

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



**Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Shakespeare's Englishes: Against Englishness*  
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This book's title signals not just its focus but also its central argument: simply put, the linguistic heterogeneity or 'extravagancy' of Shakespeare's plays registers their resistance to a monolithic, exclusive national identity. Shakespeare's comedies and histories of (mostly) the 1590s form the centrepiece of this study: *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Twelfth Night* receive ample attention as do *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. *Sir Thomas More* also figures heavily, and it makes sense to begin my review with this play, even though the most sustained discussion of it is in the penultimate chapter.

Noting that *Sir Thomas More*'s Hand D is 'now widely if not universally regarded as Shakespeare's' (p. 4), Tudeau-Clayton sets Shakespeare's contribution to this multi-authored play within the context of, on one hand, 'local virulent manifestations [against foreigners] in London in the early 1590s' (p. 132) and, on the other, voices supportive of London's community of foreigners, such as the MP Henry Finch, whose 1593 parliamentary speech Shakespeare's More echoes. 'Imagine', says Shakespeare's More, 'that you see the wretched strangers, / Their babies at their backs, with their poor luggage, / Plodding to th' ports and coasts for transportation'. Inviting his on- and off-stage fellow citizens to put themselves in these strangers' shoes, More then asks them if you faced banishment 'whither would you go?'. Directing its stinging interrogative to the Londoners' 'mountainish inhumanity', More's speech works to solicit a humane response to 'the strangers' case'. Shakespeare's contribution to *Sir Thomas More* at once enacts and resists 'the recurrent scapegoating of strangers' (p. 142). The Bard's pre-1603 texts, Tudeau-Clayton argues, are marked by acts of inclusion and charity. An attendant, albeit underdeveloped, argument is that the post-1603 plays 'of the in-house

playwright of the King's Men begin, if ambivalently, to move with, rather than against history, with rather than against the drive to English "plainness" (p. 123). This quotation really does not do justice the plays such as *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*. Imogen's 'There's livers out of Britain' is, surely, 'against Englishness'.

For Tudeau-Clayton, then, Shakespeare's contribution to *Sir Thomas More* reveals a 'deep ideological consistency' (p. 5) with his Elizabethan comedies as well as the second tetralogy. Verbal echoes, for example, between *Sir Thomas More* and *The Merchant of Venice* are noted: for instance, 'Spurn you like dogs' (*STM*) and 'spurn a stranger cur' (*MV*). Moreover, a Christian ideal of 'neighbourly charity' surfaces in both plays; as the author writes:

in their mutual othering Shylock and Antonio become alike in a bond of hatred that is the negative double of the bond of "neighbourly charity" which More's on-stage audience is persuaded to practise in recognition of the precariously contingent character of their shared human condition, a common humanity which is denied Shylock. (p. 120)

Similarly, *I Henry IV*, like *Sir Thomas More*, 'seeks to "correct" the popular perception of strangers as the origin of social evils' (p. 147). Central to her reading of this play is Hotspur's Anglocentrism or what the author terms — in reference to Hotspur's comments on (the) Welsh, especially Hotspur's 'I think there's no man speaks better Welsh' — his cultural astigmatism / deafness. One of this book's key arguments is that '(the) English [are] a nation of strangers' (p. 146), by which is meant, in relation to both language and people, 'an inclusive, accommodating [...] mix of diverse mutual strangers' (p. 145). Given that *I Henry IV*'s 'civil butchery' extends to Scotland and Wales, perhaps more could have been said about how the Tudor incorporation of Wales and the likelihood of King James VI succeeding Queen Elizabeth (Douglas, the play's 'Scot of Scots', is not mentioned) fostered in the 1590s ideas of Britain as an island of strangers.

Shakespeare's plays are 'against Englishness' in the sense that they resist what Tudeau-Clayton terms 'cultural reformation ideology' (p. 3). Cultural reformation ideology privileges 'the plain-speaking, plainly dressed citizen', and such ideology manifests itself in the form of 'the King's English' (a phrase which appears in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but is used by other Elizabethan writers: e.g., Thomas Wilson, Thomas Nashe) as well as the figure of the 'true-born Englishman' (*Richard II*). Although Shakespeare's plays incorporate cultural reformation ideology, they do so only to reject it in favour of the English language as a 'gaullimaufry' (*MW*) and 'the figure of the

Englishman dressed in a motley of foreign fashions’ (p. 30). Tudeau-Clayton ranges far and wide in her exploration of Elizabethan culture, but the prime context for obvious reasons is London and the London stage. Tudeau-Clayton posits a cosmopolitan London made up of a plethora of immigrants (we know Shakespeare lodged with French Huguenots), but she acknowledges cultural reformation ideology was deeply entrenched in London. In fact, as the author argues, ‘the sense of a common national identity — a common Englishness — develops above all among the “middling sort” of “citizens”’ (p. 10). To buttress this crucial point, the author presents her readers with an illustrative opposition: a ‘festive Shakespeare’ ideologically opposed to a ‘lenten [Ben] Jonson’. In Shakespeare’s ‘one English comedy’ and ‘one essay, or engagement with, the emergent genre of citizen comedy’ (p. 46), namely *Merry Wives*, he goes against the grain of the genre. No play receives as much attention as *Merry Wives* (the Folio version), which seems to best support the author’s arguments about linguistic diversity, especially in its celebration of ‘our English’ in opposition to ‘the King’s English’, and a heterogeneous community of strangers. In *Merry Wives*, Shakespeare, we are told, offers ‘an inclusive, mixed vernacular against the aspirations of cultural reformation ideology to disentangle a pure “true” English from French’ (p. 71). Moreover, this play contains the figure of ‘the cash-poor, language-rich, nomadic courtier’ (p. 69) Falstaff, whom Tudeau-Clayton champions throughout the book. Her reading of *Merry Wives* opposes Falstaff, ‘a cultural Robin Hood’ (p. 175), and George Page, who embodies ‘the merchant citizen class’ as well as ‘the drive to cultural and linguistic homogeneity’ (p. 56). Exactly how much Falstaff goes ‘against Englishness’ is a topic for debate, for Falstaff’s labelling of Douglas as ‘that hot termagant Scot’ (*IH4*) cannot be easily disentangled from other xenophobic voicings in Shakespeare’s plays, not to mention other plays of this period, including, of course, *Eastward Hoe*. The accession of a Scottish monarch to the English throne in 1603, to be sure, tested inter-island neighbourliness.

*Henry V*, a play that has received ample attention in relation to language and nationhood, figures prominently here. According to Tudeau-Clayton, the play bears witness to the ‘in-between’, ‘neither/nor’, both/and’ space to which Shakespeare’s plays gravitate, and the result is a potentially ‘inclusive inter-national community [...] in which (the) French and (the) English meet and mingle’ (p. 194, 195). The French Princess Katherine is the sole female character in all of Shakespeare’s plays to be called an ‘Englishwoman’ (5.2), suggestive, perhaps, of the resistance to ‘the exclusionary definition of the English/Englishness’ (p. 7) that Tudeau-Clayton detects in this and other plays. The French and English who ‘meet and mingle’ in the play’s final scene are, of course, nobles and royals; commoners are excluded. Whilst the material on *Henry V* (indeed the entire book) sheds invaluable light on ‘(the) French and (the) English’, the Celtic context is underexamined (there are no ‘Ireland’, ‘Scotland’,

‘Wales’ entries in the index; to be fair, there are entries for ‘Scots’ and ‘Welsh’). In the introductory chapter, Tudeau-Clayton acknowledges the ‘more local neighbours’ of the English: ‘the Welsh, Scots and Irish, that make up the British Archipelago’ (p. 2) — I should add ‘Atlantic Archipelago’ is the preferred term — but the three-kingdom, four-nation context in which Shakespeare was writing in the 1590s is often elided. Take, for instance, one of this book’s key words (indeed concepts): gallimaufry. Many Elizabethans would have come across this word when reading Richard Stanihurst’s *Description of Ireland*, included in *Holinshed’s Chronicles* (1577/87). Discussing the intermingling of (the) English and (the) Irish, Stanihurst writes: ‘in our daies [the English in Ireland] haue so acquainted themselues with the Irish, as they haue made a mingle mangle or gallimaufreie of both the languages, and haue in such medleie or checkerwise so crabbedlie iumbled them both together, as commonlie the inhabitants of the meaner sort speake neither good English nor good Irish’ (p. 4). We could point to (the Folio’s) *Henry V*’s Macmorris as a prime example of a speaker of ‘neither good English nor good Irish’. For some editors, Pistol’s ‘Qualtitie calme custure me’ (4.4) is yet another also instance of archipelagic linguistic practices. One wonders to what extent the Englishries in Ireland and Wales and the Welshries in England informed and influenced Shakespeare’s Englishes?

The value of this fine book lies in its refiguring and rethinking of issues of the national vernacular and national identity in the period. ‘These plays do not’, Tudeau-Clayton writes, ‘reproduce English “ethnocentrism” as critical opinion would have us believe’ (p. 5). I am not convinced that this statement truly reflects the dominant critical opinion at the time of this book’s publication, but I am convinced that this book makes an invaluable critical intervention and that it will spark more debate and discussion, just as the best presentist-inspired scholarship does.