translation falters, alterities are not negotiated fully, or that they have to be negotiated differently. It is this last point which interests me most and which, I argue, sheds useful light on *Henry V*.

In many instances, and no doubt unconsciously, Shakespeare adopts the style of macaronic verse or prose. Macaronic style implies that its author uses a medley of both vernacular and foreign words. They are juxtaposed and thus co-exist side by side. The work of translation is displaced onto the reader, or in this case onto the members of *Henry V*'s audience. Anne Coldiron explains usefully that "the full visibility of the foreign in them [macaronic writings] nevertheless invites attention to intercultural fault-lines and ideological conflicts" and that "in macaronics every line is a contact zone".<sup>17</sup> The most famous example of macaronic prose in modern times is probably James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).

### The English Lesson Scene

Translation implies an attempt at negotiating difference, as we have already noted, but it can also convey the idea of displacement and thus potentially of loss and disorientation.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in *Henry V* Shakespeare confronts his audience members directly with this sense of loss and allows them to experience for themselves what it means to be strangers in a strange land. In the scene known as the "English lesson" (III.iv), where the French princess Katherine is taught a few rudiments of the conqueror's English, audiences have to struggle linguistically. In a strange way, the scene also turns out to be a kind of lesson in French. Indeed, Shakespeare suddenly changes the conventions used so far – the French now actually speak French. This change of conventions is unsettling and this was no doubt intended. Realism and verisimilitude are beside the point here, as the purpose is not really to make the French sound more French. This is in fact a complex moment from a theatrical point of view, one that works on several levels.

The English male actors playing Katherine and Alice and pretending to be French women create a comic distance. Yet the comic and somewhat bawdy wordplay in which Shakespeare engages them with cannot quite sever the two characters from the preceding

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<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, in Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, Induction, lines. 1 and 6–7. David Steinsaltz has likewise argued that a "linguistic polemic runs through the history plays". I disagree slightly, however, with his view of "a Shakespeare, immersed in the linguistic patriotism of his day" ("The Politics of French Language in Shakespeare's History Plays", *Studies in English Literature* 42:2 (2002), pp. 319, 322).

<sup>16</sup> Hubert Bost also underlined the intimate links between political power and the story of Babel: "Babel serves as a base and metaphor for the whole issue of politics which lies at the heart of language" (translation mine) (Hubert Bost, *Babel: Du texte au symbole*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1985, p. 192).

<sup>17</sup> A. E. B. Coldiron, *Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 33–34.

<sup>18</sup> See Saenger, *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English*, pp. 7–8; 105; 109; 112–113.

passage – the siege of Harfleur and Henry's menacing sexual rhetoric directed at French women close to Princess Katherine's age. Thus, Henry's soldiers would be "mowing like grass / Your fresh fair virgins and your flowering infants" (III.iv.13–14), while he could not be held responsible "If your pure maidens fall into the hand / Of hot and forcing violation" (20–21). Katherine could be seen as the comic – cynically burlesqued – counterpart of Henry's "shrill-shrieking daughters" (35). There is an undeniable continuity between the two passages, a continuity that opens up the English lesson scene to larger perspectives and reminds us of its unspoken purpose: to enable the princess to speak the language of the conqueror.

Nevertheless, this is not quite what happens for a series of reasons. First, even in a scene spoken mainly in Shakespeare's French, where interpretation and translation are naturally involved, foreign and English words retain a resonance that reminds us of macaronic prose. Despite Katherine's satisfaction with the way she has acquired a few English words, the lesson fails comically and culturally. There is good reason to believe that an audience might feel at once amused and alienated by Shakespeare's broken French<sup>19</sup> jumbled with partly deformed English words chosen for their potential to create sexual innuendo through wordplay and linguistic confusion.<sup>20</sup>

Only a few English words emerge, which have to do with parts of the body thus allowing for kinetic play and miming that could help audience understanding. Yet the English words which filter through are distorted – they produce that distancing comic effect which we have mentioned, but they also contribute to the play's verbal confusion, linguistic hybridity and instability. Indeed, language in this scene is so unstable that Katherine's pronunciation of the English words she so wants to learn produces strange effects. The princess's linguistic efforts rebound on her ironically as the English words she pronounces have unforeseen meanings in her own language. They take on obscene connotations, which are multiplied by the fact that they were originally spoken by two cross-dressed boys on the Elizabethan stage. Sexual intercourse, or semen ("foot" / "foutre") and female genitals ("count", or "con", in modern French / "cunt" [46–47]) are evoked through a series of interlingual puns. Again, it is typical of this play that the so-called proper way of speaking a language is denied and even the supposed proper pronunciation produces "improprieties", as it were.<sup>21</sup> As in macaronic verse and style, alterities remain juxtaposed, "assuming motion

<sup>19</sup> On Shakespeare's French in this scene, see Jean-Michel Déprats, "A French History of *Henry V*", in Ton Hoenselaars (ed.), *Shakespeare's History Plays, Performance, Translation and Adaptation in Britain and Abroad*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 88–89 et passim.

<sup>20</sup> The scene is also to some extent a parody of language manuals (cf. Katherine's "je suis le bon écolier" [I am a good pupil] [12]), using the same methods that the English used to learn French, that is to say, phrases, word lists and repetition (cf. "la répétition de tous les mots que vous m'avez appris" [to repeat all the words that you have taught me] [22–23]), but with limited accuracy in terms of phonetics ("dites-moi si je parle bien" [tell me if I speak well] [15]), an issue which some authors of language manuals tried to address. On the links between language manuals and Shakespeare's plays, see: R. C. Simonini, Jr., "Language Lesson Dialogues in Shakespeare", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2:4, 1951, p. 323 et passim. The aim of course, as always, is to sound like a native speaker, but Alice's congratulatory comment to Katherine sounds, to us, like a backhanded compliment: "vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs d'Angleterre" [you pronounce the words as right as the natives of England] (34–35). For we are well aware that even the English natives are a hybrid bunch linguistically.

<sup>21</sup> "De *foot* et de *count*? O Seigneur Dieu, ils sont les mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d'honneur d'user. Je ne voudrais prononcer ces mots devant les seigneurs de France pour tout le monde! Foh! De *foot* et De *count*!" [De *foot*, and de *count*? O Lord God, they are words of evil sound, corrupting, gross, and immodest, and not for ladies of honour to use. I would not pronounce these words before the lords of France for all the world. Fie! De *foot* and de *count*!] (III.v.47–51).



rather than stasis and yet without assuming any overall telos", or resolution, as Anne Coldiron writes.<sup>22</sup>

Adopting a reception point of view, one can easily imagine that this scene could never produce univocal interpretations. How did such a scene translate for an audience? Could this have been entirely realistic when the scene was first staged? Shakespeare's early modern audiences no doubt experienced what it felt like to be foreigners. Whether they understood French or not, the English lesson scene may well have produced an alienating effect: French members of the audience (there was quite a large community of Huguenot exiles in London at the time) could suddenly feel out of place in London and English people could feel out of place in Shakespeare's France. In both cases, translation, and the metaphoric change of place it implies, introduces disruption and unease, as Saenger argues, leaving us "without a home".<sup>23</sup>

### The Wooing Scene

As the truce between the two nations is about to be concluded in act v, scene ii, audiences are again linguistically disrupted. Indeed, while the English and the French aristocracy cannot be told apart at the beginning of this scene from the point of view of their spoken English, Shakespeare alters the rules once more when Henry remains alone with Katherine and Alice. He has Katherine speak in broken English and – again – dubious French.

As with the preceding episode under study, the status of the wooing scene is structurally ambiguous. A seeming parenthesis in a larger scene of high politics, it works apparently as an independent passage (it was considered as a scene by itself by some editors, as we know). Yet it is a thematically linked passage, which is embedded in the play's conclusion and is not separated from the rest of the closing scene in most modern editions, as I have pointed out.

Interestingly, it is Henry this time who pretends to be a pupil – one who has a lesson to learn: "Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms / Such as will enter at a lady's ear" (99–100). This, however, is merely a pose of false submission on the part of the victor as Katherine's answer intimates: "Your majesty shall mock at me. I cannot speak your England" (102–103). Despite the linguistic din, Katherine's *Franglais* wittily shows that she is perfectly aware of the game played by Henry: "Your majesty 'ave *fausse* [incorrect/insincere] French enough to deceive de most *sage demoiselle* [prudent young lady] dat is *en France*" (199–200). The king has to retreat on his own linguistic terrain: "Now fie upon my false French! By mine honour, in true English, I love thee, Kate [...]" (201–202). Despite Henry's claim to the contrary, one may wonder to what extent the English tongue is a surer source of truth.

Henry in fact tries to overcome the aforementioned Babylonian curse by making an opportunistic use of the linguistic chaos between them. For him, the hybrid nature of their language bodes well: "thy speaking of my tongue, and I thine, most truly-falsely, must needs be granted to be much at one" (189–192). This is the moment when Henry fleshes out a new dream of Christian unity that would encompass difference and hybridity: "Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard?" (188–191).

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<sup>22</sup> Coldiron, *Printers without Borders*, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Saenger, *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English*, p. 114.

Henry's Anglo-French crusade is clearly set to expand his colonialist enterprise to the land of the infidel.<sup>24</sup> The king's rhetoric soon reaches new heights, suggesting that Katherine and he will be pioneers and trendsetters. Together they will carve a new cultural identity that will reach beyond the boundaries of their two nations: "Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak list of a country's fashion. We are the makers of manners, Kate, and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouth of all find-faults [...]" (243–246). Unfortunately, this promise is quickly overshadowed by Henry and Burgundy's lurid innuendos in the ensuing dialogue between the two men. The English king cannot quite hide his colonialist desire to possess those "maiden cities" in France (291).

In Henry's Anglo-French project, the promise of hybridisation is there as well as the prospect that both nations will be transformed and yet, as Sara Ahmed writes of colonial encounters, "the conditions of meeting are not equal, so too hybridization involves differentiation (the two do not co-mingle to produce one). How others are constituted and transformed through such encounters is dependent upon relationships of force".<sup>25</sup>

The collapse of Henry's so-called hybrid dream of reunion – one that would put an end to the Babylonian curse and conclude all linguistic and cultural conflicts happily – is soon apparent in Katherine's polite, but no doubt only falsely candid "I do not know dat" (v.ii.193). Moreover, Henry's wordy lines during the whole passage are undercut by Katherine's laconic reminder that all this wordplay is merely patriarchal state politics: "Dat is as it sall please de *roi mon père*" (v.ii.224). The finishing touch is the denial by the play's chorus of Henry's epic project – something which, of course, a good many people in the audience already knew: "they lost France and made his England bleed, / Which oft our stage hath shown [...]" (Chorus, 12–13).

To conclude, one could add that this is also the moment when the two main scenes we have focused on in this essay can be construed as unbounded micro-histories, which are both separate from and attached to a fractured macro-history – the conflicted story of how England attempted to construct itself through its closest neighbour, France. From a textual and theatrical point of view, this is enhanced by the fact that the vast majority of Shakespeare's first printed editions (and no doubt the manuscript copies on which they were based) did not have act or scene divisions, as we have seen. Thus, the very fabric of the source texts allowed early performers to emphasise at will effects of rupture and coalescence.

<sup>24</sup> As Jacques Derrida has pointed out, "colonial violence" and "linguistic imperialism" are notions which figure implicitly in the story of Babel. See his "Des tours de Babel" in Annie Cazenave et Jean-François Lyotard (eds), *L'Art des confins*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, pp. 209–37, esp. p. 215.

<sup>25</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 12.