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Review of Joanna Bellis, *The Hundred Years War in Literature, 1337–1600*. Cambridge: Brewer, 2016. xii + 300 pp. ISBN 9781843844280.

Stephanie Bennett

corresponding email: ll15sgb@leeds.ac.uk

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Reviews

Joanna Bellis, *The Hundred Years War in Literature, 1337–1600*. Cambridge: Brewer, 2016. xii + 300 pp. ISBN 9781843844280.

Although the Hundred Years War has been well researched by scholars over the years, representations of the war have not been extensively explored beyond 1453, the date typically thought of as the end of the war. Joanna Bellis' book is a thoroughly researched exploration of the English language and the linguistic construction of nationhood and identity in relation to the war. Tracing shifts in language from fourteenth- to seventeenth-century England, Bellis provides a novel perspective on the significance of war literature.

Bellis's study is predicated on the seismic impact on English of the Norman Conquest in 1066, which produced an English language that was (and remains) lexically mixed. Inevitably hybrid, language is not re-constructed so much as re-imagined. Tracing English anxiety amidst French strength, Bellis highlights that in both medieval and early modern literature, 'words and war developed an intense mutual identification' (p. 2).

Exploring various primary sources, including polemics, tracts, parliament rolls, letters and chronicles, Bellis attempts to challenge the reliance of previous scholarship on periodisation. Bellis emphasises instead the continuous connections between the medieval and early modern periods. She successfully manages to combine the intertextuality of two periods generally perceived as disparate. Moreover, by examining less popular works, Bellis succeeds in her aim to shed light on previously neglected texts.

The first chapter establishes the foundations of the book, plotting the overwriting of the English language through conquest. Indeed, Bellis suggests that linguistic conquest was more palpable than physical invasion. Indeed, as later asserted in chapter three, 'loanwords were spoils of war' (p. 129). This underpins the textual analysis which follows in subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, Bellis argues that the chroniclers of the Hundred Years War used language as a 'performative parallel front' (p. 77) of documenting the war. Their language was self-conscious and reflexive. Markedly permeable, the English language was fraught with too many French loanwords to attain a distinct national identity. English was deeply ambivalent and contradictory, often leaving writers 'uneasy about exactly where its boundaries lay' (p. 71).

Perhaps the most convincing chapter is chapter three, in which Bellis argues that language was constructed as a mimesis or mimicry of war. In the war poetry of Laurence Minot, John Lydgate and John Page, linguistic antagonism is an established undercurrent against both the

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French and their allies the Flemish. Bellis highlights poetry's awareness and fascination with conflict. The animosities with France were embedded in language and articulated through connections with the French, filth and deceit.

In the final two chapters, Bellis emphasises the typical Tudor self-fashioning of national as well as personal identity through the enduring influence of the Hundred Years War. The Tudor theatre became the literal stage for the 'ideological collision of past and present, mimesis and object' (p. 217). Both an over-arching and particular assessment, chapter five focuses on Shakespeare and the enduring mimesis of warfare in language. Sustained scrutiny is applied to the 1590s and Bellis highlights the how the extended conflict with France often emerged through the politicisation of literature.

Stephanie Bennett (University of Leeds)