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To Nell and Back: Revisiting Mistress Quickly

Although Sir John Falstaff has historically inspired an abundance of critical considerations commensurate with his girth, his straightwoman, Mistress Quickly, has received relatively scant attention. She was popular enough, however, for Shakespeare to include her in no fewer than four plays and, in fact, of all the characters invented for *1 Henry IV* only Bardolph can equal this feat. Given Mistress Quickly's ubiquity when her plays are considered together, an extended interrogation of the role seems well overdue. This project arose from conversations about editing the Mistress Quickly plays—*1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—for the *Internet Shakespeare Editions (ISE)*.¹ The facility of the hyperlink encourages editors of electronic texts to draw attention to echoes and connections across related plays. As editors of plays with several characters in common we were keen to exploit this aspect of our texts; however when we turned to the figure of Mistress Quickly we found good reason to pause and reconsider the effects of jumping via a mouse-click from one play to another. To what extent can Mistress Quickly be viewed as a stable entity? Is there a danger that the hyperlink can create misleading impressions of character consistency? Even deciding on speech prefixes for the different plays in which she appears is tricky. More often than not, she is simply “Hostess” in the history plays; however this appellation is not appropriate for the character in *The Merry Wives*, where she develops a new professional life, as well as new character traits and a significantly different power-relationship with Falstaff.

The following linked papers re-assess the role of Mistress Quickly in the *Henriad* and *Merry Wives* and considers some of the problems editors, readers and performers face with this slippery, shallow character. “‘Neither Fish nor Flesh’: Grasping the Hostess of *Henry IV*, *Parts 1 and 2*,” serves as an introduction to Mistress Quickly, considering the development of her voice in the *Henry IV* plays and the difficulties associated with pinning down a character

whose language effervesces with layers of conflicting connotations. “‘My Nell’: The Naming and Claiming of Mistress Quickly in *Henry V*” focuses on the character’s evolving naming conventions and their implications in relation to issues of possession, female agency and objectification. “‘A Very Frampold Life’: Marriage and the Mistress Quickly of *Merry Wives*,” then draws attention to the very different Mistress Quicklys that appear in the 1602 quarto and first folio versions of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, uncovering, especially in the quarto Quickly, an acuity that the hostess of the histories seems to lack. Finally, the afterword responds to our discussion, providing further thoughts on Mistress Quickly’s fragmented character, and how her performance mode can open up the potentially under-read ambiguity of her lines.

“Neither Fish nor Flesh”: Grasping the Hostess of *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*

Shakespeare was cavalier with the details of Mistress Quickly's life. A female character identified as Quickly appears in four separate plays, but her marital status and professional life shift from play to play. Even within the two parts of *Henry IV* the role evolves significantly: in *Part 1* she is “an honest man’s wife,” in *Part 2* “a widow”; in *Part 1* Falstaff implies that her tavern is distinct from a bawdy house, but in *Part 2* it starts to resemble one. For me, annotating Mistress Quickly has been one of the more perplexing aspects of editing both parts of *Henry IV* for the *ISE*. While the e-editing process does generate a sense of intimacy with the hostess's voice, her many inconsistencies are laid bare when we can refer almost instantaneously to her various appearances via the hyperlink. She thus presents a knotty editorial problem: to what extent should we try to impose coherence on a flighty character that reappears across separate (albeit related) plays in an ostensibly marginalized role?

Women of any class have relatively little to say in the *Henry IV* plays. According to the *ISE*'s statistics generator, the two English-speaking women in *Part 1*, the hostess and Lady Percy, speak a mere 412 and 419 words respectively. By way of contrast, the play's most garrulous character, Falstaff, has 5570 words, and even minor male figures such as Vernon and Mortimer each get more to say than the women. In *Part 2* Mistress Quickly's role expands to a total of 1419 words, with appearances in three scenes spread out across the play, but the part shrinks again in *Henry V*, to just 371 words in two short scenes. Mistress Quickly is, nevertheless, the only female figure to appear in all three plays of the Henriad, and the fact that she was revived so many times reflects the popularity of her distinctive comic voice. She drops malapropistic gems at every turn, fostering a close attention to language that works to draw us in to the imagined world on stage. As a working woman of Eastcheap, Mistress Quickly is placed outside the events that animate

the history plays. She does, however, add vital feminine color to the depiction of Prince Hal's riotous life away from court.

Performances by veteran actors such as Margaret Rutherford, Julie Waters, and Paola Dionisotti establish the hostess as an iconic figure: a familiar character type that audiences feel they know even though they may not catch every nuance of intended or unintended meaning. Readers need editorial intervention to untangle her linguistic confusion, however, and hence she immediately poses an editing challenge just through the sheer extent of detailed annotation her speeches require. Her accumulating bawdy verbal slips, coupled with Falstaff's slurs against her character, potentially contradict her repeated assertions of honesty and respectability. This paper will attempt to trace Mistress Quickly's contradictions across the two parts of *Henry IV*. It aims to review what we can and cannot take for granted about the character and consider the implications of her inconsistencies for e-editing the role.

According to Falstaff in *Part I*, Mistress Quickly is as slippery as an otter, “neither fish nor flesh” (3.3 TLN 2134–35).² In the context of *Part I* this seems, as the prince points out, a slanderous charge: her appearances in act 2, scene 4 and act 3, scene 3 suggest a fairly straightforward character: a feisty, married business-woman who knows the exact price of an ell of holland, but who is nevertheless susceptible to Falstaff's charm when he chooses to use it. Even in *Part I*, however, evidence reveals that Shakespeare's ideas for the character changed as her voice came into being.

The first reference to the hostess is from Falstaff in act 1, scene 2 when he remarks to the prince, “is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?” (*IH4* TLN 153–54). The line may be a lingering echo from *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, where in scene 1 Prince Henry declines his companion's invitation to visit “our old hostess at Feversham” (*FV* TLN 89) in favor of the old tavern in Eastcheap where “there is a pretty wench that can talk well, for I delight as much in their tongues as any part about them” (*FV* TLN 94–

96). Shakespeare's prince is less interested in wenches than the prince of *The Famous Victories*, and his countering quips to Falstaff, "is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance? ... What a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?" (*IH4* 1.2 TLN 155-61), serve to dissociate the future Henry V from Falstaff's lasciviousness. For Ian Donaldson, the buff jerkin joke implies a sexual relationship between Falstaff and the hostess: "buff" as a reference to skin was used in other contemporary sexual joking, and "sweet robe" anticipates the *bona roba* jokes of *2 Henry IV*.³ The prince might also be referring slyly to the idea of Falstaff usurping the role of the hostess's husband, given that the latter is referred to as a "leathern-jerkin, crystal-button, not-pated ... smooth-tongue Spanish pouch" (*IH4* TLN 1031-33) in act 2, scene 4. In any case, while we may assume a more leathery hostess than Falstaff's "sweet wench," the exchange suggests that Mistress Quickly was conceived initially as a potential *bona roba* or sex object for Falstaff.

When we get to her first appearance in act 2, scene 4, however, Mistress Quickly is a peripheral character, coming and going with news of visitors at the door: Sir John Bracy from the prince's father, and later the sheriff and all the watch. Falstaff and the prince pay her scant attention. Quarto and folio stage directions display a similar lack of due regard: she is given an entrance at TLN 1239, but no signaled exit before entering again at TLN 1445, leaving open a range of editorial possibilities: is she obliged to leave when Falstaff instructs, "convey my tristful Queen" (*IH4* TLN 1352), or is her exit facilitated, as in most stage productions, by an ominous knock at the door further on in the scene? Mistress Quickly's lines in act 2, scene 4 suggest general busyness, excitability, and impressionability. Four of her eight speeches begin in the first quarto with the exclamation, "O Jesu!," and one with "O the father." She also uses what many have read as her first malapropism, when she compares Falstaff to "one of these harlotry players" (*IH4* TLN 1354). Frances Barasch has plausibly argued that the hostess intends to describe Falstaff as a *harlequin* player,⁴ while other assessments of her character have dwelled upon the bawdy

associations of her word choice.⁵ According to the *OED*, however, *harlotry* could simply mean “base, scurvy, worthless, [or] trashy” in the 1590s, which opens the possibility that the error is not as smutty as it sounds.

Her words are a response to Falstaff’s casting her as the “sweet Queen” to his King Henry. Again we could identify an insulting pun on *quean*, as in harlot. Falstaff resorts to the insult in *Part 2*, when Mistress Quickly attempts to have him arrested and he cries “Throw the quean in the channel” (*2H4* TLN 655). Here in *Part 1*, however, the ridiculousness and audacity of Falstaff’s association of the hostess, weeping with laughter, with the queen of the realm is, to my mind, enough humor for the line to bear. The joke expands on the prince’s jovially flattering salutation, “How now, my lady the hostess” (*1H4* TLN 1241), and, as we will see below, in “My Nell: The Naming and Claiming of Mistress Quickly in *Henry V*,” the absurdity of casting Mistress Quickly as royalty seems to have gone on to become a recurring motif. Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich describes Mistress Quickly’s role as fictional queen in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as making sense within the context of a carnivalesque pageant.⁶ In *1 Henry IV* it is similarly consistent with the carnival role reversals enacted by Falstaff and the prince.

Only in act 3, scene 3 of *Part 1* does Shakespeare really establish Mistress Quickly’s defining habits of speech. In this scene she defends her business against Falstaff’s claim to have had his pocket picked, and her loquacity, her memory for detail, and her fondness for formal titles, rhetorical questions, repetition, and syntactic parallelism come to the fore:

Why, Sir John, what do you think, Sir John? Do you think I keep thieves in my house?
I have searched, I have enquired; so has my husband, man by man, boy by boy,
servant by servant. (*1H4* TLN 2056–59)

No, Sir John, you do not know me, Sir John; I know you, Sir John. You owe me

money, Sir John, and now you pick a quarrel to beguile me of it. (*IH4* TLN 2067–68)

The staccato rhythm of her speech accords with Falstaff's insulting greeting, "How now, Dame Partlet the hen" (*IH4* TLN 2054), as if Shakespeare thought to himself, how would a clucking hen speak?⁷

This scene is where we first hear the hostess referred to as Mistress Quickly (in *Part 2* she also becomes "gossip Quickly," "old Mistress Quickly," and "neighbor Quickly"). As adjective, according to the *OED*, *quickly* means living, vital, or lively.⁸ Mistress Quickly is certainly lively and quick to take offence, but an added irony of her charactonym is that—particularly in *Part 1*—she is not at all quick-witted and is often mystified by the bawdy banter flying over her head.

Act 3, scene 3 also yields a classic verbal slip. Falstaff, in an attempt to deflect attention from her accusation that he has spoken "most vilely" of the prince, instigates a series of insults associating the hostess with prostitution, finally trapping her into self-betrayal:

FALSTAFF Why? She's neither fish nor flesh, a man knows not where to have her.

HOSTESS Thou art an unjust man in saying so. Thou or any man knows where to have me, thou knave, thou. (*IH4* TLN 2136–37)

For me, the comedy of this exchange depends on Mistress Quickly's utter obliviousness to the sexual joke her righteous indignation generates, and the humor is only heightened if we take her at her word as being a respectable woman married to an honest man. The scene contains two references to bawdy houses: Falstaff claims that "this house is turned bawdy-house: they pick pockets" (*IH4* TLN 2106–07) and the prince notes that Falstaff's pocket contained only "tavern reckonings, [and] memorandums of bawdy-houses" (*IH4* TLN

2164–65). Both references indicate a clear distinction between the bawdy house and Mistress Quickly’s tavern; hence it seems reasonable to assume that, for *Part 1* at least, the tavern is a tavern and Mistress Quickly is simply its harried, put-upon hostess.

Things become more complicated when we turn to *Part 2*. Various critics have described a transformed Mistress Quickly in this sequel play. In 1965 Larry S. Champion pointed to the “important comic alteration in her relationship with Falstaff,” as, no longer a wife, she now sets her social sights on marrying the knight, revealing in her gaffes, “culpable venality and hypocritical pretension.”⁹ Barbara Hardy claims that the hostess’s malapropisms in *Part 1* may be identified as putative, whereas in *Part 2*, they “tend to be more easily recognizable, their thematic levels blatantly dark,”¹⁰ Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin point to the “sexualizing and criminalizing of Quickly in *Part II*,” which coincides with “an increasing emphasis on her economic well-being,”¹¹ and Kay Stanton asserts that although Shakespeare supplies no evidence that the tavern is a bawdy house in *1 Henry IV*, “in *2 Henry IV* the tavern has indeed become one.”¹² In the latest Arden edition of *Part 2*, James Bulman provides a damning summary of Quickly’s character and profession:

Furthermore, to a much greater degree than in *Part One*, Mistress Quickly has a riotously original way of speaking through which she unwittingly reveals her sexual history with Falstaff and punctures her pretence to respectability. . . . Her comic attempt to use a vocabulary beyond her ken betrays her bourgeois social aspirations, just as her bawdy puns betray her profession as a brothel-keeper.¹³

Still officially the hostess of the Eastcheap tavern, Mistress Quickly has mysteriously lost the protection of an honest husband and has instead become in *Part 2* a self-described “poor widow,” who, in her first appearance in act 2, scene 1, is attempting to have Falstaff arrested for debt. As the scene progresses the hostess’s lines are crammed with ribald

suggestion: “he stabbed me in mine own house, most beastly,” “if his weapon be out, he will foine like any devil,” “I have borne, and borne, and borne, and have been fubbed off, and fubbed off, and fubbed off” (2*H4* TLN 626-45). Master Fang, the officer, is oblivious to any sexual innuendo in Mistress Quickly’s words, and indeed possibly contributes to the run of unintended double entendres: “An I but fist him once, an ’a come but within my view” (2*H4* TLN 634).¹⁴ Here, Shakespeare seems to be reprising and extending the vein of humor associated with Mistress Quickly in her final scene from *Part 1* “Thou or any man knows where to have me” (3.3 TLN 2137).

Eventually she gets to explain her case to the Lord Chief Justice, which she does with a typical flurry of questions and sharp memory for irrelevant detail:

Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin chamber, at the round table by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Wheeson week, when the prince broke thy head, for liking his father to a singing man of Windsor, thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech the butcher’s wife come in then and call me gossip Quickly, coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar, telling us she had a good dish of prawns, whereby thou didst desire to eat some, whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone downstairs, desire me, to be no more so familiarity with such poor people, saying that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? (2*H4* 2.1 TLN 690–703)

It is easy to assume, as does the Lord Chief Justice, that this speech shows Falstaff has “practiced upon her easy-yielding spirit” and made her “serve his uses both in purse and in person” (2*H4* TLN 715). The hostess certainly agrees with this summary, but then again

she might understand serving his uses “in person” as simply nursing his wounds, or as a reference to the kiss exchanged for thirty shillings—a Judas-like betrayal. The knight has clearly abused her trust and comically continues to do so, managing to secure another loan soon after the attempted arrest; however in all their on-stage encounters in both parts of *Henry IV*, Falstaff seems to regard Mistress Quickly as sexually unresponsive: in *Part 1* “a man knows not where to have her” (TLN 2137), and in *Part 2* she is “pistol-proof” (TLN 1143). Despite the tale of broken promises she relates to the Justice, Mistress Quickly, in turn, seems to have little interest in Falstaff as either a lover or husband, and she exits this first encounter in *Part 2* with a conciliating offer to bring Doll Tearsheet to meet Falstaff at supper. Perhaps significantly, in at least two major twenty-first century productions of the *Henriad*—Dominic Dromgoole’s 2012 Globe Theatre production and Gregory Doran’s 2014-2015 RSC production—the casting of Mistress Quickly differed between the *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V*, so that she became noticeably younger for the later play and more plausibly the object of rivalry between Pistol and Nym.

Mistress Quickly’s next appearance in *Part 2* is in act 2, scene 4. As in *Part 1* this tavern scene provides a long comic break from the historic narrative, but this time with a stronger focus on the women of the tavern as they spar with Falstaff and fight with Pistol. The women are presented as close allies and, when talking to Doll, Mistress Quickly appears to acquire a more knowing voice. It is possible she is conscious of the double entendre in lines such as “One must bear, and that must be you” (2.2 TLN 1084), and it seems implausible that she would not be aware that Doll is a prostitute. There is no ambiguity regarding Doll’s profession in the play; described misogynistically as a common “road” (2.2 TLN 945) by the prince and Poins, she even refers to herself as “meat” (2.4 TLN 1152).¹⁵ Mistress Quickly happily coaches Doll through her queasiness from drinking “too much canaries” (TLN 1055) and encourages her to run after Falstaff at the close of the scene: “O run Doll, run, run good Doll. Come, she comes blubbered, yea!” (TLN

1418). Her encouragement of Doll could be evidence of Champion's "culpable venality" and is the main indicator that she might indeed run a brothel. No financial transaction is ever mentioned, however, and given that Mistress Quickly repeatedly lends money to Falstaff with no return in both *Part 1* and *Part 2*, profit here seems an unlikely motive. Indeed, Falstaff himself admits that the only reason he has to call the hostess one of "the wicked" is that he owes her money (*2H4* 2.4 TLN 1365).¹⁶ Further, both Mistress Quickly and Doll appear to be driven by their affection for the knight. The dominant emotional thread at the end of act 2, scene 4 of *Part 2*, is sentimental distress at the thought of Falstaff's going to war:

HOSTESS Well, fare thee well. I have known thee these twenty-nine years come
 peasecod-time, but an honest and truer-hearted man—well, fare thee well. (TLN
 1411–14)

The hostess is damned by association, something she has good cause to fear in *Part 2*. In support of her determination not to allow Pistol into her establishment, she delivers one of her rambling speeches explaining that she was "before Master Tisick, the deputy, t'other day" (*2H4* 2.4 TLN 1117) and received a warning to be wary of the guests she receives. Moments earlier she claimed "I am in good name and fame with the very best," yet now she lets slip Tisick's accusation of having an "ill name" despite being "an honest woman" (*2H4* 2.4 TLN 1118), and we might wonder why she had cause to appear before Tisick in the first place. Mistress Quickly's repeated professions of honesty may exacerbate suspicions regarding the status of her reputation and the operations of her tavern. They certainly highlight the vulnerability of a lone working woman's reputation.

Mistress Quickly's final appearance in *Part 2* is in act 5, scene 4. In this brief scene she is carted off to jail with Doll because, according to the beadle, "the man is dead that

you and Pistol beat amongst you” (2*H4* 5.4 TLN 3189). Bulman argues that this is “testimony to the violence that commonly erupted in brothels, and evidence that despite her protestations, the hostess does indeed run a bawdy house.”¹⁷ Interestingly, however, the accusation of collusion with Pistol’s violence completely contradicts what we saw of Mistress Quickly in the earlier tavern scene, where just the thought of his swaggering makes her shake like “an aspen leaf” (2*H4* 2.4 TLN 1135). While admittedly Mistress Quickly and Pistol are married in *Henry V*, the play offers no clear evidence of any close connection between them in 2 *Henry IV*, and in fact she doesn’t seem to know who he is when they meet in act 2, scene 4. It is also possible that the arrest in act 5, scene 4 applies initially to Doll only, with the implication that Mistress Quickly is drawn into the incident after coming to Doll’s defense. The beadle responds to the hostess’s complaint, “Thou hast drawn my shoulder out of joint,” by justifying his arrest of Doll: “The constables have delivered her over to me, and she shall have whipping-cheer, I warrant her” (2*H4* 5.4 TLN 3172–75). Further, in the following scene when Pistol draws Falstaff’s attention to the incident, he only mentions Doll, not the hostess, as being haled to “base durance and contagious prison” (2*H4* 5.5 TLN 3240). The only charge we can confidently level at Mistress Quickly in her final scene of *Part 2* is that she lies (ineptly) in defense of Doll: “I pray god the fruit of her womb miscarry” (2*H4* 5.4 TLN 3185).

If we view Mistress Quickly as a stable character capable of psychological depth, then the cumulative effect of her repeated *double entendres* in *Part 2* may suggest a more knowing, sleazy character behind the ditzy facade, so that, as Hardy puts it, her “language exposes her as a bawd.”¹⁸ One of the delightful things about Shakespeare’s portrayal of Mistress Quickly, however, is that even in the face of so much apparent self-exposure, there is still no definitive evidence that she is not what she claims to be: an honest woman of “good name and fame” (2*H4* 2.4 TLN 1103). Language is comically beyond her control, and the humor only intensifies if we entertain the possibility that most of the time she is an

innocent bungler.

Howard and Rackin write that “Quickly’s malapropisms jam the communicative networks by which the law does its work of making distinctions and hierarchies, separating criminals from honest men and women, whores from wives, winners from losers, legitimate kings from their theatrical imitations.”¹⁹ I think this is a key point to bear in mind when interpreting her lines in *Part 2*. Her language is anarchic; it complicates and forestalls judgement. Each slip, then, needs to be taken at face value: as a *slip*—language at its most subversive and carnivalesque, but not necessarily Freudian or suggestive of a developing character arc.

Commentators on the hostess’s character are often inclined to pin her down and iron out her inconsistencies. In such accounts the character sketch Shakespeare prepared for *Part 1* is filled in for *Part 2* and along the way is darkened and amplified in line with the trajectories of more prominent characters such as the prince and Falstaff. Our recent preference for serial productions of the history plays has much to do with this inclination: we want Mistress Quickly to be stable and coherent across at least the two parts of *Henry IV*. We must remember, though, that when first performed the plays were not staged together. Furthermore, Mistress Quickly, represented by a boy, would always have had an extra performative dimension implied through the comic gap between the body of the actor and the age and gender of the character: she is associated with leather jerkins and stewed prunes in *Part 1* and described by the page as “old Mistress Quickly” in *Part 2* (2H4 2.2 TLN 930). In some ways prefiguring the dame of British pantomime, Mistress Quickly can be played with metatheatrical self-awareness, where actor and audience share the joke despite the fictional character’s obliviousness to innuendo.

Many aspects of the hostess are consistent across the two parts of *Henry IV*. She is overawed by status and takes pains to address people according to their rank as “my lord,” or “good master.” And of course she frequently gets this wrong, such as addressing the

Lord Chief Justice as “your grace” (2*H4* 2.1 TLN 674), or Pistol as “good Captain” (2*H4* 2.4 TLN 1162). Like Dogberry in *Much Ado*, she also complicates her vocabulary unnecessarily, reflecting a comic desire to impress; she says “infinitive” rather than “infinite,” “honeyseed” rather than “homicide,” “exion” rather than “action,” “aggravate” rather than “alleviate” and so on. Her speech patterns also reflect a personality that, while volatile, is open, warm, forgiving, and sentimental. She says of the suggestion that Bardolph should pay her in *Part 1*, “Alas he is poor, he hath nothing” (1*H4* 3.3 TLN 2079), she cheers up Doll in *Part 2* with “I’faith, sweetheart, methinks now you are in an excellent good temporality” (2*H4* 2.4 TLN 1051), and in the same scene when she sees the prince she exclaims, “Now the lord bless that sweet face of thine” (TLN 1137). Certain aspects of her voice and personality were clearly seen as worth retaining and developing across both plays even though the details of her life are variable and opaque.

In light of this odd combination of distinctive voice and elusive identity, I think it is vital as an editor to be mindful of giving the hostess’s ambiguity room for play, and, in the context of an electronic edition, to use hyperlinks to point to inconsistencies as well as points of congruence. Linked annotations can usefully highlight similarities of tone, image, and register, but it is important not to interpret *Part 1* through the lens of *Part 2* or to over-read the plethora of references to harlotry and prostitution that the hostess attracts. Although Mistress Quickly’s consistent inconsistency across and within each of the two parts of *Henry IV* could be seen as symptomatic of her relative marginality, it also coincides with several other instances of shape-shifting within the plays. Again and again these histories require us to revise our assessments of key political figures. Viewed from this angle, Mistress Quickly’s nagging contradictions acquire potential thematic resonance and added grounds to be treated with due editorial care.

“My Nell”: The Naming and Claiming of Mistress Quickly in *Henry V*

We might expect *Henry V* to be one of the most male-centered plays in the Shakespearean canon, exclusively focused as it is on a military adventure. Indeed, the cast contains only four female characters: the hostess, Catherine, Alice, and the French Queen, appearing in a total of four of the play’s twenty-nine scenes. But we should pay attention to the fact that this number doubles the number of female roles of the company’s other non-comedic Shakespearean offerings at roughly the same period. The examples of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *As You Like It* suggest that the company had access to four strong female impersonators in 1599, but *Hamlet* requires boys only for Gertrude and Ophelia; *Julius Caesar* only for Portia and Calpurnia (whose roles could even conceivably be doubled). While it is true that *Henry V* almost entirely eschews domestic settings for courts and battlefields, it nevertheless insistently reminds us of the female perspectives and voices that war and politics might be seen to erase, and the character variously known as “Nell,” “Mistress Quickly,” and “Hostess” is central to this perspective in ways that need to be acknowledged.

The history of *Henry V* criticism has been predominantly one of picking apart the actions, morality, and character of King Henry, and as Norman Rabkin famously argued in 1977, the play seems to encourage binary and opposed viewpoints: it’s a critique of power and/or a propaganda play; Henry’s a hero and/or a war criminal.²⁰ This narrowness of focus—and it must be said, its predominantly masculine inflection—brought the play’s criticism to something of an impasse in the late twentieth century, as Edward Berry pointed out in 1986.²¹ Feminist criticism, especially by Lance Wilcox, Phylis Rackin and Jean Howard, and Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, went a long way in the 1980s and ’90s to find a way out of this impasse. Feminist readings have largely focused on the

character of Catherine, on the troubling overlap between marriage, conquest, and rape.²² The English conquest of France, such feminist treatments demonstrated, is recapitulated in the act 5 wooing of Princess Catherine, and after her voice is removed from the play, the French, English, and Burgundian men come together in a comic acknowledgment that wooing and conquest are one and the same. I want to add to the feminist critical conversation around *Henry V* by considering the character of the hostess, who, despite her limited role in the play, is central to the its concern with problems of possession, female agency, and objectification.

Appearing in only two of the play's scenes, Quickly easily disappears into *Henry V*, a play so vigorously invested in a king and his male subjects negotiating their values with the memory and legacy of forefathers biological and symbolic. But Falstaff, who appears in zero scenes, still affects and structures the play in—and by—his absence; part of King Henry's arc is the constant recapitulation of his rejection of Falstaff at the conclusion of 2 *Henry IV*. Mistress Quickly, who matches Falstaff's record, appearing in the same four Shakespearean plays, presents a similarly sustained potential for thematic commentary on gender in the Henriad and beyond.

For all the noticeable inconsistencies in the character across the four plays—her place of residence, her relationship to Falstaff, the coming and going of her malapropistic speech patterns—Mistress Quickly seems clearly intended as one character, conceived and pursued with a consistency of authorial and performative vision. A subtle and curiously under-appreciated aspect of the character that underscores this consistency is the repeated comic suggestion of her royalty. She may not have been intended to be read as a quean, but she is repeatedly put into the position of a queen.²³ Falstaff makes her a supporting character in his impersonation of Hal's royal father in *1 Henry IV* (2.4), using her tears of laughter as props for his portrait of royal displeasure: "Weep not, sweet Queen, for trickling tears are vain" (*IH4* TLN 1348).²⁴ Quickly's standing in for Henry IV's queen is

the only mention in any of Shakespeare's histories of Hal's mother; moreover, aside from the mention of Elizabeth I in *2 Henry IV*'s epilogue, Quickly is the only queen who appears in the *Henry IV* plays at all. In *Merry Wives*, Mistress Quickly again stands in for a queen at the play's climax, the metatheatrical comeuppance of the would-be adulterer Falstaff. Although Page suggests that his daughter Anne Page should represent "the queen of all the fairies" (*MW* TLN 2198–99), it is Quickly who commands the fairy-impersonating children to punish Falstaff with pinches and mockery. In the folio version of the play, Mistress Quickly not only enables the play's comic resolution, but delivers a twenty-one-line speech of uncharacteristic blank verse that draws parallels between the play's fairy sports and the Garter ceremony that may have occasioned its original performance, for an audience that included Queen Elizabeth. Stepping out of the dramatic fiction in this moment, Mistress Quickly becomes a mirror of the virgin queen herself.

It is impossible to make definitive claims about the reasons for this recurrent, and only sometimes comic, association of Quickly with royalty; perhaps she was played by a boy actor formally known for playing queens, but now aging into other roles, and "Queen Quickly" constitutes an in-joke for company and audience alike. Reasons aside, however, the association can usefully inform the way we read the hostess in *Henry V*, because the pattern continues, if very subtly, in that play. While arguments about the doubling of roles in Shakespeare are always grounded in speculation, it seems likely, given limited casting resources, that one actor doubled the roles of the Boy and Princess Catherine; they never appear together or separately without enough time for a costume change, and a convincing approximation of fluency in French is required for both parts. Since Alice appears on stage with both Catherine and the French Queen, then, it is probable that the same actor portrayed the queen and the hostess. Moreover, her husband, Pistol, seems to announce Quickly's death six lines before the French Queen's entrance in the last scene of the play (*H5* TLN 2976), as if to ensure that no audience confusion between the roles will endanger

the reception of the doubling.

The French Queen's lines are often cut in performances of *Henry V*; her presence is often forgotten by readers, and she is excised entirely from the quarto version of the play. But if the queen does represent the theatrical resurrection of the hostess, then we might usefully think of the queen in conjunction with Mistress Quickly, and take her advice as applicable to the play itself, and to her player's other, more central role. When asked whether she will attend the diplomatic negotiations around the contentious peace treaty or stay to observe Henry's wooing of Princess Catherine, the French Queen replies that she "will go with them. / Haply a woman's voice may do some good / When articles too nicely urged be stood on" (*H5* TLN 3081–82). Helen Ostovich has made the case for the French Queen's importance to the play's treatment of gender. Her displacement of her politically impotent husband culminates Shakespeare's portrayal of French male effeminacy as weakness, Ostovich argues, but it also undercuts the assumptions of that portrayal, asserting an unapologetically feminine authority.²⁵ I would add that the doubling of Quickly and the queen serves a similar function with regard to the play's pattern of male competition for possession of women, potentially subverting that pattern merely by exposing it to scrutiny.

The hostess's is arguably the most powerful "woman's voice" in *Henry V*, but she's also the latest version of a character who is a curiously unfixed entity, in ways noticeable especially by the editor. Some version of a tavern-keeper or landlady called Quickly appears in four Shakespearean plays, though her naming conventions are always fluid (see Table 1). In the quarto and folio texts of the *Henry IV* plays, her speech prefixes almost invariably refer to her character as "Hostess" or its abbreviation—with the exception of the quarto 2 *Henry IV* QLN 925, where her speech is prefixed "*Qui*." Likewise the *Henry IV* stage directions list her as "Hostess," naming her "Hostesse Quickly" only once (*2H4* TLN 3169). The *mise-en-page* of the *Merry Wives* texts presents a very different picture: just as

the comedy's relocation to sixteenth-century Windsor transforms Falstaff into a farcical caricature of the figure from the history plays, the speech prefixes and stage directions in *Merry Wives* insist on calling Quickly "Mistress Quickly," never "Hostess."

Play text	Designation	Dialogue	Speech Prefixes	Stage Directions
<i>1 Henry IV</i> (Q)	"Quickly"	1	0	0
	"Hostess"	2	24	3
<i>1 Henry IV</i> (F)	"Quickly"	1	0	0
<i>2 Henry IV</i> (Q)	"Hostess"	2	24	4
	"Quickly"	5	1	1
	"Hostess"	5	49	2
<i>2 Henry IV</i> (F)	"Quickly"	4	0	1
<i>Merry Wives</i> (Q)	"Hostess"	2	49	3
	"Quickly"	1	42	16
	"Hostess"	0	0	0
<i>Merry Wives</i> (F)	"Quickly"	5	74	9
<i>Henry V</i> (Q)	"Hostess"	0	0	0
	"Quickly"	2	0	1
<i>Henry V</i> (F)	"Hostess"	0	9	0
	"Quickly"	1	0	1
	"Hostess"	1	11	2

Table 1: Occurrences of "Quickly" and "Hostess" in the Quickly plays

Audiences, encountering the character on the stage rather than the page, would not have encountered such a marked generic split. The dialogue surrounding the character gives a more consistent picture of her identity, and notably it traces the slow emergence of her surname through the four plays. After she has twice been addressed as "hostess" in *1 Henry IV* (2.4), her quarrel with Falstaff in act 3, scene 3 highlights the competition over what to call her and how to conceive of her. Falstaff, who bawdily maligns her as "neither

fish nor flesh,” unleashes a string of epithets for the hostess that reduces her to something inhuman: “beast,” “otter,” “drawn fox,” “Dame Partlet,” and “thing.” Prince Hal first gives her a name, referring to her for the first time in Shakespeare and the only time in this play as “Mistress Quickly” (*IH4* TLN 2099). Even as he does so, however, his address makes clear that the surname is only hers by her marriage—to a man about whom we learn nothing but that he is honest: “How now Mistress Quickly? How does thy husband? I love him well, he is an honest man” (*IH4* TLN 2099–2100).

The hostess has a larger role in *Henry IV*'s second part, and that play's dialogue substantially shifts her identity away from her occupation and toward her name. In the folio she is referred to as Quickly four times and as hostess only twice; in the quarto she is called each five times. Moreover, while in *1 Henry IV* it was the prince's prerogative to give her her name, in *2 Henry IV* it is she herself who twice asserts her identity as “Quickly,” each time citing her surname as an anchor of identity within an urban community threatened by the masculine encroachments of Falstaff and his hangers-on. Reminding Falstaff of his proposal of marriage to her, she uses her name in the community of women as evidence of the time and place of the proposal:

[T]hou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech the butcher's wife come in then and call me gossip Quickly. . . ? And didst thou not, when she was gone downstairs, desire me, to be no more so familiarity with such poor people, saying that ere long they should call me madam? (*2H4* TLN 693–701)

Her appellation as “gossip Quickly” serves the hostess both as a marker of her class and her respectability, ironically so, as the hypothetical marriage to Falstaff would serve to erase that identity. Later in the play, she again invokes her name's recognition among the

authorities of her community to undergird her refusal to entertain the “swaggerer,” Pistol:

[Y]our ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. I was before Master Tisick, the deputy, t’other day, and, as he said to me -- ‘twas no longer ago than Wednesday last, i’good faith . . . “neighbor Quickly,” says he, “receive those that are civil, for,” said he, “you are in an ill name.” Now ‘a said so, I can tell whereupon. “For,” says he, “you are an honest woman, and well thought on, therefore take heed what guests you receive. Receive,” says he, “no swaggering companions.” (2 *Henry IV* TLN 1112–21)

While the patrons of her establishment continue to refer to her as “hostess,” her identity both as “Quickly” and as “neighbor” here, in preserving the specifics of her subjectivity, serves as protection against the ill intents of such malign masculine influences as Falstaff and Pistol.

Sir John’s bawdily insulting claim in *1 Henry IV* that “a man knows not where to have her” (*1 Henry IV* TLN 2134–35), is dismissed by the prince as slander, and it comes as part of Falstaff’s attempt to avoid paying his tab, but the careful alternation between “hostess” and “Quickly” underscores a crucial aspect of the character. The unfixed binary of Quickly’s naming conventions—often erased by the editorial impulse to name characters consistently—delineates an important character arc, the ongoing competition among men to name and claim her. This arc reaches a breaking point in *Henry V*, in which she is referred to not only by her surname of Quickly and her job description as hostess, but by various possessive pronouns and, for the first time in any of the plays, a given name.²⁶ The variations in naming the character in *Henry V* have been perceived as provocative textual cruxes by editors and critics who have sought to iron them out, but I’d like to suggest that the variations are central to our understanding of the character. The hostess functions in the play—like Princess Catherine, like France—as an object of male competition, and her

naming conventions enter and implicate the author, his editors, and his readers into such a competition.

Before her first appearance in *Henry V*, we hear that the hostess is the cause of contention between the two cowardly ruffians, Pistol and Nym. If both the character of Nym and perhaps Pistol's courtship of Quickly, had been introduced in *Merry Wives*,²⁷ so both represent the incursion from another genre that ties together the four Quickly plays. Although Nym and Pistol are too cowardly actually to use the rapiers they repeatedly draw and sheathe, the violence between them over the hostess threatens to divert the newly impressed soldiers (themselves newly designated "Corporal Nym" and "Lieutenant Bardolph") from the royally-sanctioned violence in France:

BARDOLPH It is certain, corporal, that he is married to Nell Quickly, and certainly she did you wrong, for you were troth-plight to her.

NYM I cannot tell; things must be as they may. Men may sleep, and they may have their throats about them at that time, and some say knives have edges. (*Henry V* TLN 521–27)

Bardolph's use of the given name Nell, for the first time in any play, is striking for two reasons. Since Bardolph has no explicit erotic interest in the hostess, it suggests a platonic intimacy that includes Nell Quickly among the fellowship of Falstaff's former companions. At the same time, the name carries connotations—as a shortening of "Helen"—that align her with Helen of Troy, and by extension, the tradition of women as metonyms for international conflict that encompasses both the Trojan war and, as the last act of the play makes clear, Henry V's conquest of France.

The claiming of Nell Quickly in *Henry V* again involves controversy over what to call her: in this scene, and in act 2, scene 3, she is referred to variously as "Hostess," "Nell,"

“Quickly,” and “his [Pistol’s] wife,” but never, as we might expect, “Mistress Pistol.”

Pistol is married to her, but the question of whether he, or anyone else, can determine her new married identity is an open one.²⁸ Bardolph’s first address to Pistol—“How now, mine host Pistol?” (*H5* TLN 532–33)—seems to suggest that it’s *Pistol* whose identity has changed with marriage, that the force of her identity as hostess has subsumed his own, reducing him to a mere publican and denying him the military honor of an “ancient” (an ensign, or standard bearer). Perhaps this threat of being absorbed by his new wife’s identity is what gets Pistol’s “cock” up, rather than the word *host*’s connotation of “bawd”—the usual editorial explanation of his reaction. It is certainly telling that in his response he both reasserts his claim on the hostess and divorces her given name from the surname Bardolph had used: “Base tyke, call’st thou me host? Now by this hand I swear I scorn the term! Nor shall *my Nell* keep lodgers” (*H5* TLN 534–36, emphasis mine). After this scene, Shakespeare will never refer to this character as “Quickly” again.

On the folio page, this nominative fluctuation is all the more pronounced than in performance. After Bardolph’s initial naming of her as “Nell Quickly,” the folio stage direction seems to enter the conflict on Nym’s side: in the second and last occurrence of her surname in a history play’s stage direction, it reads “*Enter Pistoll, & Quickly*” (*H5* TLN 530).²⁹ Bardolph rhetorically reenacts her marriage to Pistol, declaring her to be “his wife,” but then implicitly asserts her identity as *hostess* to Pistol’s *host*. But just after Pistol tries to end the ambiguity by calling her “my Nell” and emphatically denying her hostess identity (“Nor shall my Nell keep lodgers”), her first speech prefix—like all her speech prefixes in this play—reasserts that function by referring to her as “*Host.*” (an abbreviation of hostess, of course, but also perhaps an absorption of her new husband’s role into hers—in the next scene, the abbreviation will be expanded to the full “Hostesse”). Not only do the speech prefixes insist on *Hostess*, but all entrance directions subsequent to her first use only her occupational identifier. It is as though the contentious naming and claiming of the

hostess occurs again, in a silent parallel to the spoken text, within the editorial apparatus of the scene.

Editorial incursion has attempted to straighten out the nominative ambiguities of this silent parallel. Most editors, following Alexander Dyce's edition of 1857, have removed the name *Quickly* from the entrance direction, replacing it with the *Hostess* more usual in the play, and thus diminishing the sense that the Nym/Pistol conflict has enacted a change—"Quickly" to "Hostess." In the *ISE* edition, the wording clarifies her recent marital status: "*Enter Pistol and [Hostess, formerly Mistress] Quickly,*" emphasizing the battle over nomenclature to an even greater degree than the folio text does.

When the boy enters at the end of act 2, scene 1 to summon the hostess to Falstaff's sickbed, his speech seems to reinforce the sense that the occupational identity has become primary: "Mine host Pistol, you must come to my master, and your hostess" (2.1.26). Pistol no longer responds to being called "host" with violence, and it is clear that the boy links the two of them by and to *her* identity, as if host/hostess has become a replacement surname, even as the possessive pronoun makes her "his."

We are free to read the very short story of Nell Quickly's identity in this scene—the move from a full name to a mere occupation—as the reduction or erasure of her identity. It may be just as valid, however, to see it as the *defeat* of Pistol's attempt to erase her function through their marriage. "Quickly," after all, was the name of her former husband, that honest man referred to in *1 Henry IV*. If she has any role independent from men, it is that of "hostess." When the boy refers to her as "your hostess," the possessive pronoun could as easily indicate her authority over Pistol as Pistol's possession of her. My fondness for this ambiguity is why, although nearly every editor since Thomas Hanmer in 1744 has emended the boy's line to "and you, hostess," I have retained the possessive pronoun. In the quarto text, incidentally, the analogous line has the boy address the hostess first, with Pistol as the afterthought: "Hostess, you must come straight to my Maister, / And you Host

Pistoll' (QLN 297).

The most noteworthy speech that the hostess has occurs in act 2, scene 3: her description of Falstaff's death. Though the character speaks with the inadvertent bawdy and occasional malapropism that appears, if inconsistently, in her speeches in the other three Quickly plays, her prose eulogy for Falstaff is genuinely moving, managing to humanize him at the same time as it solidifies his status as a comic icon:

Nay, sure he's not in hell. He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. A made a finer end, and went away as it had been any christom child. A parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o'th'tide. For after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger's end, I knew there was but one way. For his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a babbled of green fields. "How now, Sir John?" quoth I. "What, man, be o' good cheer!" So a cried out, "God, God, God," three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So a bade me lay more clothes on his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone. Then I felt to his knees, and so up-peered, and upward and all was as cold as any stone. (*H5* TLN 832–47)

This speech is patently the most sustained and focused reference to Falstaff in a play haunted by his absence and yet strangely insistent on forgetting him. The bishops in the opening scene do not mention Sir John's name, merely folding him into their complaint about Prince Hal's "companies unlettered, rude, and shallow" (TLN 96). And although Fluellen's comparison of Henry to Alexander hinges on Henry's having killed Falstaff by rejecting him, in the same way that Alexander drunkenly killed his friend Cleitus, Fluellen can recall Sir John only abstractly as "the fat knight with the great belly-doublet. He was

full of jests, and gipes, and knaveries, and mocks. I have forgot his name” (TLN 2571–73). This is a play *about* memory and forgetting, about the way we remember our history “with advantages.” Henry is obsessively concerned that his legacy should be more than a “waxen epitaph” (*H5* TLN 380). He plays upon his soldiers’ memory of their glorious forefathers and is himself haunted both by the martial accomplishments of Edward the Black Prince and by his father’s usurpation of Richard II. Indeed, *Henry V* contains twenty-two explicit verbal references to memory, more than any other play except *Hamlet*. It is particularly remarkable, then, that in this play, the keeper of Falstaff’s memory is the hostess, Nell Quickly, whose name is in the process of being forgotten, and who disappears from the play after her two scenes.

The fact that the hostess is the play’s designated keeper of Falstaff’s memory may account for the curious nature of her own end. Like Falstaff, she disappears and possibly dies offstage, and as with Falstaff, the supposed description of her death is mired in a textual crux.³⁰ In his last speech, the well-cudged Pistol complains to the audience:

Doth fortune play the hussy with me now? News have I that my Doll is dead
i’th’Spital of a malady of France, and there my rendezvous is quite cut off. (*H5* TLN
2975–77)

What are we to make of “my Doll”? It seems that Pistol either: refers to his wife here, but has forgotten her name; uses “Doll” not as a given name at all, but a pet name for his wife; or refers to another woman entirely. Although both printed texts of the play clearly read “Doll,” editors since Samuel Johnson have argued that this must be an error for “Nell,” since *Henry V* has finally given us a given name for Pistol’s new wife, a name that he would be unlikely to forget. Perhaps this editorial insistence that Pistol’s “rendezvous” must refer to his wife stems from a sentimental impulse about the character’s marital

fidelity. Pistol's parting instructions to his wife, demanding thrifty and chaste behavior—including the delightfully bawdy additional line in the quarto "Keep fast thy buggle boe [i.e., vagina]" (QLN 497)—in no way imply a promise that he, Pistol, will keep himself away from camp-followers. Perhaps, then, "Doll" is simply a generic term for a mistress or prostitute. The reference to the Spital, i.e., Saint Mary's Hospital outside Bishopsgate, might suggest that Pistol is referring to *2 Henry IV's* Doll Tearsheet, mentioned earlier in the play recovering in the Spital from syphilis (*H5* TLN 575–78). Dr. Johnson suggested this possibility, and John Dover Wilson took it up as tantalizing evidence of authorial revision of *Henry V*. Dover Wilson argued that Falstaff, who unlike Pistol has a sexual relationship in earlier plays with Doll Tearsheet, was originally written into *Henry V* as a central character as the epilogue to *2 Henry IV* had promised, but that at some point in the composition of the latter play, Shakespeare decided to kill off Sir John and give his lines to Pistol.³¹ This mention of "my Doll," then, survives as ghostly evidence of Shakespeare's original intention, a textual corollary to Falstaff's haunting of the plot and dialogue of *Henry V*.

So our options for explaining this textual crux are these: perhaps there is no error, and Nell has actually been replaced in Pistol's affections by a "Doll" (Tearsheet or otherwise), in the way that Falstaff is replaced, for both King Henry and for Pistol, by the attractions of war in France. Perhaps the text recapitulates the world's forgetting of Falstaff's name in Pistol's forgetting of Nell's. Or perhaps, as Dover Wilson would have it, the Doll-that-should-be-Nell is another memory, or ghost, of Falstaff, a forgotten echo of a story that might have been told. Whichever explanation we settle on for the textual crux of "my Doll," Mistress Quickly becomes a sort of female surrogate in the play for Falstaff. She is the witness to his death, she is the keeper of his memory, and her invisible end is inextricably linked to his. In act 2, the term "Hostess," for better or worse, sublimates and erases the identity of "Nell Quickly." In act 5, after a war in France has eliminated the

need for Falstaff, and killed off his former companions, a “malady of France” wipes out the hostess.

The triumphant ending of *Henry V* is undercut and rendered bittersweet by the play’s epilogue, which reminds us that the accomplishments of “this star of England” were fleeting, as “oft our stage hath shown” (*H5* TLN 3373, 3380). It has long been acknowledged that Falstaff’s absence from the play constitutes a tragedy of forgetting that exists alongside, and enables, the glorious story that the good man shall teach his son (TLN 2299). The fate of Mistress Quickly presents a parallel, female-gendered tragedy of the forgotten. Like Falstaff, while she attains a comic afterlife in *Merry Wives* as Mistress Quickly, her identity as the hostess of the history plays cannot be put aside. As is the case with Falstaff, *Henry V* clings to her memory, even if it is uncertain as to her name. The fact that the ghostly tragedy of the forgotten that undergirds *Henry V* includes this female character—that she, as well as Falstaff, haunts the vasty fields of France—adds new dimension to the play’s depiction of power and gender. Male-authored history, in chronicle or drama, may colonize female subjectivity and subjugate female voices, but Shakespeare seems concerned to make those violent processes visible.

“A Very Frampold Life”: Marriage and the Mistress Quickly of *Merry Wives*

“A very frampold life” (F2.2, TLN 858³²): so Mistress Quickly describes Mistress Ford’s experience of marriage with her jealous husband. Ford’s temperament, in line with *OED*’s description of *frampold*, is at worst “sour-tempered, cross, disagreeable, peevish”; quarrelsome, even mad; and given to spooked or nervy fantasies, like “an headstrong . . . horse, that will not not be ruled by a gentle snaffle,” in the citation from Holland’s translation of Livy’s *Roman History* (1600). The word “frampold” is obscure, appearing only in the folio text, not much used in other early texts, and considered regional, a northern word, probably from the Lake District or Scottish Borders where language tends to be more inflected by Frisian and Scandinavian sources. If we try to connect this clear-eyed Mistress Quickly logically as a character consistent with the history plays, we are likely to become frampold ourselves: she is “consistently inconsistent,” and worse, she is not the same character in the folio *Merry Wives* as she is in the quarto, let alone in any play of the Henriad, despite desperate attempts by editors and directors to homogenize her. As an editor and dramaturge, I want to introduce you to the Mistress Quickly you already know, the folio character, and then point out that the quarto, published twenty-one years before, varies her representation considerably, thus allowing a quite different woman in a different performance style to emerge from the earlier text of the play. I will then suggest why the character needs our acceptance as mutually informative for both texts of *Merry Wives*—a project that is part of my ongoing e-edition for *ISE*. The variant Quicklys do not simply alert us to performance consequences, but also to reading/critical consequences of accepting her as a multifaceted creation, changing throughout all four of “her” plays.³³

Editors and critics of this play have discussed the differences between the folio and quarto versions at substantial length,³⁴ when not ignoring the latter entirely as “bad quarto” not worth considering as Shakespeare’s work. The differences are not superficially

extreme, but length, character, stage-management, and plot differ and thus alter the perspective on the story's development and its ending. The quarto is less than two-thirds the length of the folio, with scenes and lines from the quarto appearing in the folio in different places, shifting meaning. For example, Fenton does not make his first appearance until the quarto is almost half over (Q12, QLN 1066, or F3.4, TLN 1567). He is not a persuasively romantic option; the host describes him as an upper-class twit: "he capers, he dances, he writes verses, he smells of April and May" (QLN 804–05), and Page sees him as "wild: he knows too much" (QLN 808), but neither associates him with the Prince Hal of two centuries ago. Despite these negative terms, he is for other reasons Anne's choice. Stage directions are frequent in the quarto, but almost non-existent in the folio. Without consulting the quarto, readers would find it difficult to tell what happens during key moments, like the buck basket scenes, or the final elopements of the brides and grooms, or indeed the whole community masque that ends the play. Setting Anne Page aside, both plays focus on the planning, interactions, and retellings of the wives' revenge on Falstaff, with numerous lines (especially in the folio) explicitly detailing and repeating the action, even though the relationship between the two wives is less balanced in the folio, whereas the Anne plot, especially in the quarto, is silent, secretive, demanding our observation, not the *in flagrante* Falstaff in the wives' plot. Nevertheless, the bride's plot is as successful as the wives'. Mistress Quickly in both plays cements female bonds with her regular appearances, but in the quarto she has a logical function lacking in the folio, which tends to mock rather than praise her match-making and money-making skills. Above all, her name provides clues to the differences between the rapid-fire farce of the quarto and the more languorous comedy of the folio. The quarto Mistress Quickly is both a charactonym and a witty figure, beyond the slapstick buffoon she can become in the folio. No one in the quarto describes her, as Mistress Ford does in the folio, as "that foolish carrion, Mistress Quickly" (F3.3, TLN 1523-24). Female audiences were more likely to see her, in the vein

of Margaret Cavendish, as one of Shakespeare's eight named women characters she considered exceptionally strong, four of them from *Merry Wives*.³⁵ Unlike women in the history plays, all the women of *Merry Wives* are part of an inclusive society in Windsor, in which wives, husbands, children, professionals, as well as the housekeeper and the innkeeper, are bound together in a "social network" empowering its female members.³⁶ Indeed, this emphasis on shrewd women in the play, I would say, strongly supports the idea of the quarto as the original Elizabethan play-script, and the folio as a revised Jacobean development.³⁷

Who is the "foolish" Mistress Quickly we know? Largely, she is a product of the folio. Although her job-descriptions are similar the woman herself is changed. Like the hostess in the *Henriad*, she is a caregiver who likes to please and manage those in her charge, and probably for that reason also a willing go-between both for Anne Page's suitors and for Mistress Ford's and Mistress Page's seduction of Falstaff. In that sense, she is, as Gajowski and Rackin assert, "a kind of Nemesis": Quickly inverts her role in the *Henriad*'s Eastcheap, where she was "duped and victimized by Falstaff's empty promises of marriage" and debt-repayment; in *Merry Wives*'s Windsor, she makes Falstaff "the object of ridicule . . . as she repeatedly lures him into the traps set by the wives."³⁸ Part of her interest is self-interest, in the money she receives from the men she seems to support. Her job description as "nurse" crops up several times in the folio, although only three times in the quarto (used by Evans, Fenton, and Slender). The folio Parson Evans defines her role in Doctor Caius's household as "his nurse; or his dry-nurse, his cook, his laundry, his washer, and his wringer" (F1.2, TLN 290-91). Later, the doctor defends his pursuit of Anne Page by claiming the promise of his nurse-confidante: "Ay begar, and de maid is love-a me: my nursh-a Quickly tell me so mush" (F3.3, TLN 1326-27). What do they mean by "nurse"? Not the the modern sense of the word as we see in *Henry V*, when Mistress Quickly nurses Falstaff until his death. In *LEME: The Lexicons of Early Modern*

English,³⁹ we find, current between 1574 and 1611, meanings that apply more aptly: a nurse is one who indulges and puts up with a child more than a mother would, singing or babbling to him in a special voice or language, nourishing him and wishing him well (Th. Cooper, 1584); a nurse is a housekeeper who maintains her charge's place, keeping him and his rooms clean and tidy (John Baret, 1574); she is a foster-mother (Florio, 1598, 1611), a schoolmistress or governess (Richard Perceval, 1599), and a source of comfort and affection, dandling her foster-child on her lap (Randle Cotgrave, 1611). That last, of course, has other implications for an adult fosterling, but sexual implications appear only in her vocabulary, not in her deeds. In her interaction with Simple, Mistress Quickly describes her job as housekeeper, laundress, alewife, cook, kitchenmaid, and charwoman: "I keep his house, and I wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink, make the beds and all myself" (F 1.4, TLN 495-87), a job so onerous that she is always "up early and down late" (TLN 491).⁴⁰ As in the quarto, her varied experience helps her to handle her difficult employer, "a parlous man" (Q4, TLN 403.1), distracting him from his anxieties by singing at her work and fetching at his command, although when she retrieves the "green-a" (TLN 439-40) box of medications from the closet, she does so to prevent him from discovering Simple hiding there. Her actions, then, are protective of both men, as well as protective of herself, establishing her as self-reliant and dynamic in Q, but frazzled and defensive in F.

She can deal quite handily with Master Fenton, who calls her "good woman" (F1.4, TLN 520) but asks too many pressing questions about his suit for Anne Page. Although Mistress Quickly has just expressed some contempt for Doctor Caius's "worst fault . . . that he is given to prayer" (TLN 410), she uses God piously as an excuse for not promising that Fenton shall have Anne: "Troth, sir," she says, "all is in His hands above" (TLN 529). She then cleverly distracts him by undercutting his already low self-esteem, giving him something more to worry about: "Have not your worship a wart above your eye?" she

asks, and follows that up with a report of another side of Nan Page: “we had an hour’s talk of that wart; I shall never laugh but in that maid’s company, but indeed she is given too much to allicholy and musing, but for you—well—go to—” (TLN 531-37), giving Fenton the impression that Anne probably loves him despite the wart, and her significant pauses alert Fenton to the need for bribing Mistress Quickly to speak on his behalf. She keeps him anxious by promising to urge in his favor with Anne, and report on “more of the wart the next time we have confidence, and of other wooers” (TLN 544-45) That is, while she solaces him, she keeps him edgy and feeling the need to pay her more, because of his physical deficiency—the wart that makes Anne laugh, or get depressed—combined with his fear of other wart-free suitors who may be preferred over himself. The mere mention of the—to us—invisible wart is such a comic surprise that audiences have to see Mistress Quickly either as inordinately clever at cutting this socially privileged “nurseling” down to size and keeping him under her thumb, or extraordinarily stupid in apparently revealing Anne’s confidential opinion of this lover. The wart business, funny as it is, is not in the quarto, where speed does not allow for milking such moments at length. But, as in Q, Mistress Quickly’s opinion of who should marry Anne revolves, depending on which husband will do Quickly the most good. As the play reveals ultimately, she did not know Anne’s mind any better than anyone else.

She replicates her success with Fenton in her visits to Falstaff, a ludicrously boyish would-be lover, who feels superior to Quickly, until she pricks him, as she did Fenton and his wart, to let a little air out of the fat man. She puts him off-balance by rejecting his greeting as “fair wife” and confusingly accepting his second attempt “fair maid” by declaring herself equivocally the same “[a]s my mother was the first hour I was born” (F2.2, TLN 804-08; QLN 497-98). Her concern, in this first interview with Falstaff, is to speak to him alone without Pistol, Nym, Robin, or Bardolph seeing through her performance; she tries to coax him twice “a little nearer this ways” (TLN 814-15) until

Falstaff, still refusing, declares off-handedly “nobody hears: mine own people, mine own people” (TLN 820-21; Q6, QLN 500). This patently untrue remark has two results: it seems to have aroused Mistress Quickly’s talent for mimicry, the same skill we saw her use describing Slender to Simple earlier: “does he not hold up his head (as it were) and strut in his gait?” —physical mimicry accompanying the question. “Yes, indeed does he!” chortles Simple (F1.4 TLN 426-27). We get a more indirect echo of Falstaff’s remark as Quickly stored it up for her off-stage report to the two merry wives later. They in turn re-use the words when Mistress Page interrupts Mistress Ford’s second meeting with Falstaff:

MISTRESS PAGE How now, sweetheart, who’s at home besides yourself?

MISTRESS FORD Why, none but **mine own people** – (F4.2, TLN 1911-13)

vociferously enough for Falstaff to hear the remark in his hiding-place, and it may be that Mistress Page is silently laughing so hard she can hardly utter her replies, despite her friend’s urging, “Speak louder!”. “Indeed?” gasps Mistress Page. “Truly, I am so glad you have **nobody here**” (TLN 1916), another near-echo of Falstaff’s remarks to Mistress Quickly, perhaps inducing more silent hilarity between the wives, as they picture Falstaff’s reaction both to their mimicry and then to the announcement of Ford’s imminent return home to discover the knight. This first double-edged reaction to Falstaff shows us both Mistress Quickly’s needle-sharp ability to size Falstaff up, and her instinct for comedy that will make her imitate him for the wives.

The second result of this arrogance about his servants prompts Pistol’s fascination with Quickly, who has managed to get Falstaff’s purse before leaving the inn. In admiration, Pistol determines, “This punk is one of Cupid’s carriers” (TLN 897), and declares his intention to pursue her as his “prize” —that is, he wants to hook up with a prospective bawd who knows how to wheel and deal. For the players at the Globe, the

folio script offers a setup for Pistol's remaining secretly in Windsor after his dismissal, to join in the Windsor Forest punitive masque of Herne the Hunter, and at the same time linking the folio *Merry Wives* to the first act of *Henry V*, in which Pistol and Quickly have married—even though in the history plays Quickly remains the widowed hostess of a tavern, not Q's respectable unmarried housekeeper.

Back in Mistress Quickly's first visit to Falstaff, we might wonder why Falstaff is squirming so much, why he refuses to get closer to his go-between, but the situation highlights another feature of Quickly's character in her wildly detailed and imaginative story of Mistress Ford's long line of rejected would-be lovers,

knights, and lords, and gentlemen with their coaches; I warrant you, coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift, smelling so sweetly, all musk and so rustling, I warrant you, in silk and gold, (F2.2, TLN 833–37)

ending with the large bribes of “twenty angels” she has received to convince Mistress Ford to accept a lover, whether an earl or a pensioner from Windsor Castle. This unwanted sideline in the sex-trade is part of Mistress Ford's “frampold life,” and makes Falstaff just one of many who probably won't succeed. In Mistress Quickly's scrambled folio narrative, its improvised list of lovers, however, there is hope: Mistress Page is more likely to accept Falstaff as her lover because “I never knew a woman so dote upon a man; surely I think you have charms, la! Yes, in truth” (TLN 869-70). And Falstaff believes her, taken in by *her* second-hand flirtation, although she is not taken in by *his*.

Mistress Quickly is an acute woman, able to fill the gaps in Falstaff's knowledge with what she wants him to believe, coddling him like a good nurse to accept the mistress he might be able to get, not the one he wants. Her detailed observations, whether imaginary or real, help us understand how she is able to manipulate most people. Her control over

“parlous” Doctor Caius is least effective, partly because she is afraid of him, or at least wants him to believe she is too afraid of him to go against his wishes. If we return to the closet scene, we see that Quickly’s attempts to keep the doctor out of the closet fail when he goes to it a second time for simple medications he needs at court, only to discover the Simple he knew nothing about. Despite running interference, in Q and F, Quickly was unable to prevent Simple from blurting out the real reason for his visit, Parson Evans’s request that Quickly help Slender to win Anne Page, and the result is Caius’s challenge of Evans to a duel, followed by threats to his housekeeper: “Peace-a your tongue,” he warns her; “by gar, if I have not Anne Page, I shall turn your head out of my door!” (F1.4, TLN 510-12) —intimidation only uttered in F. But Mistress Quickly is supremely self-confident, not shy about taking credit for successful work, such as her suggestion to Fenton that he beg Mistress Page to rethink her opposition to him as Nan’s husband, a suggestion that gets Fenton limited support. Mistress Quickly immediately claims to Fenton that she has, behind the scenes, influenced Mistress Page significantly in Q and F: “This is my doing now. ‘Nay,’ said I, ‘will you cast away your child on a fool and a physician? Look on Master Fenton’ – this is my doing.” (F3.4, TLN 1665-66; Q12, QLN 1095-96). Fenton accepts her powerful intervention as truth, slipping her a large tip: “There’s for thy pains,” he says discreetly (TLN 1664.2), a surprising sum of “a brace of angels” (QLN 1097). We see the same self-confidence in Quickly’s final go-between scene, in which she avoids being overheard by insisting to Falstaff, “Sir, let me speak with you in your chamber” (F4.5, TLN 2337), a shocking suggestion considering how horrified the host of the Garter was earlier to hear that Falstaff had entertained the fat woman of Brainford in his room. This time, Quickly delivers Mistress Page’s letter, with other details to feed his ego, setting him up as Herne the Hunter for the last scene. Finally, her eager portrayal of the Fairy Queen in the Windsor Forest masque celebrates her super-competence as an actor, whether we accept the lower-middle-class doggerel-spouting

nummer-queen of the quarto, far more suitable as a citizen production, or the high-flown iambic-pentameter rhetoric of Gloriana in the folio, Quickly plays her part to the hilt, with the folio addition of Pistol's assistance to his "radiant Queen," although Parson Evans is still in charge of the schoolchildren elves and fairies, who search for, pinch, and burn Falstaff while they dance around him singing in "scornful rhyme."

Thus far, the Mistress Quickly I have been describing is largely the Mistress Quickly of both folio and quarto, with a few significant exceptions. Both versions of *Merry Wives* show Quickly as a sympathetic, as well as an acquisitive, woman. She has the skills of the hostess in the *Henriad* without the corruption. She's actually smarter than the hostess. She is not a wife, a widow, or a maid, leaving her (as far as the *Henriad* is concerned) in the space of the whore. But, although Quickly takes money for her go-between work, she is neither prostitute nor bawd. She is clearly welcome at the Page house, perhaps more so in the quarto. Early in the play, Mistress Page greets her with "You are come to see my daughter Anne?" (QLN 388, F TLN 697), and then delays her by asking for "an hour's talk" with the two wives before visiting Anne. This welcome places Mistress Quickly as an acceptable visitor to the household. In F's act 3, scene 4, when Shallow orders her to break up the conversation between Fenton and Anne so that Slender may woo her, Quickly responds by drawing Slender aside first, allowing Anne to finish her talk with Fenton, whom she still urges to gain her father's consent. We also hear Anne's complaint about her father's choice of suitor, a fool whose faults he overlooks for the gained income of "three hundred pounds a year." Then Quickly draws Fenton aside, urging him to speak to Mistress Page, before Master Page orders him out. These bits of business are essential for the audience or reader to track events.

What is Quickly's actual influence on Anne Page? The answer is probably not much—whether we speak of the folio or the quarto version of the play. Anne seems to know her own mind in both texts.⁴¹ The big question here is why is Quickly an appropriate

companion for the well-to-do women of Windsor? In the folio version, the answer may be based on her age and willingness to serve. Only in the folio does Mistress Ford describe her contemptuously as “that foolish carrion” whom they might send to Falstaff again, “to betray him to another punishment.” What are the implications of “carrion”? Surprisingly, it did not simply mean “a cadaver or corpse,” or “extremely aged” or “close to death,” as one might assume. It meant “corruptible flesh,” whether physical or moral, as Hooker used the term in 1597 (*Ecclesiastical Politie* v. lxvii. 177): “The Sacrament being of it selfe but a corruptible and earthly creature” (*OED*). As a term of contempt, Thomas Thomas (1587), associates it with “A labouring beast . . . a lean carrion jade that is nothing but skin and bones” (*LEME*): the idea of a skinny Mistress Quickly, worn down by hard work, is not impossible, given all the housekeeping chores she listed in her act 1 job description. Florio worsens the context in 1598 by suggesting carrion is associated with “baggage stuffe, filth, a common shore, jakes or sinke” [cesspool], and Randle Cotgrave in 1611 agrees to the extent that he refers to “A leane, ill-fauoured, carrion mare” (*LEME*). And “horse” is a common pun on “whores” in playwrights from Shakespeare to Brome. The folio nips at Mistress Quickly behind her back, and undercuts her influence by playing on her appearance, her character, and her perhaps lack of mental agility or education (her malapropisms), especially in the interpolated Latin lesson scene with little William Page and Evans (F4.1, not in Q). As I have suggested, however, the materials taken from the quarto and included in the folio seem to disparage such a view of Quickly. Nevertheless, most performances tend to portray Quickly, according to the merry wives’ words, as “a foolish carrion” who can *carry-on* messages and have little influence on Anne. If that is the case for the folio, that she is unattractive and silly, then why does Pistol admire her (he recognizes her adroit management of Falstaff and her opportunism as something he’d like to pursue as his “prize”), why does Falstaff fear standing too close to her, why does

everyone seem to follow her advice, and why is she elevated to Fairy Queen in the final masque?

The quarto Quickly is not treated with contempt by anyone, nor does she use malapropisms, usually the sign of Shakespeare's contempt for lower-class ignorance. Instead, she is quick-witted and fast-talking in her dealings with educated men like Caius, Fenton, and Falstaff, as well as with the merry wives. That "quick" Mistress Quickly, if not allowed a quarto production showing her capabilities, should at least influence the performance of her role in a folio production, instead of insisting on the Henriad Quickly. The quarto role is definitely not the Hostess Quickly of the Henriad, with her tavern and pimping connections. Rather, she is like a commedia figure, a continuing role-type of the Columbina/mischievous maid/best friend of the romantic lead, who changes according to the scenarios. In that sense, her sexuality in the Henriad becomes her match-making in the quarto of *Merry Wives*.⁴² We cannot entirely "put aside" Mistress Quickly's identity as the history-play hostess, but it is a shadow, not a template for the comedy. Understanding the Quickly roles, for an editor, means linking the two versions of *Merry Wives* together and cross-referencing by through-line-numbers (TLN) to show the underlying concept of the part. When we sweep away the extra verbal business in the folio, and re-consider the basis for the character outside of the history plays, what remains? Mistress Quickly is a character in the "now" of Windsor, circa 1600. Here is where the charactonym has influence: *OED* suggests a number of definitions that bring her alive: she does her work rapidly, the current sense of "quickly" (*OED* 2), but also defines her liveliness and animation generally, never at a loss for words (*OED* 1a), her skill in mimicry, her alertness to opportunity (*OED* 1b)—whether in winkling out bribes or sensing the right moment to get Mistress Page to soften her attitude toward Fenton, or wheedle Falstaff into agreeing once more to his own humiliation—and finally her imagination in living her role to the full as the Fairy Queen (*OED* 1c). *LEME* provides similarly positive meanings: Baret (1574)

suggests perceptiveness in terms of observation and of thought, “quicke of sight; . . . Circumspectly, wisely, with good foresight, providently”; Florio (1598) adds “nimble” and “subtile” extending Baret; and Cotgrave (1611) includes “wittily” and “aptly” in the sense of immediate responsiveness. So, to be Mistress Quickly in the quarto is to be fully alive to the spirit of the game, without the malice of Falstaff and his crew. Of course, to be quick is not necessarily to be profound; I certainly agree with the earlier final judgement on Mistress Quickly’s “shallowness required for her to flourish” in her milieu. But shallow streams sparkle and entertain life.

One major difference in the role as it shifted between quarto and folio is the treatment of Mistress Quickly’s age. How old is she? She may be the same age as the wives, or she may be of some middle age between Anne and the wives, giving her a certain authority in Anne’s eyes without posing a challenge to motherly authority. Anne may confide in her because Quickly is closer to her own age and thus more likely to understand the pull of first love judged beside economic necessity. Or Quickly may be grandmotherly, and thus considered too old for Windsor citizens to worry about how she lives in the doctor’s house. In Anne’s eyes, Mistress Quickly is a suitable companion because she listens and does not blab; she is sharp, but not cutting, seeing the point but not using it against her. In the wives’ eyes, Quickly’s age makes her a suitable confidante both for Anne and for themselves—and this perception is equally true for the audience, who enjoy Quickly’s knowing glances into the theatre, sharing a secret joke with the spectators that is ours alone. The merry wives tend to share only between themselves. Quickly’s folio malapropisms may help her camouflage her true self as needed, with only the audience to notice the charade. Mistress Quickly lets us feel that our presence brings out the best in her wit. The clown’s privilege of straddling the line between stage and audience is not simply fat Falstaff’s; the possibly slender Mistress Quickly’s direct address permits a gendered inclusivity and complicity that the others lack. But it does not have the same effect on Nan

Page, who cannot really confide in anyone; she even snaps at Fenton for suggesting elopement too soon. She wants both a husband she can manage and a father who won't disinherit her. She feels no compunctions at deceiving both Quickly and her parents about her choice of Fenton, using their Windsor Forest masque as the opportunity for her elopement.

Quickly tends to agree with Anne's wishes largely because the results add to her income. But by the end of the play Quickly still has not cast her vote for the suitor she prefers, seeing benefits to herself with either Slender, Caius, or Fenton. As always, she is the voice of practicality, even as the bustling Fairy Queen ordering her fairies to their jobs: "Some do that thing, some do this, / All do something, none amiss" (Q18, QLN 1478-79; F5.4, TLN 2531.8-31.9). This attitude to lively "doing" describes the success of Mistress Quickly, as character, charactonym, and impromptu actor. Her liveliness does what a good editor does to a text: twisting Fredson Bowers's gist, she "strip[s] the veil of print from a text" to authenticate its performance choices for the players who transmit meaning to the audience.⁴³ Her nurse-persona will keep everything—household or community—tidy, clean, and in its proper place. As Wendy Wall points out, ending *Merry Wives* with "the fairies' regard for housework" suitably culminates a play "devised by housewives" and facilitated by a housekeeper whose "castigating fairies" dispel court-centered values in favor of citizen virtues in a middle-class town life.⁴⁴ Mistress Quickly is smart, directly confronting and solving problems that face her, always active to some purpose, and always profiting from her various activities, always respected and well-liked, despite the occasional sniping from the folio. She is a good collaborator, a valued busybody, a mediator, a go-between, an observer, and a tease. In the quarto, with its tight fast-moving script, Mistress Quickly has no excess, no faults of speech, no mindless digressions. If she notes any class difference between herself and the middle-class dwellers of Windsor, she

does not acknowledge it. Her talents make her promiscuous in the best sense, her agency perhaps random or unsystematic in having no predetermined goal, but always open to possibility. Her gleeful exit from the play is perfect, offstage with her fairies, once the whirling brides disappear with suitors, leaving Falstaff, too fixed in his foolish goals, to be confronted by the Pages, the Fords, Evans, and finally the newly-wed Fentons. Quickly's exultation at her rise to complete queenly power saves her from watching the humiliation of Slender and Caius, the latter of whom is still her employer in stage-life. Comedy doesn't require that she land with a thud, jolted out of her dream role. At the end of the play, she is no longer simply a working woman, neither wife, nor widow, nor maid, hangovers from the *Henriad* now cast off. She becomes the one who lives happily ever after, married only to her fairy dream, despite the rude awakening for the suitors and the Page parents. The Fords have already had their wake-up call. Quickly's is the only power-fantasy left and in Windsor she keeps that role forever.

Afterword: “make all whole”⁴⁵

The character we know as “Mistress” or “Hostesse” Quickly appears in four of Shakespeare’s plays: *1 Henry IV*; *2 Henry IV*; *Henry V*; and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.⁴⁶ Each section of this article has addressed her role in each of these instalments, uniting the focus on what we can refer to as the “Quickly” plays (rather than the “Henriad”) in order to understand her discontinuities across Shakespeare’s output 1596-9. Despite an easy critical familiarity with “Quickly,” she is a divided character who is difficult to pin down; her reach extends our grasp. Whilst we wish to draw attention to her impact on the sense of history the Quickly plays deliver, her shifting shape from play to play and even within a play’s editions, means that we cannot point to one dominant aspect/behavior/type, as is possible with other characters from the history plays. For example, Queen Margaret is another significant woman who also appears in four of the history plays (*1-3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*), and has recently been promoted out to her own play, *Queen Margaret*, by Jeanie O’Hare (2018). O’Hare amalgamates her character from across the “Margaret” plays into one, using “original” text.⁴⁷ This would simply not be possible with Quickly, as the character that would emerge would be too changeable and elusive to bear a protagonist’s role. This article collectively argues that we need to revise our opinion of Quickly as a marginal character with infinitely cuttable lines, without homogenising the varying traits that define her.

Her appearance in the first part of *Henry IV* is ambiguous from the start. As the first section argues, she appears to be an “honest man’s wife” despite being described much more uncertainly as “neither fish nor flesh” (TLN 2135). This is only compounded by the multiple names which split her identity, as the second section argues. In the *Henry IV* plays, she is invariably “Hostess,” whereas in *Merry Wives* she is “Quickly.” Her fluid names are an index to her status as an object of male competition, as it is Falstaff, Nym,

Bardolph and Pistol who get to define and undermine her shifting nominal statuses. More significantly for these history plays which lack a female monarch, she is repeatedly positioned as a “Queen”. The second section adds to our understanding of her early reception by arguing that this royal playfulness is extended by the probable doubling of the actor who portrayed the Hostess and the French Queen in *Henry V*. The third section investigates the vast editorial differences between the quarto (1602) and folio (1623) editions of *Merry Wives*. The quarto is still the poor relation, and the dominant reception of the folio Quickly as a malapropos and fool occludes her quarto persona as a witty, persuasive matchmaker. The quarto *Merry Wives* brings out an aspect of female identity which rivals the dominance of male relations in the Quickly plays and, as the third section argues, deserves to be better heard. It provides an alternative model, based on early textual evidence, of a type of Quickly which forces revision of her extensive critical dismissal.

H. J. Oliver, for example, describes her language as “irrelevant” as the Arden editor of *Merry Wives*, and that she is an “enemy of the English language.”⁴⁸ He defines her character through her errors and certainly does not value them. Despite the fact that Quickly’s language is not always malaproping across the four plays in which she appears, she is nevertheless known primarily through association with inadvertent verbal faults.⁴⁹ For example, in *Henry V*, the Boy, Bardolph, Nym, and the Hostess discuss Falstaff’s erstwhile opinions of women:

BOY Yes, that a did, and said they were devils incarnate.

HOSTESS A could never abide carnation; ‘twas a color he never liked.
(TLN 852-5)

The Hostess mistakes “incarnate” for “carnation”, comically confusing devilish female temptation with the color of flowers. This mistake, as with many others, is a performative possibility for Quickly in that she can live in ignorance while everyone around her is

amused, or she can give a knowing look to the audience to show that this is a joke to share. The Boy does not correct her mistake, and his silence leaves a performative space for Quickly to fill by turning to the audience to offer a silent wink. Although critics have often interpreted her as the butt of the joke especially in comparison with Falstaff's infinite wit, it is possible that she draws attention to her own mistakenness, transforming the culpability for her misspeaking into knowing irony.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, at other moments Quickly does not seem to be in on the joke and, as Walter Cohen argues, her "language's sexual innuendo often escapes the speaker herself".⁵¹ In *IH4*, Falstaff says of Quickly, "a man knows not where to have her," and her response lacks some of the defensive verve she elsewhere displays: "Thou art an unjust man in saying so: thou or any man knows where to have me" (TLN 2135-7). More often than not, however, the intent of her words and her awareness of them is ambiguous. These faults may be her way of taking up the clown's position of talking both to the onstage characters and offstage audience; critics do not take up this interpretation but it is one that deserves more frequent consideration. It would open up the idea that through her, Shakespeare represents a social self – collaborative, networked, even possessed by others, not just the onstage characters who name and determine her, but also the audience who laugh at or with her, resolving her as a fool or clown. She seems unaware that her words and actions represent herself to others and instead goes with the flow of comedy. This style of performativity stands in contrast with Falstaff, who rivals her as a better-known performer.

Falstaff's performative mode is demonstrative rather than collaborative. When he addresses the audience he literally points to the thing he wishes to communicate, his "*ecce signum*," which is of course only a falsification of his wounds (*IH4*, TLN 1127). He turns to the audience frequently in soliloquy, the main purpose being self-revelation.⁵² He details what he is: "I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth" (*IH4*, TLN 759-60), or

what he conceals: “I have misused the King’s press damnably” (*IH4*, TLN 2388-9). He uses soliloquy to comment on that concealment, declaring “I am no counterfeit” whilst playing dead (*IH4*, TLN 3080-1). Quickly’s style of performance is to share something with the audience, whereas with Falstaff it is to show something, usually about himself. The way they direct comic attention is also different: Quickly is happy to be laughed at while Falstaff is only sometimes self-deprecating. Unlike Falstaff whose “Oldcastle” heritage ties him at least loosely to chronicle history, she is a figure from comedy, and exists in her separate world of redundant meanings, verbal slips, winks to the audience, and ultimately elusivity of character.

Her place is in the Eastcheap tavern, in the domestic space of “the kitchen, Or the cuberts, or the presse, or the buttery,” answering the door or running the streets of Windsor to deliver letters, with ordinary concerns of the nights drawing in and always with care for others (*Merry Wives*, Q1, TLN 1530.3-4).⁵³ She is a woman in control of her world: “Washing, brewing, baking, all goes through my hands” (*Merry Wives*, Q1, TLN 485). She is not determined in any way by the histories’ overarching ideology of military adventure and royal ascendancy which sucks in and spits out Falstaff who must eventually “fall to thy prayers” (*2H4*, TLN 3259).⁵⁴ She is shallow and changeable because she does not need to narrativise herself, to fit into the dramatization of history and is therefore able to stand outside of it. She does not assume the mode of self-revelation of Falstaff or Hal with his “I know you all” soliloquy (*IH4*, TLN 296-318); the few things she says about herself do not give certainty or depth to her character. Instead she is more able to be purely theatrical in her comedy – playing and performing for its own sake without particular need for her consistency from one play to the next. Hal, on the other hand, discusses onstage the king he must become, when he will finally “throw off” his “loose behavior” and his “reformation” will hang “glitt’ring o’er my fault” (*IH4*, TLN 309, 314).

Through Quickly, Shakespeare dramatized a different social history, of taverns, prostitutes, gossip, the folk comings and goings of daily life, brewing and serving, and making the beds. The unclarity about her home, her disputed age, name, depravity, honesty, marital status, and ambiguities of speech come from this alternative world, which is not subject to the same formal development of other historical characters. To “make all whole” as an editorial or theatrical aim is thus a complication for a character like Quickly. While other Shakespearean characters appear in multiple plays, the hostess is left with an elastic ambiguity, where her changeable speech and identity across the various plays in which she appears seriously challenges the wholeness of her character. We need a different way to conceive Quickly – as a connected, collaborative performer who invites the audience to share the joke, but perhaps to the detriment of our sense of “character”. Quickly in performance is one way of enabling her inconsistencies and ambiguities of meaning and understanding, of allowing her a fool’s relationship to the audience. Yet we are not just interested in performance consequences: these papers are about the readerly and critical consequences of insisting on one Mrs Quickly instead of the several who can emerge in performance or reading, especially when we acknowledge the variations between the in-play Quickly and the to-audience Quickly, different sides of her persona, itself distributed across four plays.

Endnotes

¹ The *ISE* aims to provide a complete set of searchable, fully-annotated and collated modern-spelling electronic editions of Shakespeare's plays, as well as facsimiles and old-spelling transcriptions of the earliest quarto and folio editions (see "About the Internet Shakespeare Editions Website," *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, University of Victoria, accessed February 14, 2018),

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Foyer/makingwaves/about2/>). Several plays have been completed and published online, including *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. *2 Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are currently in progress.

² Citations of Shakespeare refer to Charlton Hinman's Through Line Numbering (TLN) or to the analogous quarto Line Numbering (QLN) found in the *Internet Shakespeare Editions (ISE)*. Modernization is that of the *ISE* editors.

³ Ian Donaldson, "Falstaff's Buff Jerkin," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.1 (1986): 100-01.

⁴ Frances K. Barasch, "Harlequin/Harlotry in Henry IV, Part One," in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 27-37.

⁵ See Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering A Nation: a Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 173.

⁶ Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.3 (2012): 328-54, 346.

⁷ In the BBC's *An Age of Kings* (1960) Falstaff's salutation is a response to Mistress Quickly's cackling laughter.

⁸ The possibility of an obscene "quick-lay" hiding behind her name has been suggested (see Russ McDonald's *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 147, and J. Maidson Davis and A. Daniel Frankforter's *The Shakespeare*

Name Dictionary (New York: Routledge, 2004), 406); however the *OED*'s earliest example of the use of “lay” in this sense is from 1932 (LAY *n.* 7d).

⁹ Larry S. Champion, “The Evolution of Mistress Quickly,” *Papers on English Language and Literature* 1 (1965): 99–108, 105.

¹⁰ Barbara Hardy, *Dramatic Quicklyisms: Malapropic Wordplay Technique in Shakespeare’s Henriad* (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1979), 100.

¹¹ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 178.

¹² Kay Stanton, “‘Made to write “whore” upon’: Male and Female Use of the Word ‘Whore’ in Shakespeare’s Canon,” in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd ed, ed. Dymphna Callaghan (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016) 98–120, 106.

¹³ James C. Bulman, “Introduction,” *King Henry IV, Part 2*, ed. James C. Bulman (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 71.

¹⁴ See Bulman, p. 214–15, n.

¹⁵ She also accuses Pistol of basing his claim to captaincy on “tearing a poor whore’s ruff in a bawdy house” (2 *Henry IV* 2.4 TLN 1168). Kay Stanton points to this as the only instance in Shakespeare’s canon of the word “whore,” being used by a female character to describe herself (“‘Made to write “whore” upon,’” 106). I am not convinced, however, that Doll is necessarily referring to herself.

¹⁶ It is possible to read the hostess’s subsequent defence of selling a “joint of mutton or two” (2 *Henry IV* TLN 1372) in Lent as a reference to prostitution, but, again, the joke is funnier if unintended.

¹⁷ Bulman, “Introduction,” 76.

¹⁸ Hardy, *Dramatic Quicklyisms: Malapropic Wordplay Technique in Shakespeare’s Henriad*, 121.

¹⁹ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 182.

²⁰ Norman Rabkin, “Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977): 279–96.

²¹ Edward Berry, “Twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism: the histories,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 255.

²² See Lance Wilcox, “Katherine of France as Victim and Bride,” *Shakespeare Studies* 17 (1985): 61–76; Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, “History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation,” *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, ed. Alan Sinfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 109–42; and Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*.

²³ Although Mistress Quickly is arrested by the Beadle along with Doll Tearsheet in 2 *Henry IV*, her offense seems to be affray or accessory to manslaughter, not whoredom. And despite the repeated suggestion that her tavern may double as a bawdy house, the plays do not imply that she is herself a prostitute. See Wendy Wall’s defense of Quickly’s sexual morals in *Staging Domesticity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and “Neither fish nor flesh.” above. For discussions of Mistress Quickly as the Fairy Queen in *Merry Wives*, see, e.g., the introduction of T. W. Craik’s edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 37–39 and Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity*.

²⁴ Maurice Charney is not alone in seeing a queen/quean pun in Falstaff’s line, but nothing about the scene bears out the idea that such a pun, if it exists, is a believable slight on Quickly’s character (see Charney, *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2009]), 153.

²⁵ “‘Teach you our princess English?’: Equivocal Translation of the French in *Henry V*,” in *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, ed. Richard Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 147–62.

²⁶ It has sometimes been suggested that the “old Mistress Ursula” to whom Falstaff writes

and to whom he claims to have promised marriage in 2 *Henry IV* 1.2 (TLN 489) is Mistress Quickly, though the staging does not require this and it seems unlikely that he would need to send his hostess a letter to communicate with her. It is just as, if not more likely, that, as the *ISE* edition suggests, Ursula is “another woman Falstaff has been fleecing” (TLN 489n.), but if the name does reflect an original intention for Mistress Quickly, a ghost of a given name, it is even more striking that it is so easily forgotten by the men who treat her as commodity and object of competition.

²⁷ See ““A Very Frampold Life,”” below.

²⁸ Pistol’s declaration that he has and will hold the “*quondam* [i.e. former, erstwhile] Quickly” (TLN 578) compounds this, both insisting that she is no longer “Quickly” and refusing to name her anything else.

²⁹ The quarto reads “Hostes Quickly” here (QLN 251).

³⁰ I refer to the folio’s puzzling and apparently absurd formulation in the hostess’s speech on Falstaff’s death: “and a table of green fields,” which Lewis Theobald emended to “a [i.e. “he”] babbled o’ green fields.”

³¹ John Dover Wilson, ed., *Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947), 114–15.

³² All quotations come from the *ISE Merry Wives*: letters indicating the source, F for the 1623 folio and Q for the 1602 quarto, are indicated parenthetically along with Q’s scene number or F’s act/scene numbers, and accompanied by the through line numbers (TLN) or quarto line numbers (QLN) that identify the lines in the original printed texts.

³³ See Gaby, esp p. 10, commenting on the casting of *Henry IV* (dir. Dromgoole, Globe, 2012) vs *Henry V* in which Mistress Quickly seems “noticeably younger for the later play [Doran, RSC, 2014-15] and more plausibly the object of rivalry between Pistol and Nym.”

³⁴ See Helen Ostovich, “Bucking Tradition in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1602: Not a bad quarto, really,” *The Merry Wives of Windsor: New Critical Essays*, edited by Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 96-105. Later

cited as *New Critical Essays*. See also Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, “Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives,” 328-54. Both papers explore exhaustive evidence of other earlier editorial assessments.

³⁵ Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69. Indeed, the whole community joins in emasculating the demon-lover outsider, Falstaff.

³⁷ See Kolkovich, “Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives”; and Richard Dutton, *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 245-58, describing *Merry Wives* Q as the primary text to which later Jacobean F additions were made, a view I wholly support.

³⁸ Gajowski and Rackin, “Introduction: A Historical Survey” in *New Critical Essays*, 7. In Windsor, Falstaff is the victim, not the women.

³⁹ Electronic resource, hereinafter cited as *LEME* is edited by Ian Lancashire (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2018.

⁴⁰ Mistress Quickly’s mention of washing and wringing might make us question just what Doctor Caius’s yearly income amounts to, and why he might be considered a good catch for Anne. In most middle-class households, the laundry was sent out (as we see in the buckbasket scenes). See Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72-73.

⁴¹ For an excellent reading of Anne, see Rachel Prusko, ““Who hath got the right Anne?”: Gossip, resistance, and Anne Page in Shakespeare’s *Merry Wives*,” Gajowski and Rackin, *New Critical Essays*, 51-60. For Anne as the possible Fairy Queen of the first half of the final masque, see Dutton, *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist*, 256-58.

⁴² Kay Stanton would call this part of the “parallel universe” balancing sleazy Eastcheap against proper Windsor. See ““Made to write “whore” upon,” 89.

⁴³ Quoted in David Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 62.

⁴⁴ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 113-26, focusing on the folio. See Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 68–100, for her defense of the quarto as a separate and valid text.

⁴⁵ Gadshill in F1, *1 Henry IV*, TLN 708.

⁴⁶ These are eight early editions of Shakespeare's plays: the first quarto (1598) and folio (1623) of *1 Henry IV* (1598), Q (1600) and F of *2 Henry IV*; Q (1600) and F of *Henry V*; and Q (1602) and F of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

⁴⁷ Playing at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, 14 September-6 October 2018. See <<https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/whats-on-and-tickets/queen-margaret>> [date accessed 6 September 2018].

⁴⁸ Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. H. J. Oliver (London: Methuen, 1971), xxxi, lxxiv.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Kolkovich sees little value in her type of language based on the reaction of characters around her, who “express great frustration at her malapropisms and tedious speeches, and they often try to silence her or urge her to get to the point.” Kolkovich, “Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives,” 351.

⁵⁰ Ephim Fogel argues: “In every scene in which Mistress Quickly appears, her speech is liberally adorned with trite universal affirmatives and negatives, with hackneyed comparisons and hyperboles. Not for her the splendidly imaginative exaggerations of a Hal or a Falstaff.” Ephim Fogel, “‘A Table of Green Fields’: A Defense of the Folio Reading”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958): 485-492, 490.

⁵¹ Walter Cohen, “The Merry Wives of Windsor” in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1463-70, 1467.

⁵² Quickly has only two short soliloquies across all the Quickly plays. Neither reveals much of herself and are notably focused on others. In both she is concerned with the match between Anne and her suitors: ‘I will do what I can for them all three’ and conveys the

sense of her hectic business between people: ‘Well, I must of another errand to Sir John Falstaff from my two mistresses. What a beast am I to slack it!’ (*Merry Wives* TLN 1676-8). This soliloquy from the folio appears in a condensed form in the quarto TLN 1674-1675.2, while the other only appears in the folio TLN 547-50.

⁵³ As she says to John Rugby: ‘we’ll have a posset for’t soon at night, in faith, at the latter end of a sea-coal fire’ (*Merry Wives*, F TLN 406-7).

⁵⁴ Indeed, she interacts little with Hal and in turn he declares: ‘Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?’ (*IH4*, TLN 161).