

The Hundred Years War and the 'Creation' of National Identity and the Written English Vernacular: A Reassessment

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The so-called 'Hundred Years War' and the creation of both English and French nationhood have been inextricably bound together in the historical imaginations of modern historians. Historiographical commonplaces about the later middle ages as a chaotic era of transition towards modern Europe typically treat the Anglo-French wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the archetypal example of 'nation states [being] forged by conflict against their neighbours'.³³ This prominence has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, the high point of explicitly nationalist historiography in England and France. The association with nationhood remains today, and it can still be very overt.³⁴ For France in particular, the language of the nation and national identity has been strongly connected with the Hundred Years War.³⁵ It is a little more difficult to propose such a strong link on the basis of the English evidence; nonetheless, 'representations of the Hundred Years War have become intertwined with constructions of nationalism both by the English and the French'.³⁶ Even those who have argued that 'it is vain to look for nationalism' in this period have wanted to see 'the beginnings of a crude form of patriotism' stemming from the French wars.³⁷

Both historians and social scientists have seen a powerful connection between the phenomenon of 'national identity' – as well as other 'identities' – and language. In Benedict Anderson's influential scheme, the medieval 'imagined community of Christendom' derived much of its relevance and force from the status of Latin as a universal 'language-of-power', and the rise of vernaculars as 'competitors' for this position in different places ('French in Paris', 'English in London') at once manifested and catalysed the displacement of Christendom by 'national' imagined communities.³⁸ This argument puts a linguistic spin on the traditional narrative which situates in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the 'decay' of the 'medieval ideal' of 'world government' in the face of a number of consolidating monarchies which were underpinned by a 'modern theory of

³³ M. L. KEKEWICH and S. ROSE, *Britain, France & the Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 161.

³⁴ For example G. MINOIS, *La guerre de cent ans: naissance de deux nations* (Paris: Perrin, 2008).

³⁵ C. BEAUNE, *Naissance de la nation France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

³⁶ E. C. CALDWELL, 'The Hundred Years' War and National Identity', in *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures*, ed. by D. N. Baker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 237–65 (237).

³⁷ J. BARNIE, *War in Medieval Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 97.

³⁸ B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006), 42.

sovereignty' centred upon the incipient nation state.³⁹ It harnesses the voluminous evidence that 'vernacular tongues... intruded more and more into the sphere of written culture' in the later middle ages to the narrative of nation state formation.⁴⁰ Given that England and France have been treated as the two archetypal late medieval incipient nation states, it is hardly surprising that their endemic wars have been linked to the legitimation and increased use of the English vernacular in England and the French vernacular in France. Philippe Wolffe articulates this war-induced linguistic divergence in strong terms: 'Ce sont surtout les haines de la guerre de Cent Ans qui creusent le fossé linguistique [entre l'Angleterre et la France]'.⁴¹ This is a particularly significant argument for England. Whereas in the heartlands of France a written version of *langue d'oïl* was the only alternative to Latin, in later medieval England the vernacular had to be chosen over a third written language: French. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the very clear increase in the use of written English in all kinds of contexts between 1337 and 1453 has often been attributed by historians to the 'semblance of "national sentiment"'⁴² or 'growing national feeling'⁴³ which they believe was stimulated by the wars with France between these years. Mark Ormrod's evocative description of the contemporary English view of the Hundred Years War as 'a form of national crusade'⁴⁴ epitomises the presumed connection between it and constructions of Englishness – and, by association, the English language.⁴⁵ Even the canon of Middle English works traditionally classified as 'literature' have been seen in part as products of the Hundred Years War. It is typically one of the most prominent 'factors' cited to explain the rise of the use of English in prestigious texts from the late fourteenth century onwards.⁴⁶

This tendency to connect the ascent of the written English vernacular with the Hundred Years War is understandable. The chronologies of these developments appear to coincide neatly, and, as we have seen, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are viewed as a period in which early statehood and nationhood – with which the written vernacular is closely associated – were forged in war. The idea of nationhood in particular is deeply rooted in the foundational nineteenth-century scholarship, and even shaped the selection and arrangement of the source collections which we still use today. The preoccupations of historians and literary

³⁹ G. HOLMES, *Europe: Hierarchy and Revolt* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p 1–4; J. H. BURNS, *Lordship, Kingship and Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 162.

⁴⁰ C. F. BRIGGS, *The Body Broken: Medieval Europe 1300-1520* (London: Routledge, 2011), 262.

⁴¹ P. WOLFFE, *Les origines linguistiques de l'Europe occidentale*, 2nd edn (Toulouse: Association des Publications de l'Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail, 1982), 136.

⁴² S. LEWIS, *Later Medieval France* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 77.

⁴³ K. FOWLER, *The Hundred Years War* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 20.

⁴⁴ W. M. ORMROD, 'The Domestic Response to the Hundred Years War', in *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War*, ed. A. CURRY and M. HUGHES (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 83–101 (87).

⁴⁵ Cf. W. M. ORMROD, 'The Use of English: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 750–87 (781).

⁴⁶ For example N. WATSON, 'The Politics of Middle English Writing', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by J. WOGAN-BROWNE and others (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 331–52 (334); J. H. FISHER, 'A Language Policy for Lancastrian England', *PMLA*, 107 (1992), 1168–80 (1170).

scholars in recent decades have also worked to place language at the centre of historical debates and explanations. Already in the 1970s the new quest to capture past *mentalités* forced historians to think about the limitations that language (amongst other things) placed upon their subjects' ability to imagine, articulate, and engage with the world around them. The 'linguistic turn' then underlined the historical agency of language, while the broader 'cultural turn', especially insofar as it has stemmed from literary theory, has largely manifested itself as an obsession with discourse, textuality, and semiotics. These methodological and historiographical shifts have quite rightly accentuated the dimension of subjective meaning in sources and the importance of language beyond its old role as a tenuous subsidiary of nationhood. The casual consensus that the Hundred Years War strengthened English identity and catalysed the employment of the written English vernacular is not simply a result of blind acceptance of old national teleologies; today it is just as much a consequence of a well-meaning desire to acknowledge the historical significance of worldviews and language.

Nonetheless, the widespread presumed relationship between war, identity, and language in later medieval England poses a problem. As Anne Curry has pointed out, the notion 'that the change of language [of English writers] from French to English towards the end of the fourteenth century was due to the sense of national identity which the French wars had strengthened... is clearly an oversimplistic explanation of the complex issues surrounding the rapid rise of written English in the period'.⁴⁷ The vernacular texts produced between 1337 and 1453 by no means unequivocally support this hypothesis; important bodies of evidence either do not relate to it, or even contradict it outright, in ways which are discussed below. Furthermore, the interpretations discussed above contain underlying assumptions about vernacularity, warfare, nationhood, and identity in the later Middle Ages which are challenged by the nature, content, and context of sources surviving from this period. The motivations behind language use are complex, so positing a vague connection between war and the increase in the production of vernacular writing not only explains little, but also occludes potentially more significant social developments and their intersection with the intricate events and agencies behind the nineteenth-century abstraction of 'the Hundred Years War'.

The role played by 'identity' in this narrative is particularly unclear and schematic. Because it has become a 'defining concern of cultural history',⁴⁸ there is now a fashionable tendency to read identity into all sources and situations, often in a rather perfunctory manner which unwittingly assumes that this reified category was a universal and authentic phenomenon at both individual and collective levels. This danger is not automatically averted by qualifications about the fluidity, multiplicity, or instability of the identities in question; such disclaimers simply rob identity of its analytical purchase by making it ambiguous to the point of meaninglessness.⁴⁹ One way to clarify the significance – if any – of identity is to reformulate it as 'identification', that is to say the constant process of self-definition

⁴⁷ A. CURRY, *The Hundred Years War*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6.

⁴⁸ P. JOYCE, 'What is the Social in Social History?', *Past and Present*, 206 (2010), 213–48 (220).

⁴⁹ R. BRUBAKER, 'Identity', in *Colonialism in Question*, ed. by F. Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59–90 (59–60).

in relation to the surrounding world which is intrinsic to human life and which can – but does not have to – create a sense of group affinity at a given point in time. A common consequence of identification is ‘self-understanding’, an appraisal of the self in particularistic terms which can motivate action on the part of the appraiser.⁵⁰ Thinking in these terms entails precision in specifying the actors who engaged in identification and the way in which the outcomes of this activity had agency.

Precision is what this essay will seek to attain, by reference to some key episodes and developments which involved English users in the centuries of the Hundred Years War, for the sake of a closer consideration of the validity and implications of the purported relationship between war, identification, and vernacularity in this same period. It is after all the task of historians to ‘specify the cultural contexts’ in which identification took place and affected other phenomena (in this case vernacularity) in a historically contingent manner.⁵¹ In undertaking it, this essay also aims to consider how vernacularity itself, as a vital aspect of the later middle ages, might be explained and conceptualised.

Questions of chronology and identification in the rise of ‘Middle English’

The traditional dates of the Hundred Years War encompass the ‘long fourteenth century’ which has often been viewed as the decisive period in the ‘triumph of English’, centred above all on the lifetime of Chaucer.⁵² Despite this narrow focus, literary scholars have turned the era of Chaucer, Langland, and Gower – and, to a lesser extent, that of Hoccleve and Lydgate – into a vast field with its own ‘medieval literary theory’.⁵³ The advent of this canonical vernacular literature has traditionally been associated with a nationalistic self-confidence in the face of the people and culture of France, ‘the clear enemy’.⁵⁴ The decision to write in English is said to reflect its sudden new status as ‘the language of the nation, a powerful patriotic bond uniting commons, aristocracy, and crown against enemies from abroad’.⁵⁵ Even in Jeremy Catto’s provocative assault on the view that it was inevitable that English should acquire this status, the choice of written English remains a very deliberate and combative one which reflects an attempt to elevate the national language and challenge Francophone hegemony on the ‘horizon of European culture’.⁵⁶ Though it is rarely fully articulated, the implication of these interpretations of the valorisation of vernacular writing against the backdrop of war with France is that the activity of writing the kind of texts conventionally

⁵⁰ Ibid., p 68–73; P. MANDLER, ‘What is “National Identity”?’ , *Modern Intellectual History*, 3 (2006), 271–97 (276).

⁵¹ Ibid., 273.

⁵² D. MATTHEWS, *The Invention of Middle English* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 3.

⁵³ R. EVANS and others, ‘The Notion of Vernacular Theory’, in *Vernacular*, ed. by WOGAN-BROWNE, 314–30 (314).

⁵⁴ B. COTTLE, *The Triumph of English* (London: Blandford Press, 1969), p 10, 51–88.

⁵⁵ WATSON, ‘Middle English Writing’, 339.

⁵⁶ J. CATTO, ‘Written English: The Making of the Language 1370–1400’, *Past and Present*, 179 (2003), 24–59 (59).

thought of as 'literature' was an exercise in conscious self-identification in relation to a long-standing foe with a different mother tongue.

The chronology of the French wars before and during the age of Chaucer presents a problem for this explanatory framework. As some Middle English scholars have begun to point out, there are no neat cut-off points or sudden departures in the long evolution of Anglo-Saxon into recognizably modern English.⁵⁷ Already in the early thirteenth century texts were being carefully crafted in a language which is unmistakably the close ancestor of the vernacular used by Chaucer. Sometimes, as in *Laȝamon's Brut*, the author's desire to locate and honour Englishness is advertised plainly: 'þat he wolde of Engelond [i.e. English people]... / [and] the Englene lond... / þe ristnesse telle'.⁵⁸ By the early decades of the fourteenth century, the decision to write in the English language was itself being given worth in certain texts, notably the *Cursor Mundi*, the writings of Robert Manning, and the *Speculum Vitae*.⁵⁹ Their purpose is apparently to attempt to define, convey, and celebrate a linguistic self-understanding grounded in and projected onto a perceived realm-wide (or 'regnal')⁶⁰ community of England. In the case of these texts, it can plausibly be said that 'the very act of writing in English is a statement about belonging'.⁶¹

Of course, these vernacular verses were not simply contributions to an abstract process of self-definition, but participations in polemical debates about religious and political policy in the troubled decades preceding Edward III's first French campaign. It seems likely that some of those involved in these debates employed and were receptive to rhetorical appeals to linguistic and ethnic solidarities framed in opposition to Francophone groups. This does not reflect a social, still less a racial, division along linguistic lines in early fourteenth-century England, but rather the construction of a deep-rooted collectiveness to facilitate the conceptualisation of the 'regnal' entity that was being negotiated and fought over from within in this period. If 'otherness constitutes national narratives',⁶² it is not surprising that Frenchness was singled out at this time when even the gentry was adopting English as its everyday tongue, and French was beginning to be learned as a foreign language by all but the highest peers of England.⁶³ However, the French element to this discursive 'othering' should not be exaggerated. The *imaginaire* which seems to have driven the vernacular identification in these texts was located above all in the mythologies and realities of the political and legal consolidation of the English realm and its struggle for dominance in the British

⁵⁷ MATTHEWS, *Middle English*, p 1–15.

⁵⁸ *Laȝamon: Brut*, ed. by G. L. BROOK and R. F. LESLIE, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1963–78), I, 3.

⁵⁹ See the extract from the *Cursor Mundi* in *Vernacular*, ed. by WOGAN-BROWNE, 270; on Manning and the *Speculum Vitae*, see Watson, 'Middle English Writing', 337.

⁶⁰ S. REYNOLDS, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 254.

⁶¹ T. TURVILLE-PETRE, *England the Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 11.

⁶² W. SCASE, 'Nation, Identity, and Otherness', *New Medieval Literatures*, IV (2001), 1–8 (4).

⁶³ G. L. HARRISS, *Shaping the Nation: England 1360–1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 156.

Isles – a ‘putatively unified space of insular rule’.⁶⁴ This narrative was a useful basis for the vernacularising cause of these early fourteenth-century polemicists, for border warfare within the British Isles was a constant experience for many English people in a way that war with France was not. In fact, beyond the south coast this remained true throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in their entirety. Revealingly, the refrain about ‘Skottes... bot gaudes and gile’⁶⁵ in Lawrence Minot’s poetic celebration of the victory at Halidon Hill in 1333 is more venomous than any of the anti-French sentiment in the *Cursor Mundi* (and a far cry from the poet’s grudging admiration for ‘þe franche men [who] er fers and fell’).⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the few surviving early fourteenth-century vernacular verse compositions and pseudo-historical compilations contain the strongest written evidence of anti-French feeling linked with a self-identification in terms of Englishness of any late medieval texts of these genres. They suggest that, for a brief period ending in the mid-fourteenth century, the English language became an abstract code for a ‘regnal’ solidarity, as in the famous 1295 Latin declaration of Edward I that the French intended to ‘obliterate the English language from the land’.⁶⁷

Within a decade of Edward III’s first attempt to make good his new claim to the crown of France in 1340, the polemical vernacular discourse which had celebrated the notion that ‘euerich Inglische can’ and differentiated these ‘Inglische’ from those who ‘Freynsche vse’ disappeared.⁶⁸ There is a conspicuous silence regarding French enemies in the writings associated with the ‘triumph of English’, despite the forty years of intermittent wars against Valois France which separate Manning’s chronicle from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Whereas the glorious Crécy and Poitiers campaigns provided ideal subjects for the chivalric narratives of Froissart, it is difficult to find any suggestion that they inspired the writers who confidently adopted and valorised the English vernacular at the end of the fourteenth century. Chaucer assiduously limits his Knight’s military itineraries to crusading conflict zones on the fringes of Christendom;⁶⁹ whether or not this is out of a desire to raise questions about chivalric conduct,⁷⁰ it is significant that French theatres are entirely omitted when these were far more likely destinations for knights who served abroad in the mid- to late fourteenth century (the battle of Crécy alone involved around 3,000 men at arms).⁷¹ In Gower’s case the relationship between the French wars and the use of English is contradicted outright. His only mention of the wars is his impassioned ‘lettre’ *In Praise of Peace* (c. 1400), addressed to Henry IV. In it he declares that ‘werre is modir of the

⁶⁴ C. INGHAM, *Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 171.

⁶⁵ *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by R. H. ROBBINS (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 30.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁷ M. VALE, ‘Language, Politics, and Society’, *English Historical Review*, 120 (2005), 15–34 (20).

⁶⁸ TURVILLE-PETRE, *England the Nation*, 31.

⁶⁹ *The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue*, l. 43–66.

⁷⁰ Cf. S. H. RIGBY, *Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7ff.

⁷¹ A. AYTON, ‘The English Army at Crécy’, in *The Battle of Crécy*, ed. by A. AYTON and others (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 159–251 (168–9).

wronges alle' and notes pointedly that even 'Alisaundre' could not achieve lasting conquests, his violent legacy being sinful division.⁷² The realm of England is exalted on the basis of its wise laws (and wise new monarch), through which 'the pes schal stonde'.⁷³ England is conceptualised and praised in the vernacular, not in opposition to any 'other', but through its potential to lead the way in the pious task of ending strife between Christian brothers and healing the Schism within 'holy cherche'.⁷⁴ Thus, this final poem of Gower's is an exercise in identification which appeals to the very opposite of war-inspired 'otherness'; instead, England is subsumed within a wider Christian world in which its positive attributes are validated and shared.

The difficulties involved in linking the advent of English as a prestigious and widespread written language to war in France extend beyond the absence of or opposition to national and military themes in the canonical literature. Even the idea that the adoption of English was a gesture of cultural rivalry intended to elevate English to the same international status as French or Italian, which Catto has seen as a very deliberate top-down endeavour,⁷⁵ does not entail any 'othering' of the traditions vernacular English was supposed to supersede. Convention seems to have demanded humility and deference to Latin and even French traditions; thus Chaucer's *Complaint of Venus* ends with an apology for the use of English for a verse style invented by and better suited to 'hem that maken [poetry] in Fraunce'.⁷⁶ Even translations, which form the bulk of the vernacular 'literature' produced between 1337 and 1453, do not attempt to validate the choice of written English in confrontational terms. At their least self-deprecatory, they end with a dead-pan acknowledgement of the work's non-English origins: 'This is the name that turned this book fro latyn to Engliche...'.⁷⁷ If the text was embellished or reinvented, the protocols of the *translatio studii* demanded that the work be prefaced by reverential comments about the original material and *auctor* and a recognition of the unworthiness of the Anglophone end-result and its translator.⁷⁸ Clearly, the downplaying of English here forms part of a set of obligatory topoi which prestigious texts were expected to incorporate. In some cases, particularly John Lydgate's prolific work, the topoi may have been deployed in an ambivalent manner which aggrandised the patron and therefore, indirectly, vindicated the patron's decision to promote vernacular English. It has even been suggested that behind the usual tropes found in the *Troy Book* lay a nationalistic manifesto in support of Henry V's cross-channel expeditions.⁷⁹ The notion that Lydgate

⁷² *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. MACAULEY, 2 vols (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900–01), II, 482–84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, 492.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 488–89.

⁷⁵ CATTO, 'Written English', 46.

⁷⁶ *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by F. N. ROBINSON, 2nd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 538.

⁷⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 233, fo. 207; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 291, fo. 120v.

⁷⁸ R. COPELAND, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 112.

⁷⁹ EVANS, 'Vernacular Theory', 320–21.

supported his patrons' ambitions and transmitted their ideas in the vernacular to a growing politically engaged public centred on London seems very plausible,⁸⁰ but if works such as the *Troy Book* were in any way intended to identify England and Englishness, they did not do so by reference to a French 'other' over which a self-confident English vernacular had been chosen, in spite of the background of diplomatic and military tensions.

An important point raised by a recent volume on the theme of English vernacular writing in relation to France can help to explain the complete absence of explicit 'othering' of Francophone subjects and the plentiful evidence of respect for and incorporation of them: there was an awareness amongst the authors and compilers behind the traditional canon of great Middle English works that 'court culture' in England had long been intertwined with French (and, more broadly, 'European') trappings, and never more so than during Chaucer's lifetime.⁸¹ The Chaucerian brand of English was unapologetically reliant upon French loanwords; it 'required not just the presence but the interanimation of both natural languages'.⁸² For wealthy or aristocratic English people, the relationship between Englishness and Frenchness was characterised by a tension between shared tastes, values, and vocabularies and conflicting political agendas which produced 'constant cycles of friendship and violence'.⁸³ English literary scholarship has produced some extremely thorough and nuanced research, but as a discipline fundamentally centred upon English texts it understandably struggles to formulate frameworks and narratives in which the adoption of the English language for its own sake and for the sake of a strengthened understanding of Englishness were not priorities for the very actors who undertook that adoption. Yet the celebrated vernacular writings of the supposedly decisive phase of the 'long fourteenth century' present very ambivalent justifications for the use of English, and none of them appear linked to the wars in France. What identification was undertaken by the authors (and audiences) of these texts does not seem to have been straightforwardly 'national' (in the sense of self-definition in relation to a perceived 'other'), especially compared to the relatively explicit rhetoric of the early fourteenth-century vernacular polemics. The 'Hundred Years War' and the self-confident rise of English clearly do not go hand in hand from the point of view of carefully crafted written discourse. As we shall see, the nature of the conflict actually militated against the discursive valorisation of English in war-related contexts, especially after 1415.

Vernacularity and identification in the context of a dynastic agenda

⁸⁰ M. NOLAN, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3–14.

⁸¹ *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War*, ed. by A. BUTTERFIELD (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8–10.

⁸² S. GUTHRIE, 'Dialogics and Prosody in Chaucer', in *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices*, ed. by T. J. Farrell (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 94–108 (99).

⁸³ *Familiar Enemy*, ed. by Butterfield, 393; cf. also M. G. A. VALE, *The Ancient Enemy: England, France and Europe from the Angevins to the Tudors* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007).

In seeking to elucidate how the French wars affected the ways in which English users understood and expressed themselves, it is important to keep the aims of and justifications for the conflict in mind. The sporadic fighting and negotiating was above all about the defence or enforcement of dynastic claims to titles and their accompanying rights, revenues, and jurisdictions. This is acknowledged in the near-universal view that the struggle between Edward III and Philip VI was 'feudal' in origin,⁸⁴ but the idea that later 'phases' of the Hundred Years War became more 'national'⁸⁵ in character (which, as we have seen, underpins the standard narrative of the rise of the written vernacular) can occlude the fact that until 1453 the central *casus belli* remained the claims of the English monarch to possessions and privileges in France, including the French crown itself, claims taken more seriously than ever after the 1420 Troyes settlement. This does not mean that England and France were not experiencing increasing cultural divergence, or that aspects of what we call 'nationhood' and 'statehood' were not created or stimulated by the ongoing wars. However, it does mean that the way in which the Anglo-French wars manifest themselves in the sources can best be understood in terms of a contest for rights and possessions rather than a clash of 'nations' which reinforced English identity and linguistic self-confidence. What Edouard Perroy saw as a 'strange contradiction' – that 'Englishmen' continued to support 'their king's French policy with all their might' despite becoming 'more and more anglicized'⁸⁶ – ceases to present a problem once it is appreciated that the wars were not primarily conceptualised in relation to Englishness (and an opposing Frenchness), but to the legal cause of a dynasty.

Nowhere does this emerge more clearly than in the treaties which were intended to resolve the disputes behind the wars. The very first clause of the Treaty of Brétigny attempts to address the vexed question of jurisdiction and ownership in Aquitaine: 'Premierement, que le Roy d'Engleterre, avec ce que il tient en Guyenne et en Gaiscoigne, aura, pour Lui, et pour ses Hoirs, parpetuelment et a touz jourz, toutes les choses qui s'ensuivent...'.⁸⁷ The document drawn up at Troyes in June 1420 does justify itself 'pro Franciae et Angliae Regnorum reintegranda Pace',⁸⁸ but the practicalities are very much focused on legal issues, most supremely that of the right of Henry V's descendants to inherit the French crown, and the settlement is contractually guaranteed in the first clause in a very personal way: a dynastic marriage between the houses of Lancaster and Valois. It was the status of the kings of England and France and their vassals as competing claimants which drove the Anglo-French conflict, and contemporaries understood this. That is why we find few references to 'nations', let alone linguistic conceptions thereof, after 1337. Instead, English propagandists concentrated on their monarch, emphasising the justness of his cause and the invalidity of the enemy claimant's. Already in the 1338 Anglo-Norman poem *Veus du Hairois* the Valois are consciously

⁸⁴ E.g. C. T. ALLMAND, *The Hundred Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸⁶ E. PERROY, *The Hundred Years War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951), 210.

⁸⁷ *Foedera, conventiones, literae et cujuscunque generis acta publica*, ed. by T. RYMER, 20 vols ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1704–35), III.i, 202.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.i, 171.

denigrated as usurpers ('Philype de Valois, Qui se fait roi de Franche'),⁸⁹ and an anonymous Latin work written shortly after Crécy provides an in-depth genealogical justification of Edward III's claim to the French crown in rhyming couplets.⁹⁰ This approach survived into the fifteenth century; the Anglo-Burgundian faction in post-1420 France attacked the character and legitimacy of Charles VII and uncompromisingly portrayed the Lancastrian leaders as *de jure* rulers of France.⁹¹

Because this emphasis on the rights of an individual ruler was concerned with him in his capacity as king of France, there does not seem to have been any preference for the vernacular as a register for pushing the Plantagenet or Lancastrian agenda. The dynastic cause was after all neither entirely 'national' nor entirely 'foreign', which made it difficult to link the use of particular language to its promotion. Certainly, as English gained prominence as a prestigious language, it was used to celebrate Lancastrian pretensions in France. For example, John Audelay used English poetry to rejoice at the birth of Henry VI, which he believed would 'saue our ryght [to the French crown] þat was forelorne'.⁹² In the 1420s and '30s Lydgate wrote a series of poems justifying the Lancastrian claim to the French crown, most notably his 'remembraunce of a peedeugre how that the kyng of Englonde, Henry the Sext, is truly borne heir vnto the Corone of Fraunce by lynyall successioun', which comes to the arresting conclusion that the young king was 'to Seint Lowys sone & very heir'.⁹³ But because this was about the ambitions of a dynasty, there is no attempt in these works to relate the choice of English to the subject matter, and discursive articulations of Englishness and a sense of nationhood are nowhere to be found. The sentiments contained in them are no different to the support expressed in French by Thomas Langley for the accession of Henry as 'un Roy de les deux Roialmes d'Engleterre, et de France' in parliament in 1423.⁹⁴ Lancastrian propaganda (and Plantagenet propaganda before it) was not an exercise in identification, except perhaps in that it affirmed the shared loyalty of English subjects to their sovereign and their willingness to support his projects within reason. Furthermore, the theory of a war-related, Anglocentric Lancastrian 'language policy' has 'been steadily crumbling away under historians' and linguists' investigations'.⁹⁵

Indeed, the Lancastrian project seems to have attenuated any sense of Englishness predicated on linguistic separation from a French 'other'. The Treaty of Troyes, which established the Lancastrians as heirs (and, from 1422, rulers) of

⁸⁹ *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History*, ed. by T. WRIGHT, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1859–61), I, 16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 35.

⁹¹ E.g. 'The Duke of Bedford's challenge to Charles VII', in *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, ed. by C. TAYLOR (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 119–22.

⁹² *Historical Poems*, ed. by ROBBINS, 110.

⁹³ *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. by H. N. MACCRACKEN, 2 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1911–34), II, 613–22.

⁹⁴ 'Henry VI: October 1423', *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=116530>> [accessed 30 May 2013].

⁹⁵ *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100-c.1500*, ed. by J. WOGAN-BROWNE and others (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), 4.

France, enjoyed substantial support in northern France, Burgundy, and Gascony. These supporters needed to be cultivated, especially as they bore the brunt of the war effort against the opponents of the Troyes settlement. Jean-Philippe Genet's judgement that the Lancastrian 'politique de guerre' was 'antifrançaise par excellence'⁹⁶ does not square with this imperative. The Anglo-Burgundian faction could ill afford to alienate its supporters, which is why the treaties of Troyes and Amiens assiduously safeguarded the rights of loyal lords, towns, ecclesiastics, and corporations in Lancastrian France, while soldiers, mercenaries, and settlers who upset local populations were dealt with harshly.⁹⁷ Paris in particular had to be nurtured, for possession of the traditional French cultural centre gave credibility to Lancastrian pretensions (especially when the time came to crown Henry VI), and the Parisians had to make enormous sacrifices and engage in near-constant frontier warfare to avoid recapture by Charles VII. Some remarkable correspondence from Paris to the municipality and people of London and Henry VI's Regency Council survives from the period of Lancastrian control of Île-de-France which attests to the close links between the war agenda of the crown and the Parisian authorities until the Valois reconquest of 1436.⁹⁸ In it the Londoners are consistently addressed as 'tres chiers freres et tres especiaulx amis', and asked to petition the government of Henry VI, 'nostre souverain seigneur et le vostre' for aid for beleaguered Paris.⁹⁹ These are admittedly formulaic phrases, but such expressions of affinity from the heartlands of France must surely have made it very difficult for public references to war and nationhood to contain anti-French feeling of the kind which supposedly fostered the use of vernacular English. Indeed, the Lancastrian regime was keen to avoid this: a disciplinary ordinance passed by the duke of Bedford in 1423 actually prescribed penalties for anyone who labelled the Armagnac-Dauphinist enemy 'the French'.¹⁰⁰ Literate and politically engaged English people had to have some awareness of the divided loyalties of different groups and regions in France, some of which shared their commitment to the Lancastrian dynastic agenda, and the popular poems bemoaning the loss of Burgundian support following Philip the Good's *volte face* at the 1435 congress of Arras show that this awareness was widespread.¹⁰¹ In view of this appreciation, the notion that 'what was becoming increasingly a "national" war forced men to think in terms of "French or English"' is clearly too simplistic.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ J.-PH. GENET, 'Le roi de France anglais et la nation française au XVe siècle', in *Identité régionale et conscience nationale*, ed. by R. BABEL and J.-M. MOEGLIN (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1997), 39–58 (44).

⁹⁷ A. CURRY, 'The Impact of War and Occupation on Urban Life', *French History*, 1 (1987), 157–82 (p 168–70); A. CURRY, 'Isolated or Integrated? The English Soldier in Lancastrian Normandy', in *Courts and Regions of Medieval Europe*, ed. by S. REES JONES and others (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 191–210 (210).

⁹⁸ *Collection générale des documents français qui se trouvent en Angleterre*, ed. by J. DELPIT (Paris: [n. pub.], 1847), 233–39, 248–49.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 233, 249.

¹⁰⁰ J. W. MCKENNA, 'Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 28 (1965), 145–62 (151).

¹⁰¹ *Historical Poems*, ed. by ROBBINS, 78–89.

¹⁰² FOWLER, *Hundred Years War*, 21.

The need to promote a particular configuration of dynastic rule – what historians have dubbed the ‘Lancastrian dual monarchy’ – capable of transcending the increasing divergence of native vernacular languages on either side of the English Channel appears to have led the Lancastrian regime to avoid language as its primary medium of propaganda as much as possible. It is true that, as we have seen, some court poetry was harnessed to the dynastic agenda. James Doig has detected an intermittent programme of Lancastrian-sponsored written works, extending back even to the years before Troyes.¹⁰³ This seems plausible, especially in the case of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*; Latin was a suitably neutral language in which to eulogize a king who aspired simultaneously to rule an English-speaking and a French-speaking realm, and the *Gesta* endorses that goal in no uncertain terms: ‘Et det deus... ut uterque et Francorum et Anglie gladius in debitam redeat monarchiam’.¹⁰⁴ However, still more thought and resources were invested into non-verbal means of encapsulating and communicating the pretensions and objectives of the Lancastrian dynasty. Iconographic representations of the dual monarchy in the form of mingled leopards and fleurs-de-lis and two side-by-side crowns were applied to some of the coins minted in Lancastrian France (some of which would inevitably have reached England through cross-Channel trade).¹⁰⁵ A genealogical ‘poster’ showing the purported descent of the Lancastrian dynasty from Clovis, via St Louis, has survived in some English manuscripts; it appears to have been intended for widespread consumption, though the extent of its circulation is unknown.¹⁰⁶ On a more prestigious and less public level, intertwined symbols of the English and French royal houses have been found in several manuscripts, some of them otherwise unrelated to the war effort.¹⁰⁷ Such intertwining of Lancastrian or English and French or Burgundian motifs happened in much more public locations: a façade of the Hôtel de Ville in Paris was decorated with fleurs-de-lis and Lancastrian ‘rosiers’ in 1434, while the banners carried by the duke of Bedford’s troops at the battle of Verneuil were decorated by a combination of St George’s crosses overlaid by Burgundian St Andrew’s crosses.¹⁰⁸ Most expensive and most targeted of all were the parades and ceremonies performed at the time of Henry VI’s coronation in Paris and his return to London the following year. The journal of the so-called ‘Bourgeois’ of Paris and a report from the municipality of the town itself relate the sumptuous and heavily symbolic details of the procession of the young Henry through the streets of Paris in December 1431. Its most significant feature in relation to the dual monarchy was the leading of the royal retinue by a stag covered in a drape with the arms of France and England along an itinerary which culminated at a tableau consisting of a boy

¹⁰³ J. A. DOIG, ‘Propaganda, Public Opinion and the Siege of Calais in 1436’, in *Crown, Government and People*, ed. by R. ARCHER (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), 79–106 (87).

¹⁰⁴ *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, ed. by F. TAYLOR and J. S. ROSKELL (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 180.

¹⁰⁵ MCKENNA, ‘Dual Monarchy’, 145–50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 151–52.

¹⁰⁷ E. DANBURY, ‘English and French Artistic Propaganda’, in *Power, Culture, and Religion in France*, ed. by C. Allmand (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), 75–97 (84, 93).

¹⁰⁸ C. REYNOLDS, ‘Evidence for Painting in Paris and Normandy’, in *ibid.*, 37–55 (48–49).

dressed as Henry and sitting beneath two suspended crowns.¹⁰⁹ The authorities in London put on an even more extravagant celebration of Lancastrian claims for the king's royal entry in February 1432. The Latin narrative of the proceedings mentions two 'antelops' decorated with English and French royal heraldry and a wooden castle within which stood a huge tree (representing, we are told, Henry's lineage) at the roots of which sat figures representing St Edward the Confessor and St Louis. According to the lyrics transcribed in the report, the attendant choir rejoiced that 'God... hath holpe you atteyne your right / And crowned twyes with gemes bright'.¹¹⁰

The performative, visual, and material aspects of Lancastrian propaganda are a reminder of the importance of non-written media of communication in the later Middle Ages, but they also represent an attempt to avoid the potential pitfalls of having to choose a language while ruling two increasingly distinct vernacular spheres. Whereas under Charles V the French monarchy was able to begin quite deliberately to promote an association between itself, the French space, and the French language,¹¹¹ the claims of English kings in France precluded such an exclusive, identification-oriented valorisation of the English vernacular, especially during the brief fifteenth-century window within which these claims seemed fully realisable.

Conclusion

The incontestable rise to predominance of the English language in the written culture of the Anglophone world between the early fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth centuries cannot adequately be apprehended by reference to sweeping background forces such as 'national identity' and 'the Hundred Years War'. The exercise of interrogating sources with these thematic categories in mind underlines their unwieldiness and lack of explanatory power. Of course, as a narrative discipline which has to engage with large-scale change across time, history cannot avoid generalisation. However, it is clear in this instance that there is an unsatisfactorily large disconnect between the popular metanarrative which links manifestations of the vernacular to an emerging sense of nationhood catalysed by war and the contextually contingent detail of the sources which it purports to encompass. Some historians have made a convincing case for the existence of medieval collective solidarities which could be described as 'national identities',¹¹² and sensitive work grounded in rigorous analysis of certain discursive fields and their attendant circumstances has provided some late medieval examples of direct relationships between conscious use of vernaculars and conflict with foreigners.¹¹³ In the case of the sporadic and evolving 'Anglo-French' wars, however, we have

¹⁰⁹ *A Parisian Journal, 1405-1449*, trans. by J. SHIRLEY (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 269; *Documents*, ed. by Delpit, 243.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245-7.

¹¹¹ F. AUTRAND, *Charles V: le Sage* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 1-6.

¹¹² R. DAVIES, 'Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World', *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, XXXIV (2004), 567-579 (576).

¹¹³ E.g. C. SIEBER-LEHMANN, *Spätmittelalterlicher Nationalismus: Die Burgunderkriege am Oberrhein* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

seen that conditions were not favourable to such a relationship, even if the logic of the lingering teleology of nation state formation dictates that they should have been.

The ambivalent place of French vocabularies and mores in the English literary and linguistic landscape, further complicated by the claim of the kings of England simultaneously to be the rightful rulers of France, did not foster any straightforward hostile 'othering' of the French on the part of English users, especially – paradoxically – those who were most intimately involved in the war effort. Indeed, the notion that self-identification was automatically the product of constructions of 'otherness', popularised by 'fashionable postmodern thinking on the significance of "difference" in constructing meaning',¹¹⁴ is not borne out by the justifications for and employments of vernacular English investigated here. Insofar as vernacular use even involved self-identification in the first place, this pertained to the well-explored and substantiated themes of communitarianism¹¹⁵ and pastoral instruction for 'lewed peple',¹¹⁶ neither of which originated in or primarily found expression through war-related national sentiments. The multitude of different situations and ideologies subsumed within the falsely monolithic 'Hundred Years War' ceased to be conducive to simplistic discursive contrasting of the English and French languages and their associated peoples after the mid-fourteenth century. Even by the mid-fifteenth, when a wide variety of perspectives were finding vernacular expression, the choice between English, French, or an ad hoc and interchanging mixture of both languages seems to have been determined by the prosaic limitations imposed by the linguistic familiarity and scribal habits of writers and audiences. Indeed, the importance of language and written discourse as sites for the articulation and affirmation of self-understandings should not be overstated given the parallel roles of performative, visual, and material modes of communication. Against the attention-grabbing backdrop of dramatic political and military events, and given our training to engage with the past through written sources, it is difficult for us as historians – and still more difficult for literary scholars – to assign the vernacular its proportionate place in later medieval life. If we are to do so, we will ultimately have to improve the capacity of our clearly inadequate narrative frameworks to apprehend the way in which our subjects' various plausible preferences and opportunities were shaped by the specific and historically contingent psychological and social processes which conditioned their existence.

¹¹⁴ MANDLER, "National Identity", 273.

¹¹⁵ J. WATTS, 'Public or Plebs: The Changing Meaning of "the Commons"', in *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 242–60.

¹¹⁶ E.g. F. SOMERSET, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 2.