John taylors penniless pilgrimage english literature essay

Literature, British Literature

Printed in 1618, two years after Shakespeare's death, " THE PENNYLES PILGRIMAGE, OR The Money-lesse perambulation, of Iohn Taylor, Alias the Kings Majesties Water-Poet," starts: READER, these Travels of mine into Scotland, were not undertaken, neither in imitation, or emulation of any man, but only devised by myself, on purpose to make trial of my friends both in this Kingdom of England, and that of Scotland, and because I would be an eye-witness of divers things which I had heard of that Country; and whereas many shallow-brained Critics, do lay an aspersion on me, that I was set on by others, or that I did undergo this project, either in malice, or mockage of Master Benjamin Jonson, vow by the faith of a Christian, that their imaginations are all wide, for he is a gentleman, to whom I am so much obliged for many undeserved courtesies that I have received from him, and from others by his favour, that I never to be so impudent or ungrateful, as either to sufferer any man's persuasions, or mine own instigation to incite me, to make so bad a requital, for so much goodness formerly received; […][8]When John Taylor's " penniless pilgrimage" took him to the border between England and Scotland, he was startled by what he discovered: Eight miles from Carlisle runs a little river, Which England's bounds, from Scotland's grounds doth sever. Without horse, bridge, or boat, I o'er did getOn foot, I went, yet scarce my shoes did wet. I being come to this long-looked-for land, Did mark, remark, note, renote, view'd, and scann'd; And I saw nothing that could change my will, But that I thought myself in England still. The kingdoms are so nearly join'd and fix'd, There scarcely went a pair of shears betwixt; There I saw sky above, and earth below, And as in England, there the sun did show; The hills with sheep replete, with corn the

dale, And many a cottage yielded good Scottish ale; According to the author-traveller, England borders Scotland on a ‘ little river’ which he crossed without even wetting his shoes, and – however hard he tried – he could not make any difference between the two countries. Taylor’s surprise at Scotland’s resemblance to England confirms the early modern expectation that borders are markers of significant difference: the sun was rising in the morning, ‘ as in England’, sheep were grazing on the hills, while the farmers were happily brewing ‘ good Scottish ale’, just as the English farmers would do. Taylor vaguely anticipates some kind of transformative event, but to no avail: " I saw nothing that could change my will." Not only is the landscape the same, but so is Taylor. Of course, the " water poet" makes fun of his own expectation of transformation. Still, Taylor’s joke requires that his early modern reader recognize the symbolic potency of border crossing. What precisely might such a reader have been anticipating and why? What exactly do borders and border crossing mean in the period? We have already commented upon the importance of the map, as an instrument of defining borders and nationhood. Borders would be fought for, and they could be crossed and even erased from the map in expansion wars. Borders would then be traced anew, using thicker lines, to define the new geography. Thus Shakespeare’s Britain was mapped and re-mapped, and his history plays bring a wealth of information which literary critics, even historians, could not possibly overlook. But, just as Shakespeare’s geography is more than once fictional, or even poetical, so is his history. Shakespeare traces the history of Britain in such a way that it suits the needs and expectations of his royal audience, and the public at large. One good example would be Richard III.

The stated mission of the 20th century society of the Richard III Society is " to promote, in every possible way, research into the life and times of Richard III, and to secure a reassessment of the material relating to this period, and of the role of this monarch in English history" (see website: www. richardiii. net). They consider the play to be ‘ bad history’ or, to be more precise, ‘ not history at all.’ No matter how one feels about Richard III, amateur and professional historians alike can regret that Shakespeare’s stature as a writer had such great influence over historians, professors, and teachers in the centuries since. If we owe the Ricardians anything, it is an appreciation of the fact that they were instrumental in destroying Shakespeare’s credibility as a historian. No one now believes that the Shakespearean Richard was the historical Richard. Unfortunately for the Ricardians, this might be the only valid contribution they can make toward repairing his reputation. Far too many of them have given into a false dichotomy, thinking that Richard must be a hero is he is not a monstrous villain, ignoring all of the shades of gray in between these two extremes. To believe Richard was a hero, one must reject nearly every contemporary source and accept a double standard whereby only contemporaries with a bias in Richard’s favour are entertained. Thus, they quote Thomas Langdon’s letter which says Richard contents the people wherever he goes, and don’t have the honesty to add that Langdon had received the bishopric of St. David’s from Richard and would receive the bishopric of Salisbury from him at the forfeit of Lionel Woodville. The Ricardians are quick enough to reject contemporaries for biases – real, perceived, or imagined – against Richard. They also fail to question whether the good laws passed by Richard’s Parliament were

inspired by him or the product of a Parliament which had the upper hand, serving a king who needed all the support he could muster. People who do not share the Ricardians' undiscriminating admiration for him tend to fall into two camps regarding the events of the Spring and Summer of 1483, which more or less came to define his reputation: Richard was either a very intelligent man, orchestrating a successful coup, or a man of limited intelligence, led and manipulated by others. One historian has pointed out that the second view of Richard was not shared by Richard's contemporaries, who must indeed have the last word on Richard, since they were the ones who knew him far better than we moderns could ever hope to know him. I think that Richard was a young man of considerable ability (only 32 when he died) who was just nearing the top of his game when his brother Edward IV died. At that time, he was held in high esteem by most Englishmen. Not because he was the saint that the Ricardians paint him to be. Even before his brother's death, we have evidence of greed, ambition, spend-thriftiness, intransigence, and ruthlessness. However, none of these negative and very human traits are meant to infer that Richard was considered anything other than a man of honour. In fact, such was his reputation that Anthony Woodville, who would later be executed on his orders, requested that Richard assist him with a legal matter as late as March 1483. There is also evidence before his brother's death that he was even-handed in dispensing of justice. Of course this does not mean that he would be as even-handed when it came to matters where his own self-interest was involved. He was an eager and effective soldier, and the accolades that he collected during his brother's last Parliament were for his victories over the Scots. Edward IV had

accomplished much more by way of peace and prosperity, but, as Shakespeare's glossing over of Edward's reign illustrates, peace and prosperity can be rather unglamorous and boring compared with military heroics. Richard seemed to relish war. He dissented with Edward over a less than honourable peace with France. Edward had to restrain him in his eagerness to rush to war against the Scots, and some might speculate that Edward " allowed" the skirmishes with Scotland to continue as a means of keeping Richard occupied, just as he might have " allowed" Parliament to award Richard with a grant for the Scottish lands he would conquer just to provide an outlet for his energies. But let us return to Shakespeare and his Histories. With his history plays, Shakespeare proved England's past to be a subject worthy of great theatre. For the first time in English drama, historical events were treated as grandly as timeless themes such as love and death. Elizabethans of the 1590s were swelling with patriotism and military pride. In 1588, Sir Francis Drake had defeated the Spanish Armada against all odds. By then, too, England had established a presence in the New World and on maritime trade routes. Elizabethans began to view themselves as subjects not merely of a monarch but also of a historical process whose precarious shape could be changed by their actions. Nowhere is this more evident than in Shakespeare's history plays. All but Henry VIII were written during the most optimistic years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Yet even in these plays, Shakespeare is less interested in historical accuracy than in compelling drama. And it is a testament to the playwright's priorities that the history plays include many of his most enduring and universally engaging dramas. Ten of the eleven history plays – Edward III was only recently admitted into

the Shakespearean corpus – are listed as ' Histories' in the First Folio. They are not difficult to distinguish from other kinds of Shakespearean plays: comedies, tragedies and romances. Each play is set principally in England and addresses the political challenges confronted by a specific English king, whose name figures as the play's title. Each king's troubles are usually covered in a single play, although two Lancastrian monarchs receive more than one play each: three early plays treat the reign of Henry VI and two somewhat later plays the reign of Henry IV. Macbeth and King Lear are not counted among the history plays, for while King Macbeth in Scotland and King Lear in England were historically attested rulers, these plays, like Julius Caesar and the other Roman tragedies, focus instead on the tragic fall of a heroic person who only happened to be a historical ruler. The history plays examine not a single person or thread of action but rather a sequence of historical events related to the theme of the unification of England. However, while these plays form a distinct category of Shakespearean drama, they contain elements of other kinds of drama. Most history plays present a character similar to the central figure of a tragedy: the heroic figure who falls, and, with the final scenes of many history plays offering cause for celebration, their conclusions resemble those of the comedies. Indeed, few of Shakespeare's characters are more comical than Falstaff and his associates, who nevertheless make their first and most enduring appearances not in a comedy but in a history play. Yet Shakespeare's history plays do not merely combine aspects of comedy and tragedy. They form an independent genre characterized by specific themes, dramatic structures and political implications. In Elizabethan times, these plays were also enormously topical:

audiences were assured by the history plays that, thanks to their ruler’s Tudor bloodline, they dwelled in a country providentially united. But at the same time, they were cautioned not to be complacent, for the calamitous civil wars of pre-Tudor England could one day return. Thus, the ideological stance of the history plays is consistent: were England divided internally, it could face defeat both at home and overseas. The history play was not the first dramatic genre in England to resemble political propaganda. Even before Shakespeare flourished, morality plays treated political themes, often in a didactic manner. In John Bale’s King John (c. 1530) and Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s Gorboduc (c. 1562), tyranny and rebellion unravel the national unity inevitably restored in England by the end of each play. But after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the morality play, with its simplified worlds of good and evil, no longer satisfied Elizabethans eager to celebrate England’s grand successes and ambitions. Cardboard cut-out figures of Virtue and Vice needed to be given flesh and bones. George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge and Christopher Marlowe first turned to English history for dramatic material appealing to new audiences. As in Elizabeth’s England, where the vulnerable succession of her crown was coveted by rulers overseas and upstarts at home, the England of past monarchs was also plagued by foreign and domestic threats to stability and continuity. Thus, the past offered ample material mirroring the present. Further, English history was well documented by the 1590s, when the fad for plays about historic defeats and conquests was peaking. The stage was set for a talented new playwright to satisfy spectators of a changed London theatre scene and of a new English political reality. Shakespeare’s earliest

works in this genre were not radically different from the linear chronicle plays then popular in London. But as his plays begin to explore historical figures as individuals with inner worlds and dimensional passions, they came to form their own kind of English drama. For all but three history plays, Shakespeare set action during reigns associated with the rise and fall of the house of Lancaster. Following the deposition of Richard II in 1399 by the Lancastrian Henry IV through to the usurpation of the throne by Henry VII in 1485, sons of the House of Lancaster struggled to gain and then hold onto the English crown. In using reigns associated with Lancastrians and their Yorkist rivals as dramatic settings, Shakespeare was making a politically astute and even ideologically charged choice. For it was Queen Elizabeth's Tudor grandfather, Henry VII, who brought an end to the bloody Wars of the Roses by uniting the dynastic lines of Lancaster and York. The legacy of Henry VII left its mark on the Elizabethans, who believed not only that English rulers were vice-regents of God, but also that history itself unfolded according to divine design. God may have intended for England to suffer through foreign and civil wars but, with Henry VII, Elizabethans believed God had interceded to end an era of devastating strife and bloodshed. King Henry VII shrewdly called for chroniclers to recount England's history from the new, Tudor viewpoint. He commissioned the Italian humanist Polydore Virgil to write Historia Anglica, which in turn served as the basis for the two chief sources for Shakespeare's history plays. The first was Edward Hall's 1548 The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York, whose very title refers to Henry VII and the Tudor line that brought peace to England by unifying opposed claimants to the crown. The second and most

important was Raphael Holinshed’s The Chronicles of England, Ireland, and Scotland, published first in 1578, and again in 1587, when the work served as a major source for London playwrights responding to the post-Armada thirst for plays about English history. Equipped with these and other chronicles, and drawing on such diverse materials as classical Senecan tragedies and more recent political morality plays, Shakespeare addressed in some of his earliest plays the reigns of the Wars of the Roses. Known collectively as the ‘ first tetralogy’ because they were written early and around the same time (1589-93) are: Henry VI Part 1, Henry VI Part II, Henry VI Part III and Richard III. Richard III ruled during three decades of civil wars pitting the House of Lancaster (symbolized by a red rose) against that of York (symbolized by a white rose). The reign of Lancastrian Henry VI is handled in linear episodic fashion, the work of a playwright trying his hand at a new form. Richard III portrays a villain of the House of York, who murders and marries his way to the throne held by his Yorkist brother Edward IV as the play begins. In this play, certain rigid and repetitive elements drawn from Senecan tragedy are overwhelmed by the dazzling fiendishness of Richard’s persona. In dialogues of intense dramatic irony and in riveting soliloquies, Richard III distinctly shows Shakespeare making the history play his own kind of drama. From 1595 to 1599, Shakespeare wrote another grouping of four history plays, known as the ‘ second tetralogy’, or the ‘ Henriad’: Richard II, Henry IV Part I, Henry IV Part II, and Henry V. While written after the first tetralogy, these plays are set in the earlier era of the Hundred Years’ War between England and France. Richard II, notable for its lyrical language, treats the reign of the deposed and murder Yorkist king as a man who failed

to rule effectively. Turning to the reigns of Lancastrians Henry IV (1399-1413) and Henry V (1413-22), Shakespeare moved from high lyricism to a remarkable mixture of prose and poetic language, and tragic and comic modes. The playwright's most grandiose creation, Sir John Falstaff, enters in Henry IV Part I with his feisty associates and remains in Henry IV Part II, with his death mourned in Henry V. For Falstaff and his entourage, Shakespeare found an English of entirely new energies, which he balanced against the more formal language of other speakers to render both parts of Henry IV among his most extraordinarily innovative plays. Henry V changes stylistic tempos yet again, following in a highly patriotic register the rise to the throne of the rebellious young Hal, who as Henry V is represented as the most successful of Shakespeare's English kings, achieving an ideal balance between man and king, soldier and lover. During the interval between the composition of the two tetralogies, Shakespeare wrote two other history plays: King John, set in the early 13th century, portrays the English monarch as an incompetent usurper who loses most English territories in France, murders the rightful heir to the throne and is then poisoned to death; and Edward III, set in the mid-14th century, is principally a vehicle for exhibiting the heroism of the king's son, Edward the Black Prince, in defeating the French in the battles of Crécy and Poitiers. Fourteen years after writing his last Elizabethan history play, Henry V, Shakespeare returned to the genre with Henry VIII, based on the reign of Queen Elizabeth's Tudor father. Written with John Fletcher while King James held the throne, Henry VIII treats Henry's break with Rome after the Pope refused to sanction his divorce from Katherine of Aragon and his marriage to Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth's

mother. The play is among the very last written by Shakespeare. One final remark, before going even deeper into our journey of discovering the Englishness of Shakespeare's histories: Readers and audiences in and beyond Britain frequently mistake the history plays for accurate representations of the reigns of their eponymous kings. But Shakespeare took immense liberties in recasting history for the stage. At the beginning of our presentation we were mentioning Shakespeare's geographical errors which only add to the poetical dimension of his Geography. The histories abound in historical errors: chronologies are freely compressed and sometimes wildly altered, locations are changed, anachronisms inserted, motivations fabricated and characterizations invented. Shakespeare's concern was not to represent historical events with accuracy. He sought to make great theatre, but he paid heed to the political sensibilities of Queen Elizabeth and King James. Nevertheless, his influence on perceptions of the historical English kings is so far-reaching that even today Richard III is thought to have been as much a wicked plotter as the real Henry V is believed to have been a national saviour. The history plays are proof that literature can overwhelm history even in a sphere as carefully documented and closely studied as the dynastic rule of England. The interest of the sixteenth-century English in the history of their own country can be seen as one aspect of the complex process by which England was slowly emerging as a modern nation state. In the medieval period, states were typically decentralized entities. Their boundaries were fluid, readily changed when dynastic marriages united them or when conquest led to the absorption of one state by another.[9]Medieval subjects owed allegiance to a feudal

overlord and to the monarch, but not to the fixed entity we usually designate as " a nation." England was one of the first European powers to develop some of the practices and institutions of a modern nation state.[1]0The Tudors came to the throne in 1485, and for the next one hundred years they worked to wrest political power from the feudal barons and centralize it in the person of the monarch, and to wrest religious authority from the Church of Rome and vest it, as well, with the king. When Henry VIII through the Act of Supremacy in 1534 became head of the Church of England, he united – at least symbolically – temporal and spiritual authority in one person. Equally important, the Tudors developed a centralized administrative infrastructure for the country, making local justices of the peace, for example, accountable to London authorities, and extending bureaucratic control of taxation and judicial review. Ironically, however, the Tudors' relative success at building a more unified and centralized state created conditions in which the centrality of the monarch as the focus of allegiance could diminish. England's geography, commercial vitality, laws, and language could all become points of pride that focused attention less on the monarch than on what were perceived as the natural and essential aspects of the country itself as an entity with an organic and essential integrity.[1]1Of course, no nation is a " natural" entity. Nations are artificial creations, and the unity of a nation is a carefully constructed fiction. In Benedict Anderson's telling phrase, nations are " imagined communities," that is, they are communities that are imagined into being by certain cultural practices and ideas, rather than pre-existing entities that have only to be recognized and named.[1]2 In sixteenth-century England, trade between London and the rest of England

increased markedly.[1]3 As products moved from Bristol to London, for example, people, money, and ideas moved with them. This material practice – increasing internal trade – helped to bind England's different regions together. Discursive innovations such as mapmaking, linguistic standardization, and the development of a self-consciously national literature also contributed to the nation-building process. In short, conceptions of national unity both enabled and were enabled by a set of evolving material practices. Modern forms of racial distinctions, supposedly based on somatic differences, were also beginning to emerge in this period. The word " race," which earlier referred simply to lineage, designating those persons descended from a common ancestor, was beginning to take on its modern meaning of a tribe, nation, or people distinguished by common physical characteristics such as colour or physiognomy. its commercial strength through a vast expansion of overseas trading activities; the opening decades of the seventeenth century saw English ships sailing the shores of Africa and India, Java and North America, while English overland traders were established in Moscow and in Fez.[1]4 As England consolidated as a nation state, English traders were increasingly involved in a global economic system in which their ability to extract maximum profits from their endeavours was facilitated by the gradual racialization of those with whom they came in contact.[1]5 By the mid-seventeenth century, among the goods regularly carried in English ships were African slaves. In short, as scholars such as Etienne Balibar and Samir Amin have made clear, European nationalism was from its inception intertwined with the emergence of modern forms of racialization.[1]6In 1918, Sir Walter Raleigh delivered a

British Academy lecture on ‘ Shakespeare and England’ in which he openly declared: I propose to return to the old Catholic doctrine which has been illuminated by so many disciples of Shakespeare, and to speak of him as our great national poet. He embodies and exemplifies all the virtues, and most of the faults, of England. Any one who reads and understands him understands England. This method of studying Shakespeare by reading him has perhaps gone somewhat out of vogue in favour of more roundabout ways of approach, but it is the best method for all that. Shakespeare tells us more about himself and his mind than we could learn even from those who knew him in his habit as he lived, if they were all alive and all talking. To learn what he tells we have only to listen. I think there is no national poet, of any great nation whatsoever, who is so completely representative of his own people as Shakespeare is representative of the English. There is certainly no other English poet who comes near to Shakespeare in embodying our character and our foibles.[1]7Summing up, Shakespeare is the key to an understanding of England, the embodiment of the British spirit, the quintessence of Englishness. In his essay ‘ Mapping Shakespeare’s Britain’, Peter Holland points out that Shakespeare’s angle on cartography was an odd one: ‘ History is written in the drawing of national borders and borderlines are a visible manifestation of the politics of map-making, what Shakespeare contemptuously calls in Troilus and Cressida " mapp’ry" (I. 2. 205), an unusually rare word, so rare OED can offer only this example before 1840’.[1]8UlyssesThey tax our policy and call it cowardice, Count wisdom as no member of the war, Forestall prescience, and esteem no actBut that of hand. The still and mental partsThat do contrive how many hands shall

strikeWhen fitness calls them on and know by measureOf their observant toil the enemy’s weight, Why, this hath not a finger’s dignity. They call this bed-work, mapp’ry, closet-war. So that the ram that batters down the wall, For the great swing and rudeness of his poise, They place before his hand that made the engine, Or those that with the fineness of their soulsBy reason guide his execution.(Troilus and Cressida, 1. 3. 197-210)Holland mentions ‘ the two crucial examples’ of cartographic conflict in Shakespeare, ‘ the map of England being divided up and re-divided … in Hotspur’s irritation in 1 Henry IV and the map of Britain being divided up in King Lear’ (Holland, 199). We have already commented upon Lear’s division of the map of Britain. In 1 Henry IV, the rebels’ map of Britain in Act 3, Scene 1 seems particularly relevant. Here, we want to argue that the map points both to Hotspur’s incompetence as a leader and to the general threat his rebellion poses to the kingdom. As the rebels prepare to talk strategy, Hotspur shouts " a plague upon it! / I have forgot the map" (3. 1. 1). Glendower finds it, of course, but we’re immediately struck by Hotspur’s disorganization and seeming ineptitude. In this moment, the map seems to be symbolic of the kingdom as a whole and gestures toward Hotspur’s inability to manage Britain: HOTSPURMethinks my moiety, north from Burton here, In quantity equals not one of yours: See how this river comes me cranking in, And cuts me from the best of all my landA huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out. I’ll have the current in this place damm’d up; And here the smug and silver Trent shall runIn a new channel, fair and evenly; It shall not wind with such a deep indent, To rob me of so rich a bottom here.(1 Henry IV, 3. 1. 93-101)When Hotspur unfurls his map and demonstrates how the rebels plan to divide the

kingdom into three parts, we are reminded that the rebel cause is bent on division and dissection, not unity. The business with the map seems to confirm that young Percy's plans are decidedly not in the best interest of a kingdom that's moving toward unification: MORTIMERThe archdeacon hath divided itInto three limits very equally: England, from Trent and Severn hitherto, By south and east is to my part assign'd: All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore, And all the fertile land within that bound, To Owen Glendower: and, dear coz, to youThe remnant northward, lying off from Trent. And our indentures tripartite are drawn; Which being sealed interchangeably, A business that this night may execute, To-morrow, cousin Percy, you and IAnd my good Lord of Worcester will set forthTo meet your father and the Scottish power, As is appointed us, at Shrewsbury.(1 Henry IV, 3. 1. 68-83)At the time Shakespeare wrote 1 Henry IV (around 1597), England was very much concerned with the unification of Britain and global expansion in general. In Shakespeare's day, maps and globes were often used as symbols of England's status as a big, giant world power, not a kingdom that's been hacked up into little bits and pieces. Paintings of the age show royalty carrying the geographical globes, standing on the maps of the known world, and Queen Elizabeth I herself was extremely interested in and fully supporting the cult of her own image (see Fig. 13). In Engendering a Nation, influential literary critics Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue that " the rebel cause is discredited, not only or even chiefly because it defies the authority of the monarch, but because it threatens to dismember the body of the land, a threat that is graphically illustrated when the rebel leaders haggle over the map of Britain and agree finally to have the river Trent

turned from its natural course in the interest of their ‘ bargain.’"[1]9In the play’s opening scene, King Henry remarks that his messenger’s horse has been " stain’d with the variation of each soil" as it travelled from Northumberland to London to deliver news of a battle in northern England: KINGHere is a dear, a true industrious friend, Sir Walter Blunt, new lighted from his horse. Stain’d with the variation of each soilBetwixt that Holmedon and this seat of ours;(1 Henry IV, 1. 1. 62-5)This vivid depiction of the soil-stained horse captures perfectly the play’s interest in covering a broad geographical range. 1 Henry IV is set in England and Wales around 1492 and portrays diverse locales – the king’s palace in London, various fields of battle, the Boar’s Head Tavern in London’s Eastcheap neighbourhood, the mysterious and sensual home of Welsh rebel, Owen Glendower, and so on. The royal palace in London is where the king hangs out, makes decisions about important state matters, and lays into his rebellious subjects and his unruly son, Prince Hal. The vibe here is grave and serious, so much so that Hal feels the need to have a kind of dress rehearsal before his confrontation with his father. The infamous Boar’s Head Tavern, on the other hand, is a dive bar in London’s Eastcheap neighbourhood. (Even though the play’s set around 1492, critics like Jean E. Howard note that Eastcheap looks and feels a lot like England’s colourful commercial district in the 1590s. Here, notes Howard, characters drink imported sweet wine, refer to clothing worn by Elizabethans, and make fun of popular Elizabethan plays.) This is where Hal cuts loose with his buddies and hangs with the commoners. Aside from being a really fun and colourful hangout, the Boar’s Head is an important location because it’s a space where matters of state are made fun of. In the famous

play-acting scene, Prince Hal and Falstaff turn the tavern into a mock " palace" and take turns performing the role of " King Henry," which is a pretty rebellious thing to do. This rebellious act is also something Elizabethan actors did every time they took the stage in a performance of King Henry IV, which makes the Boar's Head Tavern seem a lot like a rowdy theatre. Gads Hill is the location (on the road to London) where Falstaff and his crew rob the king's exchequer just before Prince Hal and Poins jump out of the bushes and rob Falstaff, who barely puts up a fight before retreating like a coward. The setting and the robbery can be seen as a comedic parody of what will later occur on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. Battlefields are significant places where " honour" is won and lost. At Holmedon, Hotspur takes important prisoners, defeats the Scottish invaders, and gathers many " proud titles." Later, at the battle at Shrewsbury, Prince Hal kills Hotspur, taking all of young Percy's " honours" for his own. For Hal, then, the battlefield is a place for redemption and transformation. It is where his father forgives him for his wild behaviour and also where Hal begins to pull away from Falstaff and his " vile" ways. Falstaff, on the other hand, treats the battlefield at Shrewsbury like any other one of his stomping grounds. This is where he plays dead like a coward and lies about killing Hotspur, all of which recalls the comedic episode at Gads Hill, where he also behaves like a coward. While most of the action takes place in England, a few scenes occur in Wales, at the residence of Owen Glendower. In the play, Wales is associated with " wildness" and mystery, despite being right next door to England. It's also a dangerous place, where Glendower is said to participate in black magic, where the rebels convene and make plans to divide the

kingdom into three parts, and where Mortimer turns traitor and lolls around in the lap of his new Welsh wife. In the play's first act, we also learn that 1, 000 English soldiers have been slaughtered in Wales and their bodies mutilated by the Welshwomen. The play suggests this isn't a place where Englishmen want to get caught. The portrayal of Wales is pretty unfair and speaks volumes about Elizabethan attitudes toward the Welsh. But one did not have to look so far afield in the late sixteenth century to see how much English nationalism depended on the racializing of other groups, especially when colonization was the objective. England's war against the Irish in the 1590s was often described as a war against a racialized other.[2]0 English texts depicted the Irish as different from the English in language, religion and dress, and even in the way they wore their hair. At the same time, the leaders of the invading forces feared that English soldiers sent to fight these Irish kerns might intermarry with them, adopt their customs and language, and cease to be English. This anxiety tellingly reveals the fragility of fictions of racial and national difference. Englishness could not be an essence if it could so easily evaporate through contact with the Irish. With Scotland and with Wales the story was equally complicated. Wales had been officially incorporated into England in 1535 and the use of the Welsh language forbidden in many contexts. Neither the Welsh tongue nor Welsh national feeling was eradicated, however, and in many texts of the period Wales is still imagined as a foreign and threatening place, rather than as a region of England like any other region. In the first decade of the seventeenth century James I tried to effect a formal union between the kingdoms of England and Scotland. He failed, and the union did not occur until 1707. In the early

modern period, therefore, there was always potential ambiguity about the very territory which the word " England" was to designate. In this chapter we speak of " English" nationalism and the " English" nation, but with the recognition that these are problematical terms. Great Britain did not exist in the 1590s, but to use " England" to refer to any entity containing part or all of Wales, Ireland, or Scotland can be a form of verbal imperialism that elides the historical struggles, and the perceived differences, among these regions. We will indicate when, in plays such as Henry IV and Henry V, such struggles are part of the historical material being negotiated. Viewed in the context of this process of national consolidation and national self-definition, the vogue for national history and the national history play in late sixteenth-century England appears as an important component of the cultural project of imagining an English nation. Like their historiographic sources, the plays performed the necessary function of creating and disseminating myths of origin to authorize a new national entity and to deal with the anxieties and contradictions that threatened to undermine the nation-building project. These stories had an obvious selective function as well; that is, they highlighted some players in the nation's history and sidelined or erased others. The history play was probably one of the first types of drama in which Shakespeare worked. Of the plays we have, most scholars agree that among the earliest written are three plays we now know as Henry VI, Part I, Part II, and Part III (usually dated 1589–92) and Richard III (c. 1593). These four plays together comprise what has become known as " the first tetralogy," a term used by modern scholars to indicate both that the plays dramatize historically connected events and that they were written before the other

history plays with which Shakespeare's name is associated. Many scholars have argued, however, that the Henry VI plays were not entirely Shakespeare's work. Collaborative authorship was common in the period, and as a young playwright Shakespeare may have joined with others in composing these early works.[2]1 However, by 1592 at least one of those plays was clearly associated with his name. Perhaps encouraged by the success of these early plays, Shakespeare continued writing English histories. King John was probably composed some time between 1594 and 1596; and in the period 1595 to 1599 Shakespeare wrote the plays that are now known as " the second tetralogy": Richard II, Henry IV, Part I and Part II, and Henry V. It is these nine plays with which we will be chiefly concerned in the following pages. Two of these plays, Henry VI, Part I and King John, were never published in Shakespeare's lifetime. Along with about half of Shakespeare's entire canon, they were first printed in the 1623 folio in which John Heminges and Henry Condell, senior members of The King's Men (the theatrical company with which Shakespeare had been associated for most of his career), published the first collected edition of his plays. The other seven history plays, like many of his other dramatic works, appeared in individual quarto or octavo versions before the folio was issued. The titles of Shakespeare's plays in these early printed versions were sometimes different from those in the folio, and sometimes there were major textual differences among various versions of one play. The play we have come to know as Henry VI, Part II, for example, appeared in the 1623 folio as The Second Part of Henry the Sixth, but it also appeared in a quarto version of 1594 with the title The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous

Houses of York and Lancaster. Quarto versions bearing approximately the same title appeared again in 1600 and 1619. While the folio title focuses attention on the reigning king, Henry VI, whose weak rule invited usurpers to lay claim to his throne, the quarto title draws attention to the warring dynastic factions who, capitalizing on Henry’s weakness, embroiled England in civil war. The number of dramatic histories which Shakespeare wrote or helped to write indicates the popularity of this genre in the 1590s. Clearly, theatregoers had a taste for these plays; and the number of early printed versions that were produced suggests that readers did, also. Collectively, in their multiple versions, these plays incited patriotic interest in England’s past and participated in the process by which the English forged a sense of themselves as a nation. When apologists for the theatre wished to defend it against attacks from critics who saw it as a place of idleness and moral danger, they often held up the history play as an example of theatre’s value. And they did so in terms that stressed the role of history plays in preserving the memory of English heroes and of encouraging patriotic feelings in the spectators. Thomas Nashe, for example, praised the genre because in itour forefathers valiant acts (that have line long buried in rustic brasse and wormeaten bookes) are revived, and they themselves raised from the Grave of Oblivion, and brought to pleade their aged Honours in open presence…. How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at severall times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding?[2]2The

reference to Lord Talbot suggests that Nashe had in mind Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part I, in which Talbot and his son are slaughtered in a battle against the French in which they face overwhelming odds but from which they refuse to flee. For Nashe, what matters is that the history play lets English heroes from the past live forever in the memories of ordinary Englishmen, many of whom would not have been able to read the sixteenth-century prose chronicles by Holinshed, Hall, and others from which much of the subject matter of these plays was drawn. The stage makes the dead arise, forging the continuity between those who have embodied Englishness in the past and those who are the heirs of that legacy.