

CHAPTER I

Introduction
Shakespeare and Cultural Reformation Ideology

Whose English(es)?

The last decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence into widespread use of the plural form ‘Englishes’. Used first by linguists of discrete varieties of English, perceived today as ‘everywhere’ in a constantly evolving, global multilingual ecology, it has also been used more loosely of the ‘polyphony that is English’.¹ If, however, the current uses are relatively new, the form, as Tom McArthur has noted, is not.² The last decade of the sixteenth century saw a self-conscious use of the form, in its then usual sense of English equivalents to a foreign word, by the polyglot lexicographer and translator, John Florio, in his address ‘To the reader’ in the first

¹ Christian Mair, ‘The World System of Englishes. Accounting for the Transnational Importance of Mobile and Mediated Vernaculars’, *English World-Wide* 34:3 (2013), 256; Seamus Heaney, ‘Beowulf’, *Sunday Times*, 26 July 1998, books section 8, 6. According to Tom McArthur this use by linguists dates from the 1970s, though there is at least one instance as early as 1964. Tom McArthur, *The English Languages* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61; see P. D. Stevens, ‘Varieties of English’, *English Studies* 45:1 (1964): 20–30. If initially balked at by purists the form received the imprimatur of Robert Burchfield in 1994, as McArthur points out (*The English Languages*, 64). See Robert Burchfield, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Burchfield, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), V, 4, 5. McArthur briefly summarises the political implications as well as the historical circumstances of the emergence of the word as does Seamus Heaney, who celebrates the practice of local varieties of English in a literature that he sees as at once reaching back and looking forward to a ‘world culture’, which is of course now with us, witness the global ecology of ‘World Englishes’, and the ‘worlding of literature’, which draws on even as it interrogates this ecology. See Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Comparative Literature and the Global Languagescape’, in Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas, eds., *A Companion to Comparative Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 273–95.

² McArthur notes the form ‘an English’ was used in the seventeenth century both of a sentence to be translated (*OED* ‘English’ 3c) and, more often, of ‘the equivalent in English of a foreign word’ (*OED* 3b), though his one example of this sense dates only from 1679 (*The English Languages*, 61). The *OED* is misleading since its earliest instance of the plural form in this sense, from 1534 (N. Udall), is placed under a presumed distinct sense of a ‘translation’ (*OED* ‘English’ 3a). There is, moreover, an earlier instance of the plural form in the sense of English equivalents to a foreign word in John Holt, *Lac Puerorum* (London, 1508), sig. Civ. It is in this sense that the plural form is most commonly used until the mid-seventeenth century.

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edition of his Italian–English dictionary, *A Worlde of Words* (1598). Commending his project even as he acknowledges its necessarily provisional character given the ‘yeerely increase’ of words ‘in English’ Florio proceeds to comment: ‘And for English-gentlemen me thinks it must needs be a pleasure to them to see so rich a toong [i.e. Italian] out-vide by their mother-speech, as by the manie-folde Englishes of manie wordes in this is manifest’.³ In a gesture of alignment with his country of adoption Florio uses the plural form to celebrate the superior lexical range of English – its ‘manie-folde’ copious character – to which, as the title page advertises, his own ‘most copious’ dictionary contributes.⁴ This copiousness which, following Pierre Bourdieu, we might call symbolic capital, is the ‘property’ of (the) English in the sense of defining character as well as of that which is owned.⁵ It is a property identified here with the male elite of ‘English-gentlemen’ who are assumed to represent the whole – the nation of English speakers – of which they are the privileged part at the centre of power, the court. Their display of this ‘property’ of ‘their mother-speech’ serves to promote their own (‘proper’) superiority as well as the superiority of (the) English in the cultural playing field of an evolving Europe in which nations are competing to define their ‘property’ – their defining character as well as their territorial domains – through their differential relations with others. For the English these are their European continental neighbours, as well as their more local neighbours, the Welsh, Scots and Irish, that make up the British archipelago.⁶

This book seeks to place Shakespeare’s dramas of the 1590s, especially the comedies and the second tetralogy of history plays, in relation to the

³ John Florio, ‘To the Reader’, in *A Worlde of Wordes, Or Most copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London, 1598), sigs. b1r–b1v. In quotations from early modern texts *ij* and *u/v* spelling forms have been normalised throughout unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ ‘Florio is responsible for the earliest appearance of 1,149 words’ in the *OED* ‘173 of which are unique citations’. Michael Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England: A Cultural Politics of Translation* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 230.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Oxford: Polity/Blackwell, 1991).

⁶ For an excellent survey of work on Shakespeare and these local ‘others’ see Willy Maley, ‘British Ill Done? Recent Work on Shakespeare and British, English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh Identities’, *Literature Compass* 3 (2006), 1–26. The relation of the English to their European others as figured in ‘auto-images and hetero-images’ ‘in literary texts’, especially drama, is explored in A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558–1642* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), and taken up from another perspective in Lloyd Edward Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). The specific importance of ‘vernacular languages’ in the staking out of ‘the identities of particular communities’ is foregrounded in Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter*, 204.

discursive struggle *within* post-Reformation England over the ‘property’ of (the) English:⁷ the defining ‘proper’ character as well as ownership of (the) English, especially, though not only, as this is conveyed by competing ideas of the vernacular, both as explicitly expressed and as implied in linguistic practices. Put at its baldest and boldest my claim is that these plays evoke only to resist the project of a cultural reformation ideology to appropriate for the figure of the plain-speaking, plainly dressed virtuous citizen the normative (‘proper’) centre of ‘the King’s English’ (*Merry Wives*, 1.4.5) (Chapter 2) and the ‘true-born Englishman’ (*Richard II*, 1.3.273) (Chapter 3).⁸ My argument will thus bear out the close relation that others have pointed out between the protestant Reformation(s) and the ‘writing of the nation’, as Cathy Shrank puts it, as well as the more specific point made by Janette Dillon that the construction of ‘English’ and the English was ‘firmly allied with plainness and transparency’ in its differential relation to foreigners.⁹ Taking up and exploring more fully these ideas I want to draw attention to how this post-Reformation construction of ‘Englishness’ is connected to social distinctions, and more particularly, ‘the prominence’ acquired by ‘the middle’, as Neil Rhodes

⁷ The singular ‘Reformation’ is no longer self-evident, the plural ‘Reformations’ being more or less obligatory since the ground-breaking work done in Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially 12–17. See too Brian Cummings and James Simpson, ‘Introduction’, in Brian Cummings and James Simpson, eds., *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Though salutary in its insistence on the complexity of the cultural and religious history of England in the sixteenth century, the use of the plural form occludes the drive to a defining cultural homogeneity to which this book seeks to draw attention.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Shakespearean texts are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 3rd edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016).

⁹ Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163–4. David Loades observes: ‘By the end of Elizabeth’s reign Protestantism was to be one of the salient characteristics of Englishness’. David Loades, ‘Literature and National Identity’, in David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227. See too Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). The point is underscored in Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 25; George Garnett criticises the neglect of the impact of protestantism in Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); see George Garnett, ‘Riotous’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 June 2007, 8. If there was, as Christopher Highley explores, a ‘Catholic’ ‘version of Englishness’ under Mary, this served to generate not only international solidarity amongst protestants, as Scott Oldenburg argues, but also a will to (re)appropriate the national character for protestantism. Christopher Highley, *Catholic Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Scott Oldenburg, *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 23.

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puts it, and how this relates to larger questions of the future political as well as cultural history of England.¹⁰

As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, the phrase ‘the King’s English’ is first used not descriptively, as scholars have assumed, but performatively to define through exclusion the normative centre it represents. Crucially, amongst those excluded, is Florio’s centre of ‘English-gentlemen’, who are thus located as outsiders, like and with other constitutive ‘others’, especially the French.¹¹ The same is done in the homologous exclusionary sartorial definitions of the ‘true-born Englishman’ examined in Chapter 3. Opposing the exclusionary ideology of this cultural ‘re-formation’, or what James Simpson has called ‘revolution’, Shakespeare’s plays resist the structural shift it heralds towards class inflected, cultural norms of Englishness and the attendant tsunami of socio-political breakdown and civil war which, I suggest, the second tetralogy more or less explicitly predicts.¹²

More immediately, these plays resist the xenophobia attendant on this ideology, as I take up in Chapter 4. This xenophobia is explicitly addressed in the contribution to the playtext of *Sir Thomas More* by ‘Hand D’, now widely if not universally regarded as Shakespeare’s, which engages

¹⁰ Neil Rhodes, *Common: The Development of Literary Culture in Sixteenth Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 19. This ‘reconfiguration of the social order’ is illustrated strikingly by Thomas Smith who, following William Harrison’s description of England (1577), names ‘citizens’ after ‘gentlemen’ as the second of the four social categories into which the people of England are divided. Thomas Smith, *The Common-wealth of England* (London, 1589), 29. For the changing terms used of such social distinctions, see Keith Wrightson, ‘Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England’, in Penelope J. Cornfield, ed., *Language, History and Class* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 30–52. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass comment in passing that there was no strong sense of English national identity either amongst the (internationally oriented) aristocracy whose taste for foreign sartorial fashions they highlight, or amongst the (locally oriented) popular classes of England. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57. What this implies, of course, is that, as I argue, the sense of a common national identity – a common Englishness – develops above all amongst the ‘middling sort’ of ‘citizens’.

¹¹ For the case that national identities are constituted by defining others rather than essences, see John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 4. In its exclusion of the French as well as in its close connection to protestantism this defining of the ‘true’ English will, after 1707, morph, as Linda Colley has shown, into the defining of ‘Britons’, though not without vigorous opposition from Englishmen. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, rev. edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 13.

¹² James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2002). As I take up below, my argument will bear out Michel Foucault’s point that the seventeenth century saw the emergence of ‘a new form of power’ disseminated through the ‘norm’. See Catherine Malabou, ‘The King’s Two (Biopolitical) Bodies’, *Representations* 127:1 (Summer 2014), 98–106. See too the important point made by Keith Wrightson that ‘the concept of the middle sort of people came into its own in . . . the civil war period – above all, in defending the social basis of parliamentary support against royalist accusations that the king’s opponents relied heavily upon supporters drawn from the “rabble”’. Wrightson, ‘Estates, Degrees, and Sorts’, 49–50.

specifically with its local virulent manifestations in London in the early 1590s.¹³ In Chapter 4 I show how the Shakespearean contribution is connected to comedies of the 1590s and the second tetralogy not only through (well-documented) verbal echoes, but also through deep ideological consistency. For while the Shakespearean contribution to the playtext takes a stand on behalf of strangers against the stand taken by other 'hands' on behalf of London citizens hostile to strangers, these comedies and the second tetralogy set themselves against a cultural ideology which would appropriate for the 'plain', temperate protestant citizen the normative centre of the proper or 'true' English (nation and language) through exclusion of constitutive others. These plays do not then reproduce English 'ethnocentrism' as critical opinion would have us believe.¹⁴ On the contrary, they resist the exclusionary, centripetal ideology of a cultural reformation that would instate such a centre. Indeed, they put into question the very idea of a centre promoting as they do rather an idea of 'our English tongue' (*Merry Wives*, 3.1.53) as a 'gallimaufry' (2.1.104), that is, a mobile and inclusive mix of (human and linguistic) 'strangers' without defining, 'proper' boundaries.

In Chapter 4 I show how this idea finds support in the argument made by Shakespeare's More that 'the strangers' case' is at once contingent and common in the sense of shared as well as recurrent lived experience. Borne out by the comedies, which repeatedly stage the 'straying' into the condition of a stranger, this argument is brought 'home' in the second tetralogy, which depicts England as a nation of mutual strangers. Shakespeare's audiences are thus called upon to see themselves in 'the strangers' case', as More's on-stage audience of hostile citizens is explicitly called upon to do. This produces fellow-feeling towards the strangers amongst the citizens who turn, as Shakespeare's off-stage audience is invited to turn, from hostility to the disinterested hospitality of the ethical and spiritual ideal of charity. Frequently evoked in these plays, if often ironically, as in Portia's reference to 'neighbourly charity' (*Merchant*, 1.2.66), this ideal of 'charity', in the pre-modern sense of 'the community building state of

¹³ For an earlier version of this argument, see Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, "This is the stranger's case": The Utopic Dissonance of Shakespeare's Contribution to *Sir Thomas More*, *Shakespeare Survey* 65 (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 239–54.

¹⁴ See Walter Cohen's introduction to *Merry Wives* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1465–6. This opinion has been bolstered by a claim that Shakespeare wrote as a 'spokesperson for a fundamental Englishness', a 'normative' model 'grounded' on 'a common – albeit not yet standardised – language'. Carole Levin and John Watkins, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 82, 81. This book argues almost exactly the opposite.

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love towards God and neighbour', is dramatised without irony in the scenes with which, as I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* close.¹⁵ Indeed, *Two Gentlemen*, which may be Shakespeare's first performed play, invokes the practice of 'charity' as that which makes one 'worth the name of a Christian' (2.5.45–9), and which finds expression at once in hospitality towards strangers, and in unlimited forgiveness.¹⁶ Produced during the period of intense citizen hostility towards strangers in London, these two comedies engage, I argue, with what Simonds d'Ewes calls the 'weighty matter' of 'strangers' in his account of the parliamentary debate of 1593 referenced in the playtext of *Sir Thomas More* (Chapter 4). Most importantly, *Errors* recalls a biblical passage from the Epistle to the Ephesians – long recognised as one of the play's principal sources – which represents the inclusive reach of the reconciliation achieved through the mediating atonement of Christ in terms of strangers made citizens in the house of God.

This inclusionary vision is expressed too through the culturally resonant figure of the Host of the Inn in *Merry Wives*, notably in a scene of reconciliation that I discuss in Chapter 2. Indeed, as I argue, the very title of 'Host', which evokes the means as well as the sign of universal reconciliation, itself carries resistance to cultural reformation ideology inasmuch as the word 'host' was expressly excluded from the sacred lexicon by protestant apologists. This figure is, moreover, explicitly associated with 'our English' as a mobile, inclusive, mixed language/community. This inclusive mix is, as I point out, associated with a time prior not only to the Reformation(s) of the sixteenth century, but also to an earlier political rupture – the Lancastrian seizure of power. For this was perceived as

¹⁵ The replacement of this pre-modern meaning of 'charity' by the modern meaning of 'an external act of benevolence to the poor and needy' is one aspect of John Bossy's work on the changes to the construction of Christianity in the West highlighted in Eamon Duffy, 'Rites of Passage', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February 2017, 15–16. See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 143–8, 168; Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 120–40.

¹⁶ Strikingly, Francis Bacon inserts the 'Gracious, and Curteous' welcoming of 'Strangers' as his first instance of the 'Signes of Goodness', which 'answers to the *Theologicall Vertue Charitie*', in the expanded (1625) version of his essay 'Of Goodnesse and Goodnesse of Nature', in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 39, 40. As Shakespeare's use of 'Christian' in *Two Gentlemen* (and throughout the canon) suggests, no authorial 'confessional identity' may be gleaned from the plays which tend to promote social and ethical 'Christian' values beyond doctrinal divides. At best we might describe this identity as 'mixed' as Jean-Christophe Mayer does in Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 8.

coincident with a cultural break which saw the emergence of English as the national vernacular preferred over, and defined in differential relation to, the other national vernacular of French. It is indeed with this rupture that, as we shall see, the origins of 'the King's English' appear to lie. In its later uses as in its putative origins the phrase, or trope as I prefer to call it, carries then an exclusionary definition of (the) English, defined notably through exclusion of (the) French and a court-centred male elite associated with the French. It is this exclusionary definition of the English/Englishness that, I claim, the comedies, especially *Merry Wives*, and the second tetralogy resist.

In the final chapter, the focus shifts to recurring linguistic practices in the plays of the 1590s that tend to defeat the cultural reformation project to a normative linguistic/cultural centre:¹⁷ borrowed new words, which Richard Mulcaster tellingly calls 'enfranchisement', 'mistaking', 'play upon the word' and above all 'synonymia' or 'variation of an English'.¹⁸ Wandering or 'straying' across proper and proprietorial boundaries these practices tend to the production of 'our English' as a 'gallimaufry' even as they resist the project of cultural reformation ideology to a normative centre. Still more importantly, they carry emancipatory and empowering implications, as I point out in a discussion of two discourses with which they are explicitly linked. On the one hand, through transferred uses of the discourse of 'manage' (horsemanship), linguistic 'straying' is associated with the release of energy attendant on a liberation from control; on the other, through biblical references, notably to parables, especially the parable of the prodigal son, it is associated with the freedom from the 'law' attendant on the debt-gift economy of universal redemption in Christ. Given this second association, Shakespeare, we might say, seeks to reinstate the freedom of the debt-gift economy of universal and unconditional grace, the cornerstone of protestant theology¹⁹ where, as the institution of the church becomes more firmly harnessed to the state, cultural reformation ideology seeks to reinstate the 'law' in a centripetal drive to

¹⁷ The turn from the criterion of 'copia' to the criterion of 'plainness' or transparency has been well documented by linguistic historians, notably Manfred Görlach, Sylvia Adamson, Norman Blake and David Crystal, although they do not consider its connection with the history of 'the King's English' or Shakespeare's plays.

¹⁸ John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton University Press, 1935), 25.

¹⁹ See Nathalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 167–298.

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homogeneity through exclusionary definitions of (the) 'true' or proper English.

In this the plays are set not only against xenophobia, but also against the future history attendant on this centripetal reformation project to instate 'the law' in cultural practices, and in particular to appropriate the normative centre of (the) English from the courtier who 'speaks holiday' (*Merry Wives*, 3.2.60–1) to the citizen who aspires to the transparency of 'a plain man in his plain meaning' (*Merchant*, 3.5.50), an ideal of 'plainness' with which, as I show in Chapter 2, 'the King's English' is associated. In the second tetralogy specifically, the 'reformation' of the future king Henry V is at once represented in linguistic terms as a casting off of the 'gross terms' of 'a strange tongue' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.73, 69) and staged as the rejection of the 'gross' figure of a fat, intemperate and nomadic courtier who is short of cash but abundantly supplied with linguistic wealth. Linguistically as well as morally extravagant, associated with other 'others' constitutive of the 'true' or 'proper' plain English of cultural reformation ideology, as I discuss in Chapter 2, John Falstaff is also recurrently associated with the figure of the prodigal son, the protagonist of the parable dear to protestant exegetes for its illustration of the debt-gift economy of God's free and inclusive redemption, as I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. Falstaff belongs, moreover, to a family of figures discussed in Chapter 5 that are related by virtue of their shared function of 'carry [ing] the 'word quickly', as one of them – the tellingly named Mrs Quickly – puts it (*Merry Wives*, 3.5.40), a shared function that has been occluded by editors and critics who work with their own (often class-based) criteria of distinctions. For these figures are all vehicles of an emancipatory, extravagant, or straying word, which, traversing 'proper' boundaries, between English and not-English, proper and 'stra(y)nge' senses, tends to the generation of an inclusive, mixed and expansive, mobile economy of 'our English' (3.1.68) without a centre.

At one level then the banishment of Falstaff stages the rejection of this economy for the centripetal law which 'the King's English' represents, and which, as Robert Cawdrey (also spelled Cawdry) puts it, in his preface to the first English–English 'hard word' dictionary (1604), requires that 'we . . . banish all affected Rhetorique' and use 'one maner of language'²⁰ – a 'we' that hovers between a preemptory, executive royal 'we' and a hypothesised national community. As others have noted, Cawdrey's

²⁰ Paula Blank, 'The Babel of Renaissance English', in Lynda Mugglestone, ed., *The Oxford History of English* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 232.

preface is taken almost verbatim from Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), which features the first, and culturally most prominent recorded instance of 'the King's English'. Published four years after the Act of Uniformity, as I discuss in Chapter 2, Wilson mobilises the trope to extend the scope of the aggressive centripetal drive of the church–state apparatus to the production of a normative linguistic centre – 'one maner of language'. Specifically, the trope is used performatively to define the normative centre of the 'plainness' with which it is associated, through exclusion of 'outlandish' words practised, on the one hand, by professionals (clerks, lawyers and accountants), on the other, by well-travelled, internationally oriented gentlemen, who are thus banished to the place of a 'strange tongue' (2 *Henry IV*, 4.3.69) – the place where other 'strangers', notably the French, Dutch and Welsh, although also drunk and stuttering native speakers, are located by other performative uses of the trope, as we will see.

It is this exclusionary, ideological use of 'the King's English' that is exposed and interrogated in the one Shakespearean play which features the trope and which is, significantly, his one engagement with the emergent genre of English citizen comedy: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Used as it invariably is in early instances to exclude performatively, the trope is used specifically of the English practised by a Frenchman, as it is in William Haughton's blatantly xenophobic play *Englishmen for My Money* (performed 1598), widely considered a prototype of the genre. Whether or not, as I discuss in Chapter 2, Haughton's play is a specific object, Shakespeare's play engages with the exclusionary xenophobia which it exemplifies (typical in this respect of the genre it inaugurates), and which is propagated through the linguistic ideology of 'the King's English'. Uniquely, however, among early instances, the trope is invoked in Shakespeare's play by an uneducated, low-born female native speaker who is excluded by her own 'mistaking' practices from the normative centre it represents. Attention is thus drawn to the question of the constituency of the 'our' in 'our English tongue', a recurrent phrase in the discursive struggle over the 'property' of English, which might be described as a struggle around this 'our'. More generally, the project to linguistic uniformity and stability is undercut at once by the mobility of the vernacular as a living ('quick') language which Mrs Quickly embodies, and by the play's heterogeneous range of linguistic styles. This includes, without privileging, the citizen's 'plain' style of speech, which is represented as it is practised by the tellingly named figure of the male citizen, George Page, who is something of a self-appointed linguistic (as well as social)

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policeman, like the cultural reformers who mobilise ‘the King’s English’. Indeed, *Merry Wives* not only exposes ‘the King’s English’ to ironic interrogation but also sets against it ‘the gallimaufry’ (2.1.104) of ‘our English’ (3.1.68). Taken from culinary discourse this trope is regularly used of social, stylistic and generic mixes as well as, most frequently, of a (usually negative) view of English as an inclusive, heterogeneous and expanding mix, as I take up below. This view of ‘our English’ is overtly celebrated not only by the play’s centrifugal stylistic range, but also, more specifically, through self-conscious performances of ‘synonymia’ by Falstaff and the Host of the Inn where he resides.

It is then in its imagined community of ‘our English’ as an inclusive and mobile heterogeneous mix – a ‘gallimaufry’ – that *Merry Wives*, at least the Folio version,²¹ joins the second tetralogy of history plays.²² Indeed, in its explicitness in this respect it may be placed, as it is in this book, at the centre of the plays of the 1590s rather than as an occasional oddity at their periphery, which is how it is usually treated.²³ More specifically, it points up the stakes of a cultural reformation that aspires to produce a normative centre of (the) ‘true’ or ‘proper’ English by banishing the figure of the nomadic, extravagant courtier as a stranger and his ‘holiday’ speech (*Merry Wives*, 3.2.61) as ‘a strange tongue’ (2 *Henry IV*, 4.3.69).

Shakespeare and ‘reformation’

The word ‘reformation’ occurs six times in the corpus of single, or co-authored Shakespearean plays, twice in relation to Hal’s banishment of Falstaff (1 *Henry IV*, 1.2.188; *Henry V*, 1.1.33), which, as I have indicated,

²¹ As Giorgio Melchiori has pointed out, the focus on the national vernacular is only in the Folio version. Giorgio Melchiori, ‘Introduction’, in Giorgio Melchiori, ed., *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 5–9. I discuss the implications of this at greater length in Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, ‘“The King’s English” “our English”? Shakespeare and Linguistic Ownership’, in Katie Halsey and Angus Vine, eds., *Shakespeare and Authority* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 113–33.

²² This is to argue against the grain of a tradition of commentary which has insisted on differences between the Falstaff of the comedy and the Falstaff of the second tetralogy and which reaches an apogee in the speculation by Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin ‘that Shakespeare conceived of the Falstaff who turns up in Windsor as a direct antithesis to the character he created for the history plays’. Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin, ‘Introduction’, in Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin, eds., *The Merry Wives of Windsor: New Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2015), 7. This is to ignore evident likenesses at once in plot – the banishment/rejection/humiliation of Falstaff – and in the linguistic practices shared by the two Falstaffs including, notably, ‘synonymia’ (Chapter 5).

²³ This critical tendency is expertly summarised and countered by the new collection of essays cited in the previous note, which unfortunately take little account of the class issues in the play.