



This England, That Shakespeare

New Angles on Englishness and the Bard

Edited by

**WILLY MALEY AND
MARGARET TUDEAU-CLAYTON**



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ASHGATE

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
Introduction: 'To England send him': Repatriating Shakespeare <i>Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton</i>	1
Part 1 This England	
1 <i>Pericles</i> and the Language of National Origins <i>Thomas Roebuck and Laurie Maguire</i>	23
2 'And bloody England into England gone': Empire, Monarchy, and Nation in <i>King John</i> <i>Willy Maley</i>	49
3 The 'trueborn Englishman': <i>Richard II</i> , <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> , and the Future History of (the) English <i>Margaret Tudeau-Clayton</i>	63
4 'Eat a Leek': Welsh Corrections, English Conditions, and British Cultural Communion <i>Allison M. Outland</i>	87
5 'O, lawful let it be/That I have room ... to curse awhile': Voicing the Nation's Conscience in Female Complaint in <i>Richard III</i> , <i>King John</i> , and <i>Henry VIII</i> <i>Alison Thorne</i>	105
Part 2 That Shakespeare	
6 Imagining England: Contemporary Encodings of 'this sceptred isle' <i>Sarah Grandage</i>	127
7 Shakespeare Eurostar: Calais, the Continent, and the Operatic Fortunes of Ambroise Thomas <i>Ton Hoenselaars and Clara Calvo</i>	147

8	'Not a man from England': Assimilating the Exotic 'Other' Through Performance, from <i>Henry IV</i> to <i>Henry VI</i> <i>Amanda Penlington</i>	165
9	A Nation of Selves: Ted Hughes's Shakespeare <i>Neil Corcoran</i>	185
10	Shakespeare-land <i>Graham Holderness</i>	201
	Afterword: One of Those Days in England <i>Andrew Hadfield</i>	221
	<i>Works Cited</i>	225
	<i>Index</i>	251

List of Illustrations

- 3.1 Woodcut portrait of an Englishman, c. 1550, from Andrew Boorde, *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge*, ed. F.J. Furnivall (London, Early English Text Society, 1870), p. 116. 84
- 3.2 The figure of the motley dressed Englishman: genealogy of a cultural meme. Layout: Matthias Heim. 85
- 6.1 Cline of allusivity. Design: Sarah Grandage. 138
- 7.1 Francis I and Henry VIII at Channel Tunnel mouth (Calais). By permission *Archives Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne*. 160
- 7.2 Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare gaze down the Channel Tunnel. By permission *Archives Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne*. 162
- 7.3 Programme cover to the video presentation of the Compiègne production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Covent Garden (2003). By permission *Archives Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne*. 164
- 8.1 *Henry V*, Royal Shakespeare Company (2000). By permission Malcolm Davies Collection. © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. 176
- 8.2 *Henry VI*, Royal Shakespeare Company (2000). By permission Malcolm Davies Collection. © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. 181

Introduction

‘To England send him’: Repatriating Shakespeare

Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton

Hamlet Without the Prince

In his conclusion to a review of work on early modern British history at the turn of the millennium, Hugh Kearney lamented the lack of attention paid to England – ‘it is the view from the periphery which is dominant, ignoring the core’ – adding in a very telling phrase: ‘If the comment is not too Anglocentric, it is like *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark’.¹ Leaving aside the place of England in that play – a place of exile, madness, and murder – Kearney had a point, for when John Pocock made his famous ‘plea’ three decades ago for a new subject called British history, ‘the plural history of a group of cultures situated along an Anglo-Celtic frontier and marked by an increasing English political and cultural domination’ – a plea to which Kearney himself was one of the first to respond with his magisterial ‘history of four nations’ – neither he nor Kearney could have anticipated the extent to which this dominance would be met by an almost exclusive focus on the Celtic side of the frontier.² In literary studies collections on Shakespeare and Ireland, Shakespeare and Scotland, and Shakespeare and Wales have added weight to the non-Anglo end of the ‘British’ seesaw, while England is acknowledged more in the breach than the observance.³ Between Sir Walter Raleigh’s 1918 British Academy lecture on ‘Shakespeare and England’ and Linda Colley’s 1992 lecture on ‘Shakespeare and the Limits of National Culture’, a marked scepticism has,

¹ Hugh F. Kearney, “‘Faith and Fatherland Revisited’”: Review of (among others) Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal*, 4/2 (Winter 1999/Spring 2000): 145–57 (156).

² J.G.A. Pocock, ‘British History: A Plea for a New Subject’, *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (1975): 605–6. First published in 1989, Kearney’s book has been reissued in a second, updated edition: Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (eds), *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (eds), *Shakespeare and Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (eds), *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

moreover, entered discussions of Shakespeare's England.⁴ Raleigh was clear as to his mission:

I propose to return to the old catholic doctrine which has been illuminated by so many disciples of Shakespeare, and to speak of him as our great national poet. He embodies and exemplifies all the virtues, and most of the faults, of England. Any one who reads and understands him understands England. This method of studying Shakespeare by reading him has perhaps gone somewhat out of vogue in favour of more roundabout ways of approach, but it is the best method for all that. Shakespeare tells us more about himself and his mind than we could learn even from those who knew him in his habit as he lived, if they were all alive and all talking. To learn what he tells we have only to listen. I think there is no national poet, of any great nation whatsoever, who is so completely representative of his own people as Shakespeare is representative of the English. There is certainly no other English poet who comes near to Shakespeare in embodying our character and our foibles.⁵

In a reprise of Thomas Carlyle's claim that wherever 'English men and women are, they will say to one another: "Yes, this Shakespeare is ours; we produced him, we speak and think by him; we are of one blood and kind with him"',⁶ Raleigh here locates Shakespeare as a given, shared centre around which the specificity of the English character as well as the totality and unity of the English nation consolidate, albeit a totality and unity with its 'foibles' and eccentricities. This confident sense of ownership and complacent identification of poet and nation are interrogated by Colley whose rigorous historicizing invites rather sceptical relativism. Yet her conclusion that 'Shakespeare eludes appropriation' suggests, between Raleigh's absolute patriotism and her relative pluralism, a continuity in the ineffable, if intuitively grasped, nature of Shakespeare, and this becomes transnational proof of the national poet's elusive genius. For Raleigh, an everyday, everyman 'core' of Englishness similarly eludes definition; it is intuitively apprehended, like and with the writing of the national poet who, despite *de rigueur* scepticism in the literary academy, continues to represent this core, not only brashly for tourists who flock to the 'heart of England' that Shakespeare's native town of Stratford still sells itself as, but also more discreetly – and feelingly – for academics such as Kearney.

Raleigh's lecture comes of course in the wake of the elaborate tercentenary celebrations of 1916. The complex and contradictory configurations of Shakespeare and nation produced at this moment of ideological and political, international as

⁴ Sir Walter Raleigh, 'Shakespeare and England', Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy, in *England and the War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 120–44; Linda Colley, *Shakespeare and the Limits of National Culture*, Hayes Robinson Lecture Series No. 2 (Egham, Surrey: Royal Holloway, University of London, 1999), 23.

⁵ Raleigh, 'Shakespeare and England', 120–21.

⁶ Cited in Robert J.C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 228. That Carlyle was a Scot adds a layer of irony to this observation.

well as national, crisis are examined in our closing essay by Graham Holderness, one of the first and fiercest interrogators of 'the Shakespeare myth', who here goes beyond sceptical interrogation, looking forward as well as back, in pursuit of reconfigurations of this relation to salvage a desperately needed sense of belonging.⁷ As Holderness discusses, the moment of the tercentenary celebrations was also the moment pinpointed by Terence Hawkes in the conclusion to the vaudeville act of criticism that was *That Shakespeherian Rag* (1986) where he locates the origin of English Studies in a reactionary resistance to the Russian Revolution, and a siege mentality that made the English nation and the subject of English converge around questions of colonialism and cultural elitism. In his suggestive closing remarks, Hawkes evokes 'a complex relationship between the academic subject of English and the culture and identity the subject was designed to serve – "Englishness"':

The one sustains, and even helps to create the other. And yet, in the same period since 1917, a series of continuing confrontations has brought just this matter of 'Englishness' into question. Issues raised by events in Ireland and Ulster, the retreat from colonialism followed by immigration from former colonies, the rise of Welsh and Scottish nationalism, the special problems of Africa, membership of the European Economic Community, the Falklands campaign, have all to some degree brought into focus the matter of the definition, limits and specific character of 'Englishness'. And latterly they have done so for millions to whom twenty-five years of cheap travel and television have perhaps also suggested that English culture involves a peculiar and specific way of life, rather than the only or necessarily the most desirable one. It might even be reasonable to detect in the invention of the subject itself a major diagnostic response to an early apprehension of the complexities surrounding cultural identity. Current talk of a 'crisis' in English neglects that history. There is no crisis *in* English. There was and is a crisis which *created* English and of which it remains a distinctive manifestation: a child of Empire's decline, we might say, by America out of Russia.⁸

⁷ 'Bardolatry: or, the Cultural Materialist's Guide to Stratford-upon-Avon', in Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 2–15; and more recently, Graham Holderness and Andrew Murphy, 'Shakespeare's England: Britain's Shakespeare', in John J. Joughin (ed.), *Shakespeare and National Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 19–41.

⁸ Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag: Essays on a Critical Process* (London: Methuen, 1986), 'Conclusion: 1917 and All That', 121–2. Others have located this origin earlier, in relation to other political concerns; see Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 12–13. Balz Engler reminds us of Robert Crawford's point that the study of English literature was born in Scotland, a child of the union of the kingdoms in 1707. Balz Engler, 'Englishness and English Studies', in Balz Engler and Renate Haas (eds), *European English Studies: Contributions towards the History of a Discipline* (Leicester: The English Association for ESSE, 2000), 335–48 (339). See Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

At the end of *Shakespeare in the Present* (2002), Hawkes takes up the theme with Shakespeare specifically in view and in relation to the one among his 'issues' here that, more than any other, has succeeded in calling into question not only theoretically, but actually and painfully, 'this matter of Englishness', namely, the will to separatism of the other nations of the British nation state: 'Could it possibly be that the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish might at a certain point in the future come to regard an involvement with Shakespeare as somehow condoning or even embodying the "Englishing" by which, in some eyes, they were for too long moulded?'⁹ Inseparable still from an elusive core of 'Englishness', representing the heart not only of England but also of English Studies, Shakespeare is here the instrument of a colonizing will to dominance within the nations of the British archipelago as, for other critics, he has been within the nations of the British Empire.¹⁰ Yet today both English Studies and the Englishness it purportedly serves are in disarray, in part at least thanks to such 'postcolonial' interrogations, which have been instrumental in their dismantling. Murmurings at the close of the second millennium swelled into the collective wail of a full blown 'English identity crisis' at the turn into the third, notably in the wake of the breaches opened in the United Kingdom, in particular by Scottish devolution.¹¹ This volume is a response to this perceived crisis of identity, which proposes Shakespeare not as an object so much as a collaborator in the project of collective self-understanding.

In a telling anticipation of Kearney's telling comment about '*Hamlet* without the Prince', Raleigh, in his lecture on 'Shakespeare and England', treats the nation the way Philip Sidney approaches poetry, defining it by negatives, opposites, and exclusions. One revealing example is his refutation of an allegorical reading by another nation of its relationship to the very play that Kearney treats explicitly as an analogy and implicitly as a metonym of the core at once of Shakespeare and of Englishness. That this other nation is Germany lends a certain frisson to Raleigh's rallying cry (whatever you do, don't mention the war):

Seventy years before the War the German poet Freiligrath wrote a poem to prove that Germany is Hamlet, urged by the spirit of her fathers to claim her inheritance, vacillating and lost in thought, but destined, before the Fifth Act ends, to strew the stage with the corpses of her enemies. Only a German could have hit on the idea that Germany is Hamlet. The English, for whom the play

⁹ Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 143.

¹⁰ See Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Jyotsna Singh, 'Different Shakespeares: The Bard in Colonial/Postcolonial India', *Theatre Journal*, 41/4 (1989): 445–58; and Nandi Bhatia "'Shakespeare" and the Codes of Empire in India', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 18 (1998): 96–126.

¹¹ Amelia Hill, 'The English Identity Crisis', *The Observer*, 13 June 2004, Focus, 12; on the relation of this crisis to Scottish separatism, see Neil Ascherson, 'England Goes It Alone', *Diary, London Review of Books* (5 April 2007): 38–9.

was written, know that Hamlet is Hamlet, and that Shakespeare was thinking of a young man, not of the pomposities of national ambition.¹²

Hamlet is Hamlet in the same way that England is England, and Shakespeare is England too, since 'Any one who reads and understands him understands England'.¹³ Yet nobody knows what Shakespeare and England (let alone Hamlet) really stand for except for each other and an elusive – ineffable yet intuitively grasped – 'core' or essence that, if defined at all, is defined by negation. This interchangeability may account for the tautological ring to the idea of an 'English Shakespeare Association', a body which has never existed, unlike the British Empire Shakespeare Society (BESS) (established in 1901) and the British Shakespeare Association (BSA) (established a century later). Yet both bodies signal, too, the vulnerability of the elusive 'core' of Englishness and the potential for reversal – from the instrumentalization of Shakespeare in the Englishing of the British to the Britishing of both Shakespeare and the English. Indeed, the relation between the names of Britain/the British and of England/the English has become fraught again as it was for Shakespeare and his contemporaries when those who opposed adoption of the name of Britain under James couched their opposition in terms of England as a 'colonial territory'.¹⁴ As contributors here discuss, other

¹² Raleigh, 'Shakespeare and England', 141. This is part of a concerted effort to separate the English and Shakespeare from the nation with which both had been associated in the nineteenth century and which had even claimed that Shakespeare should be formally made over to it in the event of victory in the First World War; see Engler, 'Englishness and English Studies', 342–3 (and note 14). On Hamlet as a 'Teuton' see the citation by Young of 'an anonymous literary critic in Edinburgh' who 'published the first study of Shakespeare on the principle of race – with Iago as the Romano-Italic type, Hamlet as the Teuton, Macbeth as a Celt, Shylock as a Jew, and so on'. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 68. Note the absence of a type of Englishness, apparently outside the field, more ideal than ethnicity.

¹³ Hamlet is Scotland, of course, but that's another story. See Lilian Winstanley, *'Hamlet' and the Scottish Succession: Being an Examination of the Relations of the Play of "Hamlet" to the Scottish Succession and the Essex Conspiracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921). The gauntlet has been taken up since by Stuart M. Kurland, in 'Hamlet and the Scottish Succession?', *Studies in English Literature*, 34/2 (1994): 279–300; and by Andrew Hadfield, in 'Hamlet's Country Matters: The "Scottish Play" within the Play', in Maley and Murphy (eds), *Shakespeare and Scotland*, 87–103. For other views that nationalize and politicize the play in ways Raleigh would not approve see Ralph Berry, 'Hamlet: Nationhood and Identity', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 49 (1980), 283–303; Peter Erickson, 'Can We Talk About Race in *Hamlet*?' in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *Hamlet: New Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2002), 207–13; Lisa Hopkins, 'The Coast: *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 35–57; Patricia Parker, 'Black *Hamlet*: Battening on the Moor', *Shakespeare Studies*, 31 (2003): 127–64; and John S. Pendergast, 'A Nation of Hamlets: Shakespeare and Cultural Politics', *Extrapolation*, 36/1 (1995): 10–17.

¹⁴ Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142. Neil Ascherson (op. cit.) comments: 'The return

narratives of colonial occupation rather served James's project, whether the occupation by the Saxons of an ancient British nation (Maguire and Roebuck) or the subsequent occupation of the Saxon kingdom by the Normans, assimilated to the period of 'foreign' Catholic hegemony by protestant revisionary historians strategically echoed by James himself when, in his first speech to Parliament, he evoked a 'slavish yoke' from which the two kingdoms of Scotland and England had been freed (Tudeau-Clayton).¹⁵ In Shakespeare's England/Britain, then, various competing 'postcolonial' narratives were in circulation that defined England and the English differently in relation to European as well as British 'others'. Today, it is again in relation to Europe as well as to Britain that this identity has to define itself. This is pointed up here by our essays which examine the complex – and unstable – relations between the English and their European as well as British neighbours both as explored by Shakespeare and as fashioned in cultural afterlives, including performances of the plays. The question at bottom is whether and how – with or without Shakespeare's help – the English might define themselves otherwise than in a negative relation of difference – as not-German, not-French (in other words not-European), and as not-British.

Significantly, it is in relation to the other nations of the British state that the negative definition of the English and an Englishness epitomized by Shakespeare returned in the 1980s. Thus, in a piece first published in *New Society* in 1982, Angela Carter recalls 'Empire Day' at her South London primary school:

Assembled in a playground strung with Union Jack bunting, those children who had been assigned no special roles sang patriotic songs: 'Land of hope and glory' and 'There'll always be an England'. There was a procession of flags and emblems: England, Scotland, Wales, Ulster. The emblems, of cardboard carried on poles, were a Tudor rose, a thistle, a daffodil and shamrocks. Those who carried the Scottish, Welsh and Ulster flags wore a national costume – kilt, steeple hat, Kathleen Mavourneen headscarf; but the little girl who bore up the cross of St George wore just a regular gymslip. The lesser breeds, evidently, were picturesque; the English, not.¹⁶

Not only are the English, compared to their British neighbours, not 'picturesque', they are, Carter concludes, 'an unhistoric nation' (187), a comment that comes close to Conrad Russell's claim that England was the least revolutionary of the

of English nationalism ... is beginning to question Britishness, and the growing conviction among the English that they are somehow its victims.'

¹⁵ This discourse anticipates the unifying discourse of the British as at once Protestant (not-Catholic) and not-French following the Union in 1707, fully documented in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Angela Carter, 'So There'll Always Be an England', in *Shaking a Leg: Journalism and Writings*, with an introduction by Joan Smith, edited by Jenny Uglow (London: Vintage, 1998: first published Chatto & Windus, 1997), 185–9 (185).

four nations in the early modern period.¹⁷ Carter's irony undermines the racially inflected imperial superiority of an English identity defined as a negative difference from 'lesser breeds' signalled by a lack. Her ironic deconstruction finds an echo in the earliest printed portrait of an Englishman (Fig. 3.1), who is depicted, again ironically, as almost naked, without a costume of his own, at a moment just prior to Shakespeare's birth when, as essays here consider, the character of English and/or British identity was an emergent, contested object with high ideological and political stakes. Four hundred years later, in 1998, the 'naked' character of the English, now not only without a national costume but also without a national language – English having disappeared into Englishes – furnishes for the historian David Starkey an occasion not so much for deprecatory, and deconstructive, irony as for affirmation of a new identity as 'the first truly global multicultural society'.¹⁸ Ten years on such a prospect is viewed with gloom by Graham Holderness here as a 'cosmopolitan vacuum' (echoing Tom Nairn's view of 'globalisation' as an 'abyss'), perhaps symptomatically given the very different mood that prevails today.¹⁹

There is, however, a risk here, too, of withdrawal into a merely negative definition of the English – and of Shakespeare – in relation to the global/cosmopolitan, a risk that Clara Calvo and Ton Hoenselaars detect in Holderness's earlier work. As Holderness himself discusses, Shakespeare has hitherto enjoyed a prominent role in this relation, having been represented from 1623 on as at once universal and specifically English/British, a representation which has, notoriously, served the imperial project.²⁰ Yet, as other contributors consider, this relation is itself an object in the plays – only most explicitly in Innogen's conceit of the 'world's volume' in which 'Our Britain seems as of it but not in't' (*Cymbeline*, 3.4.137–8), a conceit that, as Richard Wilson and others have recently commented, points to the imbrication of the 'local' and the 'global' in the material environment of the print culture which produced the books of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.²¹ If contributors here point to the hold exercised by various more local categories, whether of city, gender, or estate, over the categories of the national as well as the global, the relation of the national, whether English or British, to the global was in addition, as they show, complicated by the historical rupture that was the

¹⁷ Conrad Russell, *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), 251.

¹⁸ David Starkey, 'Hooray, England doesn't exist', *News Review*, 5, *The Sunday Times*, April 26, 1998.

¹⁹ Tom Nairn *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism*, 3rd rev. ed. (Altona Vic: Common Ground, 2003), xx.

²⁰ This is, in effect, announced by the first and founding instance in Ben Jonson's prefatory poem to the First Folio which declaims: 'Triumph my *Britaine* thou hast one to showe / To whom all scenes of *Europe* homage owe. / He was not of an age but for all time'. As Britain and England are not yet the interchangeable terms they will become (see below), 'Britaine' is a politically charged choice by Jonson.

²¹ Richard Meek, Jane Rickard, and Richard Wilson (eds), *Shakespeare's Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 8–9.