



Hikaru Minami*

Writing and Rewriting Nationhood: *Henry V* and Political Appropriation of Shakespeare

Abstract: Shakespeare's *Henry V* is often regarded as a nationalistic play and has been appropriated for political spin and propaganda to enhance the sense of national unity. Shakespeare captures the emerging nationalistic feeling of the Tudor era in Henry's emphasis on national history and pride, but various parts of the text suggest a more diverse and complex figures of the king and his subjects than a war hero and the united nation. Such complexity, however, is often ignored in political appropriation. Laurence Olivier's film adaptation during WWII glamorizes the war and defines the English nation as a courageous "band of brothers" through its presentation of Shakespeare's play a shared story or history of national victory. Kenneth Branagh's film in 1989, on the other hand, captures the ugliness of war but it still romanticizes the sacrifice for the country. In 2016, Shakespeare was made part of the Brexit discourse of growing nationalism at the time of the EU referendum. Brexit was imagined as a victory that will bring back freedom and sovereignty the country once enjoyed, and Shakespeare was used to represent the greatness of Britain. Shakespeare's text, however, depicts the war against the continent in a more skeptical than glorifying tone. The war scenes are scattered with humorous dialogues and critical comments and the multi-national captains of Henry's army are constantly at odds with one another. Shakespeare thus provides us with a wider view of nationhood, resisting the simplifying force of politics.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, *Henry IV*, *King Richard II*, *Cymbeline*, Brexit, national identity, populism, nationalism, adaptation and appropriation, Laurence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh.

* Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan. hminami31@gmail.com



“Cry ‘God for Harry! England and Saint George!’” (3.1.34)

Henry V is often regarded as patriotic.¹ Constance Hunt, for example, argues that the St Crispin’s Day speech is effective in “inspiring his men to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a greater purpose” (138), noting that “[h]uman beings rarely risk their lives for abstract ideals of justice, but rather for emotional attachments to brotherhood, family, love, and nation” (138). Henry’s speeches are indeed patriotic and moving, but is there anything such as a unitary nation?

This paper will examine how nationhood is created within and without the play world of *Henry V*, and how Shakespeare has been appropriated for political spin and propaganda to heighten the sense of national unity even though the original texts are at least ambiguous or even argue against the ideology of national uniformity.

The first section will explore the creation of nationhood within and without *Henry V*, surveying nationalistic movements in Renaissance England, and both nationalistic and non-nationalistic aspects of the play to outline how the idea of nationhood was constructed. The second section will analyse film adaptations by Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh to show how they present the English nation as a victorious people throughout history. The final section will focus on the representation of the country and people at the time of the EU referendum, and show how Shakespeare was implicated in Brexit discourse to uplift nationalism. Resisting the simplifying force of politics, Shakespeare provides us with a wider view of nationhood.

Nationhood Within and Without *Henry V*

This section examines nationalistic movements in Renaissance England as well as both nationalistic and non-nationalistic aspects of *Henry V* to outline how the idea of nationhood is created within and without the play. The first part will survey how the Tudor monarchs endeavoured to create a sense of unity through the production of atlases and composing of a history. The second part of this section will focus on how Henry defines his nation and manipulates discourses

¹ Lily Campbell considers Shakespeare’s portrayal of Henry V as that of a war-hero, and recognises “[a] mood of exultation” (255) that pervades the play; Greenblatt notes that Shakespeare “deftly registers every nuance of royal hypocrisy, ruthlessness, and bad faith” but still considers the play as “a collective panegyric” (56) to the king. On the other hand, William Hazlitt sees Henry V as a man of “brute force, glossed over with a little religious hypocrisy” (132) who does not deserve Shakespeare’s effort “to apologise for the actions of the king” (132); and Thomas Healy considers the play critically as “a mouthpiece of a British national spirit” (176).

of nationalism, and the final part on other characters who cast doubt on the king's idea of the united nation.

As Richard Helgerson notes in *Forms of Nationhood*, maps were often intended "as an expression of power" of the ruling monarch (107). The Elizabethan government ordered the first detailed survey of England and Wales, which was published in 1579. The atlas displayed the royal arms on every page, the connotation of which was that "[n]ot only are these the queen's maps; this is the queen's land, her kingdom" (111). Visualising the land was a way of consolidating power over it.

When the land is delineated, people within the boundary are also defined. Citing William Camden's *Britania* (1586) and Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605) as examples of works that described the English as an Anglo-Saxon race, Ania Loomba notes that, in the early modern period "national boundaries were increasingly defined by identifying its people as a 'race', or as a group with a common heritage, bloodline, and religion" (24). The emphasis on shared identity thus serves to unify the inhabitants of the land as a nation.

The Elizabethan era was also a time for the production of national history. Works such as Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), William Harrison's *Description of England* (1577), and John Stow's *The Chronicles of England* (1580) were published and reprinted throughout and beyond her reign. These works present history as stories that everyone who lives on the land shares, further contributing to the sense of national unity.

Unity is moreover achieved by means of othering and exclusion. Loomba points out that Europeans in Shakespeare's time began "to trade with outsiders, but also to expel those they considered 'foreign' from within their own nations" (4) and that "both nationalist feelings and hostility to outsiders increased" (15) throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The fact that the English population included "people from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, who were neither fully outsiders nor insiders" made the situation more complicated for the monarchs, and King James I's attempts to "effect a union between England and Scotland met with resistance from the House of Commons" (Loomba 15). The relationship between different "races" was complex in spite, though also in service, of the efforts by the ruling class for national unity.

Within the world of *Henry V*, the king defines 'true' English men as being capable of manly valour, while labelling those who did not join the invasion as unmanly cowards. Whereas "he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother" (4.3.61-62), others shall "hold their manhoods cheap" (4.3.66). When he says in the St. Crispin's Day Speech, "We would not die in that man's company / That fears his fellowship to die with us" (4.3.38-39), Henry draws a clear line between his nation and the other, and threatens

his troops with being forgotten not only as soldiers, but also disregarded as his subjects.

Henry's speeches emphasise descent, kinship, and history to appeal to the emotions of the listener so that they develop pride in being a part of his England. For example, he emphasises bloodline, kinship, bonds in lines such as "On, on, you noble English, / Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof" (3.1.17-18) and "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" (4.3.60). Henry also appeals to personal emotion, pride and a sense of honour in being English when he orders to his troops "Dishonour not your mothers" (3.1.22) and "good yeomen, / Whose limbs were made in England, show us here / The mettle of your pasture; let us swear / That you are worth your breeding" (3.1.25-28) while labelling the French as "men of grosser blood" (3.1.24) who need to be taught how to fight.

When he mentions that "Fathers that like so many Alexanders / Have in these parts from morn till even fought" (3.1.19-20), the king connects personal account to national history. In the final part of the speech, the king turns the listeners' mind again to history in lines such as "This story shall the good man teach his son, / And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by / From this day to the ending of the world / But we in it shall be remembered" (4.3.56-59). The significance of remembrance—both remembering and being remembered—serves to present the Battle of Agincourt as an epoch-making moment for the country as well as individuals.

As Howard and Rackin rightly observe, Henry's men "whether Irish or English, Scottish or Welsh, yeoman or earl—temporarily become a band of brothers, the many differences among them rhetorically and emotionally elided by the moving eloquence of the young king" in war (4). However, this scheme entails othering and exclusion. In the process of creating the image of brave English men, Henry, who as a prince knew his people from the top to bottom levels of society, eliminates those who do not fit into his ideal figure. As Prince Hal he kept company with the poorest of the nation, that is, Falstaff, Bardolph, Nym, and Ancient Pistol, who spend their days robbing travellers and spending money to drink in the tavern. Those who showed him a life that struggles to make ends meet in *Henry IV* are marginalised and eliminated in *Henry V*. They are either dead from illness or executed as a result of their poverty.

Interestingly, their deaths are not directly depicted but only reported in an often detached manner as if to further signify their distance from the king. Falstaff is reported to be in a critical condition in act 2 scene 1, and his death is grieved by his fellows later. This once eloquent character is not given any lines, but the consensus of his fellows is that "The king has killed his heart" (2.1.88) or "The King hath run bad humours on the knight" (2.1.121). Later in the middle of the battle of Agincourt, the pageboy recounts how Bardolph and Nym were hanged for stealing a lute-case and fire-shovel (4.5.71). Thus, Henry is shown to

abandon those most in need for the sake of his endeavour to present himself as the righteous king and to bring the country under unified rule.

Disquieting situations described in the text shows that Henry's nation is far from unified. For example, the king is betrayed by his close subjects, Richard Earl of Cambridge, Lord Scroop of Masham, and Sir Thomas Grey of Northumberland at the time of his departure to France. The scene that exposes their plot and their subsequent punishment in act 2 scene 2 not only reveals the discord within his court but also shines a light on the scheming side of Henry. Already aware of their plot, he once let them deny mercy to a minor offender who is to be executed before sentencing them to death.

The captains of his army are constantly quarrelling (act 3 scene 2, act 4 scene 7). The English captain Gower tries to assert his predominance by taking the initiative in their conversations through giving orders or questioning other captains over the state of war (3.2.54-55, 3.2.87-88), or taking the role of an arbitrator (3.2.136, 5.1.40). The Welsh Fluellen always tries to pick an argument over "the disciplines of the wars" (2.3.97) and is quick to seize on opportunities through his Welsh connection to the king (act 4 scene 7), while the Irish Macmorris flares up at whoever he suspects of looking down on him.

Not only the courtiers and the officers but also the poorest of the nation poses a threat to order. Nym and Bardolph are prowling around the battlefields to "steal anything, and call it purchase" (3.2.42) despite the king's command that "there be nothing compelled from the / villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the / French upbraided or abused in disdainful language" (3.6.108-10). In this way, Shakespeare's text unveils the complex state of the nation behind Henry's emphasis on unity.

As shown above, outside the world of the play, the sense of nationhood was created through various means such as the clarification of national borders, compilation of history, and the creation and exclusion of the other. Shakespeare represents the diverse and complex state of the nation while also capturing the emerging nationalistic feeling that is reflected in compositions of history. Henry V follows the actual Tudor kings in his emphasis on national pride and history, and therefore the play appears to be nationalistic when focused on his speeches. If we follow subtexts, however, it offers a more diverse and complex figuration of the nation and the king himself.

Film Adaptations and Nationalism

Wartime especially is the time for Shakespeare as "the embodiment of Britain's cultural elitism" (Johnson 48), and during the WWII, when the film industry was stimulated by "propaganda imperative" (Street 155), literary and theatrical heritage was "an obvious source for scripts which communicated particular

notions of nationhood” (Street 155). Laurence Olivier’s cinematic adaptation of *Henry V* (1944) is one of such films. In contrast, Kenneth Branagh’s 1989 film adaptation is often regarded as a counter narrative to Olivier’s war-time propaganda. Therefore, this section focuses on how these films present the English nation through the story of victory.

Olivier’s Film

In Olivier’s cinematic adaptation during WWII, Henry and the English nation are defined as a heroic leader and orderly subjects. The film first draws attention to the importance of the play as a shared cultural asset of Britain by showing “authentic” Shakespearean audience and inviting its modern viewers to identify with them. It opens with the view of London around Shakespeare’s time and moves into the Globe Theatre. The camera angle that often looks up to the stage makes the viewer of the film feel as if they are among the audiences in the yard. In the end, the film again reminds the viewer that they have watched the play with those audiences in the sixteenth- or seventeenth century.

The Chorus in the Elizabethan costume serves as “the audience’s first and most immediate link to England’s glorious past” (Royal 106) creating “intimate continuity between Elizabethan theater and contemporary cinema, between the England of Agincourt (and Elizabeth) and the England of 1944” (Donaldson 62). In Shakespeare’s text, Chorus’ repeated appeal to the audience to “make imaginary puissance” (Prologue 25) and “sit and see, / Minding true things by what their mockeries be” (4.0.53) makes us conscious of self-deception which we are willing to employ (Royal 104). This highly theatrical gesture of the Chorus also makes us aware of the rhetorical pose of Henry, who “cloaks his personal ambitions in a language of ceremony and nationalism” (Royal 104).

Olivier’s Chorus, however, does not only introduce the viewers to different scenes but also plays a part in raising the sense of national pride with the lines such as “Now all the youth of England are on fire. . . Following the mirror of all Christian kings, / With winged heels, as English Mercuries” (2.0.1, 6-7). Several cuts in his lines reinforces his role in the film as an advocate for the king and his victory. The most noticeable example is the lines which mention Henry VI and the loss of his territory in France (Epilogue 7-13). As a result, the Chorus that provides critical as well as praising view on Henry and his deeds in Shakespeare’s text is reduced to “a mere lackey of seamless patriotism” (Royal 105).

The film encourages not only physical but also psychological assimilation of audiences. After the cheerful departure of Henry and his subjects to France, the scene changes to dying Falstaff. The close-up of the signboard of the Boar’s Head Tavern with sorrowful music is followed by the flashback of

the moment in which Hal who became Henry V banished Falstaff in *2H4*. The scene on and around Falstaff's death amounts to almost ten minutes, and with Falstaff, the viewer is asked to remember the entire *Henry IV* and how prince Hal became the king casting away those who he regards "the base contagious clouds" (*IH4* 1.2.185). Olivier's film presupposes the viewers' knowledge of the previous plays and thus implies that Shakespeare's plays are widely shared culture of Britain.

In Shakespeare's text, the war scenes amount to 1500 lines, which is about half the entire text. Although both Harfleur and Agincourt scenes include patriotic speeches, however, the tone is more sceptical than glorifying with scenes scattered with the page's observing commentary on moral and manhood (3.2.28-53), humorous (mis)communication and quarrels among captains (3.2.54-142, 4.1.65-83, 4.7.11-53), Pistol ranting (3.6.20-58, 4.1.35-63, 4.4.1-65), common soldiers confronting the king (4.1.87-226) and the consequent confusion about the gloves they exchange (4.8.6-73). These sceptical comments or rather comical moments amount to more than 500 lines.

Critical comments towards war are found in various places in the text. For example, after Henry's speech that drives soldiers "Once more to the breach" (3.1.1), Nym holds Bardolph back from charging on to the breach saying that the fight is "too hot" and "I have not a case of lives" (3.2.3-4). At the camp a common soldier wishes that King Henry "were here alone; so should he be sure to be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved" (4.1.121-123), and when Henry insists that "his cause being just and his quarrel honourable" (4.1.126-27), the soldier says, "If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us" (131-32). In this way, war scenes in the text are filled with negative opinions.

In contrast, the war scenes which take up about forty percent of the running time of Olivier's film, are glamorised by two means. One of them is the deletion of lines that would detract from Henry's figure as a war hero. A large part of his prayer to God before the battle of Agincourt is cut, and only the first four lines are kept so that the prayer shows his resolution for war without a hint of his emotional turmoil: "O God of battles! steel my soldiers' hearts; / Possess them not with fear. Take from them now / The sense of reckoning, if the opposed numbers / Pluck their hearts from them" (4.1.286-89). The remainder of lines is cut, in which he confesses that he acknowledges "[his] father made in compassing the crown" (4.1.291) and "bestowed more contrite tears" (4.1.293). Henry's controversial order that "every soldier kill his prisoners" (4.6.37) is omitted, and the execution of Bardolph is not mentioned. In this way, the king's weakness and violence are kept out of sight.

The other means of glamorisation is an extension of and addition to the war scene, showing the English army of different classes and ranks from infantry to cavalry gallantly fighting together for the country. The most significant

addition is the duel between Henry and Dauphin (1:45:38-1:46:28). The fight is highly reminiscent of that of Prince Hal and Henry Hotspur in *IH4*, where the former defeats the latter to gain fame as a war hero. Henry V does not kill Dauphin, of course, but his victory over him concludes the battle as his triumph over Hotspur did in the previous play. Again, the film brings in the sense of continuation from *Henry IV* and touches upon the shared culture as it does in giving more attention to Falstaff than the text does.

Branagh's Film

Branagh's 1989 film adaptation is often regarded as a counter-narrative to Olivier's war-time propaganda (Deats 285; Shaughnessy 48; Watts 10). However, his sympathetic portrayal of the king and his subjects render the film defective as a counter-narrative as it ends up presenting nationalism in a positive light. While Olivier's Henry was portrayed as a charismatic leader, Branagh's Henry is recreated as a more sympathetic figure. A significant change from both Olivier's version and Shakespeare's text is that Branagh shows us Henry's anguish in the execution of Bardolph (1:01:09 – 1:03:30). Henry remembers his merry time with Bardolph at a pub in a flashback, in which Bardolph asks him, "Do not thou, when thou art king, hand a thief" (*IH4* 1.2.58-59), and as Henry replies, "No, thou shalt" (*IH4* 1.2.60), the scene returns to the present. When the execution is put into action, tears run down his face (1:02:42), and he declares, "We would have all offenders so cut off" (3.6.106) in a tearful voice.

As Royal points out, Henry in this added scene appears "more of victim than an instigator of the tragedy that surrounds him" (108), and the sense of victimhood is reinforced when he mutters in agony, "Upon the King! . . . We must bear all. O hard condition" (4.1.227-230). Such emphasis on his suffering renders Branagh's Henry more sympathetic than a national icon. However, this is precisely how Branagh fails to make this film fundamentally different from Olivier's glorification. The film endeavours to close the distance between Henry and the audience, and as a result, it leaves no room for them to become aware of the king's duplicity.

The war scenes emphasise Henry's relatability by another means, i.e. brotherhood between him and his subjects. Both in Harfleur and Agincourt, the king is closely surrounded by his soldiers when he gives speeches, he looks at them in the eye, and even taps a pageboy's shoulder during his St. Crispin's Day Speech (1:29:48), and thus awakens a feeling of brotherhood. Henry in the battlefield "resembles his men and is distinguishable only by the rather muddy coat of arms on his tunic" (Forbes 258), and such portrayal of the king as "a simple man" (Forbes 259) makes him seem as if he can truly be one of the simple but strong band of "brothers" rather than show his moving eloquence as a façade.

With rain and wounded soldiers crawling in the mud, these war scenes depict the ugliness of war more realistically compared to Olivier's clear sky and green field. Nevertheless, Branagh's film glorifies the sacrifice for the country. The most notable example is the scene which continues for almost four minutes after the battle of Agincourt, when Henry and his army retrieve the bodies of victims chanting *Non nobis*, which goes, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give the praise" (1:52:05-1:55:53). *Non nobis* is mentioned in Shakespeare's text, but this fairly emotional scene is Branagh's addition, and the killing of the French prisoners is, again, omitted to conceal Henry's darker side.

The Chorus, which offers a critical commentary in Shakespeare's text, is not effectively used in Branagh's adaptation. For the first two scenes before the battle of Harfleur, the film reflects the critical undertone in Shakespeare's text. The prologue by Chorus who is dressed in modern attire disengages the audience rather than lead them into the play world as in Olivier's version by showing stage props and lighting apparatus.

In the rest of the film, however, the Chorus loses the sharpness in his commentaries, and Henry is presented in a positive light as a war hero. The Chorus, who stayed outside the scenes of the play, appears in the middle of the battle of Harfleur, covered in sweat, as if he is a TV reporter at the scene. From then on, he accompanies the English army, and in the epilogue he has scars above his left eye as if to say, as Henry claimed in his speech, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day" (*H5* 4.3.48). In this way, the Chorus gradually becomes "caught up in the plot that he is contriving" (Royal 107), and loses his critical attitude in the end.

As shown above, adaptations by both Olivier and Branagh present the English nation as a band of people united against the greater force from outside. Presenting Shakespeare's play as a shared history or story of national victory, Olivier's film glamorises the war, and defines Henry and the English nation as a heroic leader and orderly subjects. Branagh's film, on the other hand, delivers the ugliness of war in its realistic representation, but it nonetheless romanticises the sacrifice for the country. In both films, resulting sentiment is "O England, model to thy inward greatness, / Like little body with a mighty heart" (2.0.16-17).

Brexit, Nationalism and Shakespeare

As examined in earlier sections, Henry V constantly reminds his soldiers that they are English and fighting for England. They are addressed as "you noble English, / Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof" (3.1.17-18), "good yeomen, / Whose limbs were made in England" (3.1.25-26) who fight for "England and Saint George" (3.1.34). Such collective identity—"us"—can only

be defined in relation to “them” (Lorenz 29). In *The Making of English National Identity*, Krishan Kumar notes that “British national identity was forged through a series of powerful contrasts with Britain’s continental neighbours, particularly but not only France” (ix); Britain’s relationship with the continent has always been a complex one.

In 2016, the UK held the United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum, commonly referred to as the EU Referendum, and voted to exit the EU. This is so-called Brexit (Moseley). Like the speeches of Henry V in Shakespeare’s text and those in film adaptations, Brexit discourse is full of emphasis on comradeship, history and national pride. This section will analyse how pro-leave campaigns appealed to people with the image of a small but mighty country’s fight for sovereignty and freedom against a giant power, and how Shakespeare was implicated in Brexit discourse for the exaltation of nationalism.

Brexit and Nationalism

In the Brexit campaign, the national flag seems to have worked in a similar way to the royal arms on Elizabethan maps. Steve Corbett observes the “extensive use of red and white in campaign literature connecting with the English national flag” (20).² About ten days before the vote, the popular tabloid *The Sun* embellished its front cover with a Union Jack and the message “BeLEAVE in Britain” (“It’s *The Sun*”). Mentioning the EU flags in London, Boris Johnson asks, “Do we feel loyalty to that flag? Do our hearts pitter-patter as we watch it flutter over public buildings?” and answers himself, “On the contrary. The British share . . . a growing sense of alienation” (“Boris Johnson’s Speech”).³ The Union Jack was thus used as a symbol to represent the British sovereignty against the European Union.

Slogans such as “Take back control” used by the Leave Campaign emphasized sovereignty and autonomy for the British nation while rejecting interventions from the EU. Such an appeal to “sovereignty” is not a new thing. G.R. Elton, in *England Under the Tudors*, maintains that “[t]he essential ingredient of the Tudor revolution was the concept of national sovereignty” (160). The Reformation was an English exit from Catholic rule in Europe, and it was promoted under the watchword of “sovereignty”.

In the Act in Restraint of Appeals in 1533 which declared King Henry VIII instead of the Pope as the final authority in religious as well as political matters, Thomas Cromwell on behalf of the king defines England as “an

² Kojo Koram notes that “[w]hile Leavers and Remainers might both see the union jack as a symbol flexible enough to be adapted for their own needs, this is largely an English approach to the flag” (5) as it proclaims English values for other parts of the union.

³ Hereafter “Speech”.

Empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King” (Bray 78). The act continues to state that “the King . . . made sundry ordinances, laws, statutes and provisions for the entire and sure conservation of the prerogatives, liberties and pre-eminences of the said imperial crown of this realm . . . to keep it from the authority of other foreign potentates” (Bray 78-79). Pointing out that the word “empire” here denotes “a political unit, a self-governing state” free from foreign intervention, Elton states that the 1530s marked the emergence of the modern concept of the country as “a sovereign national state” (161).

The same idea of the breakaway from European domination to establish sovereignty was used in Brexit, in which discourses re-imagined both the country and its people as marginalized and oppressed by the centralized power of the European Union. In his speech on the EU referendum in 2016, Boris Johnson asserted that the EU has “considerable powers . . . across the whole 28-nation territory” and “it is still becoming ever more centralizing, interfering and anti-democratic”, by which “[t]he independence of this country is being seriously compromised” (“Speech”).

Michael Gove, in his pre-referendum contribution to *The Telegraph*, maintains that “[t]he ability to choose who governs us, and the freedom to change laws we do not like, were secured for us in the past by radicals and liberals who took power from unaccountable elites and placed it in the hands of the people” and asks, “[a]re we really too small, too weak and too powerless to make a success of self-rule?” (“EU Referendum”).⁴ They conclude that “by leaving the EU we can take control” (“EU”), through the “devolution of powers back to nations and people” (“Speech”), as from the Pope to the English king and the parliament.

This breakaway from the EU was often publicized in heroic imagery of a fight. In the same speech, Johnson aligns the Leave Campaign against the EU echoing Henry V’s small army that won against France’s larger army.

It is we in the Leave Camp—not they—who stand in the tradition of the liberal cosmopolitan European enlightenment . . . and though they are well-funded, and though we know that they can call on unlimited taxpayer funds for their leaflets, it is we few, we happy few who have the inestimable advantage of believing strongly in our cause, and that we will be vindicated by history. (“Speech”)

Like Henry in his speeches, Johnson imagines himself and his followers as “a band of brothers” who are fighting for freedom despite their material restrictions, emphasizing the rightfulness of his cause by presenting Brexit as a memorable moment in history.

⁴ Hereafter “EU”.

Some tabloids echo such discourse of leaving the EU as heroic bravery. *The Sun*, for example, celebrates that “Our paper led the fight against the EU” (“It’s *The Sun*”), and *The Daily Mail* describes the Leave vote as “a magnificent affirmation of national self-belief and character” of “the real people of Britain” (“Take a Bow”). *The Daily Express* reads “[w]hen the history books are written, June 23, 2016 will be remembered as the day when Britain’s bravery ushered in a golden age of global freedom” and proudly remembers, “[o]ur heroic men and women have made countless sacrifices over the centuries to ensure that not just we, but our friends across the globe can taste of freedom every day” (“Brexit”). All these papers celebrate the victory of ordinary people over elites.

Why do they present Brexit as a fight of the people? Cécile Leconte points out that “the key concept in all populist discourses is that of the ‘people’, either ethnically, socially or politically defined” and that “populist discourse . . . defines a single cause for multiple frustrations it tries to aggregate: the presumed betrayal of the ‘people’ by the elites” (258). To construct the “people” they serve, the politicians first create “an idealised conception of the community they serve”, which Paul Taggart terms as a “heartland” (274). *The Daily Express*, for example, states that “[t]his is a great country, with a long and proud tradition of standing up for what is good and right” (“Brexit”). Such an idealistic presentation of the country and its people pervade Brexit discourse.

The heartland is “a construction of the good life derived retrospectively from a romanticized conception of life as it has been lived” (Taggart 278). A good example of Britain as the heartland is Michal Gove’s. In the abovementioned article, Gove presents Britain as an ideal country in nostalgic recollection:

In Britain we established trial by jury in the modern world, we set up the first free parliament, we ensured no-one could be arbitrarily detained at the behest of the Government, we forced our rulers to recognise they ruled by consent not by right, we led the world in abolishing slavery, we established free education for all, national insurance, the National Health Service and a national broadcaster respected across the world. (“EU”)

In a similar vein with Tudor monarchs who attempted to construct the idea of the country and its nation through chorography, Gove re-imagines Britain as once great but betrayed and suppressed by the EU, presenting Brexit as a fight for the people to make it great again.

Shakespeare in Brexit

Shakespeare was quoted (and often misquoted) in this campaign to project Britain as a great country. Arguing that Shakespeare would vote to leave, Ben Macintyre concludes, “[h]is best lines, after all, were written for English patriots

standing up to continental interference: “This England never did, nor never shall, / Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror” (“To Leave or Remain?”). Daniel Hannan writes, “Shakespeare has his ancient Britons anticipate modern attitudes with uncanny aptness: ‘Britain is / A world by itself; and we will nothing pay / For wearing our own noses’” (“How like a God”). A Washington Post article notes that “Brexit backers point to his patriotic verse—’This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England’” (Witte and Adam “In Shakespeare’s Home Town”).

These quotations are taken out of their original context. The first, from *King John* (5.7.112-13), is spoken by the Bastard as a closing remark after the king is poisoned to death. He concludes the time of the play as “when it [England] first did help to wound itself” (5.7.114). The second, from *Cymbeline* (3.1.12-14) is a rather instigating statement made by Cloten, a spoilt son of the evil queen, to lead the king into war with Rome. The third, from *Richard II* (2.1.50), is uttered by dying old John of Gaunt, who laments that “this, dear dear land . . . is now bound in with shame” and “That England, that was wont to conquer others, / Hath made a shameful conquest of itself” (2.1.57-63, 65-66). These lines used in support of Brexit are thus not the principal points of the original text. On the contrary, they convey the opposite messages. These are pernicious cases of political spin, intentionally taking Shakespeare out of context to manipulate people’s emotions.

The attempt to regain or re-create strong Britishness came with the abhorrence and exclusion of the other, most prominently immigrants. After the Brexit poll, Britain saw a rise in open xenophobia, racism and hate crime (Cain; “Brexit ‘Major Influence’”). The Brexit debate created “us” and “other” even inside Britain. *The Daily Mail*, for example, praises that “outside the echo-chamber that is the metropolitan liberal class, the real people of Britain . . . saw through the lies” and concludes that we should “pay tribute to the countless ordinary Britons who showed so much more wisdom than the self-serving political and financial elites” (“Take a Bow”). The effect of populist nationalism is the division, even within the “people” it imagines as united.

As we have seen, national pride abounds in Brexit discourse. Pro-leave politicians called attention to the crisis of “sovereignty”, claiming that it is undermined and threatened by the ever more centralizing force of the elitist EU. In their words, Britain and its nation are imagined as marginalized and suppressed, deprived of freedom and power it once enjoyed, whilst Brexit is presented as a heroic deed for people to save the country from its marginalized position. Shakespeare was made part of this discourse for the exaltation of nationalism. Politicians selected most patriotic lines, out of context, to glorify Britain and to support their campaign with the words of the nation’s bard. What Shakespeare’s texts reveal, however, is a lamentation for national downfall as a result of the war against the other.

Conclusion

This paper examined how nationhood is created within and without the play world of *Henry V*, and how Shakespeare has been appropriated for political spin and propaganda to heighten the sense of national unity even though the original texts are ambiguous or argue against the ideology of uniformity. The first section explored the creation of nationhood within and without *Henry V*. The Tudor monarchs endeavoured to construct the nationhood through the clarification of national borders, compilation of history, and the creation and exclusion of the other. Chronicles and atlases were assembled to formulate the sense of a distinct nation represented by the sovereign. Although Shakespeare captures the emerging nationalistic feeling, he pictures the diverse and complex state of the nation. His *Henry V* follows the actual Tudor kings in his emphasis on national pride and history, but various parts of the text suggest a more diverse and complex figure of the king and his subjects.

The second section examined two film adaptations of the play by Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh. Presenting Shakespeare's play as a shared history or story of national victory, Olivier's film glamorises the war, and defines Henry and the English nation as the heroic leader and orderly subjects. Though Branagh's film realistically represents the ugliness of war, it romanticises the sacrifice for the country, it gradually loses its critical attitude and become absorbed into Henry's nationalist narrative. In the end, both films define the English nation as a victorious people throughout history by presenting Shakespeare's play as a shared history or story of national victory, and making the audience a part of the narrative.

The final section analysed the representation of the country and people in the Brexit narrative, and how Shakespeare was employed in the leave campaign to uplift national pride. Pro-leave politicians emphasised comradeship, history and national pride by presenting Brexit as a heroic fight of the people to save the country from the oppression by the centralizing EU. Brexit was imagined as a victory which will bring back freedom and sovereignty the country once enjoyed, and Shakespeare was made part of this discourse. Shakespeare quotations that are made by the politicians are seemingly patriotic. If we look into the original context, however, what it reveals is often grief over the national downfall as a result of the war against the continent. In this way, Shakespeare provides us with a wider view of nationhood, resisting the simplifying force of politics.

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