



Scenes of Linguistic Warfare in Shakespeare's *King Henry v*

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In *King Henry v*, a proliferation of different national languages, dialects, and idiolects counterpoint the King's project of nationalistic and linguistic unity.¹ In the play, Shakespeare uses linguistic differences to juxtapose English and other languages. He reimagines old battles once fought upon the fields of France as linguistic battles simultaneously fought with words between the French and English, between regional captains and tavern rabble. The inability of these languages to interact successfully causes conflicts between France and England, Henry and his soldiers, Henry and Katherine, the inhabitants of Eastcheap and the regional captains, and the Welsh Fluellen and Pistol, who mistakenly thinks, as the English captain Gower points out, that because the Welshman "could not speak English in the native garb he could not therefore handle an English cudgel" (v.i.76–77).²

To further emphasise the role played by the different languages in the development of the plot, the play puts up a considerable show of miscommunication in the other's language.³ With one scene entirely in French, another half in French, not to mention Fluellen's Welsh-English dialect, Macmorris's and Jamy's disfigured English, and Pistol's archaisms: all of these voices are heard as dissonance, momentarily disrupting the King's

¹ Many studies have focused on Shakespeare's use of multilingualism in this play. See, for example, Michael Neill, "Broken English and Broken Irish: Nation, Language, and the Optic of Power in Shakespeare's Histories", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45:1, 1994, pp. 1–32; Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian*, New York, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996; David Steinsaltz, "The Politics of French Language in Shakespeare's History Plays", *Studies in English Literature*, 42:2, 2002, pp. 317–334; Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, "'Couple a gorge!': La guerre des langues dans *Henry v* de Shakespeare", *Langues Dominantes/Langues Dominées*, ed. Laurence Villard and Nicolas Ballier, Rouen, Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2008, pp. 165–180. On the different regional and English dialects see Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writing*, London, Routledge, 1996. On how the dialect theatre of Renaissance Italy influenced the role of the fool, see also Enna Martina, "The Use of Dialects and Foreign Languages in Shakespeare's *King Henry v*: Characteristics of the Fool Explored", *English Studies*, 100:7, 2019, pp. 767–784.

² The following edition will be used in this article: *King Henry v*, ed. T. W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Methuen, 1995.

³ For a discussion of the play's multilingualism, and more specifically the French scenes, see in this volume: Mylène Lacroix, "Leçons de langues dans *Henry v*"; Jean-Christophe Mayer, "'I cannot tell wat is dat': Linguistic Conflict in Shakespeare's *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.

English.⁴ By using foreign languages, regionally inflected English and distinct idiolects, Shakespeare foregrounds and exploits the ideological nature of language behaviour to express beliefs about “English” identity.

This paper analyses two battle scenes, where different national, regional, and social languages lead to misunderstandings and linguistic conflicts and ultimately question the idea of a unified England and homogeneous English. It discusses different regional and social dialects, and the encounters of national languages as they give voice to various forms of otherness, which is decisive to Shakespeare’s plays. It explores *King Henry V* through the lens of Shakespeare’s “contradictory and multi-linguaged world,” as defined by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.⁵ In Bakhtinian terminology, Shakespeare’s dramatic universe is profoundly marked by heteroglossia or the variety of competing languages, and the irredeemable multiplicity of perspectives on the world are an efficient instrument of exploring the Shakespearean cosmos in the play under analysis.

Contemporary Concerns about Language and Nation: the Concept of Englishness and Otherness

To better understand the role different regional captains and low-life characters with their distinct idiolects play, one needs to analyse the concepts of nationalism and language, and the historical and political context. Chronicle plays were thriving in the late sixteenth century, as the nascent nation-state was on the brink of becoming an empire, facilitating the consolidation of the feeling of national identity and providing rich statements on Englishness and the mother tongue.

Early modern writers frequently used language to identify the essence of a nation or race. Linguistic unity across national borders was deemed a powerful weapon in attaining and consolidating imperial claims. Antonio de Nebrija, the Spanish author of one of the earliest European vernacular grammars, *Grammatica Castellana* (1492),⁶ is often credited as the first writer who explicitly linked linguistic rule with imperial rule. Nebrija reminded his sovereign that language had always been the “companion of empire”, and that those brought under Spain’s sovereignty “must necessarily accept the laws the conqueror imposes on the conquered, and together with them our language”. This linguistic expansion, the “Englishing” of the empire, of Wales, Ireland and Scotland, as we shall see, was always based on a discourse of difference, of the other.

Political context is essential to understanding the correlation between language and imperial aspirations. In the sixteenth century, the relationships between England and its neighbours were complex. The political border between Wales and England was abolished

⁴ On the emergence of the “King’s English” and the debates on what is the “best” English dialect, see Paula Blank, *Broken English*, pp. 21–23. See also Amina Askar, “‘An old abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English’: L’émergence du ‘King’s English’ dans les pièces historiques de Shakespeare”, *Mauvaises Langues!*, ed. Florence Cabaret and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Rouen, Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013, pp. 61–78.

⁵ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 275. See also A. P. Rossiter’s lecture on “Ambivalence” in Shakespeare’s history plays, which defines it as a procedure whereby “two opposed value-judgements are subsumed as both valid” and in which he writes of “two-eyedness” and of a “constant doubleness” in these plays. In “Ambivalence: the Dialectic of History” (1951), in *Angel with Horns*, ed. Graham Storey, London, Longman, 1961, pp. 40–64, p. 42. See also Norman Rabkin’s infamous Rabbit/Duck figure as an analogue showing a figure’s radical ambiguity and ability to alter its form from one viewing to the next, in “Either/Or: Responding to *Henry V*”, in *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 33–62.

⁶ Antonio de Nebrija, *Grammatica Castellana* (1492), facsimile repr., Menston, Yorks, Scolar Press, 1969, sig. Aiii-v. Nebrija declared to Queen Isabel “que siempre la lengua fue companera del imperio”.

in 1536, when Wales was officially assimilated into its eastern neighbour. In addition to imposing English religion and English law, Henry VIII addressed the issue of linguistic variety in the preamble of the Act of Union of 1536, when he outlawed Welsh, finding that "great Discord, Variance, Debate, Division, Murmur and Sedition" had arisen because the Welsh "have and do daily use a Speech nothing like, nor consonant to the natural Mother Tongue within this Realm" (27 Henry 8, c.26).⁷ In Ireland, the King acted similarly and issued his "Act for the English order, habite and language" (1537), in which he strengthened the official position regarding linguistic unity by declaring that the "English tongue [...] (must) be from henceforth continually (and without ceasing or returning at any time to Irish [...] language) used by all men that will acknowledge themselves according to their duties of allegiance, to be his Highness' true and faithful subjects". Such outlawing of the Welsh and the Irish languages neither eradicated them, nor undermined the national feelings within these countries. However, in many texts of the time, Wales and Ireland continued to be imagined or described as foreign, threatening places rather than regions of England. With time, Wales yielded to English colonisation efforts more successfully, contrasting sharply with the less felicitous enterprises in Scotland and Ireland.

By the end of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, England's most immediate neighbours, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, had all been subjected to endeavours of annexation or union, with the linguistic expansion playing a significant role in bringing separate parts of the empire together under a single ruler and a single language. At the same time, this process of forced homogenisation was threatened by different dialects, which were generally viewed as barbarous and alien, swamping the native vernacular. The fact that English nationalism largely depended on the racialisation of other groups can be seen most clearly in England's war against the Irish in the 1590s, which was often described as a war against a racialised other.⁸ At the turn of the century, England perceived Ireland as the unruliest of the Celtic nations. The long-simmering Irish war became an issue of widespread concern and was reaching its boiling point in 1599, when the play, *Henry V* was written and performed.⁹

This process of "Englishing" took place in a constant battle between the self and the other. It was inseparable from the growth of the nation-state and the development of a national identity. The linguistic extension to Wales, Ireland and Scotland was based on a discourse of difference by simultaneously devaluing the other language as barbarous and uncivil and validating the self by drawing on the notions of civility that, in the Renaissance period, were indissociable from language. The range of metaphors invoked in early modern discussions about the English language constantly emphasised a sense of anxiety about national identity, which was at once constituted and threatened by difference.

A similar discourse was also used for the internal conquest of English, where different forms of speech and writing were differentiated – a process that helped consolidate the status of the "King's English" as the unitary language of the nation. Therefore, the triumph of the "King's English" was achieved mainly using an ongoing redefinition of the social and regional borders, setting it apart from other varieties of the language and from other, foreign languages on its borders.

⁷ See *The Statutes of Wales*, ed. Ivor Bowen, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1908, p. 75. On language and racialisation, see Nora Galland, "Armado or the Other speaking the Native's Language: Racialising the Spaniard in *Love's Labour's Lost*", *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.

⁸ See Neill, "Broken English", pp. 1–32.

⁹ As has been mentioned by Neill and other commentators, Shakespeare's audience would have made the analogy between the French wars and the ongoing wars in Ireland, Neill, "Broken English", pp. 11–12.

The Quarrelling Captains – “Gentleman both, you will mistake each other”

In *Henry V*, Shakespeare staged these “minority” languages of the expanding British empire, portraying the mutilated English of both foreigners from abroad and internal foreigners. The famous scene III.ii., bringing together Henry’s international army led by different regional Captains turns into a dialectal encounter with a wide range of misunderstandings. Despite their loyalty to Henry V and the English, there is a sort of verbal warfare going on between the Captains, which, as discussed above, may mirror the uneasy relations discussed above that existed between England and the rest of the British Isles, as well as their continuing differences, even linguistic ones, that collide with their unity. The scene presents major national dialects that are presented in the figures of Gower the Englishman, and then Fluellen the Welshman, Jamy the Scotsman, and Macmorris the Irishman, who are not heard in their native Celtic language, but speak with regional English accents typical of their respective home countries.¹⁰ Their linguistic strangeness is mainly illustrated in print by a different spelling, which serves the purpose of approximating the strangers’ native languages and representing their accented or the so-called “broken” English.¹¹ In this scene, these characters of multiple origins, accents and points of view are soon engaged in a heated dispute over national identity.

In a play promoting patriotism and national unity in its glorification of the famous English victory over the French at Agincourt, the cacophony of fiercely competitive British nationalisms, speaking corrupt English, strikes a slightly discordant note. Although the characters sometimes strike a note of comedy with their dialectal speeches, they bristle with ancient regional loyalties and hostilities to the spreading authority of England and the English.

The Welsh Captain, Fluellen, for instance, is represented by distinctive speech patterns (solecisms) and mispronunciations that mark him as “Welsh.” He, in what is meant to be a stereotypical Welsh accent, often pronounces “t” for “d”, “p” for “b” and “f” for “v”, and omits initial “w”, butchering the English language with mispronunciations, such as “plow up” and “falorous” or, when talking about the historical “Alexander the Pig” (V.ii.10). However, at the same time, Fluellen speaks English very fluently, taking pleasure in using ornate language, the sort of copious language that was often criticised for its vacuousness by rhetoricians at the time. He shows a propensity for pedantic and affected long words, like “conconvities”, “expedition”, “derivation”, “th’athersary”, “peradventure”, “affability”, “discretion”, or “particularities”. Fluellen’s excessive use of five-syllable words illustrates his pompous use of language, where meaning often gets lost or distorted by the form of expression.

In contrast to Fluellen, the Irish Macmorris and the Scottish Jamy have significantly fewer lines and dialogue, and Macmorris does not waste a single line on small talk. They, too, speak with noticeable Irish and Scottish accents and are distinguished from the standard speech by differences in sound through mispronunciations rather than vocabulary to suggest the strangeness of their dialects. Jamy uses “sal” for “shall”, and Macmorris says “ish” instead of “is”.

¹⁰ A linguistic study of the recurrent features of the dialects is to be found in “Language and Nation in *Henry V*”, in W. F. Bolton, *Shakespeare’s English: Language in the History Plays*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 221–248.

¹¹ The use of foreign-accented speech in dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been widely discussed. On the forms of “broken English”, see Blank, *Broken English*. On broken English and broken Irish in Shakespeare’s histories, see Neill, “Broken English”.

Further variants of heteroglossia can be found in III.ii. Shakespeare underscores unity by including three rogues in the scene along with the three representatives of England's border nations. The rogues are introduced immediately after the resonant rhetoric of Henry's battle speech that emphasises English unity, with the King eloquently directing his noble warriors "once more unto the breach" (III.i.1). When the band of low-life soldiers-vagabonds-thieves, Pistol, Nym and Bardolph, make their entrance in the next scene, echoing Henry's words, "On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach" (III.ii.1), to the fellow soldiers, it creates an impression opposed to either unity or grandeur. Moreover, it is immediately doubtful whether the Lieutenant or his band make any progress. Although nominally officers from Henry V's army, they are presented as ridiculously counterfeit figures. Nym advises his leader, "the knocks are too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not a case of lives" (3-4), an opinion judiciously endorsed by Pistol in old-fashioned verse. Yet this unofficial council of war is vigorously adjourned by Captain Fluellen's arrival. Fluellen immediately insults them by calling them "you dogs", "avaunt, you cullions" (21).

It is while waiting for the battle to begin that Fluellen attempts to initiate a conversation with the regional captains by asking Macmorris to consider "the disciplines of war" by way of "friendly communication" and "argument" (95-102). Nevertheless, his own exaggerated tendency towards a display of erudition, repetition, and a heavy reliance on the "Welsh" interjection of "look you", "by Cheshu", and Macmorris's angry and impatient interruptions and frequent swearing ("By Chrish"), do not let the discussion get off the ground. Fluellen's vacuous eloquence and his wish to show off his knowledge can be seen in his attempt to discuss at length the "discipline of warfare" derived from Ancient Rome. He objects to the mining operations outside Harfleur, but he is unable to explain the precise "disciplines" that are being violated. Fluellen repeats the word "discipline" seven times in the scene to demonstrate his semi knowledge and his civil discourse. However, his illusive erudition in "the Roman disciplines" is of small practical value.

Macmorris rather impatiently responds that it "is no time to discourse" about war strategies, when there "are throats to be cut", and the conversation ends with Fluellen exclaiming, "Captain Macmorris. I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation", to which Macmorris responds indignantly, "Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal? Who talks of my nation? (121-126)." Macmorris's heated reaction to the word "nation" challenges the belief that Fluellen actually knows Macmorris's nation.¹² What makes it so curious here is that Fluellen too is a member of an annexed regional nation. His remark conveys a colonialist discourse in the act of identifying Macmorris as an "Irish" subject and distinguishing himself from him.

It is also evident that Macmorris is discontented with England, which he sees as "a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal". Understandably, Macmorris being part-English and part-Irish is touchy about his unfixed national identity. What is his nation? English, Irish, or a mix? And what does this say about his loyalties?

¹² This scene and especially Macmorris's lines have been variously interpreted by commentators. For some critics, it is emblematic of the play's idealisation of national unity. For example, Stephen Greenblatt, who famously argues that by "yoking together diverse people... Hal symbolically tames the last wild areas in the British Isles". In "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*", *Shakespearean Negotiations, The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, pp. 21-65, p. 42. For a different reading, see Neill, "Broken English". For a full exploration of the significance of "nation" in this scene and its thematic prominence in the play as a whole, see Willy Maley, "This sceptred isle: Shakespeare and the British Problem", in *Shakespeare and National Culture*, ed. John J. Joughin, Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 83-108.

When Fluellen objects that Macmorris has taken the "matter otherwise than is meant", his Irish counterpart threatens ferociously to cut off his head before the English Captain Gower (whose language becomes the standard, against which others are measured) intervenes to settle the quarrel by pointing out, "Gentleman both, you will mistake each other" (136). Far from being a moment of unity, what begins as a misunderstanding between two English officers becomes a conflict between an Irishman and a Welshman, with their mixed national identities being the primary source of friction.

On the one hand, in Macmorris, Shakespeare creates a character who is a dutifully assimilated Irishman. On the other hand, this Irishman is also characterised as an impatient and ferocious person, who hates to stand idle, when "there is throats to be cut" (112) and who assures his fellow captain, "So Chrish save me, I will cut off your head" (135). He may seem civilised, but he is portrayed as no different from the Irish rebels, who were labelled as barbaric and proclaimed terrible executioners by the English. In this scene, Fluellen's and Macmorris's use of English may be seen as a mark of difference, and it does contribute to the humour of the scene, but at the same time, it subtly poses a threat. Their foreign accents and their comic linguistic errors communicate a lingering otherness and signify a potential danger of a relapse into subversion and Celtic barbarity.

The Pistol Episode: "Moy shall not serve, I will have forty moys"

The scene (IV.iv) I shall now turn to is a French-English scene, where Shakespeare stages another encounter with the other's language, a bilingual confrontation between the rogue Pistol and his captured French soldier, Monsieur Le Fer. Here, neither of the characters speaks or understands the other's language. The scene further demonstrates linguistic otherness, where the language barrier could have grave consequences, as the captive French nobleman nearly loses his life, like Fluellen previously, because of his linguistic limitations. It is only thanks to the bilingual fluency of the Boy, who acts as a translator and interpreter, as Gower had done earlier, that the French soldier stays alive. While the braggart Pistol does not stop playing word games with both French and English, the French soldier remains hopelessly monolingual.

After all the trumpeting and morale-raising that prefaces the battle of Agincourt, it is remarkable that the only combat the audience witnesses on stage is that of the "counterfeit cowardly knave" (V.i.70) Pistol. Moreover, the incident involves not fighting, but bargaining for an "egregious ransom" (IV.iv.11) which Pistol extorts from his captive French nobleman for his release. Although Pistol is the most craven and ignoble soldier in the English army (according to Gower and the Boy), the French prisoner surrenders to him and flatters him by calling him "gentilhomme de bonne qualité" (gentleman of good quality) (2-3) "un chevalier" (a knight) (57) and "le plus brave, vaillant et très distingué seigneur d'Angleterre" (the most brave, valiant and most distinguished lord of England) (58). Here, Shakespeare deflates the chivalric law of ransom, reducing it to its crude essentials and transforming the entire episode into a linguistic encounter of misunderstandings:

PISTOL. Art thou a gentleman? What is thy name? Discuss.

FRENCH SOLDIER. *O Seigneur Dieu!*

PISTOL. O Signieur Dew should be a gentleman. –

Perpend my words, O Signieur Dew, and mark:

O Signieur Dew, thou diest on point of fox,

Except, O Signieur, thou do give to me

Egregious ransom.

FRENCH SOLDIER. *O prenez miséricorde! Ayez pitié de moi!*

PISTOL. Moy shall not serve, I will have forty moys,
Or I will fetch thy rim out at thy throat
In drops of crimson blood. (5–15)

The first lines of the dialogue make it clear that neither the French soldier nor Pistol speak the other's language, leading to many comic misunderstandings in this encounter, which is rather grave by nature. Moreover, Pistol tries to imitate the language of knights or what he thinks is a version of the King's English, misusing foreign words, such as "perpend" and "egregious", to show off his learnedness (just as Fluellen did before), thereby inadvertently debasing the educated dialect.

The braggart Pistol's first question, "Art thou a gentleman? What is thy name? Discuss" is supposed to imitate his betters by showing off some knowledge of rhetoric. Pistol's comment follows the common belief of rhetoricians of the time that discourse and decorum reveal a person's origins, moral character, education, and social status. As Ben Jonson stated, "Language most shewes a man; speake that I may see thee".¹³

Furthermore, Pistol wrongly appropriates French words, mistaking the soldier's name as "O Signieur Dew" and being confident that the prisoner must be a rich gentleman. And with his "*O prenez miséricorde! Ayez pitié de moi!*" (O take mercy! Have pity on me!) Pistol simply hears what he wants to hear. In this case, that the prisoner is offering him money, "Moy shall not serve, I will have forty moys". Pistol opportunistically distorts language and separates "moy" from its initial meaning to turn it into currency. Other words fall prey to his inventiveness, such as the French word "bras" (arm), which he deforms into the English word "brass", and feels insulted to be offered such base currency. The same misinterpretation happens with the prisoner's name, Monsieur le Fer, to which Pistol responds with a series of bawdy homophonic terms, "Master Fer? I'll fer him, and firk him, and ferret him" (28–29). His wordplays sound ominous, but these are meaningless threats.

Pistol mimics French words and assembles them into a phantasy language with hybrid scraps of oral sayings, like "Owy, cuppele gorge, permafoy" (37) or "qualité? Caleno custore me" (4) mis-reciting and debasing an old Irish song about treasure to show off his learnedness. His motto "I will cut his throat" (32) and his use of Irish here remind us of Macmorris and suggest a link between the cutpurses' language and the Irish, both base and subversive languages.¹⁴ Moreover, throughout the scene, as David Steinsaltz points out, "Pistol banters with the Frenchman, interpreting his words as though they were some coarse criminals' argot."¹⁵ Pistol's verbal bombast serves to parody the epic language – the King's English – by corrupting and subverting it into a hybrid language, "fracted and corroborate" (II.i.124), as Pistol would word it.

This scene of linguistic confusion and transgression further disrupts Henry V's nationalistic conquest. Pistol's frequent abuses of the English and French languages may mark him as the butt of laughter. However, such treatment of languages also demonstrates potential dangerousness of such kind of verbal expression, which is unruly, unstable, and full of ambiguities. Its most significant hazard lies in its potent ability to deform the King's English.

¹³ Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, in *Works*, ed. C. H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson, vol. VIII, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947, p. 625.

¹⁴ In the "quarreling captains" scene, Fluellen's "correction" of Macmorris was broken off by Gower; however, later in the play, he inflicts a humiliating punishment on Pistol: "a Welsh correction" that, in Gower's words again, serves to teach Pistol "a good English condition" (V.i.78–79).

¹⁵ Steinsaltz, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

Conclusion

Shakespeare thematises linguistic strangeness and national/internal fragmentation by staging a proliferation of different languages and dialects that become the other's language. Minority languages and distorted English sharply contrast with the King's project of nationalistic and linguistic unity, showing the subversive force of "marginal" languages. All the "foreign" characters, the French, the Welsh, the Irish, the Scottish, the plebeians and cutpurses, undermine the homogeneity from within and are alien to and work against the nationalistic concerns of the play. Their voices are those of the "others" and are presented in direct opposition to the King's authority and patriarchy. These multifarious voices threaten to subvert the King's English. Their "disfigured" English becomes a form of resistance to forced cultural integration and an effective means of opposing the strive for a unified language. Different dialects and idiolects further corrupt the "garb" of the King's English, even though the national cause unites them.

By staging multilingualism, Shakespeare presents conflicting languages that narrate their regional and ideological background and create a world where disparate points of view enter into conversation with each other.¹⁶ The "polyphony" of languages at work serves to create multiple and conflicting perspectives. For instance, Gower's and the Boy's English are presented as a standard and a means of resolving linguistic conflicts on the battlefield. The more surprising of the two is the Boy who, although younger and inferior to most of the characters in the scenes, has a good command of various languages and pragmatically uses them. Satirising the languages of the officers around him, the Boy is a perfect judge of Pistol's, Bardolph's and Nym's linguistic abilities, as he makes clear in his long soliloquy in III.ii:

For Pistol, he hath a killing tongue and a quiet sword, by the means whereof 'a breaks words and keeps whole weapons. For Nym, he hath heard that men of few words are the best men, and therefore he scorns to say his prayers, lest 'a should be thought a coward: but his few bad words are matched with as few good deeds. (III.ii.34–39)

Here, the Boy lays bare their hypocrisies and limitations. Like young Hal, he draws his social competence from metalinguistic awareness. Thus, the figure of the young Boy, just like Hal, shows his reflective and conciliatory power, alongside all the misunderstandings, the abuses and the violence engendered by linguistic multiplicity.

It can be argued that in *Henry V*, Shakespeare uses the dialogic form of drama to stage fertile encounters between languages of the self and the other. The play shows how hosting a foreigner makes the English characters and the English audience become "sensitive to the strangeness of (their) own language" and yet, resistant to the idea that the immigrant can ever be fully "Englished".¹⁷ As noted by Paul Ricoeur, "linguistic hospitality", or "the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling", serves the purpose of accommodating the other in the domestic language. According to Ricoeur, linguistic hospitality aims at fulfilling "the desire to establish a dialogic relation between foreign language and native language". In this case, what the characters, audiences, and readers of *Henry V* ultimately learn from the experience of hosting the stranger within the English language is that the linguistic self is simultaneously resilient and unstable. By bringing the languages of the other and the self

¹⁶ See also Pugliatti on the different perspectives and plurilingualism that are at play, *Shakespeare the Historian*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140–141.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, intr. Richard Kearney, trans. Eileen Brennan, New York, Routledge, 2006 [2004], p. 27.

into contact with one another and attempting to translate what is strange into English, Shakespeare takes on the task of representing the foreign in his mother tongue and succeeds in demonstrating the flexibility and mutability of the English language.

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