



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

PROBLEMATIZING THE STUDY OF ENGLISH  
NATIONALISM: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

by  
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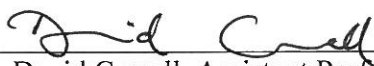
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Amani Abdel El Malek Abou Harb for Master of Arts  
Major: English Literature

Title: Problematizing the study of English nationalism: A linguistic perspective

This project is informed by postmodern theories of nationalism and is a direct response to the scholarly investment with English nationalism. Rather than presupposing the existence of English nationalism and attempting to identify its rise, this project is concerned with problematizing the existent scholarly approaches to the topic.

The main argument of this work is that any engagement with nationalism is troubled by methodological problems and critical failures that chiefly involve the marginalization or exclusion of individuals who do not adhere to the characteristics of national identity. To illustrate and support this claim, this thesis studies English identity as it is informed through English linguistic practices within England, the British isles, and the British empire over time. This identity is shown to be a factor of social and political upheavals that continuously redefine what it means to be English.

This thesis does not provide a eureka moment during which an example of unqualified national cohesion through the nation's identification with the English language is uncovered. Rather, this project demonstrates that the marginalization and racialization of individuals who do not speak "proper" English occurred both internally within England and externally within the British isles. People who did not conform with preassigned linguistic determinants for Englishness were written off as unrepresentative of the English nation. To speak of nationalistic movements without recognizing how these movements defined their subjects is an epistemic failure that this thesis attempts to address.

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To my mother, Iman, for advocating my education and offering her unconditional love and support.

To my father for his protection.

To my brother, Ali Mansour, for challenging me and loving me like no other.

To my sister, Farah Abou Harb, for tolerating me.

To my brother, Mohammad Abou Harb, whose nagging kept me going.

To my second mother, Foutouh Chehimi, for her laughter and hugs.

To my love, Mohammed Audah, for his kindness. And to our happy future.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

We cannot escape language; it is woven into the fabric of culture; it informs and is informed by every aspect of human culture. Constructions of collective identity are formulated through language, and language identity itself often becomes a key element of these formulations. This project explores the politics behind linguistic identity in England, Britain, and the British empire. As the title indicates, this study places the categories of English nationalism and the English language together, with the aim of demonstrating how an examination of key junctures in the history of England's linguistic policies, and of key literary texts reflecting those junctures, can challenge reductive narratives of English nationalism and encourage the reassessment of scholarly approaches to nationalism in general.

My exploration of English linguistic policies uncovers a world in which speakers of English within England were systematically classified, racialized, and oftentimes dehumanized on account of their distinctive speech patterns. Moreover, this project examines English national and linguistic identity not only within England but within what it posits as the essential wider context of the British Isles. I place special attention on Ireland due to the presence of English settlers who have assimilated into Irish culture in that country. England's obsession with defining the identity of English settlers in Ireland provides a fruitful medium through which to explore official (government-informed) constructions of English identity. By juxtaposing my study of English linguistic policies in Ireland against linguistic policies inside England, I draw out similarities that shed light upon the exclusions that the production of identity constructs depend

upon. Additionally, my examination of Ireland serves as a case study that helps identify the pattern for how language policy was framed and used during the subsequent imperial period.

This study problematizes typical approaches and debates around English nationalism by examining the development of the discourse surrounding the usage of the English language and the ways in which the establishment of the British empire was a leading cause in the reevaluation of English linguistic communities. I study the reevaluation and the qualified incorporation of English speakers into the imagined English, and later British, “nation” to call attention to the fluidity of identity constructs and to the politics that informs linguistic identity. This project is not concerned with identifying a special, “correct” date at which a phenomenon called “English nationalism” definitively crystallized; rather, I argue that the various nationalistic currents throughout a long duration of English history - from Bede into the modern era - rely upon constructions of nationhood that are necessarily exclusive by nature. By shedding light upon the exclusions and inclusions that linguistic identity engages in, I hope to provide a case study of how the discourse on nationalism can, and should, be critiqued. This case study, of works by Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare, demonstrates how the close reading of literary texts can provide a distinctive and illuminating source of evidence bearing on wide historical currents and specific historical moments - in this case, the impending succession of King James VI of Scotland to the throne of England, which placed the question of a British union at the forefront of English politics and directly affected the representation of English identity

English nationalism is especially controversial. Almost every period has been heralded as the birth date of English nationalism. Scholars including Patrick Wormald and Adrian Hastings have located it as far back as the eighth century in Bede’s ecclesiastical writings; others, such as Hans Kohn have identified it in the seventeenth century. Key contributions from academics of

the early modern age are invested in exploring the role of the Reformation in forging a sense of nationhood and statehood in England as a result of Henry VIII's break from Rome. This field, as its diverse scholarly approaches suggest, has thus far been multifaceted. This project is a direct response to this scholarly investment with English nationalism; however, it does not presuppose the existence of English nationalism, but rather contests the scholarly concept of nationalism from the outset. Indeed, this project will argue that scholarly approaches to nationalism have thus far been characterized by the unintentional reproduction of the marginalization and exclusion of individuals who do not adhere to the characteristics of national identity. To illustrate this claim, I will study English identity as it is informed through English linguistic practices within England, the British isles, and the British empire over time. My approach does not uncover a moment of unqualified national cohesion through the nation's identification with the English language and its rejection of and discrimination against the linguistic practices of other nations (within the British isles and the British empire later on); instead, it unravels a world in which individuals who do not speak "proper" English, and who therefore do not conform with the preassigned linguistic determinant for Englishness, are marginalized and racialized.

Since this project will draw heavily upon English and British historiography in addition to literary texts, it will develop in conversation with the "British problem" as informed by J. G. A. Pocock's "British History: A Plea for a New Subject", published in 1975 and written in response to his belief that British historiography had so far been Anglocentric. Pocock's main argument was that British history was understood either as English history writ large, or as the history of how England came to dominate and colonize the British isles (the "internal colonialism" approach). Pocock's plea for the new subject of "British history" is one that rejects both the internal colonialism approach and the Anglocentric approach in favor of a more plural

understanding of history. British history, he argues, is replete with more than two kingdoms/nations meeting so as to “modify one another’s existence”. Pocock’s essay remains extremely influential; its palpable effect was the establishment of the field of “British studies”.

Pocock’s claim that the histories of the various nations of the British isles inform one another bears upon any examination of the historical development of English national identity: If the histories of England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland cannot be studied separately, then the history of the rise (or lack) of English national identity needs to take England’s relationship with its neighbors into account. This is especially true within the context of national identity precisely because national identity is generally a fluid construct that exists through a nation’s relationship of difference with a perceived Other. However, if English national identity is simply understood through that country’s (often hegemonic) relationship with its surrounding kingdoms, then such a gesture takes English homogeneity for granted and this historically runs against the grain of English political and social structures that have heavily stratified the nation along class lines. An engagement with the question of English national identity is met with a number of challenges: What exactly does the word “nation” in “national identity” refer to? In practice, does this exclusively denote the political elite? Can it refer to the entirety of a monarch’s subjects? Is there a way of reimagining national identity which could cut across social divides?

### **A. Justification of the Problem**

There are various scholarly approaches to English national identity in current critical discourse. The problem with identifying and limiting the rise of English nationalism to a certain time is that it overlooks how different periods inform one another. For instance, to argue that the English invented nationalism in the sixteenth century, as Liah Greenfeld does, is to rely too

heavily upon the Reformation and, more importantly, to ignore the consequences of the Reformation in driving a wedge between staunch Catholic observers and the converted Protestants. Furthermore, when scholars become invested in the notion of “nationalism” in the abstract, they start searching for it and identifying it where it does not necessarily exist: to speak of English nationalism under the guise of Protestantism, for example, is to speak more properly of a national religion-based identity that is contingent upon the systematic exclusion of nonconformists. The problem of nationalism’s inclusion and exclusion of certain types of people within the nation proper (based on class, gender, religion...etc.) is one that any examination of nationalism cannot escape: a project that acknowledges this from the outset is less predisposed to overlook instances of internal discrimination in order to identify a seemingly nonexclusive national-identity formulation.

## **B. Framework**

This proposed project assumes the study of “nationalism” to be a contentious and a potentially deficient concept from the start. It suggests that English nationalism cannot be identified in any period without marginalizing individuals who do not adhere to the type of national identity that nationalism trumpets. This project attempts to avoid such critical failures by asserting from the outset that it does not seek to define the characteristics of an English nation nor identify the beginning of English nationalism. Instead, it limits its scope to the examination of the evolution of English linguistic identity in particular. In so doing, this project will not only trace how the English language came to inform British imperial identity, but will also attempt to illustrate how the discourse surrounding the use of the English language—as indicative of one’s allegiance to the throne of England—markedly changed over time: this will serve to illustrate how no single approach to national identity can ever be stable and, by extension, leaves room for

the project to be reflexively aware of its limitations. Furthermore, this project takes national identity to be a fluid construct that is based upon alterity and difference; for this reason, it cannot but acknowledge the British problem. The British problem is particularly relevant to such a study due to England's hegemonic relationship with its neighbors — a relationship that generates a Self/Other identity rhetoric that entails an examination of Englishness contra Irishness or Scottishness. More importantly, by studying English identity through the lens of linguistic practices across the British isles and through the subsequent spread of the English language across the British empire, parallels can be drawn about the nature of both practices that will call attention to the similarities between both that are often ignored in the literary discourse. In so doing, however, this project does not suggest that English linguistic imperialism (as studied through the lens of the spread of English as a linguistic practice) is identifiable with English national identity, but rather argues that the same type of “linguistic imperialism” occurs within England and is identifiable in the attempts at normalizing and regulating speech patterns and eliminating dialectical variations that indicate class hierarchy. This project ultimately does not attempt to identify English nationalism through the lens of English linguistic identity, but rather seeks to disrupt and unsettle any notion of English national cohesion.

In chapter one, I provide a survey of the political theories of nationalism that will inform my assessment and categorization of various approaches to national identity and nationalistic fervor in later chapters. Next, I provide an overview and an assessment of the scholarly debate on English nationalism. In chapter three, I begin formulating the basic outline of this project's approach to English nationalism by examining English linguistic policies in Ireland and England and identifying similarities between them. In both situations, the allusion to people's linguistic practices is made to justify the implementation of policies that oppress and criminalize them. I

raise this point to complicate the scholarly engagement with nationalism by calling attention to the fact that identity politics informs language policies and that these policies fluctuate over time. In the final chapter, I examine literary texts from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a formative period in England due to the imminent ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the throne, and I identify the different ways in which Edmund Spenser's *A View of the State of Ireland* and William Shakespeare's *Henry V* construe language difference. Though the authors approach the question of English identity differently, they both ground their constructions in relationships of difference with other countries of the British isles—Ireland in particular. I argue that Spenser provides a dichotomous view of identity, whereas Shakespeare begins to formulate a fluid, and therefore subversive, theory. Spenser and Shakespeare's different views call attention to the fact that the British problem creates the need to reassess English identity and that this pressure was felt as far back as the sixteenth century. In the final section, I recapitulate the main arguments of my thesis and argue that the British imperial project played a role in redefining English linguistic identity. I suggest that this redefinition remains classist and exclusionary in nature, and reassert the need to question the methodological approaches to the study of nationalism.



## CHAPTER II

### POLITICAL THEORIES OF NATIONALISM

While the academic study of nationalism began in the twentieth century, the emergence of nationalism as an ideology is often dated to the end of the eighteenth century (Smith 1). A proper assessment of critical approaches to English nationalism should necessarily reflect an understanding of political theories of nationalism. For this reason, this chapter provides a brief survey of its theories. This chapter introduces the main paradigmatic shift in the scholarly study of nationalism and is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the viewpoint of the earliest school of thought, primordialism, that asserts the prehistoric nature of nationalism. The second section is concerned with the development of the classical modernist approach in response to primordialism. Classical modernism rejects the essentialist claims of its predecessors and suggests that the rise of nationalism is a modern phenomenon that could not have pre-modern manifestations. The final section presents the current post-modern contributions to the field. This approach rejects the basic assumptions of earlier models and has been informed by various fields including gender studies and postcolonial theory.

#### **A. Primordialism**

Primordialists consider nationality to be part of human nature and argue that nations have always existed (Özkirimli 49). Primordialists do not all share the same beliefs, but there are basic trends that allow us to identify at least four different schools of thought within primordialism: nationalists argue that nationality is an essential trait of humanity; sociobiologists argue that the existence of human groups, despite their social constructedness, has an objective basis; culturalists argue that the sense of belonging to a nation has cultural foundations (common

languages, religion, social practices) that members of the nation consider primordial; and perennialists argue that nations have existed since the dawn of history.

## **B. Classical Modernism**

Classical modernist approaches to nationalism emerged between 1960 and 1980 as a response to scholarly assertions about the nature of nations. Classical modernists rejected earlier assumptions about the organic nature of nations such as those presented by primordialists (Smith 5). In the wake of World War I, the study of nationalism intensified due to its perceived ability to successfully mobilize people to fight for a cause under the unifying ties of citizenship.

Nationalism, as a result, became a subject of serious scholarly inquiry. Historians such as Hans Kohn, Carleton J.H. Hayes, Louis Snyder, Alfred Cobban and E. H. Carr considered it an ideology that needed to be explained and whose origins needed to be dated. For these scholars, nationalism was no longer, as it had been in the nineteenth century, an idea that called for defense or criticism. Nevertheless, these scholars treated nationalism “as an ethical issue and the nation as an ambivalent means to nobler ends. The result was frequently to blur moral judgment with historical analysis” (Smith 16).

With the 1960s, the classical modernist approach, with its rejection of primordialism, was beginning to emerge in full force. Scholars who fall under the umbrella term of “modernism” generally assert that nations and nationalism have specific and comparatively recent origins. For these theorists, nationalism could not have emerged in pre-modern times. Modern conditions such as capitalism, secularism, industrialization and urbanization are not only conducive to, but also integral to the birth and maintenance of nationalism. It follows for them that nationalism is not only the outcome of modern processes, but that it is also essential to the maintenance of the modern state. Apart from their belief in the modernity of nations, modernists do not hold many

beliefs in common. Özkirimli provides a helpful categorization of modernists according to the key factors (economic, political, and social/cultural) that they identify in their analysis.

### **1. *Economic Transformations: Nairn and Hechter***

In *The Break-up of Britain*, Nairn approaches nationalism by studying uneven economic transformations. Nairn stresses the relevance of the uneven economic development of the world to the rise of nationalisms. After 1800, the world was divided into Western capitalist centers or “cores” and peripheries outside. Core countries sought to cheaply and effectively expand their markets by using up the periphery’s raw materials and their cheap labor markets. Nationalism arose as a result of this uneven encounter between the Western capitalist bourgeoisie and the exploited subjects of the periphery (85). The elites in the periphery attempt to foster nationalism in the hope that they could mobilize the masses against the core. To do so, they emphasized their distinctiveness and venerate their own culture and language (89; 105). Nairn’s nationalism is not merely anti-imperialism in disguise: he argues that successful nationalist movements in the periphery also generate nationalist movements in the core.

Michael Hechter introduced his concept of “internal colonialism” that in *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*. Hechter’s main assumption is that even within a single state uneven waves of modernization occur. As a result, unevenly developed communities emerge within a single country; this creates an internal core/periphery dynamic. As his book title suggests, Hechter studies this core/periphery dynamic within the Celtic fringe and argues that an uneven economic development always favored England (129). England’s economic advantages were coupled with political ascendancy that allowed it to institutionalize its role within the Celtic fringe, notably after the 1707 union. According to Hechter, uneven development leads to the emergence of (a contingent) group

solidarity within the periphery that requires a strong communication system to be maintained (42).

## **2. Political Transformation: Breuilly, Brass, and Hobsbawm**

The second line of thought within the modernist approach focuses on political transformations. The three most cited scholars in this field are John Breuilly, Paul R. Brass and Eric J. Hobsbawm. In *Nationalism and the State* (1982), John Breuilly asserts that nationalism is a form of politics and is therefore essentially about power. Breuilly introduces a typology of nationalist movements (Özirimli 84). He begins by defining nationalism as “political movements seeking or exercising state power”; these movements are justified by political doctrines that emphasize the significance of the nation as a unit (Breuilly qtd. in Özirimli 84). Breuilly faults any approach that ignores nationalism’s political nature by focusing solely on economics and culture.

Instrumentalism, as espoused by Paul Brass, argues that ethnicity and nationality are instrumental tools wielded by competing elites who wish to generate mass support to bolster their ever-growing fortunes and power. By emphasizing the political nature of ethnicity and nationality, instrumentalists argue that both are socially constructed to meet the ever-changing demands of the elites. Brass’s theory is based on a number of assumptions: that both the rise and transformation of ethnic identities into a fully fledged nationalism are not assured; ethnic conflicts, while seemingly based upon cultural differences, are rather the result of (elite) political and economic struggles; the competition between elite groups will affect how ethnic groups are defined and how long they will persevere; finally, this process is reversible: nationalism can be undone and ethnicities can be redefined out of existence (Özirimli 88-90).

The Marxist historian Eric J. Hobsbawm also studied the role of political transformations to nationalism. In *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm asserts that nations and nationalism are socially “engineered”. He suggests that the invention of tradition takes place through enacting a series of symbolic rituals to inculcate “values and norms of behavior” (1). Hobsbawm differentiates between traditions that are merely altered to adapt to new situations and traditions that are invented deliberately for new purposes in times of rapid change. For a country not to fall into chaos with the onset of unprecedented change and progress, new traditions have to be invented to secure national unity. The period between 1870 and 1914 was the most generative of invented traditions. During this period, mass politics emerged as suffrage bills granted an immense number of previously disenfranchised people a degree of political agency. This posed a problem for governments and rulers who wished to ensure the obedience and cooperation of their citizens. To solve this problem, those in power resorted to inventing tradition. The process contains three overlapping types:

- a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status, or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior. (9)

Understood through this framework, nationalism is not simply a reflection of group attachment to a preexisting nation. It is rather a process that constructs/invents and consolidates the nation as a cohesive unit.

### ***3. Social and Cultural Transformations: Gellner and Anderson***

Modernists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson emphasize the role of social and cultural transformations in the understanding of nationalism, and Anderson’s *Imagined*

*Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* remains a particularly influential text in the field. According to Anderson, the study of nationalism is not sufficient if it merely identifies the factors that led to the growth of nation; it should also explain why such constructs have been successful in eliciting powerful human emotions (emotions that have led people to sacrifice their lives in the name of the “nation”). Anderson asserts that nationality and nationalism are cultural artifacts. He writes, “I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (5-6). Anderson adds, “The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them...has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (7).

Despite nationalism’s political nature, Anderson argues that it cannot be understood through a political lens; it should rather be analyzed through the historical cultural systems that provided fertile ground for its inception. The two cultural systems that Anderson examines are the religious community and the dynastic realm (12). His basic argument is that the modern nation was born as a result of cultural transformations: there was a new understanding of the concept of time (through a secular lens) and a decline of religious and dynastic communities. The most important feature in the consolidation of the modern nation is “print capitalism”: the wide scale availability of books and newspapers in particular allowed people to think of themselves as a community in ways that were previously not possible. Anderson’s final point strongly pertains to this study since he argues that print-capitalism creates languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were ‘closer’ to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the

emerging print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form. (45)

### **C. Criticism of Classical Modernism and Post-modern Approaches**

Critics have identified four main problems with the modernist approach. First, critics argue that the date of emergence of nationalism that modernists suggest is misleading in that modernists begin by defining an ideal form of the nation (one that is derived from eighteenth and nineteenth century Western thought) and then attempt to locate this novel construct in premodern times. Second, modernists are criticized for overemphasizing the role of political transformation (revolutions in particular) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at the expense of other cultural and social transformations. Third, critics argue that “instrumentalist theories exaggerate the role of the elites in shaping national identities” (Özkirimli 129); in addition, instrumentalist theories that overemphasize the role of the elite do not offer any satisfactory explanation as to why elite choose national and ethnic differences as tools for mobilization as opposed to others. Fourth, theories of political transformation are generally considered incapable of properly explaining the passions that nationalism generates (Özkirimli 126-130). Modernist theories that emphasize the role of social and cultural transformation have been faulted for not fitting historical facts (the effects of industrialization have been felt differently across countries). Social and cultural transformations alone are considered insufficient and incapable of explaining the passions that nationalism generates in people. Finally, the social and cultural transformations that modernists emphasize are considered reductive in that they operate under the simplistic pretense of social homogeneity.

Before delving into the most recent contributions to the field of nationalist studies, the ethnosymbolist approach requires a brief sketch, since it transpired as a result of a group of

scholars' dissatisfaction with modernist theories. Anthony Smith, a leading ethnosymbolist, provides the following working definition of nationalism: "An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute a nation" (*Key Concepts* 9). In his description of ethnosymbolism, Smith explains that the paradigm problematizes the exclusively elite-oriented analysis of modernism; in addition, it is concerned with "long term analysis - that is, with the analysis of social and cultural patterns over *la longue duree*" (58). The role of this long term analysis is to avoid the anachronism of "retrospective nationalism" by understanding the relationship between the past, the present and the future and the role of ethnies in history (58).<sup>1</sup> In so doing, ethnosymbolism places its study of the rise of nations within a broad historical framework of cultural identity. Ethnosymbolists therefore contextualize their analysis of nations within earlier forms of ethnicity. Smith asserts that the ethnosymbolist paradigm allows scholars to better understand the passion and emotional attachment that nationalism has elicited, because it relates national identities to previous ethnic ties and illuminates the influential role of symbols, myths and memories on people (59).

Despite Smith's assertions that ethnosymbolism clears up the problems that modernism left unsolved, the paradigm has been met with various criticisms. Ethnosymbolists give nationalism a wide definitional scope by interchanging "ethnicity", "ethnic group" and "nation", making it easier to locate nationalistic movements in any time period. Critics have also argued that ethnosymbolists downplay the differences between modern nations and the historical ethnic communities from which they emerged (Özirimli 157-164).

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<sup>1</sup> Smith defines ethnies as ethnic groups that historically constituted the rise of nations.



The 1980s brought with it a paradigm shift in the study of nationalism. New approaches began rejecting the tenets of modernism and widening the scope of the debate. Scholars of this new trend “question the fundamental assumptions of their predecessors, and seek to go beyond the classical debate” (Özkirimli 169). These new approaches have emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of nationalism and has therefore received contributions from fields such as “critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, rhetorical theory, post-colonialism and post-modernism” (170). The new approaches fault the elitism of mainstream theories, viz. their emphasis on the role of elites in triggering nationalist movements, and push for a more balanced analysis that brings both macro and micro-level analyses together. The most substantive (and most pertinent to this study) difference is the new approach’s argument that the classical debate “has become unnecessarily polarized around certain issues, such as dating the origins of nations, at the expense of others, and criticize the gender-blind, Eurocentric character of the mainstream literature” in addition to their rejection of “grand narratives” and “meta-theories” that purport to explain “nationalism in general” (170). Özkirimli suggests that the writings of Michael Billig, Nira Yuval-Davis, Partha Chatterjee, Craig Calhoun and Rogers Brubaker are representative of this new trend in the study of nationalism. This final section briefly presents some of these approaches.

Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* (1995) explores a previously ignored problem: the reproduction and maintenance of nations and nationalisms. Billig argues that genesis is not the main problem of nationalism — its reproduction is. His approach stems from a critique of the simplistic notion that runs through orthodox theorizations of nationalism: that nationalism is located in peripheral countries, and it is associated with “extreme right-wing politics” or with people struggling to “create new states” (5). The West, according to this rhetoric, is

problematically believed to exhibit nationalistic zeal only in times of crisis. However, the signs of nationalism that surface in difficult times need to have already been supported by “existing ideological foundations” (5). Billig argues that the study of nationalism needs to identify the gear that keeps nationalism running in the background:

... crises do not create nation-states as nation-states...Daily, they are reproduced as nations and their citizenry as nationals. And these nations are reproduced within a wider world of nations. For such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesize that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times. (6)

This is a succinct summary of Billig’s theory of banal nationalism. He is more interested in identifying the underlying ideological mechanisms that reproduce the nation as a nation on a daily basis, rather than in providing a Eurocentric reading of nationalism that identifies the movement in times of revolution.

Nira Yuval-Davis approaches her critique of mainstream theories in a feminist spirit by questioning their gender blindness. In *Gender & Nation*, Yuval-Davis argues that the mainstream debate on nationalism, as well as on the maintenance of nations, has ignored the role of women. She explains that scholars have based their investigations of nations and nationalism on the classical theory of the ‘social contract’ that divides the civil sphere into public and private circles. The private sphere, which contains women, has been largely considered politically irrelevant (2). Yuval-Davis criticizes the “hegemonic theorizations about nations” for considering ignoring gender relations as irrelevant (1). Her writing promotes an analytical understanding of the gendered nature of nations and nationalism by identifying the ways in

which women participate in the nationalist project. Women, she argues, are not only responsible for the biological reproduction of nations, but are also responsible for the reproduction of a nation's cultural values and notions of citizenship, unity and difference. Their absence from the visible sphere of politics does not justify their absence from the critical discourse (2-3). Yuval-Davis provides a powerful criticism of the ways in which the nationalist project, as well as its scholarly examination, ultimately excludes various social groups. While her feminist critique emphasizes gender-blindness, there are different types of exclusions that occur within the nationalist project and that tend to be reproduced within the scholarly debate.

Partha Chatterjee adopts a post-colonial approach in his study of nationalism. Chatterjee begins his analysis by pointing to the failure of bourgeois-rationalist and Marxist discussions of nationalism to differentiate between nation-building in Europe and nation-building in the post-colonial world. These theories, Chatterjee argues, take the European model for granted and do not leave room for the possibility that nationalism may constitute its own autonomous discourse in the non-European world.

Craig Calhoun has contributed to the new discourse on nationalism by criticizing the mainstream debate for its tendency to reify nations. He defines nationalism as a “discursive formation” or “a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness” (qtd. in Özkirimli 187). According to Calhoun, a nation cannot be objectively defined. It has non-definitive features such as boundaries, sovereignty, and racial characteristics that are only brought to light through discursive claims about them. This explains why nations are modern constructions. While the term “nation” is historical, it was understood to signify people who are linked by place of birth and by their culture. It was in the modern era that the term acquired a new political dimension that transformed earlier existing cultural patterns. Nationalism as a discursive formation

consolidated the notion that nations are only legitimate political communities when they exhibit a high degree of ethnic similarity. Consequently, nationalism created nations, and the opposite cannot be true.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the development of the study of nationalism. The earliest scholarly engagements with nationalism essentialized the nation and suggested that it is a construct that has always existed. In the 1960s, classical modernist approaches problematized their predecessor's assumptions and argued instead that nationalism arises in modern nation-states due to political, social, economic and cultural transformations. They concluded that the emergence of nationalism is contingent upon modern constructions of the nation-state and that it is anachronistic to discuss nationalism in premodern times. A new trend emerged in the 1980s and continues today: it questions the main tenets of the classical modernist approach and adopts postmodern reevaluations (that are informed by postcolonial theory and gender studies, among others) of the classical modernist approach. This project is written in light of these new developments in the field: it attempts to problematize the debate on English nationalism by shedding light upon the exclusions that are ignored, and often times reinforced, by the discourse.

# CHAPTER III

## A REVIEW OF CURRENT APPROACHES TO ENGLISH NATIONALISM

The literature surrounding English nationalism is massive both in size and scope. The previous chapter has demonstrated how political theorists do not agree on the origin and nature of nationalism. These disagreements are palpable in the discourse around English nationalism. The English case is particularly problematic: some scholars even contend that England never went through an age of nationalism as other European countries have done due to various reasons that will be touched upon below. In this chapter, I will provide a brief survey and a critical assessment of the most prominent theories that have been put forward to explain and identify the rise of English nationalism. The theories addressed in this chapter are divided across periods starting with those that discuss medieval English nationalism and ending with modernist readings that locate English nationalism in the nineteenth century.

### **A. Medieval English Nationalism**

There exists a strand in the literature on English nationalism that identifies the rise of English nationalism during the middle ages. Patrick Wormald, for instance, finds traces of an English spirit even before the 1066 Norman invasion. The Norman invasion replaced the English ruling class with French speaking Normans; nevertheless, the conquerers started to adopt English traits - a testimony to the fact that a persistent “English identity” had “impose[d] its personality on its conquerers” (“The Making of England” 28). Wormald writes:

The persistence of a specifically *English* identity has more than merely totemic significance. After all, the political assumptions involved could not have been maintained

by the old ruling-class alone. That ruling-class was the conquest's most spectacular casualty. Like the language which was the other great survivor of the 1066 trauma, it *must* have become widespread in society at large, or there would have been nobody to uphold its existence. (28 [author's emphasis])

In the above excerpt, Wormald draws upon the survival of "the language" after the Norman invasion as further evidence of a widespread English identity that permeated every level of society and was therefore capable of surviving the replacement of the English ruling class with a Norman one. The suggestion that the language existing before the Norman invasion, namely Old English, survived after the invasion requires some qualification. Even though England did not transform into a French speaking country after the Norman invasion, Old English was greatly influenced and affected by the Norman invasion and did not simply suffer through it, only to rise again. Languages are known to rapidly evolve when in contact with new languages. Though French linguistic influence was strongest in elite and political circles as evidenced by the genre of words borrowed into English (most belong to court and politics), Susan Irvine identifies the Norman Invasion as a watershed in the development of the English language and suggests that the event "precipitated developments in the language which would steer it ultimately towards what we now know as Middle English" (34). Old English vocabulary was enriched and expanded with the addition of thousands of borrowed French words. For three hundred years following the Conquest, the official language at the king's court was French; French was the first language of all the kings of England; literature in French, greatly influenced by French culture, was patronized (Graddol et. al 66). Official documents were written in Latin and increasingly in French, when previously Anglo-Saxon had been used. It must be noted that the transformation of Old English to Middle English was not solely influenced by the Norman invasion, as Mathew

Townend explains, but rather by its interaction with Latin, Norse and French. Townend calls attention to the difference between sketching the linguistic history of English and the linguistic history of England and suggests that one cannot be understood without reference to the other. Commenting on the linguistic diversity of medieval England, he writes, “One cannot look at English in isolation; for much of its history the English language in England has been in a state of coexistence, or competition, or even conflict with one or more other languages, and it is these tensions and connections which have shaped the language quite as much as any factors internal to English itself” (61). This provides some insight into the complexities of the development of the English language and of establishing a relationship between its persistence following the Norman invasion and the preexistence of an English identity.

The two hundred to three hundred years after the Norman invasion are acknowledged to constitute shaky ground on which to construct a discourse about the formation of an English national identity due to the existence of a great rift between the governing classes and the people that was formally manifested by the fact that the governing classes and the people did not speak the same language. However, the vast extent of political and social transformation through the fourteenth century has led to the creation of a rather large discourse surrounding the formation of national identity in that period. The arguments raised in favor of this view pertain to language, politics and religion. By the fourteenth century, French was still used at the English court; however, the king and the courtiers were bilingual. At the level of education, English replaced French as the language of instruction while the status of Latin as a medium for scholarly discourse remained unchanged. The juridical sphere was anglicized as well. In 1362, the Statute of Pleading decreed that all lawsuits should be in English. In addition, the English common law began to regain its legitimacy (Graddol et. al 70-1). The church stopped importing foreign

bishops; the longbow was regarded as a tool of nation-building due to its role in the English victories in Crécy (1346) and Agincourt (1415); and the production of English literature had begun (Kumar 54-5).

These transformations have led Wormald to suggest that by the fourteenth century, England had a fully developed national consciousness. He considers Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731 C.E.) a key text that identified the English as a single people and was a precursor to notions of Englishness. He suggests that Bede's ecclesiastical tract established the foundation for defining English nationalism and identifying the English as a single nation. At first glance, this suggestion seems unproblematic: In the wake of the Norman invasion, the English must have felt a strong sense of solidarity that was manifested in nationalist rhetoric and an emphasis on English identity. Krishan Kumar, an opponent of this view, argues that this argument is not factually sound in that it implies that two nations (Norman and Saxon) existed in stark opposition to one another. Kumar argues instead that what developed in response to the Norman invasion was not an English identity, but an Anglo-Norman one (48-52). To a certain extent, this was true. The most fruitful way to approach this subject is to study Anglo-Norman identity with the reclamation of the dukedom of Normandy by King Philip II of France in 1206 as the main backdrop.

The events that transpired after the loss of Normandy, namely the struggle between Philip II of France, Henry II of England and their heirs, has been called the "first" Hundred Years War (Gibson 7). The 1214 French victory at Bovines stripped the Plantagenets of all their ancestral possessions in France except for Aquitaine, a stretch of land located on the southwest coast; however, their claim to Aquitaine was contingent upon the English king's vow of liege homage to the king of France. When Edward I, Henry III's son, came to power, the tension with



France was rapidly escalating. Gibson takes Edward I's 1295 denunciation of the French in his summons of the bishops to Parliament as an indication of "how far nationalism had advanced" in this period (9). Especially striking, he argues, was Edward I's defense of the English language and his claim that the French were seeking to stamp out the English tongue. Gibson argues that this defense of the English language is a clear indication of a "connection between nationalistic aspirations and pride in a common language" (9). The weakness in this interpretation, and by extension in the previous ones as well, is that it associates the resistance against France with a burgeoning sense of English nationalism. Wormald takes his argument even further with his suggestion that the Normans' assimilation into England is an affirmation of a previously existing English identity. This suggestion disregards the mounting tension between England and France. Having lost most of their French possessions, and with a weakened hold on Aquitaine,<sup>2</sup> the Anglo-Normans sensed that their grip on the English throne was being threatened. The best political move in this situation was to emphasize their "Englishness" rather than risk losing both parts of their hyphenated identity and, by extension, their claim to the throne. In analyzing the linguistic milieu of Anglo-Norman England, it is important not to overlook these political and economic factors that arguably outweigh in significance the ideological associations that scholars have projected onto language subjects of tumultuous centuries.

## **B. Sixteenth Century English Nationalism**

The sixteenth century has also been hailed as the period in which English nationalism definitively came to life. Liah Greenfeld, one of the most frequently cited scholars in the field, argues this position in *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*. Greenfeld argues

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<sup>2</sup> Aquitaine was extremely valuable to England due to its annual wine revenue and would later be one of the main factors of the Hundred Years War.

that the sixteenth century witnessed an unusual degree of social mobility that resulted in the “further incorporation of the middle classes, the commoners, into the body politic” (46). Public education and the rise of printing made this political participation possible. She takes this line of thought even further and suggests that the importance of public opinion was clearly manifested in Henry VIII’s desire to “defend his private life before the citizens at Bridewell” (46).<sup>3</sup> In her analysis, the printing press functioned as the primary force behind the growing number of people who were becoming increasingly interested in the affairs of the state. Greenfeld summarizes her argument thus:

The extension of the politically interested stratum may be interpreted as the elevation of the commoners to the position of an elite, or as the approximation of the periphery to the center. The change was a change in the form of English society, and it was accompanied by a change of name. The name of ‘the English nation’ was more and more frequently substituted for other words, such as ‘realm,’ ‘country,’ ‘commonwealth.’ (47)

In the excerpt above, Greenfeld relies heavily upon the high degree of political and social mobility in sixteenth century England. Sixteenth century England remained highly stratified; though there was greater room for social mobility, that does not imply the emergence of a “state” in that period.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it does not follow that this unprecedented degree of social and political

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<sup>3</sup> Henry VIII was keen on divorcing his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, in spite of the Pope’s rejection to annul the marriage. This led the English King to officially sever ties with the Roman Catholic Church and declare himself head of the English church, thereby granting himself supremacy over religious matters in England.

<sup>4</sup> In defining the emergence of the “state”, Greenfeld writes: “To be governed as a state meant to be self-governed, or, as an approximation to this condition, to be governed by representatives of people’s sovereignty. A state form of government, by definition, was impersonal, based on popular mandate, rather than on the authority of individuals” (81).

transformations led to the refiguration of the social imagining which was manifested in a shift away from a monarch-centered patriotism to a nation-centered one, as Greenfeld's reading suggests. The political and social history of Tudor England is complex, and while the transformations that Greenfeld identifies were set in motion at the time, they were nonetheless far from completion that the label "nationalistic" does not appear warranted. In Tudor England, in an attempt to strengthen their power, noblemen sought proximity to the king. The king, feared for his unpredictability, played the leading role in social and political circles; later, with his break from Rome and with the dissolution of the monasteries, his influence extended over the church and its institutions as well. At the level of the aristocracy, whether a person supported the king or not, he had to identify as the king's subject and structure his social, political and religious behavior accordingly; failure to do so led to dire consequences. In the early sixteenth century, the less fortunate section of society was still recovering from the effects of the War of the Roses and the Black Death, both of which significantly reduced the population. The policies of land enclosure and farm engrossment exacerbated the living conditions of a large portion of the working class, many of whom became homeless and were forced to migrate to London in search of work. The sixteenth century seems too early for a sense of class-blind affiliation to nationhood free from ties to the royal court or the local village to have emerged. This idea has been thoroughly critiqued by Krishan Kumar, who argues that Greenfeld confounds patriotism with nationalism. Kumar writes, "Patriotism, loyalty and dedication to the *patrie*...meant loyalty and dedication to the monarch as the embodiment of the *patrie*...until this equation was broken...there could be patriotism but not nationalism" (101).

In addition to the above mentioned reasons, Greenfeld adds Protestantism to the factors that reinforced nationalism in sixteenth century England. Protestantism achieved this integral

link with nationalist sentiments by “further spreading education along the masses, and thus further reducing the separateness of the various strata and contributing to the formation of a sense of membership in society as a whole” (47). Greenfeld further explains that the existence of the nation at that period in time was not “self-evident” and that religion was used to justify it. English religious history played an important role in this attempt at justifying the nation:

The English were viewed as a chosen people, England’s prosperity was attributed to God’s favor...God’s favor was guaranteed to this entity, the English nation, if it fulfilled its mission to the world. The mission was to be carried out by living up to the standards of the true Christianity, but this allowed many interpretations and was commonly interpreted as the establishment of a society based on individual liberty. (48)

The above quotation not only affirms the role of religion in solidifying and justifying the notion of the English nation, but also adds the curious suggestion that notions of “true Christianity” at the time went hand in hand with assertions of “individual liberty”. However, “true Christianity” and “individual liberty” were more contested and malleable concepts throughout this period than Greenfeld’s formulation recognizes.

Next, Greenfeld argues that even this religious idiom was eventually dropped from the imaginings of the English nation. She maintains that after the Civil War “the nation was established as the primary object of loyalty; it ceased to be problematic” (49). To support this claim, she alludes to Milton’s corpus. Greenfeld argues that at the start of his career, Milton’s rhetoric, which was clearly manifested in *Of Reformation*, echoed the familiar conception of the English as the chosen people whose God-sent mission is to reform the world and spread the true message of Christianity. Later, Milton began justifying his call for social reforms (mainly in *Doctrine of Discipline and Divorce* and *Areopagitica*) by arguing that “these reforms were

integral to the English religious and historic destiny, but most of all to its national character”

(49). Greenfeld argues that in his later writings, Milton continued to employ religious authority to advance and support his arguments, but that his overall rhetoric became “devoid of any religious content” (49). Greenfeld argues:

The casting away of the religious idiom did not change, but only laid bare the values which Milton and others in this period tried to establish in the English society. The insistence on liberty was a corollary of the new recognition of the fundamental equality of men in the possession of the faculty of reason, which made all of them worthy of respect ... it was the pride in man’s reason and not reverence for its [divine] source which inspired men like Milton after the Civil War; the right of the individual conscience, freedom, the autonomy of a rational being were advocated for their own sake, as supreme values. These values were primary in the definition of English nationhood. (50)

In the above passage, Greenfeld attributes the seventeenth century with liberalist characteristics before the advent of the Age of Enlightenment. By implying that liberty and human equality were paradigmatic of English “nationhood”, Greenfeld takes the existence of an English sense of “nationhood” for granted and projects Enlightenment values and ideas of citizenship back into sixteenth and seventeenth century England only to find prefigurations of it in Milton.

Greenfeld’s approach to the question of English nationalism has many factors in common with the modernist school of thought as defined in the previous chapter: she identifies social and political transformations in sixteenth century England and argues that they led the state to manufacture and support a growing sense of Englishness. In so doing, she suggests that England was a modern nation-state in the early modern period; indeed, England for Greenfeld was the prototypical modern-nation state. One of the most outspoken opponents of Greenfeld’s theory is

Krishan Kumar, who argues that Greenfeld exaggerates the degree of social mobility in the sixteenth century, effectively ignores the highly elitist nature of the Tudor state, and provides a misleading account of literacy in the sixteenth century, thereby exaggerating the effect of the “widespread reading of the Bible”.<sup>5</sup> On the eve of Elizabeth’s accession to the throne in 1558, illiteracy levels were 80% and 95% for males and females respectively. By 1642, over 70% of males and 90% of females, a considerable part of the population, remained illiterate (Kumar 105)). In addition, Kumar critiques Greenfeld’s emphasis on the role of Protestantism in fostering English nationalism. He argues that the Reformation cannot be viewed as a movement that simply united the English under a common cause and religious belief; instead, it divided the nation along Catholic and Protestant lines.

It is true that the sixteenth century witnessed a high degree of social, political and religious transformations that paved the way to modernization. However, these transformations should not be evaluated by taking for granted the future of England that, at the time, was unknown. For instance, the equation of Protestantism with the forging of nationhood is anachronistic considering the long process of interrupted reformations that took place in that period. Stephen Greenblatt aptly describes these changes:

In the space of a single lifetime, England had gone officially from Roman Catholicism, to Catholicism under the supreme headship of the English king [Henry VIII], to a guarded Protestantism, to a more radical Protestantism [under his son, Edward], to a renewed and aggressive Roman Catholicism [under Queen Mary], and finally to Protestantism again

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<sup>5</sup> Greenfeld places a large emphasis on individuals’ personal relationships with the Bible, rather than congregational readings.

[under Queen Elizabeth]. Each of these shifts was accompanied by danger, prosecution, and death. It was enough to make people wary. (493)

As the quoted passage suggests, the sixteenth century was a turbulent time especially regarding religious reformation. The Reformation did not happen overnight and if we are to identify the birth pangs of English nationalism during the sixteenth century and in the Protestant faith particularly, as Greenfeld does, then we risk both marginalizing Catholic adherents and adopting a simplified rendition of the Reformation. Nevertheless, the political and social transformations of the sixteenth century created an important subtext for identity formulations. Below, I allude to works by Shakespeare and Spenser for the ways in which the period's outlook on the nominal union of England and Scotland under King James VI and I inform identity politics.

### **C. Seventeenth-century English Nationalism**

The seventeenth century was riddled with conflict and internal divisions within society and for this reason the literature on English nationalism agrees upon the fact that the seventeenth century is not a fruitful period to study nationalism. The mid-seventeenth century witnessed a violent civil war leading to the trial and execution of King Charles I, the abolition of the monarchy, the removal of the upper chamber of Parliament, and the disestablishment of the national church (Kumar 122). The intensely divided nature of seventeenth-century England has problematized any notion of the nation, let alone of nationalism. Nevertheless, Hans Kohn, in an article entitled "The Genesis and Character of English Nationalism", has argued that English nationalism was born during the seventeenth century Puritan revolution.

Kohn begins by discussing the shifts in the social structure of England that began to take place in the seventeenth century. He argues that the lack of foreign wars coupled with a growing economy transformed the nature of social relations in England into one that is favorable to the growth of nationalism. Kohn lists the "common discussions in Parliament about the welfare of

the land as a whole”; the “predominance of yeoman archers in the English army, in contrast to the continental armies with the knightly cavalry as their backbone”; and the War of the Roses that reduced the size of the aristocracy and diminished their warrior spirit as factors that promoted the growth of national feelings (70). Kohn analyzes the effect of these transformations as follows:

In such an atmosphere of national security, expanding wealth and parliamentary influence, the conditions for the growth of individual liberty and of respect for the processes of law, and for the security and calculability of transactions guaranteed by law, could take root. Public opinion could become a factor carrying some weight in the decisions of those in authority; the emancipation of individuality and of feudal society coalesced with the slow growth of a feeling of self-confidence and self-reliance which became characteristic of the English in the sixteenth century. (70)

The above quotation perhaps exaggerates the impact of public opinion in that period; in addition, it does not discuss whether the public’s access to knowledge and knowledge production is qualified and what the ramifications of such a limitation would have been. David Zaret, in an article titled “Petitions and the ‘Invention’ of Public Opinion in the English Revolution”, studies how the printing press changed the nature of public petitions and examines the relationship between public petitions and public opinion during the English Revolution. Zaret explains that the rules governing the form and nature of petitions were developed in medieval society. The restrictions on petitions were not made explicit by law, so Zaret infers them by studying acceptable and “factious” petitions. He explains:

First, a petition did not invoke or imply normative claims for the “will of the people”; second, the rhetoric of petitions portrayed grievance as an apolitical conveyance of



information, by emphasizing deferential, juridical, and spontaneous attributes of the grievance; and, third, grievance should be local and neither critical of laws, indicative of discontent with authority, or made public. (1513)

During the English Revolution, with the introduction of printed petitions by private associations, petitions began to invoke public opinion and, in that process, also constituted it (1517). The relationship between public opinion and petitions is not clear cut. Petitions did not simply mirror public opinion; rather, they were a possible vehicle of propaganda (1518). Popular interest in petitions was not hindered by illiteracy; petitions were usually read aloud to large congregations of people in taverns or at churches to gain signatures or marks. This process was not immune from manipulation and fraud. Zaret explains that Royalists often printed two different petitions: one that they would present to people to gather signatures and another version that they would present to Parliament. Zaret argues that this indicates a clear motive to “influence the opinion of an anonymous public” (1520); however, this could also suggest an interest in garnering a large number of signatures regardless of whether or not the “anonymous public” had been influenced. During times of tension and turmoil, the large number of signatures on a petition validates its claims and possibly presents a competitive space in which opposing parties can nonviolently battle. The clearest indication of the nominal nature of the signatures was perhaps the pervasive belief during the early Stuart age and even under Elizabeth that commoners “have no voice or authority in our commonwealth, and no account is made of them but to be ruled” (Sir Thomas Smith, an English scholar and diplomat, qtd. in Zaret 1508). Despite advancements in petitions, religious and political presuppositions in the direct relationship between social rank and rationality were not cast away. This makes it problematic to discuss the weight that public opinion carried in the seventeenth century. First, petitions did not necessarily mirror the opinion

of the people; a petition with a large number of signatures or marks is a testimony to the degree of diligence with which it was prepared as opposed to a clear indication of public opinion. Second, the notion of public opinion was a nominal construct that was appealed to in printed petitions to influence people in Parliament but that was not considered highly legitimate because of preconceptions of deference and hierarchy in politics (1533).

Kohn considers the accession of the Tudors to power integral to the history of the development of English nationalism. In particular, the rule of Henry VIII helped foster “English stateism” (70). This view maintains that Henry VIII severed the “bond which tied England to medieval universalism” (70). The Tudor monarch did not only uproot “the last traces of feudal power in England” but also helped strengthen the middle class and the gentry. The rise of the “new wealth” in England “quickened the shift in the prestige and influence of the social classes” (70). This newly empowered class continued to grow during the Elizabethan period and strengthened with the increasing literary activity of the period which served to bolster patriotic pride (71). However, this patriotism was still a long way from transforming into a “deeply-rooted, ever-present and all-pervading” sentiment that is characteristic of modern nationalism (71). Kohn adds that the cultural developments that were felt in the final part of the sixteenth century gave the English a “new feeling of importance”; while English scholars continued to compare their country’s achievements to those of France and Italy, they also began harboring an interest in England’s history: “The new pride led to a closer observation of English life, its institutions and peculiarities, its traditions and history. Therein the English writers and antiquarians followed again the trend of the Renaissance, with its newly awakened interest in research into the national past” (72).

Kohn asserts that the Tudor period set the groundwork for the rise of English “nationhood” (he uses “nationhood” and “nationalism” interchangeably) and yet adds a caution that the English people and culture did not “come into their own” during that period. The following section directly pertains to the scholarly debate surrounding the English language:

Even in the Elizabethan period the widespread fear that the English language had only a very limited future persisted. Literary criticism remained almost completely dominated by the classical standards of the past. There was as yet little feeling for English literature as English, and therefore great contemporary English poets, measured by the traditional and universal classical standards, could not be recognized in their own right. (74)

The English language was not considered a proper medium for academic discourse and literature. This changed with time: by the beginning of the seventeenth century, a defense of English poetry was underway. Kohn refers to Samuel Daniel’s defense of rhyme and suggests that it reveals a growing veneration of both English genius and Englishness in general (74). A better assessment of Daniel’s *Defense* can be provided if it is to be read against the contemporary debate between the ancients and the moderns.

Richard Helgerson contextualizes Daniel’s defense by alluding to the correspondence between Spenser and Harvey in which they discuss the path English poetry should take. Spenser advocated modeling English poetry on classical verse through the adoption of quantitative metrical composition; in order to achieve this, he suggested that certain English words and pronunciations will need to be altered so that “we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language and measure our accents by the sound, reserving the quantity to the verse” (Spenser qtd. in Helgerson 25). Though a proponent of quantitative verse himself, Harvey disagreed with Spenser and accused him of “forcibly usurp[ing] and tyranniz[ing] upon a quiet

company of words that so far beyond the memory of man have so peaceably enjoyed their several privileges and liberties without any disturbance or the least controlment” (Harvey qtd. in Helgerson 28). Helgerson suggests that this correspondence anticipates the unfolding of a schism over poetics with deeper political ramifications. In the Spenser-Harvey exchange, Harvey rejects the absolutist undertones of Spenser’s ideas. Helgerson writes, “Against Spenser’s version of the absolutist cultural politics of antiquity, he [Harvey] sets, without calling it that, a Gothic, common-law tradition” (28). The politics of this disagreement are largely rooted in a dispute over the limits of royal authority. These disagreements also surface decades later in Samuel Daniel’s *Defense of Rime* of 1603 - the year during which King James VI of Scotland acceded to the throne of England.

In his *Defense*, Daniel rejects the charges of vulgarism raised by supporters of classical humanist scholars against rhyme and extolls the “Goths, Vandals, and Longobards” for properly shaping England (Daniel qtd. in Helgerson 36). Additionally, he suggests that rhyme is an ancient tradition and does not derive its legitimacy from royal power (37). This argument ignores the fact that rhyme was adopted into English as a result of French influence following the Norman invasion (39; See also Granddol et. al. 67). Helgerson, alluding to Eric Hobsbawm, calls this the “invention of tradition” and a nascent nationalist movement: “Like many later nationalist movements, this early one established its legitimacy through the invention of tradition, the invention, in this case, of a Gothic past to which some of its most recent cultural innovations might be attributed” (39). Though it can be argued, as Helgerson does, that Daniel seems to beat the nationalist drum, his veneration of a Gothic past should not be dehistoricized nor depoliticized: this discourse emerged out of the coalescence of various factors, the most

prominent of which was the installation of a foreigner at the head of the English monarchy and the fears that it unleashed.

Kohn couches his allusion to Daniel's *Defense* in a discussion of how the veneration of English language and culture began. He explains that the arguments in favor of writing in the English language in the seventeenth century suggested that scholars should not look to the ancients to learn how to write; rather, they were encouraged to view the act of writing as highly contextualized since it exists in conversation with history and social background. As writing is informed by contemporary events, they argued, it will always be in flux (74). Kohn argues that English scientific advancements helped consolidate the notion of both England's superiority within Europe, as well as the moderns superiority over the ancients who were viewed as ignorant of the new science (78).

A sense of English superiority was not simply an offshoot of scientific advancements but also reflected a growing awareness of the English advancements in the field of political theory and political interest. Kohn writes:

Whereas Italy and Spain were declining, Germany was devastated economically and intellectually by the long-drawn horror of the Thirty Years War, and the French nation afforded the magnificent spectacle of a stable society on a classical basis, the English people were being deeply stirred by the convulsions of the Revolution. The tendencies of a nascent nationalism which had germinated under the Tudors now broke through in a volcanic eruption. (79)

Here, Kohn begins to synthesize his argument. He refers to the Civil War as the Puritan Revolution and argues that it was ultimately a religious movement which sought to assert Reformist tendencies that had been suppressed "by a ruthless authoritarianism in Germany" (79).

The English were destined to experience this moment as a result of the social transformations that began under the Tudors. Kohn therefore considers the English Civil to be an affirmation of “the liberty of man” and a rejection of the authoritarian and aristocratic tradition on which the State and the Church had been built (79).

The English Civil War is thus a testimony to the proto-nationalism of the English in the seventeenth century. Kohn argues that the religious revolution was influenced by the intellectual development of the period and was as a result “turned into a liberating intellectual movement which definitely brought the Middle Ages to an end and initiated the social and political movements of the modern age” (80). Kohn’s emphasis on the religious aspect of the Civil War leads him to assert that seventeenth-century English nationalism was a “revival of Old Testament nationalism” (81). He explains that the English during the Puritan Revolution self-identified with the Hebrews and argues that the Bible was the main influence and inspiration of Cromwell and his generation. The Revolution, viewed from this perspective, reflected a “new nationalism” that, due to its Calvinist underpinnings, “expressed itself in an identification of the English people with the Israel of the Old Testament” (79). Seventeenth-century English nationalism was thoroughly informed by religious discourse that constructed the English as the “chosen” people who were meant to spread the true Christian message. Kohn writes:

The feeling of a great task to be achieved was not restricted to the upper classes. It lifted the people to a new dignity, of being no longer the common people, the object of history, but of being the nation, the subject of history, chosen to do great things in which every one, equally and individually, was called to participate. Here we find the first example of modern nationalism, religious, political and social at the same time, although it was not yet the secularized nationalism which arose at the end of the eighteenth century. (80)

This reading conflates nationalism with its political and social implications and the identification of an imagined unified nation with a single state with the religious discourse of Christianity. If the English self-identified as the nation of God whose mission it is to spread the true Christian message in the world as Kohn suggest, this does not imply that they were exhibiting nationalistic zeal in the modern sense. Such a sentiment at best reflects a perceived level of English exceptionalism (we are the only truly enlightened nation in the world) that can be used to justify expansionist missions. If taken literally, the religious movement in which Kohn identifies English nationalism should rather be understood in international terms as opposed to national ones. Theoretically, this is not a message that the English wish to keep to themselves. Moreover, Kohn romanticizes the social and political ramifications of the Civil War and in so doing fetishizes the lower classes of mid-seventeenth century England for having reached a new understanding of their position in society and for regarding themselves as belonging to a unified “nation” that does not undermine their individuality. The problem with such a claim is that it purports to represent a section of society that, for the most part, did not have access to forms of knowledge production (see Cressy 1977 for the status of literacy in the seventeenth century). The fact that the level of literacy in the seventeenth century was directly related to social status and wealth not only prevented the “common” people from being able to identify with the ideals of the liberal-disguised-as-Puritan revolution (through the veneration of English scientific achievement), but also prevents them from writing and presenting different points of view or different understandings of nationhood. Their access to politics was usually mediated through members of a higher social status via petitions that were sometimes manipulated and that were often used for propaganda. One must therefore be cautious in this regard and avoid suggesting

that the “common people” (which in of itself is an ambiguous referent) self-identified as a single homogenous entity that could speak for itself.

Kohn’s rendition of the rise of English nationalism is impressive for its analysis of the religious discourse that undergirded seventeenth century political thought. However, he tends to romanticize the effects of the Civil War and the role of the “common people” in general. This strategy provides a reductive account of the war and its effects. Those who were against the “Revolution” are ignored; whether or not they contributed to the formation of the idea of nationhood or of “nationalist” sentiments is unimportant, and the fact that a popular Restoration occurred does not factor into this reading.

#### **D. English versus British Identity: A post-seventeenth century question?**

In 1975, J. G. A. Pocock published an article titled “British History: A Plea for a New Subject” in response to his belief that historiography has so far been Anglocentric. Pocock’s main argument was the “British” history was understood either as English history writ large, or as the history of how England came to dominate and colonize the British isles (the “internal colonialism” approach). Pocock’s plea for the new discipline of “British history” is one that therefore rejects both the internal colonialism approach and the Anglocentric approach in favor of a more plural understanding of British history. He argues that British history is that of more than two nations whose interactions continually modified one another. Pocock’s essay was extremely influential and was foundational to “British studies” as we now know it. If we are to acknowledge Pocock’s plea, we must situate any examination of English identity within the British context and ask whether Englishness was/is informed by England’s relationship with Scotland, Ireland and Wales (Pocock, in fact, pushes his claim even further and argues that we also have to consider the entire British Empire). Within the large body of work produced under



Pocock's rubric, I wish to isolate those by David Baker, Linda Colley, Willy Maley, and Krishan Kumar in this section. These critics acknowledge the complex relationship between England and its immediate neighbors; they discuss the question of English identity and the ways in which it informs and is informed by Britishness. I chose these scholars because their work reflects a growing involvement with complicating English identity.

### **1. David Baker**

David Baker's work is clearly Pocockian in its inspiration. In *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britian*, Baker attempts to read Early modern English literature against the backdrop of a nascent British historiography. Baker does not approach Britain with any preformed conceptions, but rather considers it "a question" and refuses to attribute any qualities to its identity or even to consider it retrospectively an imminent construct (7). Baker's discussion of the British problem is important in that it acknowledges, echoing Pocock, the difficulties that lie at the heart of any serious examination of historical nation-building. This is especially the problem in the case of Britain because most of the scholarly work invested in explicating British national history has been Anglocentric.

Baker is wary of making grand claims about British history and asserts that his work is informed by his training in English literature. He argues that the select works by Shakespeare, Marvel and Spenser that he analyses are "committed to the advancement of something they call 'England' and are thoroughly enmeshed in the apparatus that produced it," and adds, "they work to promote this entity by explicitly denigrating or tacitly ignoring the peoples of the other nations on the British Isles" (12). Baker asserts that these exclusions and denigrations are unsurprising and are typical of the work produced in that period. In *Between Nations*, Baker suggests that the interactions of the British peoples in the early modern period "were creating an English nation" while simultaneously "defining an extraordinarily complex intercultural site" (13). Through his

reading of English early modern texts, Baker attempts to illustrate the ramifications of the claim that modern English nationalism is relational. He writes:

What I argue in *Between Nations*, though, is that the communities that were caught up in the uneven and often bloody writing of the nation of England were not all of them English, and that in those communities there were many for whom “being English” was not always possible or desirable, or was so only ambiguously. These people wrote the English nation too, even, sometimes, as they were being written out of it. (16)

Baker rejects Anglocentric renditions of British historiography, and he is interested in illustrating how English nationhood is a construct that was informed by English, as well as Irish, Welsh and Scottish voices. Baker’s reading of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* is essential to this project in that it illustrates the ways in which Shakespeare brings in the British problem into English identity discourse.

## **2. *Linda Colley***

In *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707 - 1837* Linda Colley explores the making of British identity. Colley argues, contra Michael Hechter, that British identity is not a simple reflection of a domineering English core that stabilized and homogenized British identity by Anglicizing it (6). According to Colley, the British nation was forged in the 130-year period between 1707 and 1837; that is, after the Act of Union and the “formal” beginning of the Victorian period. Colley explains that this period was marked with confrontations with France during which the people of the British isles began the process of defining themselves against the French Others and, by extension, forming an overarching British identity. At the same time, Colley insists on the following disclaimer:

I am not suggesting that the growing sense of Britishness in this period supplanted and obliterated other loyalties....even the briefest acquaintance with Great Britain will confirm, the Welsh, the Scottish and the English remain in many ways distinct peoples in cultural terms...Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other.

(6)

Colley is aware of the internal cultural differences within the British isles and is wary of making reductive assumptions about the relationship between Britishness and its multiple sub-identities. Colley's understanding of nations and national identity relies on modernist theories such as Eric Hobsbawm's and Benedict Anderson's. She asserts, echoing Anderson, that nations are "imagined communities" and sets out to identify the circumstances that led to the creation of a British identity. Accordingly, she identifies two main driving factors: ongoing war with France and a strong attachment to Protestantism. France haunted the British imaginary as the threatening Catholic Other. In confronting France, the British learned to lay their differences aside and identify as a unified nation (368). The English, Welsh and Scottish people's commitment to Protestantism allowed them to disregard their internal divisions and gave war with France its import in terms of national-formation (367-8). Colley's study contributes to the scholarly debate on the British problem and raises unanswered questions regarding the various ways in which the multiple nations of the British isles influenced both the formation of an overarching British identity (however qualified) and what happened, as a result, to English national identity during this period.

### **3. Willy Maley**

A deep engagement with the new British history underpins Willy Maley's *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature*, which explores major and minor texts by

rereading Shakespeare, Spenser, Bacon, Ford and Milton. According to Maley, these authors are particularly relevant to a rereading of Renaissance literature that is informed by British historiography since their writings were produced during a crucial moment of the formation of Britain, namely the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He argues that his chosen texts “signal a shift in studies of nation, state and empire in the early modern period” (3) and adds, “that shift is from a preoccupation with Ireland as the exemplary site of English colonial activity towards a recognition of the complex ways in which a problematic British identity is worked out - rehearsed, resisted, revised - in the texts of some of the most influential writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (3).

Maley asserts that by exploring the political reality of Britain these authors contribute to its construction and deconstruction. Through their investment in the question of Britain, they simultaneously find themselves concerned in forging an English culture whose existence seems threatened by a British polity. Additionally, Maley finds literary criticism’s investment in exploring the contributions of these authors to English culture problematic. He explains, “the paradox at the heart of this book is that the precarious Britishness out of which these founding figures forge their colonial visions has been obscured by the emphasis, in literary criticism, on the supposedly peculiar English culture to which they contributed” (3). Thus, Maley attempts to reread canonized English authors by contextualizing them first within their British context. In chapter one, “Shakespeare and the British Problem”, Maley inscribes Shakespeare’s canon within the British corpus, labeling him the “banished bard of Britain”. Maley asserts that by categorizing plays under the genre of tragedy, such as *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, critics “deprive them of their historical specificity” (28). Shakespeare, he argues, allegorically addresses the problems facing the English state at the dawn of an Anglo-Scottish Union by displacing the

“violence of the triple monarchy...on top a mythical Scottish past” (28). Maley insists on the importance of reading Shakespeare’s corpus through the questions that inform British studies and suggests that to do otherwise could be construed as an act of cultural appropriation:

Shakespeare’s corpus undergirds the Englishness of British literary culture, and his work is often enlisted in the service of a conservative English nationalism. Yet the bard was preoccupied with putting the problems of the state onto the stage. His representations of the history, formation and future of the British state are complex and heterogeneous. We find an elaboration of the British Problem in the plays of Shakespeare, works which, due to their position within the canon of *English* are read historically as a contribution to the making of a national literature rather than the critique of a multinational state. (9)

Above, Maley calls attention to the political and cultural ramifications of Anglicizing Shakespeare. In relocating English Renaissance texts within their British contexts, Maley provides a powerful critique of traditional readings of “English” literary texts that fail to acknowledge their inscription within a British context. Maley’s contribution is insightful because it points to the ways that critical analyses of literary texts can have political ramifications to the detriment of large groups of people. In so doing, Maley sheds light upon the active role of literary critics in reinforcing English biases by undermining the British subtexts of the authors whose works they explore for traces of a brewing English nationalism.

#### **4. *Krishan Kumar***

Kumar addresses the question of English national identity through the larger lens of the British empire by arguing that the English nation witnessed “a moment of Englishness” in the nineteenth century, only after its imperial interests were threatened. He suggests that the English were aware of their (predominant) role within the empire and their “moment of Englishness” resulted from an anxiety around the loss of the British empire. Unlike the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish who managed to trumpet their

own distinctiveness while calling themselves British at the same time, the English did not find it appropriate to call attention to a unique identity. Having learned from the failed attempts at imposing cultural and religious uniformity in the British isles under Henry II and Edward I, the English became more attuned to and accepting of diversity within the context of empire (180). Kumar argues that the short-lived surge in expressions of English national identity during the late nineteenth century were manifested in reinterpretations of myths and the rise of Anglo-Saxonism. The essence of Englishness was associated with mythic attributes of a pure Anglo-Saxon past.

In addition to the glorification of imagined Anglo-Saxon liberties, communications of English national identity in the late nineteenth century heavily relied on literature. Kumar argues that the late nineteenth century “laid out a series of markers that, for the first time, aimed at establishing what was peculiarly English about English literature and...laid the claims to its greatness” (220). Literature was increasingly nationalized in this period through the publication of anthologies that commemorated works that reflect distinctively “English” characteristics such as “sincerity, individuality, concreteness and a sense of richness and diversity of life” (221). Kumar also touches upon language policies in the nineteenth century and its relationship to constructions of national identity: literature was not the only space for exploration of English identity in the nineteenth century. The English language and its diverse versions (whether in terms of pronunciation or spelling) became a playing field for constructions of Englishness: public schools began standardizing the speech and accent of students on the model of the speech patterns of the southern English gentry (221).

Kumar alludes to the *Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* whose composition was begun by James Murray in 1879 and considers it a “monument” to the philological studies of pure “English” speech. Kumar adds, “For those within the nation who persisted in the use of other forms, eccentricity, perversity, ignorance and uncouthness were the

terms now used to account for their speech” (221). Kumar also points to the rather circuitous relationship between the study of language and the study of literature in this period: language prescriptivism was based upon the English dialect of the southern gentry and, at the same time, on the language used in high literature. Kumar considers this to be another point that reveals a “preference for the expressive rather than the technical or theoretical mode in English culture” (222). Kumar does not dwell any further upon the ramifications of such an observation. The question that remains unanswered is whether or not this “moment of Englishness” is restricted to elite formulations and prescriptions of “true” identity and in what way such restrictions inform the scholarly examination of English identity.

## **E. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a brief survey of the literature on English nationalism and the formation of English identity. The disagreements that have characterized the debate are fruitful for this project in that they reveal the elusive nature of the exploration of identity formations. However, more recent works, such as those by Maley and Baker discussed above, have been informed by British studies and have therefore begun complicating the debate by questioning the relationship between Britain and England and emphasizing the need to situate our exploration of English identity and English history within a British framework. This new trend lays the groundwork for this project by asserting the need to problematize the “nation” and the importance of recognizing the ways in which certain approaches to such a debate can generate undesirable political and social consequences. For this reason, the chapters that follow do not attempt to identify the rise of English nationalism, but rather illustrate the internal social exclusions that feed into formulations of English identity.

The following chapter begins by exploring the approaches to English language usage within England and problematizes the racialization of individuals within England by appeals to

linguistic variations. This practice will be shown to be exceedingly similar to the ways in which the Irish are represented within colonial rhetoric. The chapter addresses the following questions: What did speaking English within the British isles signify both prior to and after the 1707 Act of Union? Were speakers of English within England (and later within Britain) discriminated against for dialectical variations? Can we identify the existence of a similar rhetoric of exclusive linguistic identity formulations operating within and without England? What are the ramifications of such a rhetoric upon the actual study of English nationalism or English identity?



## CHAPTER IV

# ENGLISH DIALECTICAL DIVERSITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

So far, I have presented a survey of political theories of nationalism in general and an overview of the debate over English nationalism, in particular. I have taken issue with the exclusions and assumptions that various scholars have made in their description of English nationalism and English identity. In this chapter, I focus on a more specific topic: the linguistic practices of people living in England and the different ways in which their dialects are represented and discussed. This discussion will allow me to compare the English evaluation of the linguistic practices of both English people and foreigners. I will argue that similar forms of discrimination operate in both cases. In England, vagabonds and canters have been historically racialized as gypsies and considered a threat to society. In the sixteenth century, dictionaries of canting jargon were compiled for people to comprehend any coded conversation that takes place in the presence of canters for them to avoid being tricked, robbed, or murdered. Similarly, Irish people in particular were depicted as criminals, and their speech patterns were considered threatening.

My interest in this chapter is not simply to suggest that language discrimination existed in the British isles, but rather to illustrate how a discourse of linguistic identity can be realized from one of linguistic prejudice and how easily this linguistic identity is cast away and refigured under the influence of empire. I am therefore aiming to examine a very specific aspect of national identity and to demonstrate how its configuration, though politicized, is rather volatile. More importantly, I wish to acknowledge that this process of linguistic identity-formation is limited to

people with access to knowledge production. Any statement regarding the nature of English linguistic identity is qualified precisely because it is built upon various exclusionary claims. This chapter therefore introduces the following questions that will be fleshed out in upcoming sections: If we consider the establishment of a national language a cornerstone of nationalism, how does linguistic (dialectic) diversity, with its class-based stratifications, operate to undermine or strengthen national unity? Specifically, how does something as formative to nationalism as language qualify contemporary theories that overlook the internal racialization at play within England based upon, but not limited to, linguistic practices? Furthermore, since the efforts to standardize the English language were largely based on the premise that speaking proper English would gain speakers access to powerful British circles, the need to assess the standardization of English at a larger imperial scale seems essential: What are the similarities between the discrimination against “impolite” variants of English within England and that against regional English and what are their ramifications?

### **A. Language Standardization and Nation Building**

Language standardization is a process that usually undergirds nation-building. There exists an intricate relationship between language purism and language standardization. Language purists hold that people’s linguistic practices can be either “good” or “bad” and that “bad” language needs to be corrected to adhere to a proper correct form. They attempt to “purify” the language by eliminating certain features such as foreign loan words and “vulgar colloquialisms” (Thomas 1). Language standardization is political and classist in nature in that it rests upon the identification of the dialect of a country’s central authority as the standard to which all others must adhere (McIntosh 6). Language purists usually initiate standardization movements; they target commercial and administrative languages and pressure their users to use “more orderly,

more precise, and in general [a] more written” language (McIntosh 6). Carey McIntosh provides information about the relationship between English standardization and the English print culture of the 1700-1800s and argues that it was during this time that the greatest advancements in the standardization of English took place (6). He argues, echoing Benedict Anderson, that “a kingdom of distant towns and isolated villages can more plausibly think of itself as a single nation when it is reading the same newspapers and magazines - and when local dialects and languages are being educated out of existence to clear the ground for Standard English” (7).

Additionally, he suggests that the standardization of English was closely tied to the flourishing print culture of the time as well as the development of a “sense of Britishness” that was in its early stages in the eighteenth century (7). This suggestion calls attention to the relationship between nation-building and language planning. The question of Britain in this period cannot be overlooked: the fact that the English language became associated with Britain and Britishness in general has implications related to the uneven power relationships within Britain. This chapter traces the changes in the approach to and appreciation of English within England. Furthermore, it attempts to locate the point at which language policies in England become reflective of a growing commitment to (a rather qualified) national identity. Finally, this chapter offers a comparison between English language policies within the British isles and within England in order to argue that similar traces of an English “linguistic nationalism”, previously identified by Patricia Palmer in England’s language policies in Ireland, surface across classes within England itself.

## **B. National Identity and Linguistic Identity: The Case of Ireland**

Ireland provides a fruitful medium for the exploration of English formulations of national identity due to its colonial relationship with England and due to the presence of English settlers

in Ireland starting in the twelfth century who had assimilated into Irish culture. The identity of these English settlers becomes a matter of contention in England as a result of their cultural assimilation in Ireland. They are encouraged to speak English in order to prove their loyalty to the English throne and their attachment to their English origins. In addition to providing a glimpse of the ways in which English settlers are scrutinized for their “true” identities,<sup>6</sup> and therefore providing an example of English identity politics in practice, English policies in Ireland generate anti-Irish rhetoric that helps consolidate English identity through relationships of difference. In this chapter, I attempt to show how a similar rhetoric resurfaces within England against people who occupy unprivileged subcultures.

The relationship between national identity and linguistic identity can be traced to the European Renaissance. At the time, it was deemed politically necessary to defend national languages even though contemporary languages were considered inferior to classical Greek and Latin (Graddol et al. 80). King Henry VIII’s Proclamation of 1541 urged that ‘the king’s true subjects’ in Ireland ‘shall use and speak commonly the English tongue’ (Graddol et al. 126). This illustrates that, as far back as the sixteenth century, speaking the English language could be construed as a political statement. Of course, the “king’s true subjects” referred to the descendants of the twelfth century settlers in Ireland whose loyalty to the English throne was contested due to long processes of assimilation into the Irish culture. They were dubbed by Edmund Spenser the “Old English” in Ireland and were eventually considered “more Irish than the Irish themselves”. These considerations complicate the status of linguistic identity by signaling a colonial discourse. In *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland*, Patricia

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<sup>6</sup> This will be alluded to in more detail in upcoming sections below.

Palmer studies the interaction of the English and Irish language in Ireland through a colonial framework. She considers English linguistic policies in Ireland to reflect “linguistic colonization” and explains how the spread of English was imperative for English expansion in Ireland. While language-learning was at the heart of the Anglicization project, attempts at cultural Anglicization were well under way. Henry VIII’s statement in 1536 to the citizens of Galway that asks of them to “indevor theym selfe to speke Englyshe, and to use theym selffe after the Englyshe facion; and specyally that you, and every of you, do put forth your childe to scole, to lerne to speke Englyshe” is later echoed in 1599 by Queen Elizabeth’s instructions to the Earl of Essex to force the Irish rebels to “use English habit and language” (Palmer 141). Palmer also provides an analysis of the Elizabethan relationship with the Irish language in particular and their assessment of the Irish cultural practices in general. She compares the English discourse of difference from the Irish to that of the Spanish discourse of difference from the indigenous people of the New World and argues that the Spanish included language into their discourse of difference whereas English writers “erased language difference textually” (74). By this she means that the English writers who recounted their experiences in Ireland did not allude to the language barrier that they faced and their accounts erased the voice of the Irish-speaking interlocutor and replaced it with that of the interpreter. Palmer adds that despite the English effort to textually erase language difference, “Irish was an inextricable part of native difference; judgements about the latter inevitably implicated the language which articulated it” (74).

Palmer discusses the Spanish assessment of Amerindian languages and draws a comparison between the Spanish approach to foreign languages in the New World and the sixteenth-century English approach to Irish in Ireland. The Spanish, she argues, evaluated Amerindian languages and found them wanting: their lack of words for Christian notions (such

as angel) indicated that the natives were uncivilized and backwards. To justify their overthrow of the native civilizations, the Spanish needed to negatively depict the natives' difference.

Consequently, the natives were not simply different, but also threatening, imperfect and savage (22). The Spanish evaluation of Amerindian languages, according to Palmer, was informed by now-evolved Greek and Judeo-Christian theories of language (23). To support this claim, Palmer alludes to the ancient European practice of using the phrase "barbarous tongue" and explains that language was considered integral to the European discourse of difference. The etymology of the word barbarous calls attention to the European perceived relationship between language and civilization: the Greek word barbaros meant a "babbling outsider" who could not speak Greek (27). To adopt a barbarous tongue was to be a barbarian. Palmer goes on to add:

The Judeo-Christian tradition, brooding on the legacy of Babel, brought a more systematically pessimistic conception of language. Babel begot not just linguistic confusion but linguistic degeneracy. Classical and biblical views of language had merged by the late Middle Ages...In providing the founding myths of Renaissance linguistics, they placed strong associations between language and notions of degeneracy and barbarism at the heart of European thinking about language. (27)

Above, Palmer expounds the link between the European evaluation of civility and of linguistic practices. The word "barbarous" signaled linguistic degeneracy and was extended, by the association of language with behavioral practices, into a mark of degeneracy. In her comparison between the Spanish approach to Amerindian languages and the English approach to Irish, Palmer argues that the Spanish developed their evaluation of the natives from a linguistic standpoint: their language, lacking equivalent signifiers for Spanish metaphysical notions, was deemed uncivilized and the people were considered savage. On the other hand, she argues, the

English reversed the process: instead of beginning with an assessment of Irish, they superimposed their beliefs about the Irish people on to their language. In addition, Palmer argues that the Elizabethans were not able to evaluate the Irish language since they were dissuaded from acquiring it. Instead, they relied on proxies -- the most notable of which was an Irish "word list" that included around seventy Irish words. Palmer holds that the list typifies an English-Irish colonial relationship in that it provides definitions of words that are construed to signify uncivil (not English) practices. A native practice uncommon among the English cannot therefore be given an English word. To refer to an alien or uncivil idea, an alien/barbaric word needed to be used; this was possible by consulting the word list. Palmer adds:

The Elizabethans' Irish word-list was little more than an inventory of vile customs, menacing figures, hostile terrain and despised social practices. Equipped only with this pidgin roll-call of native peculiarities, the newcomers' encounter with Irish-speakers and their language would inevitably be distorted. (86)

Palmer's analysis of the Irish wordlist relies upon post-colonial theory. Accordingly, the English partake in a process of 'Othering' the Irish, and their wordlist is symptomatic of colonial binary classifications. Furthermore, Palmer alludes to and challenges David Armitage's argument that "linguistic nationalism" is a nineteenth-century European construct, arguing instead that it was brewed in Ireland - "England's first colony" (109). According to Palmer, Armitage's theory is a response to the "almost unspoken assumption that those setting out from Shakespeare's England on voyages of discovery and conquest travelled buoyed up with a cultural confidence that sprang, in part, from the linguistic excitement of their age" (108). Contrary to this popular assumption, Armitage argues that the identified link between empire and literature only surfaced in the nineteenth century and it would be anachronistic to locate it at an earlier time. According

to Palmer, Armitage's line of argument is faulty because it rests upon the assumption that the Elizabethans at the time were only interested in the Three Kingdoms. By that internal colonialism logic, Armitage considers Ireland to have represented an "internal" problem for England - one that is distinct from its imperialism overseas. Palmer disagrees with this and argues that Ireland was a problem for England precisely because of the English inability to identify and define the status of its relationship with Ireland: calling Ireland an "internal English problem" is reductive (109).

Palmer's thesis surrounding the inextricable link between English cultural nationalism and linguistic imperialism is informed by Liah Greenfeld's assertion of a burgeoning climate of English nationalism in the sixteenth century (19). In fact, her analysis of English linguistic policies in Ireland is based upon the premise that English linguistic imperialism found its origins in cultural nationalism. Palmer presents a detailed analysis of English policies in Ireland and of the various institutional mechanisms that facilitated and promoted a form of linguistic "colonization" of Ireland. Partly due to her reliance on Greenfeld, Palmer more or less takes the relationship between linguistic imperialism and cultural nationalism for granted. While it is true that English policies in Ireland can be understood as a form of linguistic imperialism, it is problematic to suggest that this imperialism is reflective of a cultural nationalism without qualifying that cultural nationalism as being a form of elite cultural (in this case linguistic) chauvinism. At the time, there was no standard form of spoken English in England, and the English language policies in Ireland could arguably be identified, with certain variations, within England itself. It would therefore be fruitful to unravel the ramifications of this oversight while simultaneously acknowledging Palmer's insightful reading of English linguistic imperialism in Ireland.



Palmer attributes the English attempt at stamping out Irish in Ireland to cultural nationalism and a veneration of the English tongue when contrasted with the Irish one. Does the fact that similar processes of discrimination and attempted language correction or conversions (from “barbarous” English to civil English) had been taking place within England in any way qualify or add to Palmer’s argument? How does English “cultural nationalism” operate within England itself? The section below provides information on the ways in which dialectical variations and slang or “cant” English were discussed within England and how its speakers were described. A comparison with an English-oriented take on Ireland sheds light on the similar axes of discrimination and racialization that have occurred on both internal and external fronts.

### **C. The Canting Crew**

While vagrancy in Britain during the period between 1560-1640 surged, traditional policies of poverty relief decreased. The agrarian revolution was under way during the first part of this period. Additionally, the transition towards a cash culture promoted the cultivation of land for pasture rather than subsistence farming, a process that dealt severe blows to the underprivileged sectors of society. Economic conditions were deteriorating: population growth as well as inflation were on the rise. With time, the laws that were meant to restrict poverty relief for “the underserving” evolved into stringent policies that indirectly criminalized poverty (Coleman 8). The emergence of a large underprivileged section of society became a topic of great concern to wealthier individuals as acts of charity became monitored and, to a large extent, enforced. In 1552, parish officials were granted authority to raise money from wealthy individuals to support the poor. This parish-authorized distribution of wealth was subjected to high levels of state-monitored scrutiny and the parish officials were held responsible to justify how charity was distributed. As a result, a significant decrease in charity occurred, which was particularly the

case for “outsiders” (poor people who do not belong to a particular parish). Furthermore, parishes, fearing that the poor would claim residency and, by extension, the right to financial support, began evicting them. Harsher measures such as the prosecution of individuals who gathered wood or who sublet made living conditions for the poor even harsher. Consequently, a large number of poor individuals opted to travel in search of work. This was not a risk-free endeavor: the punishments for leaving one’s parish community included whipping, pillorying, maiming and even death. The measures that criminalized vagrancy were applied to people who were found begging and wandering as well as to “persons wandering, and pretending themselves to be Egyptians, or wandering in the habit and form of Egyptians” (Michael Dalton qtd. in Coleman 9). While policies against Gypsies, vagrants and criminals were instituted, demographic change and practical conditions made their enforcement rather difficult.

As the population of London grew, so did the large underprivileged section of its society, a phenomenon that did not go unnoticed by people of privilege. The publication of various “canting” dictionaries - dictionaries that listed and defined terms used by canters, the notorious group of thieves, vagabonds and poor people - increased. Interestingly, canting dictionaries of the early eighteenth century associated the speakers of cant English with foreigners such as Gypsies from Bohemia. These dictionaries tended to portray canting as a language that was different from English and they usually adopted the bilingual entry system in which words were listed according to their semantic meaning and not alphabetically. Coleman suggests that the act of portraying canting as a separate language may be attributed to the lexicographers’ desire to depict the canters as alien and threatening, thereby increasing their perceived threat and encouraging dictionary sales. In addition, they tended to efface the distinction between English-speaking wanderers and Romany-speaking Gypsies. Prefaces to canting dictionaries reveal much

about language ideology and therefore provide a useful medium for an exploration of the intersection of language and identity formations.

Thomas Harman's glossary of cant terms, published around 1566-7, is the earliest example of cant lexicography. Although Harman's *Cavaet or Warening, for Commen Cursetors vulgarly called Vagabonds* does not provide an exhaustive list of cant words, it does signal an interest in documenting and learning the "vulgar" tongue. In his introduction to the glossary, Harman assumes a disdainful air towards the speakers of cant. He describes them as "bold, beastly, Bawdy beggers, and vaine Vacabondes" and describes their language as "leud" and "lousey" (Harman qtd. in Noyes 465). This attitude towards the canting crew resurfaces in future more elaborate compilations of canting terms. However, Janet Sorenson argues that the *Dictionary of the Terms, Antient and Modern, of the Canting Crew, in its several Tribes of Gypsies, Beggars, Thieves, Cheats, & C.* that was published in 1699 and compiled by the anonymous "B.E. Gentleman" was unique in that, unlike earlier (and some future) compilations, it did not castigate canting terms or criminalize its speakers. In his preface, B.E. suggests that beggars are remnants of slavery and as such they are the price that the English have to pay for their endorsement of freedom. He writes:

What shall we say, but that if it be true; that the Emancipating or Freeing of Slaves was indeed the making of Beggars; it follows that Christianity which is daily employed in Redeeming Slaves from the Turks, Ransom'd no lese than all at once from Pagan Slavery at first, at no dearer a Rate, than the Rent-charge of maintaining the Beggars, as the Price and Purchase of our Freedoms. (A3)

In her analysis, Janet Sorenson argues that B.E.'s preface "bears little ill will or stark moral disapproval toward the 'canting crew' whose language it claims to represent" (442). My reading

of the preface differs from that of Sorenson's. I suggest that B.E. does not hold the canters in high regard. Instead, he relegates them into mere symbols by suggesting that their existence attests to an English Christian-informed freedom in order to contrast England to countries that are not 'free' and have slaves instead. In addition, B.E.'s preface addresses both English beggars and "universal" Gypsies and suggests that the canting terms in his dictionary are used by both beggars and Gypsies alike. He does not distinguish between Romany and English, and the canters are an exotic hodgepodge of Others. Furthermore, his choice of metaphor to describe the "universality" of Gypsies is telling: both Gypsies and the "foul disease" (syphilis), he asserts, are known around the world with different names. Finally, the dictionary's subtitle indicates that B.E.'s purpose in compiling canting terms is to protect people from the canting crew.<sup>7</sup> In addition to exoticizing cant (the implications of exoticization have been well rehearsed in post-colonial theory), the subtitle propounds the notion that people should learn cant to protect themselves from the canting crew and therefore fosters the image of canters as deceptive Others, creeping at the edge of society and thriving off people's ignorance of their secret language.

A rather vituperative condemnation of the canting crew appears in the preface of the *New Canting Dictionary* of 1725. Also written by an anonymous author, it is influenced by B.E.'s dictionary. In the preface, its author establishes the same relationship between English beggars and free Christian countries. The author's description of canting is worth quoting. He writes,

The CANTING DIALECT, is a confused Jargon, and *not grounded on any Rules*; and no wonder, since *the Practicers thereof are the chief Fathers and Nourishers of*

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<sup>7</sup> The subtitle reads as follows: "Useful for all sorts of People, (especially Foreigners) to secure their Money and preserve their Lives; besides very Diverting and Entertaining, being wholly New".

*Disorder...And it is observable, that, even unknown to ourselves, we have insensibly adopted some of their Terms into our Vulgar Tongue. (27 [emphasis mine])*

In the quotation above, the author claims that canting does not follow any specific rules and is ungrammatical. He argues that this is because its speakers are lawbreakers by nature and it therefore follows that their language will likewise be ungrammatical. His assertion that cant terms have been adopted by “ourselves” (a binary formulation that elicits an “us” versus “them” discourse) is described as though it were a military or rogue infiltration. The canting crew’s alleged ungrammatical language implies that they are incapable of proper reasoning as well (this type of rhetoric also surfaces in Jonathan Swift’s description of the Irish people and the Irish language that will be discussed below). The author racializes the canting crew, not only by claiming that they have arrived in London from Bohemia disguised as Egyptians, but also by suggesting that they are unreasonable and therefore that they do not carry the stamp of reason -- a hallmark of the European Enlightenment. He explains that the beggars and the canters originated from Bohemia as “Gypsies, Strowlers and Fortune-tellers” who pretended to be Egyptian to give credibility to their fortunetelling skills (A5). However, their true purpose was to swindle people out of their money -- a feat that was made easier with the help of their obscure tongue. In the history that the author presents, the canters are depicted as a murderous people who committed heinous crimes in Ireland and Scotland before arriving in London.<sup>8</sup> The author’s purpose in assembling the dictionary, by his own admission, is to allow “honest men” to understand the canting dialect to protect themselves from the canters. He writes:

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<sup>8</sup> Naturally, their visit to these countries only made them more vicious. In Ireland, for example, their own “villainous inclinations” were joined with the “Natural Barbarity and Cruelty of the Wild Irish” (A6).

By perusing and retaining many of which, an Honest Man, who is obliged to travel the Road, and to frequent Inns and Places of Publick Resort, (whereby he is often forced to mix with different Companies) may easily discover, by the Cant Terms and Dialect of the Persons, their Profession and Intentions, and know how to secure himself from Danger; Which is the principal Design of Compiling this Vocabulary. (32)

The author supports his decision to assemble the cant dictionary by his assumption that the canting crew represent a danger to society: they are criminals whose sole purpose is to harm others and that their encrypted language allows them to do so. In this gesture, the lexicographer associates language with power. The threat that the canters pose on “gentlemen” and “honest men” can be undermined if gentlemen learn cant. It is significant that the lexicographer does not suggest that the canters’ language be reformed since such a gesture would entail incorporating them into English society. The author instead wishes to distance the two from one another: the canters cannot be assimilated into society because they are irrational criminals.

#### **D. Repositioning the Canters**

Around six decades after the publication of *The New Canting Dictionary*, Francis Grose published *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785). This dictionary, as well as dictionaries produced around that time generally associate the canting crew with the “English vulgar” rather than with criminal outsiders (Sorenson 445). Grose’s attempt at incorporating a group of people into English society by renaming them the “English vulgar” has multiple ramifications. While Grose welcomes the diversity of the canting crew’s dialect, it is not a diversity that he openly welcomes. This relatively new discursive positioning of the canting crew is better understood if placed within the larger framework of British imperial expansion -- a subject that will be elaborated in the next chapter.

For now, it is sufficient to note that despite Grose's assertion that his dictionary is necessary for people who travel within London, he apologizes for having to include offensive words in spite of his attempts to censor them (these words are mainly sexual in nature). He writes:

To prevent any charge of immorality being brought against this work, the Editor begs leave to observe, that when an indelicate or immodest word has obtruded itself for explanation, he has endeavoured to get rid of it in the most decent manner possible; and none have been admitted but such, as either could not be left out, without rendering the work incomplete... Indeed respecting this matter, he can with great truth make the same defence that Falstaff ludicrously urges in behalf of one engaged in rebellion, viz. that he did not seek them; but that, like rebellion in the case instanced, they lay in his way, and he found them. (10)

In addition to drawing attention to the titillating material in his dictionary to garner a wide audience, Grose touches upon the growing emphasis on polite language that will continue to gain relevance well into the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A prerequisite of social recognition was the ability to speak polite and proper English. Despite incorporating the cant speakers within the English community, Grose labels them 'vulgar' and so excludes them from "polite" and therefore powerful circles. Grose acknowledges that "vulgar English" merely exist; they cannot, however, be incorporated unless they adopt a polite and acceptable standard of speaking. Additionally, it should be mentioned that if Grose "extols cant and vulgar language as homegrown" as Sorenson suggests (432), this praise should be read against his claim that the English vulgar language indicates England's endorsement of personal freedom as opposed to France's despotism -- a country in which people are allegedly jailed and prosecuted for any

“ebullitions of vulgar wit” (7). Grose celebrates cant’s “homegrown” nature in a discursive encounter with the French Other and thereby reduces the canters and their “dialect” to a political statement. The threat posed by France’s Catholicism subtly surfaces in such binary rhetoric. English beggars and vagrants are reinterpreted when contrasted against the French.

It must be noted that the negative portrayal of vagabonds and “rogues” was not limited to dictionary prefaces. A large collection of literary texts purporting to portray rogue culture proliferated. These texts served to foster fictions about vagrants that have been discredited by historians as false or exaggerated. For example, Linda Woodbridge lists the following myths about vagrant culture: vagrants were organized hierarchically in disciplined societies; each vagrant was had his/her criminal specialization; vagrants were in a continual plot to overthrow the government and to instill sedition in the country; vagrants were jobless by choice; vagrants were sexually loose and there was a wide-held belief in the notion that they engaged in sexual orgies and kept women as sex slaves; finally, vagrants spoke cant (6-9). In her study, Woodbridge seeks to debunk these myths; however, it must be recognized that the implications of portraying the canters in the manner discussed above are unaffected by whether Woodbridge’s arguments against the myths are valid. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that linguistic studies attest to the fact that clusters of people tend to develop their own speech-habits and to unknowingly regulate their linguistic practices: this can also include the introduction of words to represent new ideas or simply as a form of group consolidation. Therefore, cant does not seem as farfetched a practice as Woodbridge suggests. What is at issue here is not whether cant existed, but rather what its documentation meant and implied. In fact, if the cant language was truly just a fabrication, then that makes the efforts of cant lexicographers that much more impressive for their wide imaginations and for their headstrong attempts at the creation of a cant mythology --



complete with its very own lexicon. The historical facticity behind the existence of cant is irrelevant. The representation of the canters, exaggerated or not, does ideological work that I have been trying to shed light on in this chapter.

This chapter began with a summary of Palmer's analysis of the ways in which the English regarded the Irish in Ireland. In Palmer's reading, Anglicization, read largely as a linguistic phenomenon, was integral to the conquest of Ireland and is taken to reflect an ongoing commitment to an English cultural nationalism. The similarities between the English appreciation of the Irish language and their assessment of vagrant culture and cant language cannot be overlooked: In both cases, wordlists were compiled to protect the unwary Englishman from the evil ploys of the Irish in Ireland and the vagrants in England. The linguistic practices of both were considered threatening tools that target English gentlemen. In both cases as well the Irish and the vagrants were made the subjects of wide-ranging narratives of cannibalism, sexual promiscuity and moral degeneracy. These similarities have provoked a reassessment of the association between English cultural nationalism and Elizabethan policies in Ireland.

### **E. Linguistic imperialism and Language standardization**

By providing an account of the ways in which both the Irish in Ireland and the English vagrants in England were discriminated against due to their linguistic practices,<sup>2</sup> amongst other things, the above section has problematized the reference to English cultural nationalism as a means to justify cultural hegemony. In this section, I will explore the relationship between language standardization and nation-building that was presented earlier in this chapter. I am mainly interested in the examining how policies of language standardization were informed by the Act of Union of 1707. With the establishment of Great Britain, the standardization of English became a pressing matter: unlike other countries, English during the early eighteenth century did

not have any standard form or an agreed upon set of rules. There was no English Language Academy to regulate speech, proscribe or prescribe words and dictate the correct rules of English grammar. This made language purists anxious over the state of the language and its future. The question of the best way to properly instruct the Scottish people in the English language heightened these anxieties.

What needs to be pointed out in this discussion is the way in which the preservation of the English language was laid at the heart of an intense debate over the future historical memory of British history and how, even while the attempts at standardizing English were informed by nation-building goals, a great demand for books that teach the aspiring middle class to speak “correct” and “polite” English began to flourish in that period. While English was hailed as an instrument that would help mold the British nation, it simultaneously became stratified into high and low forms that signaled class divisions. An interesting observation can be made at this stage: the arguments that are raised by scholars of the eighteenth century in favor of English instruction in the British isles are exceedingly similar to the arguments raised in favor of the correction of the English language within England and employed similar strategies. I present this debate to further support my argument that linguistic imperialism was not necessarily an ‘external’ affair because similar processes of cultural/linguistic hegemony can be identified within England in a top-down class basis.

#### **F. Jonathan Swift’s Prescriptivism**

A similar preoccupation with the question of language crystallizes around a century later in the works of Jonathan Swift, who ranks with Spenser among the most important literary writers preoccupied with issues of language and nationhood. Swift’s work was extremely influential in the field of regulating and standardizing English (Neumann 1). An ardent prescriptivist, Swift

was dedicated to correcting and improving the English language. In his proposal to the Earl of Oxford, Swift addresses the problems with the English language and suggests how they can be fixed. He argues that many factors have led to the deterioration of the English language. Among these, he lists the introduction of new words into the language by “dunces”, the use of cant, the attempts at altering English orthography, and the practice of dropping certain vowels in verse writing to adhere to a proper meter:

There is another Sett of Men who have contributed very much to the spoiling of the *English* Tongue; I mean the Poets, from the Time of the Restoration. These Gentlemen, although they could not be insensible how much our Language was already overstocked with Monosyllables; yet, to same Time and Pains, introduced that barbarous Custom of abbreviating Words, to fit them to the Measure of their Verses; and this they have frequently done, so very injudiciously, as to form such harsh unharmonious Sounds, that none but a *Northern* Ear could endure. (par. 10)

In the quotation above, Swift blames Restoration poets for ruining the English language by altering its otherwise harmonious words through clipping syllables to preserve their poems' meters. Interestingly, in his vituperation, Swift argues that consonantal words are only acceptable to “northern” ears and as such harps upon difference between people to justify reform. Swift adds that the English tendency to clip words is “nothing else but a tendency to lapse into the Barbarity of those *Northern* Nations from whom we are descended, and whose Languages labour all under the same Defect” (par. 13 [author's emphasis]). Swift supports his call for correcting the English language by alluding to linguistic practices of Others (Germanic, Saxon and Nordic nations) and drawing upon fears of assimilation into their cultures.

Swift also justifies his call for language reform and fixation by arguing that language

change will eventually completely transform English which will prevent future generations from accessing historical documents, resulting in the loss of British memory. He writes:

If Things go on at this rate, all I can promise Your Lordship is, that about two hundred Years hence, some painful Compiler, who will be at the Trouble of studying Old Language, may inform the World, that in the Reign of QUEEN ANNE, Robert Earl of Oxford, a very wise and excellent Man, was made *High Treasurer*, and saved his Country, which in those Days was almost ruined by a *Foreign War*, and a *Domestick Faction*. Thus much he may be able to pick out, and willingly transfer into his new History, but the rest of Your Character, which I or any other Writer may now value our selves by drawing, and the particular Account of the great Things done under Your Ministry, for which You are already so celebrated in most Parts of *Europe*, will probably be dropt, on account of the antiquated Style and Manner they are delivered in. (par. 21)

Despite the evident sycophantic nature of the above excerpt, Swift's allusion to historical memory is significant in that it imagines the linear progression of a British nation in time, one whose connection to the past is contingent upon a homogenous and fixed language. The fate of British history, and by extension, the linear existence of British nationhood rests upon the survival of English. The political ramifications of this statement become more evident when the English language is hailed as the perfect mark of British imperial expansion: to preserve British imperial memory in time, the empire's subjects are to be taught English. This argument confirms the ongoing shift in the discourse surrounding the value of the English language: no longer deemed unworthy to compete with Latin and Greek, English, with the expansion of the Empire, increasingly becomes praised as a language of learning and civilization in and of itself. Swift's suggestion that fixing the English language is crucial to British memory is ironically laden with

internal colonial notions that is better illustrated in another essay, discussed below.

In “On the Barbarous Denominations in Ireland” (1728) Swift mocks public advertisements for land denominations in Dublin newspapers:

I am confident that they must be genuine; for it is impossible that either chance or modern invention could sort the alphabet in such a manner as to make those abominable sounds; whether first invented to invoke or fright away the devil, I must leave among the curious. (par. 1)

Swift’s ridicule turns into a scathing denunciation of the writers’ and speakers’ humanity:

I encountered near a hundred words together, which I defy any creature in *human shape*, except an Irishman of the savage kind, to pronounce; neither would I undertake such a task, to be the owner of the lands, unless I had the liberty to *humanize* the syllables twenty miles round. (par. 2 [emphasis mine])

Though Swift is well known for his political activism and his support for Ireland through works such as “A Modest Proposal” and *Gulliver’s Travels*, the passage above complicates his relationship with that country. Swift’s reference to the “Irishman of the savage kind” brings his Anglo-Irish identity to the fore by calling attention to his English loyalties. Swift’s political persuasions fluctuated throughout the course of his life and that, by belonging to the “New English” minority, he had a love-hate relationship with his country of birth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Under Mary the First the English initiated their plantation policy in Ireland. They found the Gaelic chieftains difficult to subdue and discovered that the “Old English” who had arrived in Ireland in the twelfth century exhibited a high degree of assimilation with the Irish. This led them to grant lands to English families who wished to settle in Ireland (after 1603, Scottish settlers were also granted land). The English were met with a strong Irish resistance that they managed to crush. The great rebellion of Hugh O’Neil (1594-1603) brought the strategic significance of the northern Gaelic stronghold of Ulster to light; as a result, James I and his

By 1728, Swift was known for his political pamphleteering and his condemnation of English policies in Ireland. However, the above excerpted sections suggest that Swift deems it appropriate to dehumanize the “Irishman” on the grounds of an allegedly inhuman articulation. Even more noteworthy is the fact Swift assumes a position of superiority and proposes to change the names of Irish denominations to better suit an English tongue (par. 5). He writes, “I would desire, not only that the appellations of what they call town-lands were changed, but likewise of larger districts, and several towns, and some countries; and particularly the seats of country-gentleman, leaving an alias to solve all difficulties in point of law” (par. 5). The significance of this gesture lies in its nuanced ramifications. Above, Swift appears to be deeply critical of the Irish language: he not only claims that the sounds of the Irish language are barbaric, but also adds that Gaelic has hindered its speakers from becoming civilized (par. 2). The best way to progress, according to Swift, is for the Irish to properly learn English. He elaborates this argument in “On the Causes of the Wretched Conditions of Ireland” in which he explains that Ireland is riddled with poverty and proposes to ameliorate its conditions in the following manner:

It is, indeed, in the power of the lawgivers to found a school in every parish of the kingdom, for teaching the meaner and poorer sort of children to speak and to read the English tongue, and to provide a reasonable maintenance for the teachers. This would, in

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government brought their power to bear upon Ulster, successfully displacing the native Irish and establishing it as the home of the New English in Ireland (Kumar 140). In addition to plantations and land transfers that significantly reduced the landholding of Old English and native Irish population to around one-seventh of the area of Ireland by 1704 (originally at two-thirds in 1641), the failure of the reformation in Ireland widened the schism between the Irish and the English and increased antagonism. An unexpected result of English state-sponsored Reformation was the fusion of two previously oppositional groups, the Old English and the native Irish, into a single ethnic community: the Catholic Irish (141). From the late seventeenth-century, the New English (the English Protestant minority) dominated Irish society (141).

time, abolish that part of barbarity and ignorance, for which our natives are so despised by all foreigners: this would bring them to think and act according to the rules of *reason*, by which a spirit of industry, and thrift, and honest, would be introduced among them. (7 [emphasis mine])

In the quotation above, Swift attributes unusual characteristics to the English language. He suggests that a person will be capable of mental reasoning by learning how to speak English. The ramifications are striking: Swift implies that the Irish of whom he speaks are ignorant and incapable of proper reasoning. During an age that valorized reason as its hallmark, these people are therefore backwards and unenlightened.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century and at the time of Swift's writing, English nationalism, it has been argued, was not as prominent as it became in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (and even then, the debate centers more around British nationalism than English nationalism); however, I suggest that Swift's writings demonstrate the emergence of a British linguistic identity already at work -- one that stems from a classist English hegemony.

The association between language standardization and nation building in the case of England is difficult to tease out precisely because the English language extended beyond England. In the section above, I alluded to selected works of Jonathan Swift to illustrate how he subtly establishes a relationship between the English language and the British kingdom by insisting that the language needs to be fixed in order to preserve British historical memory and by suggesting that Irish children need to be instructed in English to ameliorate the conditions in which they live. Both these remarks suggest that a relationship between the English language and the social imagining of Britain were already being made and that the efforts to not only standardize the English language within England but also to spread it and properly instruct it

within the British isles signal the discursive imagining of a growing Britain as an English-speaking nation. The Anglocentric nature of this figuration is evident but it is also qualified in that its imagined English speaker speaks proper or “polite” English - the dialect of the ruling classes. The sentiments that Swift bore towards Gaelic-speaking, “vulgar” Irish were also exhibited within England towards lower-class English people as the allusion to canting dictionaries has demonstrated. It is also worth mentioning that between the years 1797 and 1818 the British Parliament refused to acknowledge the “vulgar” as a legitimate political constituency because of their vulgar language. Olivia Smith explains that Parliament “rejected petitions for universal suffrage, the political enfranchisement of the ‘vulgar,’ because of the unelevated language of those petitions” (qtd. in Sorenson 436). Swift considered the Irish unenlightened and unreasonable because of how they spoke; Parliament followed suit in its rejection of its lower class citizens.



## CHAPTER V

### LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF LINGUISTIC IDENTITY IN SPENSER AND SHAKESPEARE

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the spread of the English language within the British isles and the call for its proper instruction were carried out on the assumption that the English language was, and is, a mark of civilization, progress and reason. Additionally, the chapter suggested that the imperial nature of these linguistic policies were coupled with a hegemonic classist approach to speech within the confines of England proper. The question of correct English gained relevance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the association between “polite” speech and social advancement became solidified -- the popularity of elocution classes, most notably by Thomas Sheridan and John Walker, attest to this (DeWispelare 859). The emphasis on polite speech and proper English provide striking examples of how the English language, while hailed as a nation building tool, could simultaneously be used as a divisive class marker.

This chapter will examine literary texts that open questions of nationhood (both British and English) through direct or indirect representations of English speech. The selected texts cover the late sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century and will help track the evolution of the assessment of language and of regional and class dialects in particular. Though I am interested in many genres, drama receives special attention in my analysis of *Henry V* since the performative nature of theatre helps foreground linguistic differences and can provide information about stereotypical associations between language, class, and morals. In this chapter, I will study how configurations of English identity were formulated with respect to linguistic

practices over time. Additionally, I will examine how the changes in what it means to be English were informed by a growing anticipation of, and then by the fact of, a British union. Finally, while British union challenged simple constructions of English identity in one way, the anticipation of an overseas British empire triggered the (qualified) reevaluation of previously exclusive notions of English identity in another.

### **A. Dialect Leveling to Combat discrimination**

This project has already demonstrated, through the example of Swift, how the association between Britain and the English language evolved. During the seventeenth centuries and eighteenth centuries, there was a surge in the publication of grammar books promoting proper English. Proper or “polite” English was modeled on the language of the aristocracy and so middle class individuals who aspired to climb the social ladder voluntarily sought to “improve” both their speaking skills and their social behavior, thereby creating a large market for prescriptive grammar books (Fitzmaurice, “The Commerce of Language” 327).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, elocutionists such as Thomas Sheridan and John Walker argued that the way people speak can impede their social progress since speech patterns encode their social, regional and ethnic background (DeWispelare 858). Proponents of the elocutionist movement argued that elocution was not an inherent human characteristic but rather a skill that can be acquired. In their effort to popularize their lectures, they reinforced the belief that social elevation is contingent upon proper speech. The appeal of elocution lectures as well as pronunciation books hint at the persistence of prejudice and class/regional profiling in that period. Interestingly, Sheridan’s vehement promotion of elocution went hand in hand with his call for the standardization of the English language. He suggested that the lack of a proper standard obstructed the efforts to uniformly instruct people across the Celtic fringe in English

(Beach 118). As a result, people's speech habits could not be effectively remodeled in Scotland, Ireland and Wales. In *An Oration Pronounced before a Numerous Body of the Nobility and Gentry*, Sheridan blames absenteeism in Ireland on the lack of a proper system of education that has forced parents to send their children to schools in England. After positing the imminent downfall of Ireland should this practice persist, Sheridan presents a strategy to amend the situation that centers on remodeling the system of education in Ireland and, most importantly, properly instructing the English language and the art of oration in Irish schools (14). This, he argues, will not only stave off student emigration to England, but will also encourage Scottish and Welsh people who are looking to perfect their English to travel to Ireland. The curious suggestion that Ireland could become a cultural hub, rivaling England, if it were to house proper schools of English grammar and pronunciation illustrates the extent to which that language was thought to attract aspiring social climbers. Whether or not Sheridan's proposal was well researched does not affect its ramifications. The claim that a school of English oration would not only offset emigration to England but would possibly redirect migration away from the metropole, calls attention to the significance of the hierarchy of languages and dialects at that time within the British isles.

Sheridan justified his efforts to promote the standardization and fixation of English pronunciation by appealing to the preservation of historical memory through preventing language change (*An Oration Pronounced* xvi-ii) and by arguing that such a project would allow people to disguise their regional identities.<sup>10</sup> However, his elocution lectures reinforced the discrimination policies that he was fighting against. DeWispalere provides information about the

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<sup>10</sup> Sheridan is informed by Jonathan Swift and frequently alludes to his writings.

method Sheridan adopted in his lectures and suggests that it reinforced the kinds of discrimination that it sought to efface:

Perhaps the most important aspect of Sheridan's method, however, was the way he actively performed examples of correct *and* incorrect speech. By regularly juxtaposing good and bad speech, and by associating each example with identifiable social groups, Sheridan's lectures helped stabilize and elaborate the very code he was trying to disarm. (867)

In addition to reinforcing discrimination against "dialectical" English, Sheridan's lectures, as described above, illustrate that his call for standardizing English is undergirded by the political recognition that to "fix" speech means to shed distinctive regional — and therefore "peripheral" — dialects and to adopt a standard — actually "central" — dialect modeled upon the speech patterns of an exclusive set of politically powerful English speakers. Sheridan's claim that the standardization of the English language is a necessary step towards the creation of national unity in that, by regulating speech, elocutionists can promote the elimination of regional discrimination is already classist and hegemonic by nature due to the fact that standardizing speech becomes synonymous with stigmatizing non-standard dialects.

Interestingly, the British government in the mid-eighteenth century acted in accordance with Sheridan's belief: Following the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion (1745), it sought measures to integrate the Scots into the Great Britain by sponsoring English education to Highlander children and by exerting pressure on Lowlanders to abandon their Scots language (Beach 118). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the elimination of people's distinctive cultural and linguistic heritage was not simply a government-driven undertaking. A quick survey of the surge in linguistic projects (grammar book publications, elocution lectures, dictionary publications)

illustrates how they were mostly driven by independent scholars. In Scotland, Robert Crawford has argued that Scottish Enlightenment scholars who were under internal pressure to assimilate with southern English culture, propagated and reinforced the classification of languages as primitive as compared to English, which led him to assert that Scotland was “a perpetrator as well as a victim of global British imperialism” (qtd. in Beach 120). Another case in point is that the first authoritative dictionary of the English language was not compiled by a national linguistic academy as l’Académie Française had done in France (Reddick 158), but by the single-handed labor of Samuel Johnson, a self-proclaimed “humble drudge” (Johnson par.2). Additionally, it was not until the Education Act of 1870 that the government legislated for compulsory education, which is arguably one of the most efficient ways for a government to institutionalize language instruction. In 1872, the act was extended to also include Scotland; however, two further acts were needed to render education compulsory in 1880 (“The 1870 Education Act”).

Though the linguistic projects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely initiated and run by independent scholars, this should not be taken to indicate that language was not a highly politicized field. Grammar and pronunciation books as well as other media for language correction did not require government sponsorship because the hierarchical classification of dialects and the social significance of “polite” speech as social indicators created a demand-driven market for language standardization. For instance, the fact that Sheridan’s elocution lessons garnered an audience (albeit one that could afford to pay a guinea to attend four lectures a week) suggests that standardizing English was not exclusively a top-down state-sponsored enterprise, especially since these lectures were very successful (among well-off people) in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and western England (DeWispelare 865). But it would be

a mistake to conclude that the lack of governmental sponsorship implies the lack of English cultural hegemony. On the contrary, the linguistic and cultural imperialism at play is so deeply entrenched in these projects that it is woven into their very fabric and escapes notice: it is not a question for the Anglo-Irish Sheridan, as it was not for Swift before him, what the reason behind his call for the proper instruction of the English language, as opposed to Scottish Gaelic or Gaelic Irish or even Welsh, is. It is taken for granted that “standard” English should be the linguistic medium of the British nation. What complicates matters further is that while linguists imagined a British state with citizens who spoke a standard form of English and while the rise of the middle class created a market for standardization projects, a counter trend was simultaneously emerging -- one that, while discriminating against non-standard forms of speech, nevertheless reinscribed subversive speakers into the nation and hailed them as proof of British liberty and diversity. The sections that follow lead up to a reading of the discursive repositioning of canners in England and of regional English within the British isles and argue that this paradigmatic shift is informed by British imperial expansion.

In the upcoming sections, I delve into close readings of literary texts, as they have the potential to provide invaluable social commentary. Following Willy Maley’s example, I chose literature from the late sixteenth century, since Elizabeth’s reign was drawing to an end and with it loomed the question of Britain.<sup>11</sup> Through their engagement with their contemporary social and political issues from different viewpoints, the texts I allude to below illustrate the difficulties associated with theorizing about language policy and linguistic identity in the abstract due to

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<sup>11</sup> Queen Elizabeth did not marry and therefore did not have an immediate heir. In anticipation of her death, the question of the union of England and Scotland loomed as the next in line for the English throne was James VI of Scotland, who became James VI and I of England.

their complex engagement with questions of language, empire and identity. I chose to read Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Current State of Ireland* against William Shakespeare's *Henry V* because of their conflicting analyses of identity and language. Spenser provides a binary view of identity and adopts a typical colonial approach in his critique of the Irish and of the English settlers in Ireland; this is not surprising since his is a governmental tract, framed as a literary dialectic. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, on the other hand, does not yield to dichotomous portrayals of identity, but rather, through its engagement with various British characters, complicates the belief in English supremacy that readily surfaces in Spenser's writing.

### **B. Problematizing English Identity: The British Question in Spenser and Shakespeare**

Though Edmund Spenser is best known as the author of the epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, he was a politically active figure who spent most of his career in Ireland serving as secretary and aide to the country's lord deputy (Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser* 119).<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I quote relevant passages that address the adoption of the Irish tongue by English settlers in Ireland from *A View of the Current State of Ireland*. The *View* is an official document framed as a dialectic between two English men, Eudoxus and Irenius. The tract follows a basic question and answer format in which Eudoxus, representing English home authority, questions Irenius, who represents the voice of the English colonial administrator in Ireland. Irenius holds the authoritative voice in the text and provides Eudoxus with a colonial view of Ireland: he deplores the backwardness of the Irish and argues that the only way to permanently subdue them is through military force. Nothing escapes his criticism: the Irish, in his opinion, have incestuous relationships, do not have a proper legal system, do not know how to cultivate and make use of

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<sup>12</sup> Additionally, he exhibited a strong interest in reforming English verse, a topic that has been alluded to above.

their land, and have subversive poetry. It is the Old English, however, whom Ireuius finds especially deserving of of condemnation for they have become more Irish than the Irish themselves.<sup>13</sup> The English have *adopted the Irish tongue*,<sup>14</sup> and their deprave behavior cannot be condoned; theirs, according to the speakers, is a more heinous crime. In his response to Eduxos's lamentation over the degeneration of the English in Ireland, Ireuius states:

...Therefore, in counting the evill customes of the English there, I will not have regard whether the beginning thereof were English or Irish but will have respect onely to the inconvenience thereof. And first I have to finde fault with the abuse of language; that is, for the speaking of Irish among the English, which as it is unnaturall that any people should love another's language more than their owne, so it is very inconvenient and the cause of many other evils. (70)

Eudoxus replies:

It seemeth strange to me that the English should take more delight to speake that language than their owne, whereas they should (mee thinkes) rather take scorne to acquaint their tongues thereto. For it hath ever beene the use of the conquerour to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all meanes to learn his. So did the Romans always use, insomuch that there is almost no nation in the world but is sprinckled with their language. (70)

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<sup>13</sup> The term "Old English" was coined by Spenser and refers to the descendants of the English settlers who arrived in Ireland during its twelfth century Norman invasion. The Old English exhibited a high degree of assimilation into Irish culture. They refused to convert to Protestantism and adhered to their Catholic beliefs. The influx of "New English" Protestant settlers as a result of the Tudor conquest of Ireland created tension amongst the two settler groups.

<sup>14</sup> Picking up a theme from Henry VIII's proclamation that was discussed above.



In the quoted selections above, Eudoxus condemns the Old English in Ireland for speaking Irish. Viewed from this framework, a person's linguistic practices are already signifiers of his or her political affiliation and identity. Two assumptions undergird his criticism: the first is that individuals should prefer their own country's language over that of any other country and that this preference is natural and inherent: any aberration from this inclination is abnormal and therefore breeds evil. The second assumption is that the flow of language is directly correlated to power dynamics: conquering nations impose their language upon those whom they conquer. This critique of the Old English's linguistic practices unapologetically hails the English as the conquerers of Ireland. Interestingly, the entire tract is laden with fears of assimilation with the Irish that eventually lead Irenius to suggest force as the only possible means with which to subdue Ireland. Eudoxus's voices his surprise at the fact that the Old English have assimilated into Irish society and appeals to Roman precedent.

The conquering Romans, he asserts, despised the language of the nations they conquered and taught them Latin. The allusion to the Romans conjures an image of linguistic hierarchy that implies the transfer of language across a perceived cultural gradient. Though the Romans learned Greek, this was easily justified by referring to Greece's cultural supremacy. It is implicit that the same cannot be said about Ireland. Eudoxus's choice of words conveys a sense of moral indignation. As used above, the words "despise" and "force" serve to illustrate Eudoxus's fixation on how power relations should inform inter-cultural attitudes. The English should have despised the Irish language and should have forced the Irish people to learn the English language instead. The fact that this did not happen challenges Eudoxus's belief in English cultural supremacy; interestingly, both Eudoxus and Irenius feel threatened by the fact that the Old English have assimilated into Irish culture. Rather than questioning their original premise that the

English are culturally superior to the Irish and that, as their conquerors, they must force them to learn English and adopt English culture, Irenuis and Eudoxus manage to redefine the English settlers as not real in the following remarkable passage:

Iren: I suppose that the chiefe cause of bringing in the Irish language, amongst them, was specially their fostering, and marrying with the Irish, the which are two most dangerous infections; for first the childe that sucketh the milke of the nurse, must of necessity learne his first speech of her... moreover drawe into themselves, together with their sucke, even the nature and disposition of their nurses: for the mind followeth much the temperature of the body; and also the words are the image of the minde, so as, they proceeding from the minde, the minde must be needs affected with the words. So that the speach being Irish, the heart must needes bee Irish; for out of the abundance of the hart, the tongue speaketh. The next is the marrying with the Irish, which how dangerous a thing it is in all commonwealthes, appeareth to every simplest sence... indeed how can such matching succede well, seeing that commonly the childe taketh most of his nature of the mother, besides speach, manners, and inclynation, which are (for the most part) agreeable to the conditions of their mothers: for by them they are first framed and fashioned, so as what they receive once from, they will hardly ever after forgoe. Therefore are these evill customes of fostering and marrying with the Irish most carefully to be restrayned; for of them two, the third evill that is the custome of language (which I spake of,) chiefly proceedeth. (71)

The above passage does not engage the deeper question of why the English, being culturally and morally superior to the Irish in the first place, would intermarry and assimilate with them. Rather than questioning his original premise about the fixed relationship between conquerors and

conquered, Irenius explains why the English speak Irish in Ireland by implying that they are not truly English. In a graphic image that associates the exchange of bodily fluids with identity constructs, Irenius suggests that English children who have been nursed by Irish women become Irish themselves. Remarkably, Irenius does not dwell upon the ramifications that such a claim bears upon essentialist ideas of identity and cultural supremacy. Instead, the assimilation of the English into Irish culture is subtly rewritten through an assertion that denies English acculturation by redefining them as not really English in the first place. In this way, Spenser's *View* provides insight into the ways in which configurations of English identity were formulated: as with any other identity construct, it is defined through difference with an Other—the Irish in this case. Spenser deplors that the English have become “more Irish than the Irish themselves” thereby suggesting that they have lost what makes them “English”, but more importantly, providing a framework through which to justify their cultural depravity without needing to question English cultural superiority.

Spenser simplifies identity constructions by asserting that they are fixed: to be English is to speak English and to uphold English customs. Any aberration from these ambiguous qualifiers (what does the “English tongue” signify? What are “English customs”?) can result in the loss of identity. Rather than recognizing that he heavily relies on what he believes to be Irish/not-English to define what it means to be English and thereby question the permanence of identity, Spenser condemns the “Old English” for assimilating into Irish culture and styles them Irish. The above discussion has demonstrated that it is not surprising for an official document to provide a fixed view of identity precisely when it purports to justify calls for martial action. In so doing, this view also constructs an image of a homogenous English Self that is imagined against the backdrop of the Irish Other.

Unlike Spenser's *View*, Shakespeare's *Henry V* does not produce rigid theories of identity but rather illustrates the tensions that surface when the question of Englishness is placed within a British context. Though written before James VI's accession to the throne of England, the play alludes to the possibility of a British union and in so doing sheds light upon questions of English national and linguistic identity, English supremacy, and British identity. The play is often contextualized by alluding to the Earl of Essex's campaign in Ireland and its interpretations are therefore informed by England's colonial enterprise. The Earl of Essex was sent to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth to force the Irish rebels, led by Hugh O'Neil, into submission and into adopting English culture ("the English habit and tongue").<sup>15</sup> Essex failed to defeat O'Neil and defied Queen Elizabeth by negotiating an unauthorized truce, instead of fighting him as instructed. Essex deserted his post and returned to England, only to be placed under house arrest by order of the Queen. In a final attempt to regain authority, Essex attempted to stir up a rebellion against the English government. His attempts were thwarted, and he was tried for treason and executed in 1601. In a letter written after Essex's failure, the policy of English censorship of all matters relating to Ireland are laid bare: "it is forbidden, on the pain of death, to write or speak of Irish affairs; what is brought by post is known only to the Council; but it is very sure that Tyrone's party has prevailed most" (Baker, *Between Nations* 25). English censorship may have played a role in the editorial history of the play: the Quarto text of 1600 omits the choral allusion of Essex, does not include Captain Jamy or Captain MacMorris, and is significantly shorter than the 1623 Folio edition. A longstanding hypothesis is that the quarto text arose from a process of memorial reconstruction, thereby explaining the frequent corruptions in the text by suggesting

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<sup>15</sup> See Palmer above

that the play was reconstructed imperfectly from the memory of actors who had played Exter and Gower; however, Annabel Patterson has argued that the fuller text reproduced in the Folio was written in 1599 and that the substantial omissions from the quarto were due to political sensitivities surrounding Essex's military campaign (Loehlin 11). The colonial and political context in which the play was written inform the text in subtle ways. In what follows, I argue that the play's engagement with linguistic diversity (whether in its handling of the French language, or in its manifestation of dialectal and standard English) offers political commentary on the anticipation of British union and that, in so doing, it effectively complicates colonial and, by extension, identity discourse. I will study the relationship between language, identity and power that permeates *Henry V* and argue that language plays a powerful role in deconstructing the binary view of England and its various Others, an example of which has been demonstrated in the above reading of Spenser's *View*. Through close readings of passages that shed light upon language and identity, I will begin condensing many of the crucial tensions around "Englishness" and "Britishness" that I have been exploring above.

Shakespeare toys with the question of a British union by assigning the Irishman MacMorris, the Welshman Fluellen, and the Scotsman Jamy as Henry's captains during the war with France. The playwright's portrayal of them is linguistically marked: though he allows them to speak, he does so by simultaneously accentuating their differences (from each other, but also from the English Captain, Gower) through their dialectal variations. The excerpt below provides an example of Captain Jamy's Scottish accent:

JAMY. By the mess, ere these eyes of mine take themselves to slomber, ay'll de gud service, or I'll lig i'th' grund for it. Ay owe Got a death; and I'll pay't as valourously as I may, that sall I

suerly do, that is the brief and the long. Marry, I wad full fain  
heard some question 'tween you twae. (3.3.54-58)

This can be read as a statement on the three captains' and, by extension, the three nations' inferiority – they are allowed to speak insofar as they speak with aberrations. However, close readings of two key scenes of the play will force us to reconsider this simple analysis.

Act three scene three is a locus classicus in Shakespeare's representation of the colonized (Baker, "Wildehirissheman" 43). In this scene, Captain Gower informs Captain Fluellen that the Duke of Gloucester wishes to speak to him at the underground tunnels. Fluellen complains that the mines are not well built and that they are not constructed "according to the disciplines of the war" (3.3.4-5). The conversation shifts to a discussion of Captain MacMorris, who Fluellen is told is directing the Duke of Gloucester in the supervision of the siege. Fluellen exclaims that "[MacMorris] is an ass, as in the world" and continues to suggest that he lacks sophistication for want of knowledge of the Roman disciplines of war (3.3.15). Gower signals the arrival of MacMorris and Captain Jamy for whom Fluellen has nothing but the greatest praise: Fluellen even claims that Captain Jamy is well versed in the Roman disciplines of war thereby suggesting that, unlike the Irish MacMorris, the Scots captain is cultured and has been exposed to classical learning. For 41 lines, the stage is held by Jamy, MacMorris and Fluellen and their different English accents in a display of linguistic variety that reaches its climax with MacMorris's exclamation "What ish my nation?":

FLUELLEN. Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your  
correction, there is not many of your nation--

MACMORRIS. 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?

FLUELLEN. Look you, if you take the matter otherwise than is meant, Captain Macmorris, peradventure I shall think you do not use me with that affability as in discretion you ought to use me, look you, being as good a man as yourself, both in the disciplines of war, and in the derivation of my birth, and in other particularities. (3.3.49-71)

Scholars disagree over the meaning of MacMorris's outburst in the quoted excerpt above. Some, such as Philip Edwards, have interpreted it as a cry of indignation and an affirmation of Irish belonging to a British nation. He paraphrases MacMorris's outburst and analyzes it as such:

'What is the separate race you're implying by using the phrase 'your nation'? Who are you, a Welshman, to talk of the Irish as though they were a separate nation from you? I belong in this family as much as you do'. This is the essence of it—indignation that a Welshman should think of Ireland as a separate nation from the great (British) nation to which the Welshman apparently thought he belonged. (75-6)

The above paraphrase suggests that MacMorris is indignant because he does not wish to be portrayed as an outsider to the British nation by a Welsh man. This analysis is rather problematic precisely because the characteristics of a British nation and its qualifiers had not yet been imagined. In order to read MacMorris's outburst, it is important to first address why the question of his identity and national belonging is a source of immense anxiety for him. David Baker provides an answer to this question by suggesting that MacMorris is Anglo-Irish and that

Shakespeare borrowed MacMorris's name from an existing Old English family.<sup>1617</sup> To explain the anxieties surrounding Anglo-Irishness, Baker narrates a historical event in which an Anglo-Irishman, St. Lawrence, was officially rebuked on October 12, 1599 for offering a toast "to the Health of my lord of Essex, and to the Confusion of his Ennemies" (*Between Nations* 32). St. Lawrence, who had been fighting alongside the English in Essex's campaign to Ireland, claimed to have made this toast in response to being called an Irishman. He is quoted as complaining in the following manner, "I am sorry that when I am in *England*, I should be esteemed an *Irish* Man, and in *Ireland*, an *English* Man; I haue spent my Blood, engaged and endangered my Liffe, often to doe her Majestie Service, and doe beseech to haue yt soe regarded" (*Between Nations* 33).

Baker appropriately draws upon the above anecdote to shed light upon the contestations of identity that inform MacMorris's outcry. Rather than asserting that the Anglo-Irish belong to the British nation, MacMorris complicates the question of their representation (both literal, as in works of art, and political) altogether. Fluellen's declarative phrase "there is not many of your nation", is unnerving precisely because he authorizes himself to linguistically conjure the Irish "nation", describe it, make stereotypical claims about it, and render it transparent. MacMorris's outburst rejects stereotypical representations of the Irishman as a "villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal". More importantly, it vehemently questions, through the repetition of "What ish my nation?", whether his "nation" can be neatly folded into a describable homogenous entity.

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<sup>16</sup> Basically, MacMorris belongs to the group of people whom Spenser has styled the "Old English".

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Hadfield suggests that MacMorris is actually a gaelicized form of the Anglo-Norman "Fitzmaurice" ("From English to British Literature" 141).



MacMorris's final line "Who talks of my nation?" also brings into question who has the right to speak of and arguably, by extension, *for* the Irish "nation".

On a performative level, the scene is an exercise in dialectical diversity. Though MacMorris and Fluellen's disputation is arguably undermined by their caricatural accents, the fact that this scene is cut from the Quarto calls for a reassessment of its benign or comic nature. In my analysis of MacMorris's and Fluellen's dialects below, I argue that they cannot be placed on a level plane of comic contribution to the play. In this scene, MacMorris's accent could allow the audience to retain a sense of English superiority and distance themselves from MacMorris. However, rather than producing MacMorris as a comical figure, the challenge he launches against Fluellen depicts the Irishman as a defiant character. His accent cannot overshadow or efface the impact of his words; indeed, it takes the interference of the otherwise quiet English Captain Gower to silence MacMorris. Remarkably, this is MacMorris's last stage appearance. His voice is completely silenced from that point onwards. Below, I examine how the phonetic differences between MacMorris's and Fluellen's accents help concretize the image of the former as subversive and the latter as benign.

The most remarkable feature of MacMorris's speech in the quoted excerpt above is his substitution of the alveolar voiced fricative sound /z/ in the copula "is" with the palatal unvoiced sound /ʃ/ in "ish". On a sonic level, this substitution destabilizes meaning by widening the surface area through which a sound is produced thereby increasing its fricative nature. The closest comparison to modern day technology that MacMorris's accent achieves is the sound of white noise interfering with the clarity of a news broadcast on the radio and agitating the listener. MacMorris voices the /ʃ/ sound twenty times in this scene, causing friction both by the effect of his "white noise" and by destabilizing English identity through questioning the validity of

defining the Irish “nation” against which the English defined themselves. While MacMorris’s disruptive fricatives send him off-stage, Fluellen’s comical accent produces him as a nonthreatening character: his substitution of the bilabial voiced stop /b/ with the voiceless stop /p/ yields seemingly humorous phrases such as “Alexander the Pig” (4.7.10).

However, Fluellen’s role in act five, scene one warrants a reassessment of his unthreatening portrayal. The scene is set in France and follows the English victory at Agincourt. Fluellen takes up arms against the Englishman Pistol who had earlier insulted him by asking him to eat the leek which he had worn in his cap earlier in honor of Saint Davy’s day. Fluellen wears the leek again the next day and plans to force Pistol to eat it -- a feat that he successfully accomplishes through battering the Englishman into submission with a cudgel. The scene’s comical nature is undercut by the subversive hint that England can find itself at the receiving end of violence. This is alluded to in Gower’s response to Pistol who in his rage swore revenge against Fluellen: “You thought, because he could not speak English in/ the native garb, he could not handle an English cudgel./ You find it otherwise. And henceforth let a Welsh correction/ teach you a good English condition” (5.1.67-9). In the preceding lines, Shakespeare toys with the relationship between power and language. For Gower to assert that the Englishman thought Fluellen could not handle an *English cudgel* because of his lack of mastery of proper English, the following implicit connection is made: an Englishman is identified by speaking proper English and will therefore be capable of handling an English cudgel. Unfortunately for Pistol, this assumption proves to be ungrounded and he discovers that Fluellen, despite his Welsh accent, is capable of challenging him (by using English tools). English hegemony figures into the conception of Britain in this scene since the non-English Others have to learn how ‘to use an English cudgel’ to achieve British status. While Fluellen’s disciplining of Pistol with a cudgel

contests England's status as the supreme police-force in the region and offers a subversive vision of the future, the fact that Gower approves of Fluellen's actions complicates this reading by encoding the Welshman as an acculturated noble colonial subject.

To provide a more holistic analysis of the scene above, Pistol's role in the play as well as his linguistic characteristics need to be further discussed. Pistol is a commoner from London and an ensign at the battle of Agincourt. He does not speak standard English and is friends with Bardolph who was Henry's friend during his youthful indiscretions. The young boy who was previously Falstaff's page and who has known Pistol and Bardolph prior to their involvement in the war, offers a direct commentary on Pistol's character in act three scene two: "he hath a killing tongue and a quiet/ sword—by the means whereof a breaks words, and keeps whole weapons" (3.3.32-4). Thus, the boy characterizes Pistol as a braggart soldier who attempts to conceal his cowardice through providing inflated descriptions of his prowess. The most remarkable incident in the play that is integral to this reading of Pistol occurs in act four scene four. The scene is set on the battlefield of Agincourt. Pistol takes a French soldier prisoner and threatens to kill him unless he is willing to pay an "egregious ransom" for his life (4.4.11). The soldier offers to pay two hundred crowns, and Pistol readily agrees to spare his life. The boy mediates between the two characters by acting as a French-English translator. In the Pistol-soldier exchange, the language barrier yields comic misunderstandings:

FRENCH SOLDIER. *O Seigneur Dieu!*

PISTOL. [*aside*] O Seigneur Dew should be a gentleman.—

Perpend my words, O Seigneur Dew, and mark:

O Seigneur Dew, thou diest, on point of fox,

Except, O Seigneur, 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.

FRENCH SOLDIER. *Est-il impossible d’échapper la force de ton bras?*

PISTOL. Brass, cur? Thou damnèd and luxurious mountain goat.

Offer’st me brass?

FRENCH SOLDIER. *O pardonne-moi!*

PISTOL. Sayst thou me so? Is that a ton of moys?— (4.3.6-20)

The excerpt quoted above illustrates the comicality of the scene. In the first couple of lines, Pistol’s inability to understand the soldier’s plea for God comically renders the holy low. In the lines that follow, the English man demands a ransom of his prisoner. On a performative level, Pistol’s actions consolidate the boy’s description of him in act three scene three: he threatens to cut the soldier’s throat, but his true intention is simply to obtain a ransom. His misapprehension of *pardonne-moi*” further adds to the farcicality of the scene; from the French soldier’s perspective, the seriousness of the encounter is comically deflated in a mock heroic direction by Pistol’s language confusion. The scene allows the audience to witness the representation of an English man, who is theoretically in a position of power, as unthreatening and comedic. As a braggart soldier, Pistol does not *do*, he simply *says*: his tongue renders the English language

impotent. It comes as no surprise that he is humiliated by Fluellen in the presence of Gower:<sup>18</sup> the scene arguably enacts an English-sanctioned expulsion of individuals who abuse Englishness of its imagined characteristics.<sup>19</sup> These characteristics can be better drawn out in a reading of Henry and Princess Catherine's exchange in act five.

Richard Helgerson examines the use of language in *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and argues that despite the success of both the Welsh-accented Evans and Fluellen in mocking Falstaff and Pistol respectively, these incidents have more to do with the latter's falling than with the triumph of accented English since "in the greater actions of war and marriage, normatively unaccented English consistently prevails" ("Language Lessons" 295). Helgerson supports this claim by alluding to the scene in which the French princess Catherine decides to learn English so that she can speak with King Henry. Catherine's English language lesson, he argues, reverberates with sexual puns that evoke the rape imagery of Henry's conquest of France, thereby extending Henry's conquest of France onto Catherine's body, and the relationship between language and conquest is laid bare in this scene. However, Helgerson is mindful of qualifying the triumph of English:

...the triumph of the English language or of any other language is always the triumph of some speakers of that language and the defeat or marginalization of others... this is the

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<sup>18</sup> Significantly, a Welshman is allowed to discipline the lowly Englishman. Wales is seen as unthreatening in general. The same scene could not have possibly been imagined if MacMorris were to play Fluellen's role.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth mentioning that Fluellen, in his heated argument with MacMorris discussed above, wished to "verify" that the Irishman "is an ass, as in the world" by illustrating his ignorance of the Roman disciplines of war (3.3.15). This gesture is significant precisely because it signals Fluellen's self-presentation as an individual equipped with the classical learning that the English pride themselves in mastering.

victory of the king's English in a very literal sense: the victory, both at home and abroad, of the sovereign's newly sovereign tongue—though it is of course also the victory of the small-town-bred Shakespeare, who puts the king's English into the mouth of both king and subject. (“Language Lessons” 296)

The fact that Henry and Catherine’s exchange follows Fluellen’s disciplining of Pistol forces us to reconsider the binary classification of triumphant non-dialectical English and defeated dialectical English. After all, Fluellen, with his own English “garb” manages to dominate Pistol who had abused the English language by comedically presenting it as unthreatening and empty. This is not to say that the “king’s English” is not raised on a pedestal in the play, but rather that the juxtaposition of the aforementioned events reflexively undermines the supposedly uncontested association of “proper” English and power. The message that this implicitly sends is that France’s defeat is not necessarily final: though Henry may physically conquer France/Catherine’s body and force Catherine to speak English, this does not a victory make. Just as Fluellen, with his accented English, manages to take up arms against Pistol so too can Catherine/France rise up against England. To a certain extent, the Pistol-French soldier scene discussed above can be read as a farcical version of Henry and Catherine’s exchange. While Pistol employs hyperbolic language and does little, Henry insists upon speaking to Catherine as a “simple soldier” despite his having militarily gained the right to her body. In so doing, Henry (re)empowers the English language after Pistol had wronged it through his empty speech. Not only does his victory ensure that the French have to learn English, as exemplified by Catherine’s language lesson, but it also allows Henry, in a powerful display of domination, to self-present as a humble soldier and ironically undermine the power of his words in the exchange. Nevertheless, the play’s epilogue serves as a powerful reminder of the loss of France at the hands of Henry VI

and of the fact that linguistic and identity power structures are not fixed and can shift unexpectedly.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### **A. Reclaiming the “Nation”: Problematizing the Study of Nationalism**

In the previous chapters, I alluded to the shift in the perception of cant in Britain and suggested that the repositioning of canters as constituting the “English vulgar” is correlated to British imperialism. Janet Sorenson offers an impressive reading of the repositioning of canting terms in Britain in the late eighteenth century, but does not examine how the imperial project informed this move. She suggests that the repositioning of the canting crew occurred in the later part of the eighteenth century during which people who belonged to linguistic subcultures and who were previously criminalized were redefined. They were repositioned as the “English vulgar” as opposed to outsider criminals; their practices were described as belonging to the “common people” and, impressively, as “worthy of jocular imitation by fashionable men” (437). According to Sorenson, the second move excluded women from the vulgar linguistic subculture: fashionable men were encouraged to learn how to speak in code to prevent ladies from understanding their sexualized conversations.

In this concluding section, I will begin to connect the various readings that I have made above and condense them into a comprehensive picture. My argument ties back to the question of English nationalism by illustrating how the definition of the English nation evolved over time through inclusionary and exclusionary practices that were informed by economics, politics, and empire, amongst other things. Consequently, I argue that a critical analysis of English nationalism needs to begin by acknowledging that the fluctuations in the definition of the “nation” pose a methodological problem for scholars wishing to engage in such a historical analysis.



To provide a more holistic view of the political currents around the same time as sections of the English population were being reclaimed, despite their being labeled as the English “vulgar”, it is essential to allude to the development of the British imperial project. In a study of English standardization and cultural imperialism, Adam Beach examines works by Hugh Blair, Adam Smith, Lord Monboddo and Thomas Sheridan to argue that the standardization of the English language was not limited to British nation building, but was rather imagined to partake in an imperial mission echoing the role played by Greek and Roman. Beach correctly identifies the recurrent image of the Greek and Roman imperial project in writings by elocutionists and grammarians and argues that this was integral to the British imagining of a cultural imperial project in which English was to function as an international language with a civilizing mission. The deep engagement with these questions illustrates the extent to which the English language and the British imperial project had become associated. The allusion to the Roman example does not crop up for the first time in the eighteenth century, but rather can be traced in earlier writings such as that of Spenser discussed above. Beach discusses the imagined relationship between empire and language:

If English could be standardized and codified, thinkers like Sheridan imagined it would become the building block of...a metaphysical empire, an empire of language and literature that would outlive the actual British Empire. Focusing on the metaphysical empire allowed British theorists to engage in a complex negotiation with the Roman past. While sometimes openly disavowing the martial nature of Rome, theorists could still wax eloquent about its metaphysical empire and the continued transmission and reproduction of Latin and of Roman letters. These epic metaphysical empires were a source of great inspiration to those thinkers who fantasized that British texts would eventually become

“classics” to formerly colonized peoples. (119)

The reading above properly identifies the emphasis on the role that standardized English is imagined to play in British imperial expansion. The cultural empire that a standardized language promises to offer, however, should stand the “internal colonial” test that Sheridan and his peers were pushing for. If every British individual could be taught standard English, then the project might be successfully enforced elsewhere. Unfortunately, as Samuel Johnson soon realized, while a standard can be theoretically produced, it cannot be enforced and the language certainly cannot be fixed.<sup>20</sup> This recognition, however, did not stave off people’s interest in correcting their speech habits and procuring a “proper” or “correct” accent. Instead, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a surge in the publication of “grammars, spelling books, rhetorics and letter-writing manuals which together constituted an arsenal of teach-yourself materials for the socially, economically and politically ambitious” (Fitzmaurice, “The Spectator” 196). The market for such books arguably reflects a desire to be labeled as an (unqualified) “British” (but actually “English”) subject.

The above juxtaposition of the imperial linguistic project and the internal rise of standardization serves to illustrate how the acquisition of “proper” English was empowering not simply in that it made social elevation more likely, but more importantly in that it was considered a tool for imperial domination. To join the circle of imperial masters, one must play

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<sup>20</sup> In fact, Johnson even suggests that language change is the mark of a cultured nation: “The language most likely to continue long without alteration, would be that of a nation raised little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the convenience of life; either without books, or, like some of the *Mahometan* countries, with very few: men thus busied and unlearned, having only such words as common use requires, would perhaps long continue to express the same notions by the same signs. But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination...” (“Preface” par. 23).

the part by speaking it and, arguably, spreading it. It comes as no surprise how in the nineteenth century, Macaulay's quite famous 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" not only reinforces Sheridan and Monboddo's rhetoric, but also suggests that English language acquisition can transform an Indian into intermediaries of Englishness. Additionally, Macaulay officially produces England as synecdochic of the British empire through his discussion of the English language:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but *English* in taste, in opinions in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (9 [emphasis mine])

Above, Macaulay makes a slip of the pen that collapses the British kingdom into England.

Though he does not equivocate between English and British earlier in his text, Macaulay does so at a crucial moment in the excerpt above: rather than claiming that teaching Indians English will transform them into *British* subjects, Macaulay states that such a gesture would create Indians who are "English in taste". In so doing, he formally establishes the links between speaking English, spreading English, and English imperialism. Read against this backdrop, the standardization of the English language and the relabeling of speakers of linguistic subcultures as "vulgar English" as opposed to racializing them, should be studied as a form of cultural imperialism that seeks to impose internal stratifications that not only justify the heterogeneity of the speech community within England (not everyone speaks proper English, but those who do not are "vulgar"), but also create linguistic credentials upon which an individual is granted

access into powerful (quasi-colonial) circles (this person speaks proper English, and can therefore properly represent England's imperial linguistic face).

At the time of writing, the writers discussed above could not have fathomed the extent to which the English language would spread in the future, nor could they have predicted its contemporary local currency as an international language of trade and of cultural exchange. They did, however, associate its spread with cultural imperialism and the establishment of a metaphysical English empire. These associations reverberate even today in anti-Western rhetoric that denounces the teaching of English under the pretense that speaking English makes youths readily adopt Western customs and lose their "true" identities. In this project, I have approached the question of English nationalism by studying the fluctuation in constructions of English linguistic identity over time. I have argued that the qualifications for being English, when examined as a factor of an individual's speech habits, are contingent upon political and economic considerations. In so doing, I have called attention to the problems inherent in discussions of nationalism. I have argued that the act of studying the rise of nationalistic movements (especially in the controversial case of England) without acknowledging the various epistemological problems that hinder it, will fall into the trap of reproducing the same exclusions on which nationalistic identity is constructed.

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