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How Wales Was Made So Happy: Exploring Nation and Nonsense in Shakespeare's Treatment of the Welsh

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How Wales Was Made So Happy:

Exploring Nation and Nonsense in Shakespeare's

Treatment of the Welsh

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Prerequisite for Honors in
Medieval and Renaissance Studies

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Wellesley College

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Introduction

I. Shakespeare, Wales, and Nonsense

“In its theatrical element, a play reveals more of its potentiality all the time, the human implications, the emotional, physical, and intellectual possibilities which belong to its original words, the ‘meaning’ of the whole play.” – John Russell Brown

This study is an attempt on my part to explore Shakespeare’s Welsh characters and thereby to deepen our understanding of the plays in which they appear, as well to highlight opportunities and questions surrounding the contemporary performance of these plays. The fact that Shakespeare wrote more than one play including Welsh characters was in itself an exciting realization for me, who as a student-actor felt somewhat isolated while portraying a Welsh-accented character in a college production of *Henry IV Part One*—from a selfish desire to defend my part against good-natured teasing, I began to investigate the intersection between Shakespeare studies and Welsh studies, and I quickly realized that many earlier critics have taken it upon themselves to seek out each of the Welsh characters and connections in Shakespeare’s works, including possible Welsh affiliation of the playwright. Frederick Harries’ 1919 *Shakespeare and the Welsh* and W. J. Hughes’ 1924 *Wales and the Welsh in English Literature from Shakespeare to Scott* both make invaluable catalogues of the various appearances of Welsh characters in the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Harries in particular enumerates the several ways in which Shakespeare himself might have Welsh sympathies, explaining his belief in Shakespeare’s having had a Welsh grandmother on his father’s side, a Welsh colleague at the Stratford grammar school, Welsh acquaintances in the London theater world where he spread his theatrical wings, and evident knowledge of Welsh folklore and language throughout his plays. Shakespeare’s “singularly friendly attitude towards the Welsh nation” is, to Harries, demonstrated in innumerable little details throughout the Shakespearean canon, from the

choice to describe the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower as “a worthy gentleman,” (*Henry IV Part One*, 3.1.170) down to the fact that the fairy Puck resembles the *pucca* of Welsh folklore.¹

If the motivation of these early critics is more to remind readers that the Welsh are simply present in, and indeed important elements of, some of the most beloved “English” literary works, then more recent scholarship has concentrated less on defending the Welsh presence in such works and more on exploring its purposes or meanings. In addition, contemporary critics have been highly attuned to the way in which a Welsh character’s presence does not necessarily result in unambiguous support for Welsh interests. Marisa Cull, in her 2008 doctoral dissertation *Staging Cambria: Shakespeare, the Welsh, and the Early Modern English Theater, 1590-1615*, focused on the historical events and trends surrounding each of Shakespeare’s major Welsh characters, with the conclusion that Shakespeare effectively participates in an early modern English tradition of claiming the desirable elements of Welsh culture for English cultural identity, calling what they thus appropriated “British” while undermining the claims of Welsh themselves to this same culture.² Michael Faletra, in the introduction to his book *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, laments the fact that students of English literature “may encounter Welshness only in one of its more negative stereotypical manifestations,” meaning Fluellen, who he describes further as “Shakespeare’s likeable but verbose Welsh buffoon” before finally deciding that “as the most visible and memorable representation of the Welshman in canonical English literature, Fluellen is a poor delegate indeed.”³ Faletra’s book deals with English writers’ treatment of the Welsh in literary works of the long twelfth century, well before Shakespeare’s era, yet his argument deals with attempts even in that early period to “erase the

¹ Frederick Harries, *Shakespeare and the Welsh* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1919), 5. Harries’ chapter 15 deals with the folkloric basis for Puck, please see pages 195-200.

² I have found Marisa Cull’s dissertation informative and essential in the construction of my current project, and will refer primarily to it throughout; her subsequent book, *Shakespeare’s Princes of Wales* (Oxford, 2015), has been released since I began my own work and is another valuable resource, although thanks to its more refined focus on the title “prince of Wales,” I have continued to rely on the initial dissertation.

³ Michael Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

Welsh from the historical and literary record” in the service of Anglo-Norman and, later, English claims to hegemony in the British isles, a practice which resonates strongly with Cull’s position.⁴

While hardly the largest or most popular field of Shakespeare criticism, therefore, the study of Shakespeare’s Welsh elements and characters has over the past century seen mounting interest, and enough work has been published to produce two recognizable positions: Shakespeare’s characters indicate his support for and personal liking of the Welsh, versus the concern that Shakespeare’s Welsh characters actually contribute to an English agenda of identity formation at the expense of Welsh interests. Into this debate I would like to interject a third position, acknowledging that in many respects these two positions are not mutually exclusive and refocusing the debate on the flexible nature of the dramatic texts taken as our source material. Shakespeare’s plays, intended for performance, are inherently changeable. In 1977, Alan C. Dessen put forward a pair of theses he admitted were “unrevolutionary,” but which bear acknowledging as much today as they did then: first, that the critical, historical, and performance angles are all *equally* important to gaining a full understanding of an Elizabethan dramatic text, and second, that reading any such play should involve more than addressing its language.⁵ As anyone who has watched or studied or performed Shakespeare understands, staging and performance can fundamentally affect a character or play’s received meaning. Dessen gives examples of anecdotes and eye-witness accounts from the period testifying to the powerful responses Elizabethan audiences could have to theatrical performance, explaining that a distinction was already acknowledged between theatrical texts as printed literature and in performance, and quoting the Elizabethan playwright John Marston’s contention that “comedies are writ to be spoken, not read. Remember that the life of these things consists in action.”⁶ While some contemporaries of Shakespeare like Ben Jonson were concerned that the

⁴ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 3.

⁵ Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer’s Eye* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 5.

⁶ Marston quoted in Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama*, 8; Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama*, 11-12.

language of drama remain paramount and that the “lively and well-spirited action” celebrated by those like Marston and Thomas Heywood not be allowed to overwhelm or “ravish” audience members, Dessen’s message to today’s critics is that the experience of a performed play can, rather than obscure or sideline the language, actually create a powerful “unity and consistency” between the play’s elements, which would not be achieved through a simple analysis of the text.⁷ Because theater is a medium “which, in production, cannot be held still for examination,” Dessen calls criticism focusing solely on a play’s text “a distortion of the nature of drama.”⁸ Using *The Tempest* as a case study, he argues that an intelligent and well-informed performance of a play has the potential, thanks to the “resources of the theater,” to “mak[e] apparent to the eye of the viewer a relationship that otherwise would exist only abstractly.”⁹ This observation about performance making appreciable what might otherwise remain abstract can be applied most productively to my position regarding Shakespeare’s Welsh characters: while the potential for characters like Sir Hugh Evans or Fluellen to be demeaning stereotypes certainly exists and will be examined, and the critical arguments surrounding their role in English theatrical appropriation of Welsh identity and voice are crucial to understanding their impact, performance of these plays brings out much more than a negative attitude towards the Welsh. Shakespeare’s works demonstrate a paradoxical promotion and support of their Welsh characters, one which is operative during performance of these works and which the best performances acknowledge and utilize, one which does not preclude the plays from being complicit in the manipulation of Welsh voices or identities in the service of English interests.

How can this be true? How can we say that *Henry V* both demeans *and* advocates for a Welsh character, or argue that the image of Wales present in *Cymbeline* is both dangerous *and* benevolent, while still holding that these works are coherent and successful? Such contradictions,

⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Ibid., 23.

particularly when encountered during live performance, would seem to suggest weakness in the play's construction—an audience will presumably be confused, and the assumption might be that a conscientious production will choose one angle on its Welsh character and stick with it. However, to borrow an idea from Stephen Booth, it is exactly such unstated but inescapable paradox which generates fascination with these Welsh characters. Rather than a drawback, Booth argues that “nonsense” is usually a central underlying power in great pieces of literature, explaining that the experience of works with some kernel of unaddressed paradox is unusually compelling. Booth writes:

...my purpose is to suggest that nonsense is often not only a valuable ingredient but a vital ingredient in the greatest literary works, to suggest that nonsense can be the physical means by which our minds approach metaphysical experience—the experience of phenomena like the metaphysical phenomena we know exist but cannot ordinarily know except by arbitrary and diminishing metaphor.¹⁰

I will spend the following four chapters tracing instances of paradox, contradiction, and “nonsense” relating to Welsh characters or Wales in *Henry IV Part One*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V*, and *Cymbeline*, in the hopes of demonstrating that not only do performances of these plays make this nonsense apparent, they ultimately benefit from it.

Because, as Dessen and John Russell Brown remind us, dramatic texts during performance are in constant flux and “influenced by many accidental circumstances of embodiment and confrontation,” attempts to settle on a single appropriate “interpretation or mode of performance” are usually hollow.¹¹ This is especially true for Shakespeare's Welsh characters. The audience hears Fluellen giving orders to the soldiers of the English army in *Henry V* and realize that he is a figure who holds a certain amount of authority, yet if his hot temper or his accent appears to have more importance than his words, he will be more quickly written off as a caricature or buffoon than

¹⁰ Stephen Booth, *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 122.

¹¹ John Russell Brown, “The theatrical element of Shakespeare criticism,” in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan drama: selected papers from the English Institute*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 182.

thought to be a dedicated soldier. The same can be said about Owen Glendower in *Henry IV Part One*, whose single appearance in the play, in which his lines are full of claims to supernatural powers, will confirm or counteract the awed and wary comments made about him in the preceding scenes. Both of these characters are caught in plays whose treatment of them is blatantly “nonsensical”; both of them have lines or actions that seem absurd while simultaneously commanding the respect of other characters and contributing to the play’s larger action in unique ways. Performance, powerful tool that it is, can be deployed to resolve the contradictions and present a “simplified” version of Glendower or Fluellen, but a richer and more effective production will encourage its performers to follow the lines’ tendencies for absurdity just as much as for respectability, lean into the dissonance of “great Glendower” appearing to speak at length about fanciful magic (*Henry IV Part One* 1.3.103) or the comically accented Fluellen being said to have “care and valor” (*Henry V* 4.1.85).¹²

II. An Abridged History of Wales

But first, in order to understand the following discussion of Shakespeare’s Welsh characters, it is important to have a basic knowledge of the state of Anglo-Welsh relations at the time of Shakespeare’s life and work. As Michael Faletra aptly puts it, “Wales is England’s original repressed Other, the unruly subaltern that England sees in its mirror, the barbarian standing at the threshold,” and the ways that this is reflected in English literature are based in the reality of the political and historical relationship between the two countries.¹³ It is hoped that the remainder of this introduction will serve as a reference to complement the following analysis and as a primer in two crucial areas: England’s long-standing political and economic superiority over Wales, and the storied history of the title “prince of Wales.”

¹² William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. John Russell Brown (New York: Signet Classic, 1998).

¹³ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 1.

Wales' relationship with England predates the existence of either country as a defined political unit, and actually is best thought of as beginning in the network of relationships connecting the multiple minor princes ruling sometime after the 4th century CE, following the dwindling of Roman power in the island they had given the name "Britannia." Whereas the Danish invasions of the ninth century helped to weaken the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of East Anglia, Northumbria, and Mercia, and created even more scope for the ascendancy of the kingdom of Wessex—meaning that it would thereafter be able to unite the other such kingdoms into what would become England—Wales' situation was entirely different.¹⁴

The fact of the matter was that England, when it finally emerged as a political unit, was not only more populous than Wales and more agriculturally rich, but thanks to kings of Wessex like Athelstan and Alfred the Great, England already had a tradition of strong, central monarchy—all of which placed it in a position of power over Wales, even when a Welsh prince could assert control over multiple Welsh kingdoms.¹⁵ The distinctive mountainous geography of Wales was such that valleys, hills, deep rivers, and even climate conditions divided the Welsh communities from one another. On the other hand, there was no substantial physical or topographical boundary between England and Wales—in contrast to the mountain ranges and other natural barriers which segmented the Welsh population from itself—and while the eighth century earthwork known as Offa's Dyke indicated one potential dividing line, as did the estuary of the Dee river in the north and the Wye in the south-east, these boundaries were crossed and re-crossed countless times by raiders, settlers, and expansionist leaders from both sides.¹⁶

As R.R. Davies puts it, "Wales was a country without a centre," a country whose population gathered in smaller pockets between the hills and mountains or along the coast, when it gathered at

¹⁴ A.D. Carr, *Medieval Wales* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 28.

¹⁵ Michael Brown, *Disunited Kingdoms: Peoples and Politics in the British Isles 1280-1460* (New York: Pearson, 2012), 16.

¹⁶ Carr, *Medieval Wales*, 28; R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 3 and 8.

all.¹⁷ Gerald of Wales, that indispensable commentator on twelfth century Wales, makes the claim that the Welsh did not live in towns, and recently Emrys Jones has furthermore observed that not only were the largely pastoral Welsh slow to adopt towns when the Anglo-Normans began to introduce them, “in short, the indigenous economy could not maintain an urban system.”¹⁸ Thanks to economy and geography, therefore, there was never a single centralized government or political structure in medieval Wales, but rather, a patchwork of smaller territories—the primary four of which, in the tenth century, were called Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth, and Glamorgan. These Welsh kingdoms and the law under which they operated have been customarily termed “tribal,” according to historian A.D. Carr, while their long-standing practices of partible inheritance, neighborly and inter-dynastic warfare, and shifting boundaries landed Wales with a reputation for chaotic and bloody history.¹⁹ While it is true that a Welsh prince’s successor might be chosen from any member of a royal kin network within four generations of the previous leader, and that family members frequently vied with each other for land and power, Carr also asserts that this sort of dynastic rivalry should not be seen as an indicator of “inherent instability in the Welsh political culture”; these kingdoms, tiny and changeable though they were, functioned as the source of protection and site of loyalty their populations desired. The system may seem tumultuous in contrast to the strong English monarchical tradition, yet it *was* a system, and one which was an important part of the shared culture which helped these small territories identify themselves all as Welsh.²⁰

It was not unheard of, prior to the unification of England, for a Mercian king or a king of Wessex to send forces into Wales and compel submission, tribute, and homage from Welsh princes. At the same time, it seems that certain princes of south Wales actively turned to Alfred the Great of

¹⁷ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change*, 8.

¹⁸ Emrys Jones, *The Welsh in London: 1500-2000*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁹ Carr, *Medieval Wales*, 2.

²⁰ Carr, *Medieval Wales*, 28 and 30; R.R. Davies, *Conquest, coexistence, and change*, 18.

Wessex in the ninth century for protection against a fierce leader of Gwynedd in northern Wales.²¹

Once Anglo-Saxon kings had assured themselves of a Welsh leader's submission, however, they typically permitted local leaders to carry on with the direct governance of a given territory.

Suzerainty, more than direct control or territorial conquest, appears to have been the aim of most Anglo-Saxon kings in relation to Wales, and the behavior of the Welsh princes only drew attention if and when they started to threaten English interests.²² At the same time, however, R.R. Davies points out that doing homage to an Anglo-Saxon king was usually “no salvation” for a given Welsh ruler, because “ultimately it reduced him to ‘one of the greater among the other magnates of our kingdom’ and provided ample pretexts for draining his authority from him.”²³

Welsh leaders' acceptance of client status and the precedent of kings in Wessex and later England viewing Welsh princes as their “under-kings” (L. *sub-reguli*) was to have a profound impact on the future of Wales with the arrival of the Normans.²⁴ On their arrival in Britain and eager succession to the titles and privileges of the English monarchy, the Normans inherited not so much a hunger for territory to the west of the Severn, as expectations of suzerainty and homage from the Welsh princes. William of Normandy's primary goal had been to claim the throne of Edward the Confessor and the territories already under the English crown's control, not the expansion of English royal power into the rest of Britain, and it would be some years after the Battle of Hastings before the raiding activity of the Welsh princes along the border with England—and their willingness to ally with Anglo-Saxons in resisting Norman control—inspired William and his barons to turn their attention to Wales.²⁵ Indeed, apart from a “pilgrimage” to St. David's undertaken in 1081, which resulted in the construction of several Norman strongholds along the way, the “piecemeal Anglo-Norman annexation of Wales” which took place gradually over the two centuries

²¹ Carr, *Medieval Wales*, 28.

²² *Ibid.*, 29.

²³ R.R. Davies, “Introduction,” *The British Isles, 1100-1500*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), 5.

²⁴ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 25 and 27.

²⁵ Carr, *Medieval Wales*, 31; Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 27.

between 1081 and 1283 was at first largely undertaken at the initiative and expense of independent Norman lords.²⁶ Because it was typically advantageous to the English king to have the unruly Welsh at least controlled by an English magnate, William I was generally comfortable delegating the responsibility for subduing lands and unrest in Wales and then turning a blind eye to the expansionist tendencies of his nobles, and their eager development of landholdings in Wales without historical or legal claim.²⁷ The Norman barons, interested both in combating these raids and in cementing their own personal footholds in the landscape, retaliated by claiming substantial portions of Welsh territory for themselves, building castles, introducing settlers, and laying the foundations for one of the most significant institutions in English-Welsh relations, the so-called Marcher Lordships.

“The March” more broadly refers to the area where eastern Wales becomes western England, but in the political language of the eleventh practically through the sixteenth centuries, the term referred specifically to the broad swath of territory curving from Chester in the north down to Chepstow and then west all the way to Pembroke, capturing a significant portion of Wales.²⁸ Within this generous area, “Marcher” territories were ruled by functionally autonomous local barons without the oversight of either the English king or a Welsh overlord, and the distinction between them and the heartland of native Wales, termed “the Principality,” persisted well into the early modern period. Native Welsh leaders, especially the princes of Gwynedd (the north-western region which comprised the heart of the Principality), periodically launched rebellions against English lords, with figures such as Gruffudd ap Cynan and Madog ap Maredudd leaving impressive legacies of uniting the habitually disunited Welsh districts into military confederations capable of reclaiming lands for Welsh rule. Yet despite this tendency towards armed uprising, English monarchs from

²⁶ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 4.

²⁷ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Crusade*, 11-12.

²⁸ Glanmor Williams. *Renewal and reformation: Wales, 1415-1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

Henry I to Edward I were by and large willing to treat the Welsh princes in the Principality as rulers in their own right, provided they acknowledged the supremacy of the English king. Michael Brown observes of Edward I that he “exercis[ed] his authority not in terms of government but of lordship,” and points out that he treated Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, an ambitious and soon dominant Welsh leader who united an impressive amount of Wales and claimed the title “Prince of Wales” as one of his vassals, bound by personal loyalty and obligation.²⁹ The relationship between Edward I and Llywelyn was fraught, and ended with Llywelyn’s death in an armed rebellion and English control of the Principality by 1282, yet prior to the outbreak of hostilities Edward had actually recognized Llywelyn as the sole and legitimate “Prince of Wales” and, according to Brown, Llywelyn himself had “acknowledged that Edward was his lord, following his predecessors and contemporaries amongst the Welsh princes.”³⁰

But Llywelyn ap Gruffudd’s death marked a turning point in the relationship between the English king and the Prince of Wales. Rather than recognizing a native Welshman, an experienced military leader or mature member of the princely dynasty as the next Prince of Wales, Edward I chose to invest his own infant son with the title.³¹ No longer would the designation “Prince of Wales” signify a war leader recognized by his fellow Welshman for martial skill, diplomacy, patronage of poets, and generosity; thereafter, it became a title awarded by the king of England recognizing the heir apparent to the English throne, requiring little or no involvement in Wales at all. With their prince designated and controlled by the English king, the Welsh as a people were no longer self-governing. This was the political relationship which was challenged, nearly two hundred years later, by a Welsh land-owner named Owain Glyn Dŵr, who in 1400 initiated an armed rebellion against the English king Henry IV that would continue for nearly a decade.

²⁹ Brown, *Disunited Kingdoms*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Llywelyn Ap Gruffudd", accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/345256/Llywelyn-Ap-Gruffudd>.

On 16 September 1400, at the meeting of nobles and Welsh leaders where the revolt began, it was as Prince of Wales that Glyn Dŵr styled himself. Unlike Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, however, he and his supporters had no intention of paying any form of tribute to the English crown to secure this position. Glyn Dŵr had a strong claim to the national leadership of Wales thanks to his family ties; his father's family was descended from the princely house of the old Welsh kingdom of Powys, while his mother's was that of the rulers of the ancient southern kingdom of Deheubarth. These territorial distinctions had been dissolved with the Norman and later English conquests of Wales, and both Powys and Deheubarth were at this time broken up into lordships and territories. Yet Glyn Dŵr was still genealogically the first male heir to both of these royal lineages, and although his personal title was merely baron to two much smaller territories, his ancestry was known and celebrated even before the outbreak of his revolt. The Welsh bard Iolo Goch, in one of his three poems in praise of Glyn Dŵr, delineates Owain's lineage, saying "he is a prince of an old family", and naming as his forebears "swift Gruffudd Maelor," "old long-lived Madog," "Maredudd of the red spear", and "Pywer Lew, my brown lion."³² While this is all in the service of celebrating his patron Owain, who helped to provide the poet's livelihood through his patronage, Iolo's words about his family only reflect what was certainly there. Of Owain himself, Iolo says he is "a peacock", a "ruler of people, hunter with hawks, dispenser of wine," and "a lovely protective lord... whose lineage I know"; of course, "there was never a mightier baron", and significantly Iolo concludes the song with the words "his domain, he requests it...and he demands his judgment, he will be an heir."

³³ Glyn Dŵr did hold his lands directly from the king of England, an uncommon situation for a native Welsh lord in a time and area where many of the most important land holders were either English lords or the English crown itself.

³² Iolo Goch, *Iolo Goch Poems*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), 30-32.

³³ Iolo Goch, *Poems*, 30-32.

While Glyn Dŵr's parentage was his earliest credential for leadership, his personal leadership abilities and military experience was the next. After rebellion was declared on 16 September 1400, Owain spent two years at large in the mountainous terrain of central Wales while the English attempted to subdue attacks on English boroughs and the capture of certain castles by his supporters.³⁴ As the rebellion gathered momentum, Owain led the Welsh forces personally in the Battle of Bryn Glas in 1402 in a pivotal victory.³⁵ The revolt became universal in Wales in 1403, in the same year that Owain again personally led forces on a march "reminiscent of the great marches of Llywelyn the Great almost two centuries earlier."³⁶

In another invocation of the memory of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, in 1403 Glyn Dŵr made Gwynedd the de facto base for rebel operations.³⁷ Glyn Dŵr benefited from widespread support among the clergy in Wales, who were eager to further his success by assisting in the construction of a more "polished" international appearance for the rebellion.³⁸ His international image, what can be reconstructed of it from the two surviving diplomatic letters sent from his court to the king of Scotland and lords of Ireland, was cultivated, strong but politic, and above all legitimate ruler. The text of the letters as preserved by contemporary Welsh chronicler Adam of Usk is in both French and Latin, which speaks somewhat to the erudition the rebellion employed. The content of the letters draws on the foundation myths of common ancestry for Wales, Ireland, and Scotland as opposed to the invading "Saxons."³⁹ With one reference to "prophecy", Glyn Dŵr demonstrates the divine or supernatural basis for his claim to a throne of Wales in a manner similar to the divine sanction the kings of England and France claimed, while at the same time placing himself squarely in the tradition of Welsh princes prophesized to unite and save the people of Wales. Yet Glyn Dŵr

³⁴ Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, (Oxford, 1997), 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest, 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 451.

³⁹ Adam Usk, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377-1421*, ed. C. Given-Wilson (New York, 1997), 151.

never had the opportunity to govern or follow through any of the plans and ambitions for the future which he and his advisers had drafted; the tide turned against his rebellion in 1406, and despite several years of sustained guerilla warfare and raiding, Glyn Dŵr's rebellion dwindled into nonexistence by 1410.⁴⁰ Henry V, at the beginning of his reign, offered terms of peace to Glyn Dŵr and his son but these were refused—rather than surrender, Glyn Dŵr simply vanished into the Welsh hills, leaving the poets to foretell his someday return as a mythical redeemer hero of the Welsh people.⁴¹

The scorched earth tactics of Glyn Dŵr's rebellion had deeply ravaged the Welsh countryside, which had already been economically depressed and underpopulated. While the rebellion did not significantly alter the ability of the Welsh elites to participate in English trade, armies, and politics, at the same time, the serious threat this rebellion posed had inspired the English Parliament to pass a series of punitive measures against the Welsh in general.⁴² This “Lancastrian penal code,” passed in 1401-2, may in essence have been no more than statutory codification of restrictions dating from the 13th century, but the decision to formalize them in law meant a “reinforced statement...of [the Welsh] existing position of inferiority,” prompted by the English panic in the face of Glyn Dŵr's rebellion.⁴³ The measures forbade the Welsh from buying land or holding office in England or English boroughs within Wales, made it illegal for a Welshman to fortify his home, congregate with other Welshmen “in any number,” or bear arms “to places of assembly,” and ensured that an Englishman marrying a Welshwoman would forfeit his legal privileges, all of which were intentionally extreme measures whose enforcement was never intended to be universal.⁴⁴ Yet they remained on the books until well into the sixteenth century, having been

⁴⁰ Williams, *Renewal and Reformation*, 4-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Williams, *Reformation and Renewal*, 10.

confirmed in Parliament several times and left untouched even by the famously Welsh-sympathizing Henry VII, and remained available for selective, opportunistic enforcement.⁴⁵

Henry Tudor—the future Henry VII—owed a not insignificant part of his claim to the English throne to the fact that he could also claim the “powerful emotive appeal to the Welsh of his ‘British descent,’” and it was no coincidence that, when he returned to England at the head of an army in 1485 to challenge Richard III and make a bid for the English throne, he chose to land his forces in Wales, at the port of Milford Haven. Because Henry’s claim to the English throne was primarily thanks to his mother’s descent from John of Gaunt, and therefore both distant and through a woman, he benefitted from the fact that his father was the son of a former queen of England, Henry V’s widow Catherine of Valois—with the Welshman Owen Tudor. Henry fought under a banner bearing the Red Dragon of Wales at the Battle of Bosworth Field, and after defeating Richard and ascending to the throne, a contemporary Venetian observer reported that “the Welsh may be said to have recovered their former independence, the most wise and fortuitous Henry VII is a Welshman.”⁴⁶ While it is certainly true that Henry’s success as king benefited Wales, not least when in the later years of his reign he passed several “charters of privilege” exempting certain Welsh lordships from the more punitive of the Lancastrian penal measures, it is important not to exaggerate Henry’s attentions to Wales. Beyond adding the Red Dragon to his royal coat of arms and rewarding his Welsh supporters with lands and offices, Henry’s primary gift to the Welsh was the “emotional and psychological union” with England which his rule represented.⁴⁷ The Welsh bards could point to him as the return of the rightful royal family on the throne of “Britain,” tying his Welsh ancestry to the hero Cadwaladr and thence to Brutus, Troy, and the illustrious British rulers of the ancient world. His reign also saw an influx of Welsh migrants in London, arriving on

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11, 13, and 242.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Williams, *Reformation and Renewal*, 237.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Reformation and Renewal*, 241.

the heels of his coronation and forming the basis for a population who would continue to live and thrive there throughout the next five hundred years.

It was Henry VIII, in the midst of his break from the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Church of England, who oversaw legislation to formally incorporate Wales as a part of England. The Acts of 1536 and 1543 did away with the profoundly medieval structures of Marcher lordships and Principality, imposed one uniform system of law and justice across Wales and England, changed the administrative landscape of Wales by replacing the existing political regions of *cymydan* and *cantref* with shires in the English style, finally delineated a boundary between Wales and England (although one which did not obey either linguistic or “ethnic” boundaries, Glanmor Williams observes), and while requiring that “no one using the Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner office...unless he or they use the English speech or language,” at the same time meant that each of the king’s Welsh subjects “should henceforth enjoy the same freedoms and laws as his subjects in England.”⁴⁸

This, then, was the legal relationship between Wales and England operative in 1564, when William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon: the Welsh, after having been ruled by England’s king and Parliament since 1284 and influenced by English hegemony since the eleventh century and before, had finally been fully “incorporated, united, and annexed” to England.⁴⁹ The border may have been confirmed on paper, but as far as government was considered, the two countries had been fused into a single unit. The business of determining what this political unification would mean culturally and socially, and in particular how men of arts and letters would address the question of Welsh and English and, possibly, “British” identities, was still to come. Shakespeare was only one of the many voices participating in this conversation, but participate he did— in multiple plays and various genres, and especially in his histories.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 268.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Chapter One

“In faith, he is a worthy gentleman”:
Owain Glendower and the Welsh in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV Part One*

The first of Shakespeare’s plays to include a named Welsh character is *Henry IV Part One*, a dramatization of this early fifteenth-century king’s reign which includes details of the ongoing Glyn Dŵr Rebellion. This revolt lasted throughout the duration of Henry IV’s reign, beginning in 1400 when he had been king for only a year and lasting in one form or another until roughly 1410, only three years before his death. Owain Glyn Dŵr, descended from two different princely Welsh families and an experienced military leader in his own right, made for a serious threat to Henry’s control of Wales, especially considering that Henry soon had to contend with rebellion among his own English nobles and their decision to ally with Glyn Dŵr. Shakespeare includes references to “Owen Glendower” (the Anglicization of Glyn Dŵr’s name) throughout *I Henry IV*, and the rebel himself appears on stage for a single scene in Act Three—a brief appearance which nevertheless constitutes an important moment for understanding Shakespeare’s treatment of the Welsh. Stephen Booth’s position that nonsense is an integral part of great literature is well supported by this play, which begins with an understanding that three of its four main characters are named Henry and continues to be illogical from there.¹ To tackle the question of the larger use of nonsense in *I Henry IV* would be a project in itself; here I wish to focus more narrowly, in keeping with this thesis’ theme, on the nonsense, paradoxes and contradictions associated with the play’s Welsh elements.

Arthur Hughes observed in 1918 that Shakespeare’s “treatment of the character of Glendower in the First Part of King Henry IV shows a remarkable inconsistency,” and while he suggests that this inconsistency shows an adjustment in Shakespeare’s conception of the character over the course of writing the play, this explanation does not satisfactorily address the larger impact

¹ Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, 11.

of the Welsh in the play.² I will argue that, in fact, the Welsh presence in *I Henry IV* is inherently nonsensical (thanks in no small part to the treatment of Glendower's daughter Lady Mortimer in addition to Glendower himself) and that this is precisely the reason these Welsh elements are exciting and important to the play's story.

There had been "meagre and inaccurate references to the Welsh in *Richard II*," Hughes explained, by which he means a "Welsh Captain" who informs Salisbury of the departure of the Welsh forces and the disturbing signs and portents he has noted which "forerun the death or fall of kings" (*Richard II* 2.4.15).³ While already presenting a connection between the Welsh and the interpretation of prophecy and omens which Shakespeare would build on in *I Henry IV*, this Captain's appearance is too brief to contribute much to our impression of the Welsh in Shakespeare. It is therefore in *I Henry IV*, probably first performed in 1596, that Shakespeare first presents a fully realized a Welsh character—two, in fact, thanks to the addition of Glendower's daughter Lady Mortimer.

The play opens in the midst of Glendower's rebellion, with messages from Wales brought to King Henry "loaden with [the] heavy news" that the Welsh remain undefeated (1.1.37).⁴ Arthur Hughes notes that Glendower was a necessary figure in any story of the reign of King Henry IV: "the personality of the Welshman hung like a thundercloud over the whole reign of Henry Bolingbroke."⁵ Glendower's constant background presence is indicated in *I Henry IV* by the number of times his name is mentioned without his appearing on stage; in the opening of 1.1, news of the

² Arthur Hughes, "Shakespeare and His Welsh Characters," *Shakespeare Association Papers 1917-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 6.

³ William Shakespeare, *The life and death of Richard II*, in "The complete works of William Shakespeare," <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/richardii/full.html>. Accessed 1 Dec 2014.; Hughes, "Shakespeare and His Welsh Characters," 7.

⁴ All quotations to *Henry IV Part One*, which will be cited parenthetically from here, are taken from the 2005 edition of the Folger Shakespeare Library's *The History of Henry IV, Part 1*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine.

⁵ Hughes, "Shakespeare and His Welsh Characters," 9-10.

crushing defeat of Edmund Mortimer and the men of Herefordshire at the hands of “the irregular and wild Glendower” (1.1.40) is brought to the king, news so important that the king decides it must “brake [sic] off our business to the Holy Land,” that is, push back his long-awaited crusade yet again (1.1.48). To heighten the impact of the news, Westmoreland alludes to the horrific manner in which the English corpses were treated after the battle by the Welsh women and camp followers, going into no detail but explaining that there was “such misuse/ such beastly shameless transformation/ by those Welsh women done as may not be/ without much shame retold or spoken of,” (1.1.44-46). Westmoreland’s exact words, “*those* Welsh women,” create a subtle hint of confusion and contradiction even here in the first mention of the Welsh. Because there is no earlier mention of the Welsh women and therefore no clear antecedent for the determiner “those,” it is not immediately clear whether Westmoreland is referring to female camp followers of the Welsh army, calling the Welsh forces which Glendower had led in battle women—perhaps to belittle them— or suggesting that the Welsh army had been female. The reference is so brief that a modern audience member unfamiliar with the story of the Battle of Bryn Glas and the desecration performed by Welsh women on the English dead there is likely to miss it, but the subtle uncertainty it creates is an example of things to come. When Lady Mortimer, a living and breathing Welsh woman, appears on stage in 3.1 and directly contravenes this brutal image of Welsh women through her musical and romantic behavior, she creates a sort of unvoiced paradox, one of the numerous pieces of nonsense which mark the treatment of the Welsh in this play.

Beyond these mentions of Glendower in the play’s opening scene, subsequent references to the Welsh rebel reinforce an image of him as mighty, wild and to be feared; he becomes “that great magician, damned Glendower” (1.3.85), “great Glendower” (1.3.103), and “he of Wales that gave Amamon the bastinado, and made Lucifer cuckold, and swore the devil his liegeman upon the cross of a Welsh hook” (2.4.348-51). He is mentioned as one of the Prince Hal’s most dangerous enemies

when Falstaff says, “could the world pick thee out three such enemies again as that fiend Douglas, that spirit Percy, and that devil Glendower?” (2.4.379-81). When he finally appears he has been so anticipated that, if the actors and production have done their jobs, the audience will be in some suspense to see who this character actually is. Up until this point Glendower’s presentation has been mysterious, he has been called a devil and a magician and a threat, and these references have been remarkably consistent. The paradoxical—that is to say, nonsensical in our Booth-ian understanding of the word— nature of his character is only revealed when he appears onstage in 3.1.

Megan Lloyd calls the domestic scene staged in 3.1 “a cultured locale” and “a true sanctuary from the battle that surrounds the rest of the play,” descriptions which helps to emphasize the contrast between this scene’s rich figurative language, music, and intimate relationships, and the earlier images of a devilish Glendower and the even more violent women of Wales.⁶ Joan Rees writes that, while no location is specified for this scene, it is frequently understood to be set in Bangor, Wales, where historically the rebel leaders had agreed upon a proposed tripartite division of England.⁷ However, regardless of where the scene may have been originally intended to take place, thanks to the focus on song, figurative or skillful language, and family, it automatically feels like a small pocket of Wales. The Welsh landscape is conjured up on the Globe’s stage simply by the presence of a “community” of Welsh-speakers (although here a community of two members only). While Shakespeare in his subsequent treatment of the Welsh would write characters that are Welsh immigrants to England, or residents of Wales who are themselves only arguably Welsh, it is here alone that he presents a portrait of a Welshman on his home turf. Wales is a country whose very idea of nation is founded on shared community, here demonstrated as a community of language speakers, so to have this moment of Welsh language at an emotional highpoint of the show is to

⁶ Megan Lloyd, *‘Speak it in Welsh’: Wales and the Welsh Language in Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 14.

⁷ Joan Rees, "Shakespeare's Welshmen," in *Literature and Nationalism* (1991), 24.

create a piece of the Welsh-nation right there on the Globe stage. In the Welsh language in the sixteenth century, the word for one's fellow Welshmen, *Cymry*, was the same as that for the territory of Wales, suggesting perhaps that where one is seen, the other is also operative.⁸ Going a step further, for the purposes of *I Henry IV* Glendower and his daughter *are* the Welsh nation, for those twenty minutes they are on stage, and they bring with them all the language and song and mysticism and bellicosity and focus on birth that Shakespeare's London would have seen as defining Welshisms.

As the scene opens and Glendower makes his first appearance, all seems in keeping with the impression of him as a "magician" and "devil." By his second utterance, he is already explaining the king's fear of him with reference to the meteorological events surrounding his birth:

At my nativity
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets, and at my birth
The frame and huge foundation of the earth
Shaked like a coward (3.1.13-17).

Hotspur's response is skeptical, suddenly making Glendower's assertion of his destiny an argument when he refutes Glendower by saying "And I say the earth was not of my mind/ If you suppose as fearing you it shook," makes this a chance to defend his own courage (3.1.23-4). The argument escalates, with Glendower repeating his tale of omens and self-importance in the face of Hotspur's repeated dismissals, and they clash a second time when examining the proposed divisions of land each of the three will receive in the event of a victory over the king. Both times, it is Glendower who chooses to change the subject or avert further discord, leaving Hotspur to be chided by the others for his willfulness and "defect of manners" (3.1.190).

Glendower is presented in this scene as a force to be reckoned with, judging from both his own announcement that there are few men he allows to contradict him (3.1.37-8) and Mortimer's

⁸ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 19.

assertion to Hotspur that “man is not alive/ might so have tempted him...without the taste of danger and reproof” (3.1.177-180), yet it is also this scene which creates the contradictions I have chosen to identify as nonsense. He is shown to be educated in English law and language, and a lover of music, saying of himself both that he was “trained up in the English court” and that he “framed to the harp/ many an English ditty lovely well/ and gave the tongue a helpful ornament” (3.1.127-130). The historical Glyn Dŵr was indeed educated in the Inns of Court in London, the kingdom’s center for law scholarship and training and a form of finishing school for the sons of the nobility which, while promising to train its students in the law, also taught them courtly manners and behavior.⁹ A signal of his elevated character lies in the very style in which his lines are printed—although not a native English speaker Glendower’s English lines do not have a scripted accent, because of his status as a “gentleman in [his] own country.”¹⁰ The effects of scripted Welsh accents will be explored in Chapters Two and Three, but it bears mentioning here that both of Shakespeare’s other explicitly Welsh characters are shown to pronounce certain words or consonant sounds in ways that are clearly intended to be funny markers of non-English identity. The respectable, even genteel aspects of Glendower’s personality are confirmed by Mortimer’s lines to Hotspur, when Glendower has left the room, when Mortimer asserts of his father-in-law that “he is a worthy gentleman/ exceedingly well read and profited/ in strange concealments, valiant as a lion/ and wondrous affable, and as bountiful/ as mines of India” (3.1.170-4).

Crucially, this scene shows Glendower as a father and country gentleman much more than it showcases his identity as military rebel leader, and in fact he comes across as somewhat doting, a father who takes the time to translate his daughter’s words to her husband and is concerned at her distress. He escorts Lady Mortimer on-stage to say goodbye to her husband, and even though the

⁹ Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 43.

¹⁰ J.O. Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin and Sawney: Being an Historical Study of the Earliest Irish, Welsh and Scottish Characters in English Plays* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1954), 5.

expressed intent is to have a speedy farewell with a minimum of tears shed, by continuing to translate her words and by taking seriously her desire to sing her husband a song, Glendower assists his daughter and functionally controls the remainder of the scene's action. Megan Lloyd is quick to note that Lady Mortimer's experience of having to speak through a translator is similar to that experienced by Welsh-speakers in the Tudor courts of law of both England and Wales, where English was the language of the proceedings and where translators were often guilty of misrepresenting or imposing their own interests on the words of those for whom they spoke.¹¹ Yet Glendower communicates his daughter's wish to sing for her husband and continues to advocate for her both by translating and by ordering a musical accompaniment when she expresses a desire to sing. The text itself supports a view of him as both a fearsome enemy, and a patient and sympathetic parent—two ideas not necessarily mutually exclusive, but which in performance begin to generate dissonance.

Glendower's assertions that he can "call spirits from the vasty deep," that his birth was heralded by heavenly omens and that he could teach Hotspur "to command the devil" are received by Hotspur as utter nonsense (3.1.55-59), and certainly may seem comical when taken without the layers of rumor and reputation which had surrounded Glendower both inside and outside the world of the play. Shakespeare is true to his source material, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in recording the supernatural rumors of Glendower's character, and although Glendower's claims may seem far-fetched they are, at least, syntactically intelligible.¹² The lengthy exchange of claims and rebuttals between Glendower and Hotspur is frequently read as undercutting Glendower, presenting him as an exaggerated version of himself fit for mockery, yet Joan Rees points out that actually,

¹¹ Lloyd, "Speak it in Welsh," 25-27.

¹² Hughes, "Shakespeare and his Welsh Characters," 8.

“Glendower’s essential dignity is not undermined by the juxtaposition with Hotspur, for, though Hotspur may score some palpable hits, his own weaknesses are at the same time exposed.”¹³

Rees also introduces the idea that Glendower’s grandiose language may be a sign of *hwyl*, “that exalted rhetorical pitch commanded by fervent Welsh speakers at the height of enthusiasm, and if the actor could achieve this effect it would give extra resonance to Glendower’s claims to prophetic power.”¹⁴ A more thorough investigation of *hwyl* produces the following explanation, which a nineteenth century commentator in an American Welsh-interest newspaper *The Cambrian*, described thus:

Hwyl is a kind of atmospheric disturbance caused by windmills. It is mere rhetorical enthusiasm. It is a nautical metaphor. “Hwyl” is a “sail;” and when the Welsh say that a man is in a good “hwyl”, they mean that he is moving along or enjoying himself immensely, navigating gloriously on a sea of good feeling. When a man enters into a discussion of a subject enthusiastically, he is said to be “sailing” into it, which is exactly the Welsh idea of “hwyl.”¹⁵

While none of the productions viewed during the investigation for this chapter included a Glendower becoming too carried away, the fifteen lines in which he repeats his declaration of his own remarkable birth and goes on to dare anyone to produce a man as capable in “the tedious ways of art” and “deep experiments” certainly lend themselves to a sense of *hwyl*. To a Welsh listener, this would not detract from Glendower’s status, but to Shakespeare’s London audience or today’s viewers, such a digression into the mysteries of his birth potentially comes across as ridiculous. Hotspur certainly thinks so, expressing as much to Mortimer and Worcester when Glendower has left the scene momentarily: “O, he is as tedious/ as a tired horse, a railing wife,/ worse than a smoky house,” Hotspur complains, describing how Glendower had the night before spent “at least nine hours/ in reckoning up the several devils’ names/ that were his lackeys. I cried “Hum” and “Well, go to,”/ but marked him not a word” (3.1.160-166). The contrast between the esteem which King

¹³ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29

¹⁵ “Welsh News and Notes,” *The Cambrian*, September 1897, 432.

Henry has held Glendower's reputation in earlier scenes and Hotspur's frustration at a smug or tedious reality certainly contributes to the embedded nonsense in Glendower's characterization. Mortimer's reply is to contradict Hotspur by describing Glendower in an entirely different way, calling him a "worthy gentleman,/ exceedingly well read and profited/ in strange concealments, valiant as a lion,/and wondrous affable, and as bounteous/ as mines of India" (3.1.170-174), which only strengthens the nonsense.

David Baker notes, too, that Shakespeare's audiences would have been far less likely to dismiss claims of communication with demons, saying "they could not have been sure that there was nothing in the shadows towards which Glendower points," meaning that belief in the devil's involvement in the world was still widespread; he notes at the same time that James I's 1597 work *Daemonologie* would include the sentiment "Doubtleslie tho denyth the power of the Devill, would likewise denie the power of God."¹⁶ Baker also views Glendower's construction as predominantly designed to be humorously absurd, writing that "The playwright wants his late-sixteenth century audience to laugh (as we do) at a threat their ancestors had taken very seriously indeed."¹⁷ Glendower's own reputation would have commanded a certain amount of respect among London residents, considering the lingering memories of his destructive and long-lived rebellion, meaning that even Shakespeare's conception of him had the potential to be taken seriously.¹⁸

In addition to the impossibility of his claims to predestined greatness and supernatural powers, a certain amount of the absurdity in Glendower's lines arises because of their seeming out of place in the current situation. The image he invokes of pastoral activity around the time of his birth, "the goats ran from the mountains/ and the herds were strangely clamorous to the frighted fields," may be easy enough to envision, but what is less clear is why it should be worth mentioning

¹⁶ David Baker, "Glyn Dwr, Glendouer, Glendourdy and Glendower," in Maley and Schwyzer, *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

at this moment of the play (3.1.41). For the purposes of the character, the motivation is to brag to Hotspur and elevate himself, but perhaps a stronger recommendation for including these lines here is the effect they have: these flowing and messy images create what Booth calls a “music of ideas,” similar to the banter of the tavern scenes and more important for its auditory properties than its content, a music which “makes us superior to the limitations of syntax and logic” and helps to generate “nonsense.”¹⁹

When taken with his reputation from the first half of the play, Glendower’s more outrageous or implausible lines form an unstated but detectable contradiction, of the sort which Booth describes thus: “Whereas a pun or a paradox is just a pun or a paradox, the raw materials for a pun or a paradox are exciting to a mind that feels them and their energy, feels them and their energy raw, not diminished by having been fashioned into toys.”²⁰ The image generated of a feared and respected rebel leader as long-winded braggart or a delusional believer in magic feels inconsistent and plays into the overarching theme of the Welsh as impenetrable and difficult to pin down. Calling some of Glendower’s lines nonsensical is in no way meant to suggest they are unimportant or not to be taken seriously. Stephen Booth contends that we hear these things not making sense, and that our minds find this *exciting*.

Lady Mortimer herself is a purveyor of nonsense in the original sense of the word, because of the unintelligibility of her lines to an audience of English-speakers. She is a monoglot Welsh speaker for whom Shakespeare never scripted lines, whose behavior onstage is reduced to stage directions such as the repeated note “The Lady speaks in Welsh” (3.1.205-218) or the direction “Here the Lady sings a Welsh song” (3.1.252-3). The status of these Welsh language passages has been the subject of much discussion among the scholars of Shakespeare’s Welsh characters, and it is widely agreed that they would have been said in actual Welsh. This would have required the actor

¹⁹ Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, 121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

playing Glendower and the boy playing Lady Mortimer to both be Welsh-speaking, because of the likelihood that the Globe's audience would have contained enough Welsh-speakers to recognize if they were truly nonsense.²¹ Unfortunately, there exists no documentation for what these Welsh passages said for any performance prior to the 20th century, when the Royal Shakespeare Company documented the lines used in their 1964 production and began to treat these as a fixed text.²² The question of how much Welsh the audience was likely to understand is also disputed: certain scholars have suggested that, with a Welsh population of about 5% of the overall London population in 1582, it was likely for even a non-Welsh-speaking Londoner to understand a smattering of Welsh, much as one today might understand a smattering of Spanish in an American city.²³ Barbara Hodgdon, however, repeats the notion that the Welsh language speeches would have been entirely cryptic to the Globe's expected audience, comparing their effect instead to that of passages of a Native American language on the modern American stage.²⁴

Whether or not the audience itself has an inkling of what she is saying, Lady Mortimer is unintelligible to each of the other characters on stage with her, apart from her father. As awkward as this obviously could make her marriage to the monoglot English-speaker Mortimer, Megan Lloyd explains that such a marriage would not have been uncommon in the early fifteenth century. It was common for the sons of Welsh noble families to be educated in English manners and language, while it was more likely for daughters to remain solely Welsh-speaking, but these daughters were also frequently married to Englishmen in the interests of augmenting their family's estates or social standing.²⁵ However, in such cases, it was more common for the wife to then learn her husband's language, a practice which Mortimer overturns when he promises his wife, "I will never be a truant,

²¹ Hughes, "Shakespeare and his Welsh characters," 19.

²² The text of the Welsh passages as has been in use by the Royal Shakespeare Company may be found in Barbara Hodgdon's *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth: Texts and Contexts* (Boston: Bedford, 1997), 272.

²³ Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 11.

²⁴ Hodgdon, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, 272.

²⁵ Lloyd, "Speak it in Welsh", 23.

love,/ till I have learned thy language” (3.1.213-14). The historical motives behind Mortimer’s marriage to Glendower’s daughter may have had more to do with cementing the alliance the two men had made against King Henry, but Shakespeare has seized the opportunity to introduce a romance into the play by making the Mortimers passionately in love, kissing when they cannot speak.

In fact, eighteenth and nineteenth century performances tended to cut Lady Mortimer’s song entirely, objecting to how unnecessary or nonsensical these non-English passages seem. Megan Lloyd explains that an 1896 commentator named William Archer was disparaging of attempts to “produce the play in ‘its integrity,’” with the full Welsh song and accompanying dialogue, arguing that “the theatre was no place for either ‘the archaeology of humor’ or the Elizabethan enthusiasm for Welsh gibberish.”²⁶ So the only play Shakespeare wrote to include the Welsh language lost the majority of it. Archer’s objection is a testament to the impatience with which Welsh “nonsense” has been approached over the performance history of *I Henry IV*, but while it confirms Lady Mortimer’s lines as nonsense, it is a wholesale misunderstanding of the impact even this type of nonsense can have. It is a different form of nonsense from that which Booth lauds, but the mental stimulation it brings about in the audience is just as potent.

The confusing and contradictory nature of the Welsh presence in this play makes *I Henry IV* a fundamental example of the importance of performance/directorial choices on the message of a play. To quote David Baker:

Shakespeare was not alone in fashioning Owen Glendower...he collaborated on this with a company of merchant thespians...Glendower, as he emerged in performance, would have been assembled from the script Shakespeare provided, stage conventions and impromptu contributions from the actors involved. ‘Shakespeare’ is used here as a literary term of art, a short-hand for this shared enterprise.²⁷

²⁶ Quoted in Megan Lloyd, “*Speak it in Welsh*,” 21.

²⁷ Baker, *Glyn Dwr, Glendower, Glendourdy and Glendower*, in footnote 13, 46.

Such a careful consideration of the involvement of performance in the creation of a character is due to all discussions of dramatic characters, but most especially in Shakespeare. Whether discussing historical or contemporary performances, it is important to note that Shakespeare's texts leave sometimes a considerable amount of leeway in how lines will be said, a given character's mood, or what action will accompany which lines, all of which can have a profound impact on the atmosphere and message of a play. It is the job of every actor, director, and company undertaking a certain play to choose how to handle this leeway. Finding compelling or unique methods of performing a given play is both their responsibility and their privilege.

One fundamental way in which performance can affect the meaning of theatrical works is the cutting or editing of the play's text itself, as is demonstrated by comparing the filmed versions of *I Henry IV* to which I have had access during this project. Richard Eyre's screenplay for *I Henry IV* as part of *The Hollow Crown* removed references to Glendower in both 1.3 and 3.2, situations in which Glendower's reputation is confirmed for the audience through allusions by members of the English court, including King Henry himself, to "that devil Glendower," "he of Wales that gave Amamon the bastinado and made Lucifer cuckold..." (2.4.348). Removing these lines in the context of this production's focus on Prince Hal makes sense, streamlining the action of the play, yet such absences automatically undercut Glendower's character. When he finally appears on screen for 3.1, despite the opulent, fur-collared robe and forceful gaze—Robert Pugh as Glendower chooses to forgo extravagant posturing in favor of an intent and forceful realism—Glendower has not been mentioned more than once, meaning that his behavior in 3.1 is moderately noteworthy at best. Because this Glendower is neither over-the-top absurd, nor preceded by the build-up of a frightening reputation, there is little to no "nonsense" generated around him, and the audience is free to find him uninteresting. Indeed, the focus of 3.1 in this particular production is quite clearly on Hotspur and his relationship with Lady Percy.

Another effect of the cuts made to the script for *The Hollow Crown's* production of *I Henry IV* is to remove earlier references to the Welsh landscape: no more does Hotspur refer to the “gentle Severn’s sedgy bank,” the “swift Severn’s flood,” and the accompanying “trembling reeds” and “hollow bank” during his argument with King Henry (1.3.100-109). In productions which retain these lines, for example the 2010 production at Shakespeare’s Globe directed by Dominic Dromgoole, each time the landscape is invoked, another degree is added to the play’s construction of Wales and the Welsh nation. While *The Hollow Crown* may have elected to remove the linguistic means of constructing the Welsh landscape, because it is a filmed undertaking it can supply something of a similar flavor through the use of visuals: in 3.1, as Lady Mortimer sings her Welsh song, the camera leaves the action within the chamber and shifts to the image of the castle’s nighttime exterior. The now non-diegetic song continues during this image of the castle, tying the physical features of the Welsh landscape to the experience of the Welsh language and the community demonstrated in 3.1.

Having Lady Mortimer’s song accompanied by visible musicians on the stage undercuts Glendower’s statement that the supernatural musicians who will accompany his daughter’s song “hang in the air a thousand leagues from hence” (3.1. 232). When the music begins, Hotspur responds with the line “Now I perceive the Devil understands Welsh” (3.1.238), a line which lends support to the idea that some sort of devilry is causing the music rather than visible human musicians. Hughes writes of the music in this scene that “this is not magic, but the old device of distant music made to approach by slowly opening the door of the adjoining room where the musicians are. An Elizabethan audience would not think this magic, for the suggestion of magic, when recognized as a stage device, melts away.”²⁸ Yet whether or not the audience is in doubt as to where the music is coming from, the characters onstage respond to the device of this stage magic as

²⁸ Hughes, “Shakespeare and his Welsh characters,” 29.

though it is magic, and this lends a level of support to the earlier claims about Glendower's magical ability. This question of magical music poses an issue for productions of the play, especially those such as *The Hollow Crown* which are performed not in the theater setting. Richard Eyre and *The Hollow Crown* handled the question of music in this scene by introducing musicians in a minstrel gallery, who appear more or less out of nowhere when Glendower gestures impressively up to the gallery. Michael Bogdanov's staging for the English Shakespeare Company went one step further towards clarifying that the music is the work of humans, by placing a musician on stage with Lady Mortimer, as well as equipping her with a harp on which to accompany herself. Gregory Doran's production for the Royal Shakespeare Company made a similar choice two decades later, but interestingly, in 2010 Dominic Dromgoole and his team at Shakespeare's Globe chose to again use music with no immediately apparent source, relying on the minstrel gallery above the Globe's stage but drawing no attention to whether there were in fact musicians there. In this production, Hotspur's face when the music begins to play is momentarily stunned, in keeping with his lines expressing surprise that the Devil not only understands Welsh but, "By 'r Lady, he is a good musician" (3.1.240). Asking an audience to believe that a viable military leader can also summon supernatural music out of thin air is something of a stretch, but this is what Shakespeare asks—and the nonsense thus created enriches the entire play.

The entire relationship between Mortimer and Lady Mortimer is even more susceptible to change depending on the production. Although Lady Mortimer is customarily presented as impassioned, the degree of her distress can walk a fine line between making her sympathetic, and frightening an audience with an unintelligible or seemingly hysterical display. Because her language will be indecipherable in any case, the degree to which she is emotionally relatable even in her incomprehensibility is of critical importance. From a delicate and melancholy pleading in *The Hollow Crown*, to full-voiced and energetic declarations of passion in the Globe's *I Henry IV*, to a level of

passionate energy which visibly stuns Mortimer and an impassioned face which borders almost on wrathful in Michael Bogdanov's 1986 production of *I Henry IV* for the English Shakespeare Company, Lady Mortimer's behavior onstage is completely open to the actress and director's discretion. Bogdanov even makes the fascinating choice to augment her unscripted lines at the end of the scene, meaning that it is Lady Mortimer who has the last onstage lines in this version of 3.1, while for *The Hollow Crown* Richard Eyre decided to include Lady Mortimer speaking even before the text calls for her to begin.

Glendower's behavior towards his daughter significantly changes how his character will be perceived. If he doesn't really react to her, or holds himself apart from the emotion of this scene as he appears to in the 2014 Royal Shakespeare Company production (directed by Gregory Doran), he ultimately looks less sympathetic. Joshua Richards played an unruffled, detached Glendower, whose physical stature and stillness did offer a contrast to the explosive Hotspur, yet this version of Glendower explored none of the potential energy in his lines. His ability to call spirits was mentioned in an indeed spiritless way, and he appeared to rely on his physical stature to convey any sense of the character's power-- with the result that the production's Hotspur ran rough-shod over him throughout the scene. In contrast, Sean Kearns' equally tall and broad-shouldered Glendower in the 2010 Globe production makes excellent use of his stature to counter Hotspur. Glendower's merry affability begins to sharpen into anger as Hotspur disregards his claims to call spirits and his assertion that he could teach a man to command the Devil, and he seems fully angry by the time he is describing his legitimate military successes against King Henry: "Thrice hath Henry Bolingbroke made head/ against my power; thrice from the banks of Wye/ and sandy-bottomed Severn have I sent him/ bootless home and weather-beaten back" (3.1.67-70). Rather than continue to escalate the conflict, however, after Hotspur's flippant remark quibbling on the phrase "boot-less," this Glendower puts an end to the entire confrontation by wrapping his arms around Sam Crane's

Hotspur and lifting him bodily from the ground in a massive bear hug, chuckling at Hotspur's impotent rage before setting him down and changing the subject. The action is that of an indulgent and much more powerful figure towards a feisty but lesser one, and does a good deal for achieving the balance of personalities required for the success of this scene.

But Glendower does not reappear after his moment onstage in 3.1, seeming to abandon his co-rebels by failing to assemble his powers in time to engage in the final battle at Shrewsbury. Because the play does not include Glendower's own words to explain his absence, we're reliant on other characters, who might be presenting biased perspectives. The Archbishop of York explains that Glendower "comes not in, o'erruled by prophecies" (4.4.18), but it's the action in 3.1 that helps guide the audience to understanding why he does it; possible explanations, that he is so dangerously under the influence of false omens as to be persuaded not to follow through on his promises, or that Hotspur has offended him sufficiently to cause his absence, take their basis in choices made in 3.1.

The importance of staging Glendower, Lady Mortimer, and the entirety of 3.1 in a way that is sensitive to its nonsense is even higher because of this scene's function as a presentation of the Welsh nation. To speak of performing the Welsh nation, or indeed of the Welsh as a "nation" in either the fifteenth century of the play's setting or in the Elizabethan period of its composition, is to run the risk of introducing an anachronistic and inappropriate concept. Regarding Shakespeare's own use of the word "nation" with reference to the minority cultural and ethnic groups in *Henry V*, J.O. Bartley explains that while "nation at this time often meant 'clan', 'family' or 'group,'" when the Irishman Macmorris asks sharply "What ish my nation?" in *Henry V*, it is clear that the group in question is "the Irish as a whole."²⁹ For the English and the Welsh, of course, an understanding of their distinct and differing national identities was still emerging even at the time of Shakespeare's writing; while it was apparent that there was a cultural, linguistic, and historical distinction between

²⁹ Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin and Sawney*, 17.

the Welsh and the English, as has been discussed, there had been political interdependence and a shared belief in common mythic roots for so long that both “nations” were still closely involved with the other. R.R. Davies has written that the ancient inhabitants of Wales and northern Britain, by at least the seventh century, after the withdrawal of Roman power and during the years of Saxon incursion, began “to describe themselves as Cymry, people of the same region or *bro*.”³⁰ Interestingly, not only did this term have a geographical basis, it was used to refer to the land itself as well as to the people, in an equivalence of territory and inhabitants which feels very much like incipient nation-hood. When claiming that *I Henry IV* gives a staging of the Welsh nation, therefore, I am looking at the fact that it contains a scene with Welsh characters, thought to be set in Wales, in which these characters communicate in their native language—itsself called Cymraeg, a term derived from Cymry. Informing this idea is the fact that, as Jodi Mikalachki writes, the very word “nation” had its roots in the Latin term *natio*, which she explains as having been used in medieval Europe as “a group designation for foreigners” from the same place of origin, who found themselves studying at universities away from their native land, such as Paris.³¹ This medieval *natio* ceased to exist when members of the group returned home from their academic time abroad—it only consisted in the experience of being outside the home culture. Therefore, a scene like 3.1, containing the language and customs of one culture but performed in the capital city of another, may be said to contain a theatrical form of such a *natio*, recognizable precisely because of its appearance in London, away from home.

The Welsh elements in this play are onstage for but a single scene, so even though they are referred to throughout the action, a performance really only has this one chance to *represent* the Welsh, meaning that what it chooses to do with 3.1 will define the Welsh for a particular audience. Is

³⁰ Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 19.

³¹ Jodi Mikalachki, *The Legacy of Boadicea: Gender and Nation in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1998), 5.

this production going to showcase Shakespeare's supposed fondness for the Welsh, with a proud and respected Welsh leader waxing poetic about his destiny and a fair Welsh maiden charming everyone who hears her? Is this production going to show how Shakespeare is contributing to the subtle undercutting of the Welsh, by making Hotspur's barbs the more important aspects of the scene? Or will the production find a way to toe the delicate line between the two extremes, and allow the textual paradoxes to exist and contribute to the scene? We can argue about what Shakespeare intended or what the effect of this scene in Shakespeare's London would have been, but the bigger picture now demands us to think about this scene in today's world. This play is still being performed, and because casual anti-Welsh sentiment or Welsh erasure is still a factor in contemporary Britain, to the point that Anglo-Welsh Shakespeare critic Emrys Jones relates the case of an unidentified book's index which included an entry reading "for *Welsh*, see *English*," its Welsh characters in particular should not be performed cavalierly or without thought as to their potential impact.³² The nonsensical elements in Shakespeare's portrayal of his Welsh characters here are not inconsistencies to be smoothed out and ignored, they are opportunities. As will be discussed in the following chapters, "nonsense" in portrayals of the Welsh not only accurately reflects the early modern English treatment of the Welsh more widely, it also makes for more interesting Welsh characters and more powerful performances in Shakespeare's plays.

³² Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 1.

Chapter Two

“Shall I lose my parson? My priest? My Sir Hugh?”:
Welsh Identity and English Community in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

EVANS ... And there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it. There is Anne Page, which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity—
SLENDER Mistress Anne Page? She has brown hair, and speaks small like a woman?
EVANS It is that fery person for all the ‘orld, as just as you will desire. And seven hundred pounds of moneys, and gold, and silver, is her grandsire upon his death’s-bed—Got deliver to a joyful resurrections!—give, when she is able to overtake seventeen years old. It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1.1.38-52)¹

This passage, which appears in the very first scene of Shakespeare’s lesser known comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, gives a brief but enlightening example of the nonsense embedded in the construction of our next Welsh character. Sir Hugh Evans, parson of the little English town of Windsor, is himself Welsh, endowed with an accent we are told Elizabethan audiences would have found “outrageously risible,” yet despite functioning as an undeniable stereotype in many ways is responsible for important developments in the play’s action and commands respect among the play’s characters.² It is this suggestion by Sir Hugh that a marriage between Abraham Slender and Anne Page be pursued which initiates one of the two major plotlines in the play, and he remains a contributing presence for the entire play. While the existing scholarship about Sir Hugh has been willing to accept his scripted accent and verbal peculiarities as indicators that his role in the play is one of two-dimensional ethnic stereotype, for example Joan Rees arguing that “the script provides ample opportunity for comic business and beyond that there is little that can be said about Evans...

¹ All quotes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which will hereafter be made parenthetically, taken from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. T.W. Craik. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

² Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 2.

in fact, the most interesting thing about him is that he is not Irish or Scots,” this chapter will examine his very real contributions to the play, and the way the paradoxical opposition of worthy and laughable in his character results in productive “nonsense.”³

Henry IV Part One, for all its scenes reminiscent of city comedy, is located squarely in the genre of Shakespeare’s history plays, but *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, despite the several characters it shares with *Henry IV Part One*, makes no pretensions to historicity. *Merry Wives* is explicitly a comedy, a romp dealing with Elizabethan small-town life set in a community some twenty-five miles outside of London populated with familiar fixtures of such a small town community—the host of the town inn, two prosperous townsmen and their wives and children, a visiting Justice of the Peace and his young well-to-do cousin, a doctor, and a priest. The fact that these last two are both written with distinctive foreign accents provides interesting comic possibilities, yet the appearance of international voices in the little town is not in itself implausible, given Windsor’s status: as the home of one of the oldest and most recognizable castles of the English monarchy, the town was familiar with cosmopolitan court visitors.⁴ Yet interestingly, the Welsh parson and schoolmaster, Sir Hugh Evans, is not a foreign visitor, instead presented as a mainstay of the community. Sir Hugh cuts a memorably comic role in the play, thanks to both his Welsh accent and the embroiling of his respectable personage in some absurd situations, yet here I will argue that a closer look at Sir Hugh reveals him to be a fundamental driver behind the play’s plot. He is someone whose decisions further the action on several occasions and whose position in his community is respected, meaning that there is the same paradoxical opposition of worthy and laughable in his characterization that there was with Glendower.

The “bad” First Quarto of *Merry Wives* was printed in 1602 and was probably a “reported text,” transcribed from memory after a live production, while a much longer and more authoritative

³ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 37.

⁴ William Green, *Shakespeare’s Merry Wives of Windsor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 7.

version was included in 1623's First Folio in a form taken from a transcript by Shakespeare's King's Men's professional scribe, Ralph Crane.⁵ The issue of textual history and authorial intent becomes particularly relevant when discussing Sir Hugh Evans' role in this play, because the character is written in the play text as speaking with a distinctive accent, one which the 20th century Welsh scholar Frederick Harries has observed is characterized by mispronunciations or word substitutions which make sense for a Welshman. Harries writes,

That Shakespeare was familiar with the Welsh pronunciation of English words is indicated by the consistent way in which Sir Hugh Evans and Fluellan drop their initial w's. W in Welsh is pronounced 'oo'...and even to this day unpolished Welshman would pronounce woman as 'ooman' and world as 'orld'...Sir Hugh Evans tells his fairies to 'pinse' Falstaff because, as a Welshman, he has no diagraph to help him over the stile to the English 'sh'; while the absence of a 'v' in the Welsh alphabet is responsible for Sir Hugh's use of 'f' in 'fery well.'⁶

A similar explanation can be advanced for why Sir Hugh says things like "petter" and "prain" for the words "better" and "brain"—the initial letter of words in Welsh can undergo a variety of mutations depending on the word's context, meaning that a word which normally begins with "p" is in some cases spelled with a "b"; the same relationship connects "t" and "d," perhaps explaining why Sir Hugh tends to say "goot" and "Got" for good and God.⁷ It is unlikely that Sir Hugh is meant to be *following* these rules, since to do so correctly he would be mutating words that begin with "p", not substituting erroneous "p" sounds in place of "b," but the fact that these two letters are connected in his accent would seem to suggest that Shakespeare may have known of the relationships between particular letters in Welsh, potentially through overhearing Welsh-accented Londoners or Stratford residents. The other possibility, that it was not Shakespeare's craft which supplies most of Sir Hugh's accent but the work of whoever transcribed the plays during performance and wrote too literally the accent of a Welsh actor, is a striking concept, but because of

⁵ T.W. Craik, *Introduction to The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Oxford World Classics edition, reprinted 2008, 48.

⁶ Harries, *Shakespeare and the Welsh*, 23-4.

⁷ Julie Brake and Christine Jones, *Welsh* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational, 2003), xvi.

the amount of humor which is dependent on Sir Hugh (and later Fluellen) mispronouncing English words in a particular way would seem to argue that Shakespeare was deliberate—and therefore quite observant—in his presentation of the Welsh accent. Considering the extent to which Shakespeare’s plays have been considered as collaborations between playwright and actors, of course, there does exist the possibility that Shakespeare included the input of a Welsh acquaintance while drafting Sir Hugh’s accent and its resulting humor.⁸

By Shakespeare’s day there had been a Welsh population in London for at least a hundred years, and there had been ongoing trade, travel, and migration between the two countries for much longer. After the centuries of interplay between Wales and England described in the Introduction, it is easy enough to understand the ways in which London, to the Welsh, was just as much the capital and metropolis as it was to country-folk across England.⁹ Concrete numbers about England’s Welsh population are difficult to come by, however, as Welsh migrants throughout the English countryside seemed, according to Emrys Jones, “in almost every respect...no different from those who came from other parts of the United Kingdom.”¹⁰ Migrants from the countryside, be it Wales or Scotland or England itself, traveled to London with exactly the same interest in seeking employment and pursuing the economic advantages of city life. Jones adds that “invisibility is...a major asset for any migrant group wishing to live in peace,” and for the period between Henry VII’s ascension to the English throne and Shakespeare’s career, the Welsh remain an essentially invisible migrant population in London, whose numbers we can guess at only through examining names in parish registries. Yet we can demonstrate that they were there, in increasing numbers after Henry VII’s ascension in 1485, and there is every indication that Shakespeare had contact with some of them. Frederick Harries explains the numerous ways Shakespeare may have had acquaintances with Welsh

⁸ For more on Shakespearean works as collaborations, please see Tiffany Stern’s *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page*, Accents on Shakespeare. Routledge: New York, 2005.

⁹ Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

people, pointing to the presence of the names Ap Roberts, Ap Rice, Ap Edwards, and even a Howel ap Howell in the town records for Stratford circa 1564.¹¹ Certainly upon arriving in London, Shakespeare would have been exposed to a vibrant Welsh population, “the first ethnic minority in the city” and one of the most tolerated because of their innocuous similarity to the English.¹² By having the same skin color and religion as the English, lacking any special monetary privilege, and not tending to settle in exclusively Welsh neighborhoods, the Welsh “seemed no different from those who came from other parts of the United Kingdom,” according to Emrys Jones.¹³ Furthermore, W.P. Griffiths has stated that the predominant occupation for Elizabethan Welsh Londoners was the priesthood, thereby solidifying our understanding of what exactly may have motivated the choice of Sir Hugh’s background and occupation.¹⁴ Shakespeare’s choice to include a Welsh parson in a play about a life in an English village is therefore entirely in keeping with both the small-town society he had known growing up and the larger city in which this play would have been performed.

The first direct reference to Sir Hugh’s Welsh identity comes from one of Falstaff’s followers, Pistol, himself something of an outsider in the Windsor area, who takes poorly to Sir Hugh’s judgment of him as a false pick-purse: “Ha, thou mountain-foreigner!” Pistol retorts, a comment which completely erases however long and however diligently Sir Hugh has worked to feel at home in Windsor by reducing him immediately to both a “foreigner” and a distinctly provincial, mountain-bound Welsh provincial at that. Pistol’s role in *Merry Wives* is brief and disreputable—he remains in the show long enough to inform Master Ford of Falstaff’s affection for his wife, and to spend some time hounding Falstaff for money; his final contribution to the show is to refer to Mistress Quickly as a “punk”, prostitute, and claim he will board her like a prize ship (2.2.120-22).

¹¹ Harries, *Shakespeare and the Welsh*, 14.

¹² Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴W.P. Griffiths, “Tudor prelude” in *The Welsh in London 1500-2000*, 13 and 18.

The next character to express a similar culturally-based stereotype about Sir Hugh is Master Ford, when he addresses the audience in his jealous soliloquy at the end of 2.2: “I would rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aquavite bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding,” Ford thunders, “than my wife with herself” (2.2.265-8). Since the audience knows that his jealousy is misplaced and that his wife is throughout the play faithful, the absolute disavowal of trust in her here appears as the product of a flawed understanding, a bitter and angry and desperate outburst—to have a series of ethnic stereotypes voiced by someone with these qualities discredits them. Such discredit is solidified by the fact that the rest of the disparaging remarks made towards Sir Hugh come from Falstaff during the moment of his final, ultimate disgrace in the face of Mistresses Page and Ford’s plotting. After he has dressed up as a mythological character, complete with antlers, been chased, pinched, and burned by what he believes to be fairies, and then informed that the entire scene is nothing but the product of the two women he has been pursuing working together to humiliate him instead of having any intention of gratifying his attentions, Falstaff is left with very little to say, and what he comes up with is riddled with seeming indignation at the affront of having been humiliated by a Welshman. “Am I ridden with a Welsh goat too?” he asks, followed closely by “Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English?” (5.5. 134-5 and 140-1). In having been brought low, Falstaff appears to lash out at the first easy target for his wit, and he continues to do so as the humiliation continues; Mistress Page, her husband, and Ford all take a go at Falstaff, and it is not until Evans joins in that Falstaff interrupts with the declaration, “You have the start of me. I am dejected,” an admission which he accompanies with another dig at Sir Hugh: “I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel. Ignorance itself is a plummet o’er me” (5.5.155-7).¹⁵ The focus of the scene shifts thereafter away from Falstaff and onto the resolution of the Anne Page marriage competition, leaving no further

¹⁵ T.W. Craik explains “flannel” here to be a “coarse woollen cloth with a nap on it, which Falstaff contemptuously associates with rustic Welshman,” note on line 5.5.138.

material relating to Sir Hugh nor any further lines for the Welsh parson. But the impression remains that Falstaff's jabs are those of a defeated man and lack any credibility they could have had in a different context. Megan Lloyd has argued that Sir Hugh "fails to defend himself and his heritage" against such variety of anti-Welsh sentiment, speculating that even if he had been on stage for Ford's comments in 2.2 he would have remained silent, in the interests of continuing to "present himself as a naturalized Englishman"—yet as has been shown, the situation of each of the characters denigrating Welshness does more to undercut their words and defend Sir Hugh than not.¹⁶

However, that is not to say that Sir Hugh is not also there in the interests of furthering the play's comedy. He is an undeniably funny character, prone to exasperatedly correcting other characters' grammar in little asides shared with the audience, endearing in his agitation while waiting to fight a duel, and of course, endowed with little verbal tics and accented words which sound quite humorous to English speakers. When describing a potential bride to young Master Slender, Sir Hugh identifies her as "Anne Page, which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity" (1.1.40-42), a clear if somewhat grammatically unusual means of identifying a person. Likewise, while it does not obscure his meaning, Sir Hugh tends to use the plural form of nouns—"It is spoke as a Christians ought to speak," he says happily upon hearing Master Page's earnest wish to reconcile his feuding neighbors (1.1.84). Sir Hugh's accent, finally, is always a source of great amusement, at least to the other characters—Falstaff makes a quip in response to Sir Hugh's pronunciation of "words" as "worts" in 1.1, taking "wort" in the vegetable sense and responding "Good worts? Good cabbage" (1.1.104). In a later scene, the fact that Sir Hugh pronounces Latin with his Welsh inflections gives Mistress Quickly considerable delight as she listens to him quizzing a schoolboy; presumably an audience with any sort of familiarity with Latin or with the educational style there

¹⁶ Lloyd, "*Speak it in Welsh*," 79-80.

depicted would also have found this amusing-- particularly when his lack of a “v” sound causes this polite clergyman to pronounce the grammatical term “vocative” as “focative” (4.1.43).

Even with all of these comic characteristics, however, Sir Hugh is an important member of Windsor society and an important contributor to the development of the play; he is also visibly respected by the other characters, a respect which is mirrored in the structure of the play itself. The first words spoken on stage are “Sir Hugh,” by Justice Shallow as he, his cousin Slender, and Sir Hugh enter to begin the action (1.1.1). In both 3.1 and 3.3, Sir Hugh has the last word in the scene, and he is moreover responsible for several plot developments, to wit: introducing the idea of marrying Anne Page to Master Slender, furthering the scheme by sending a letter to Mistress Quickly in an attempt to secure her assistance, and finally allying himself with Dr. Caius to play a retaliatory joke on the Host of the Garter Inn. Sir Hugh is demonstrably involved with the community, taking an interest in his neighbors’ endeavors and generating ideas to try and assist them; equally apparent is their familiarity and comfort with him. When explaining why he intervened in the duel, the Host of the Garter makes clear how valued Sir Hugh is in the community: “shall I lose my parson? My priest? My Sir Hugh?” he asks indignantly (3.1.90), implying that the services Sir Hugh provides to the community of Windsor—teaching “the proverbs and the no-verbs,” perhaps a quibble on Church teachings about forbidden behavior (3.1.91-2)—are simply too valuable to hazard in a duel. Sir Hugh is by his occupation a necessity, but even more than that, he appears to be a trusted part of the Windsor community. He describes himself as one of the three “umpires” in the dispute between Falstaff and Justice Shallow, functioning along with Master Page and the Host of the Garter as a concerned but objective party to try and arbitrate the dispute; if the play had intended to lampoon Sir Hugh entirely, such a self-designation may have been cause for disagreement or derision, but Master Page chimes in immediately in agreement, saying “We three to hear it and make an end between them” (1.1.120). Upon receiving the letter from Sir Hugh asking

for her help in arranging a marriage between Anne Page and Slender, Mistress Quickly not only promises to do what she can to assist the priest, she hopes that by explaining to her enraged employer Dr. Caius that the discovered messenger “came of an errand...from Parson Hugh,” the outrage of finding a concealed young man in the closet will be forgiven (1.4.67). When Master Ford races back to his house in the hopes of catching his wife committing adultery, he asks a group of neighbors to accompany him as witnesses, and who should be invited to come but Dr. Caius, his close friend Master Page, and Sir Hugh. These are the men Ford considers credible witnesses, or perhaps those he wishes most to amuse with the “cheer” and “sport” of finding such a “monster” as Falstaff cuckolding him (3.2.67-8). If Sir Hugh is to be interpreted as a uncomplicated clown, none of these examples of neighborly interest and deference belongs in the play—since they are evident, and rely on his having qualities of character that would earn such treatment from his neighbors, readings of Sir Hugh that argue that “because he is purely comic he is less entertaining” than Shakespeare’s other Welsh characters, or conclude that “there is no question of his possessing qualities which we delight to recognize beneath all the foolery,” are no longer sufficient.¹⁷

One of the most powerful arguments against dismissing Sir Hugh as “purely comic” is to consider him in performance. The only filmed production of *Merry Wives* to which I have had access during the course of this thesis was that presented by Shakespeare’s Globe in 2010, directed by Christopher Luscombe, making it impossible to present a satisfactory analysis of different productions’ choices surrounding Sir Hugh, yet the Globe’s production is nonetheless noteworthy for the success it had in presenting a Sir Hugh whose humor and comic potential coexisted with an air of gravity and a degree of capability worthy of respect. His clownish potential was immediately complicated by the costuming choice to present him in the sober black robe and cap befitting his role as parson, and even though his accent remains a source of humor and lines remain full of little

¹⁷ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 36.

absurdities: “I do despise a liar as I do despise one that is false, or as I despise one that is not true” (1.1.62-4)). This production does edit Sir Hugh’s part, however, removing lines or shortening speeches to remove moments in which he takes a comment too literally or misunderstands another character’s meaning—for example, in an earlier conversation with Slender and Shallow in 1.1, Sir Hugh is momentarily a step or two behind and mistakes the heraldic term “luces” for “louses,” that is, lice, then conflates “marrying” and “marring,” and takes the heraldic term “quartering” a coat of arms for the literal division of a coat (that is, article of clothing)—lines which are all absent from the Globe’s production (1.1.14-26).

Linguistic peculiarities and irregular English abound in this play, marking not just Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh’s speech, but that of Mistress Quickly and Master Slender as well. Mistress Quickly assures Falstaff that Mistress Page is “as fartuous a civil modest wife...as any is in Windsor” (2.2.88), and explains Master Page’s supposed fondness for a certain of Falstaff’s pages by saying “Her husband has a marvellous infection to the little page” (2.2.102); Slender expresses his willingness to marry Anne Page despite feeling no great love for her by saying “But if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance,” and continuing “I hope upon familiarity will grow more contempt” (1.1.211-215). Sir Hugh, schoolmaster and pedant that he is, cannot resist noting to the audience that Slender has misspoken when the young man declares that he is “dissolved and dissolutely” to marry Anne: “The fall is in the ‘ord ‘dissolutely,’” Sir Hugh points out, “the ‘ort is, according to our meaning, ‘resolutely,’” yet because he understands Slender’s sentiment—“his meaning is good”—this linguistic slippage is excusable (1.1.216-19). Joan Rees comments that “in this Babel, Evans is but one voice among many and hardly more absurd than others. He does little for Welsh national pride but French and English men fare no better.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 36.

Almost as common as peculiar speech are references to foreigners or other nationalities: characters drop references to Ethiopians, Cathaians (Cathayans, i.e. the Chinese), a “Flemish drunkard,” a Castilian, and a Hector of Greece, lending quite the cosmopolitan flavor to this small town comedy. The setting of Windsor itself is of course less provincial than the average small town, given its association with the royal court, “that unseen body which hovers, as does Windsor Castle itself, on the edge of the play, never seen but obliquely present” to quote Barbara Traister’s essay on Dr. Caius.¹⁹ In 4.3, the report that a (fictional) German duke will be at court tomorrow and his men request horses from the Host of the Garter Inn causes surprise only in that his arrival has not been more publicly known; “what duke should that be comes so secretly? I hear not of him in the court,” the Host says, but once he’s been assured that the prospective horse renters speak English, he is open to the idea of providing horses (4.3.4-7). Foreignness in itself is hardly “foreign” to Windsor and its people, and degree to which something foreign is noteworthy is connected to how well it can function in the town’s English-speaking society.

The importance placed on English and the ability to translate something unintelligible into English or to speak English properly is also a running theme: Falstaff assures his comrades Nim and Pistol that he has “Englished rightly” Mistress Ford’s glances and behaviors to mean that she is attracted to him in 1.3 (although Pistol observes to the audience that “He hath studied her will, and translated her will, out of honesty, into English,” leading to humorous skepticism about Falstaff’s idea of English, 1.3.42-3), while Mistress Quickly and the Host both make remarks about Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh’s tendencies to show less than appropriate care for English when angry: Quickly predicts an “old abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English,” should Dr. Caius discover an unwelcome messenger in his home (1.4.4-5), and as the Host intervenes between Caius and Sir Hugh at the duel, he declares, “Let them keep their limbs whole and hack our English” (3.1.70-1).

¹⁹ Barbara Traister, “A French physician in an English community,” in *The Merry Wives of Windsor: new critical essays*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin (London: Routledge, 2015), 124.

When Sir Hugh corrects Slender or Bardolph's linguistic oddities, we can therefore understand it as an ingrained response on his part, born of being by profession a schoolmaster and by constant neighborly chiding acutely aware of being as accurate as he can be.

Sir Hugh's own linguistic slips are in no way suggestive either of a deficiency in his intelligence or a lack of education. The Latin he uses to quiz the schoolboy in 4.1 is sound, and his command of English, while an object of humor, is never so poor that he cannot be understood by his neighbors—the visiting Master Slender shows some doubt as to what Sir Hugh may be asking of him in 1.1.184-5, but this is as much to do with Slender as it is with Sir Hugh. The priest's presence in England may well have been as a result of his education: universities such as Oxford or Cambridge had been attracting students from throughout the British Isles since the twelfth century, also the Inns of Court, and W.P. Griffiths does say “There had been some significant Welsh migration before the accession of the Tudors,” citing various London parishes whose leading residents in the late 14th and early 15th centuries had distinctly Welsh names like Carmardyn or Thomas.²⁰ The sole Oxford college established during Elizabeth I's reign was founded with the express wish to aid in “the maintenance of certain scholars of Wales to be trained up in good letters,”—this was Jesus College, founded in 1571.²¹ Considering the clerical and theological focus that these universities had well into the Renaissance, a young Welshman interested in joining the Church could easily find himself studying in England and ending up as the parish priest for a community such as Windsor—W.P. Griffith's account of the Welsh presence in Tudor London observes that at the same time, there was a “broader shift [of Welsh population] to the south-east of England.”²² J.O. Bartley mentions the presence in London of a “Welsh ‘colony,’” and explains that as cattle drovers and carriers who were frequently traveling between London and Wales, they would

²⁰ Griffith, “Tudor Prelude”, 17.

²¹ E. G. Hardy, *Jesus College* (London: F. E. Robinson & Co., 1899), 6.

²² Griffith, “Tudor Prelude,” 13.

have been familiar to eye and ear, “both exotic and familiar...need[ing] no explaining to the audience, but...offered novelty all the same.”²³ More to the point, with places as provincial as Shakespeare’s own Stratford-upon-Avon having Welsh presences, documented in the years around Shakespeare’s childhood, the play’s vision of its small town would have been an inaccurate portrayal of Windsor village life with exclusively English residents.²⁴

For both academics and politicians, the concept of “diaspora” is currently one of great value and fascination. Taking care not to employ it simply because of its recent vogue, it seems to me that the concept is productive and worthwhile in discussing the experience of the Welsh since the fifteenth century, and certainly the Welsh experience represented by Shakespeare’s Sir Hugh. Definitions of “diaspora” are manifold, with different specific parameters typically revised by each scholar choosing to investigate the term, but there is a general division existing between those who would use it to describe “any phenomenon of dispersion from a place...an ethnic, national, or religious community in one or more countries,” and those who feel that this broad application of “diaspora” dilutes its meaning.²⁵ The decision to term the migration of a certain people as a diaspora can be based, depending on who is deciding, on percentage of the population leaving the place of origin, the degree to which the choice to migrate is voluntary, or the degree to which an international community of migrants is able to form. Regardless of which metric is used, it is difficult to determine how the Welsh might compare. There has been no single incident to provoke a mass migration from Wales, yet the ongoing small-scale drain of population from Wales to England in search of education, social advancement, or especially career and economic opportunities, has had perhaps a comparable effect. With enclaves of Welsh migrants in America

²³ Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin, and Sawney*, 48 and 50.

²⁴ Harries, *Shakespeare and the Welsh*, 14-17.

²⁵ Stephane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 2. Please also see pages 21-25 for the differences between open, categorical, and oxymoronic definitions of diaspora.

and Argentina, and all the indications of a London Welsh population going back to Henry VII's time and earlier, it seems possible to say that a Welsh diaspora exists in the modern world.

In the context of Shakespeare's work and *Merry Wives* in particular, an awareness of Sir Hugh as a member of the Welsh diaspora and a familiarity with the current schools of thought on diaspora lead us to focus on the relationship between him, fellow Welsh emigrants and emigrant communities, and Wales itself. His experience does not fall neatly into any of the four "modes" of diaspora proposed by Stephane Dufoix—there is no emigrant collectivity for Sir Hugh to connect with based on common origin, although such did exist in London in the Elizabethan period. Dufoix's four "ideal types" of diaspora are based on three factors: an emigrant community's relationship to the existing regime in their place of origin, the emigrant community's idea of having a common origin going beyond the geopolitical, and the relationships between individual migrants and any sort of larger migrant community.²⁶ Asking these questions is at once revealing: at no place in *Merry Wives* does Sir Hugh refer to family living back in Wales, mention missing Wales or any sort of memory of it, or interact with anyone else with a Welsh background. The importance of his membership in the Windsor community is thrown into sharp relief as a result, alongside his tendency to correct others' English as much as his own is corrected and apparent need to display for the audience his command of English. To borrow the postmodern concept of diaspora put forth by Stuart Hall in 1990 and his emphasis on "a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*," Sir Hugh's diasporic identity is clearly a hybrid of Anglo and Welsh, whether we choose to read him as an Welshman Anglicized even prior to his migration by England's cultural dominance, a Welsh immigrant whose identity has become a hybrid from attempting to incorporate himself into his adopted home, or as a second generation Anglo-Welshman whose home has always been in the Windsor area.

²⁶ Dufoix, *Diasporas*, 64.

Most importantly, Sir Hugh is the face Shakespeare gives to the Welsh diaspora in England. He stands as representative for a class of people residing in England at the time Shakespeare composed this work, Welsh immigrants and their descendants whose English neighbors were still learning to accept them as both foreigners and fellow countrymen after the Tudor Acts of Union. Isolated though he may occasionally seem among his “English” neighbors, Sir Hugh would have been their equal as a citizen and a queen’s subject under the law of Elizabeth’s time. Fittingly, those characters who insist on treating him as an outsider or a foreigner, and ignore his membership in the English Windsor social fabric are almost universally shown to be in the wrong. Far from accepting the suggestion made by Joan Rees that “he exists primarily, and indeed solely, to add his quota to the medley of mis-speaking and has not sufficient character to resist being used for a sketch wholly unrelated to the play” (alluding to a humorous episode in 4.1 in which schoolmaster Sir Hugh quizzes a young boy in Latin and further exhibits his Welsh accent), I have chosen to emphasize the structural importance Sir Hugh has to the plot of *Merry Wives*— and to argue that, when his claims to comedy about his claims to plot importance, there occurs the kind of productive nonsense Stephen Booth claims to benefit great works of literature.²⁷ As a member of the Welsh diaspora in England and a frequently marginalized voice, it is crucial to contemporary performances of *Merry Wives* to explore the opportunities in the script for Sir Hugh to be a rich and fully realized character, and this nonsense helps to generate complexity in his character, in addition to greater energy in the play.

²⁷ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 36-7.

Chapter Three

“For I am Welsh, you know”: Welsh Identity in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*

Following closely on the heels of *Merry Wives of Windsor* and located in a more recognizable version of the historical time period *Merry Wives* occupied, Shakespeare delivers *Henry V*, the final installment in what we consider his second tetralogy and at first glance a celebration of English national identity at the early stages of its construction. It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, that the English army led by King Henry on his military campaigns in France is shown to have several explicitly *non*-English characters, with a scene early on in the campaign introducing not only a Welsh captain named Fluellen, but an Irishman named Macmorris and a Scotsman named Jamy. For all that King Henry’s most famous speeches are laden with lines like “On, on you noble English!” and exhortations to “you, good yeomen,/ whose limbs were made in England,” (3.1.17 and 25-6),¹ the army as it appears to the audience is visibly more diverse. Philip Schwyzer has concluded: “Whether one reads the play as underwriting England’s imperial domination of the British isles, or as signaling a retreat from such dreams of expansion, as marking a transitional moment between English and British identities, or as undermining all claims to a unified identity, it is no longer possible to read the nation in *Henry V* as purely and unproblematically English.”² The different readings of national identity permitted by the text of *Henry V* are, as Schwyzer describes, frequently contradictory, particularly when dealing with Englishness and Welshness. In this chapter, I will examine more closely the areas of “nonsense” as I see them, arguing that we as readers, performers, and audiences of *Henry V* benefit from acknowledging that Fluellen can be ridiculous and clownish, *and* a source of valid critique or subversion within the play’s framework, both an example of Shakespeare’s having manipulated a Welsh voice and a crucial opportunity to

¹ All quotations from *Henry V*, which will hereafter be made parenthetically, are taken from *Henry V*, edited by John Russell Brown (New York: Signet Classic, 1998).

² Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 128.

sympathetically present such a Welsh voice on the English stage. This chapter will culminate in a discussion of how, given that modern performance has an ethical responsibility to portray Fluellen in a way that does not rely solely on the humor of an ethnic stereotype, the text of *Henry V* supports a surprising degree of advocacy for Fluellen and by extension, the Welsh.

Compared to Macmorris and Jamy, Fluellen has received the most critical attention and is also far and away the most thoroughly discussed of Shakespeare's Welsh characters, with good reason—he has more lines and is more visible throughout his play's on-stage action than either Glendower and Lady Mortimer or Sir Hugh. Also unlike them, his Welsh identity becomes an important element in several scenes, including a memorable exchange with King Henry after the Battle of Agincourt in the emotional aftermath of the play's climax. Yet there is no consensus among critics as to Shakespeare's attitude toward or intentions for the Welsh captain: he has been variously read as destabilizing the ideas of Englishness otherwise fundamental to the play's development, or as Andrew Murphy explains, read as an attempt by Shakespeare at “producing alien, or subversive, voices and forces within the text in order, ultimately, to contain and negate them.”³ Joan Rees calls him the play's “principal comic character, a warm ebullient figure of fun,” and indeed, he is regularly classed with Sir Hugh as examples of humorously intended ethnic stereotypes, for example when Philip Edwards calls Shakespeare's treatment of these minority figures “condescending” and calls their comic powers designed to demonstrate an “invincible” English superiority.⁴ While none of these readings is strictly inaccurate, a solid understanding of Fluellen must take them all into account. Fluellen occupies a paradoxical, contradictory position within *Henry*

³ Christopher Ivic, “Bastard Normans, Norman Bastards?: Anomalous Identities in *The Life of Henry Fifth*.” In Maley and Schwyzer, *Shakespeare and Wales*, 84; Andrew Murphy's summary of the “new Historicist” position espoused by Stephen Greenblatt found in Andrew Murphy, “‘Tish ill done’: Henry the Fifth and the Politics of Editing,” in *Shakespeare and Ireland*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Way, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 215.

⁴ Rees, “Shakespeare's Welshmen,” 30, and Philip Edwards quoted in Murphy, “‘Tish ill done,’” 214.

✓ which is similar to, and even more striking than, those I have already proposed for Glendower and Sir Hugh Evans.

There is tension and dissonance generated by Fluellen's Welsh presence in the "English" army, by the fact that the English King Henry calls himself Welsh at least twice, and by the fact that we are invited to laugh at Fluellen's accent and linguistic peculiarities while at the same time believing King Henry's opinion that "though it appear a little out of fashion,/ there is much care and valor in this Welshman" (4.1.84-5). Such contradiction or dissonance between what we the audience hear at one moment and what we hear the next becomes especially pronounced in performance, and constitute what I have chosen to call (in the spirit of Stephen Booth) "nonsense." Of the plays considered in this thesis, I have been able to view the most filmed productions of *Henry V*, enabling this chapter to include more frequent mention of various approaches to Fluellen and his role—the critics may have acknowledged that it is no longer adequate to view *Henry V* as a pure celebration of Englishness, but its emotional value to English directors and audiences has meant that *Henry V* returns to stage and screen at significant moments in England's national experience—Laurence Olivier's 1945 film dedicated to the English armed forces in World War II, Thea Sharrock's production for the BBC's television series *The Hollow Crown* as part of the Cultural Olympiad accompanying the 2012 London Olympic Games—and is regularly tackled by notables in contemporary Shakespeare performance, from a 1989 feature film directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, to the 2012 production by Shakespeare's Globe, directed by Dominic Dromgoole.

I. "No tiddle taddle nor pribble prabble": Fluellen as clown and stereotype

There is much about Fluellen's speech and behavior in *Henry V* which lends itself to presentation as a clown. His speech in the text of the play is marked, as was Sir Hugh's, by the substitution of the letter "p" where it should be "b", meaning that he reports "prave words" uttered

at a “pridge” in 3.6.65-6, and in misremembering the name Alexander the Great, produces the amusing and potentially revelatory title “Alexander the Pig” in 4.7.13-14. He is furthermore irregular when it comes to the letter “j”, and seems to share Sir Hugh’s affinity for combining plural nouns and singular verbs in perplexing situations, traits which leads him to say of a captain whose competence he doubts, “By Cheshu, he is an ass...he has no more *directions* in the true disciplines of the wars...than *is* a puppy dog” (3.2.72-5, emphases added) and to exclaim a few lines earlier, “I think ‘a will plow up all, if there *is* not better *directions*” (3.2.65-6, emphases added). Both Fluellen and Sir Hugh have a tendency to confuse “t” and “d” sounds, meaning that Fluellen in 3.2 says that the Duke of Exeter is “digt four yard under the countermines” (3.2.64). Also like Sir Hugh, Fluellen has little verbal tics, somewhat randomly interjecting the phrases “look you” and “hold you” and “by Cheshu” into his speech, all of which only increase the wordiness, and consequent humor, of his lines.

It is worth noting here that Fluellen’s accent and verbal tics do subtly differ in some ways from Sir Hugh’s, and despite their common construction as “stage Welshman,” each is nonetheless also touched with “individual life” rather than appearing to be the same cardboard cut-out of a Welshman simply dressed in a different occupation.⁵ Sir Hugh doesn’t say “by Cheshu” in the same way Fluellen does, while Fluellen doesn’t use Sir Hugh’s exclamation “Py’r Lady,” and differs from Sir Hugh in that he doesn’t seem to confuse “c” and “g.” At the same time, the two characters share personality traits as well as verbal characteristics, with Sir Hugh’s pedantry mirrored somewhat in Fluellen’s preoccupation with the correct “disciplines of the wars...the Roman disciplines” (3.2.74-

⁵ J.O. Bartley’s observation that a stock character “touched with individual life” is better for everyone concerned may be found on page 3 of his indispensable book *Teague, Shenkin, and Sawney*. Bartley outlines the “stage Welshman” stock character, beginning with Sir Hugh and Fluellen, and argues that Shakespeare and his contemporary playwrights present their Welsh characters “already in a state of partial conventionality,” page 5 and that “The Welshman seems to spring upon the stage more or less full-fledged, and this points to the previous existence in English minds of a notion of ‘Welshman’ generalized from a significant amount of first-hand experience,” 49.

5), his expounding for ten full prose lines on the “moral” of Blind Fortune’s wheel (3.6.30-39) after a casual reference by Pistol, and his stubborn obedience to his commander’s orders in the case of Bardolph’s crime and punishment. Between strict adherence to a certain code of conduct and his frequent references to classical figures like Agamemnon and Mark Antony, Fluellen possesses an old-fashioned or antiquated quality which easily crosses over into the absurd, while the reactions of other characters to his quaintness also serves to create a substantial portion of the humor in these situations. Fluellen’s attempts to discuss, “in the way of argument...and friendly communication...the direction of the military discipline” in the middle of the battle of Harfleur (3.2.99-103), are already slightly out of place, and a production interested in capitalizing on Fluellen’s potential for absurdity can play up the outrage reflected by the character he is addressing, the Irish captain Macmorris. An example of this may be seen in the 2012 Shakespeare’s Globe production of *Henry V*, in which Fluellen gets Macmorris’ attention by standing virtually on the other side of the stage and calling over in an anxiously cheery way, proceeding to try and discuss “discipline”—which seems to be his way of trying to amend or criticize Macmorris’ approach to the English army’s ordnance—at a safe distance from the much more physically imposing Irishman, who does make to charge across the stage at Fluellen’s beginning to comment on his “nation” with the line “I will cut off your head!” (3.2.135). In contrast, the 1989 film *Henry V* directed by Kenneth Branagh, clearly a production invested in achieving a degree of realism rather than comedy, presents this scene with Fluellen, Gower, and Macmorris huddled in the same trench, speaking tensely but reservedly, and Fluellen speaking his concerns without meeting Macmorris’ eyes. Fluellen even cuts himself off when he starts to say to Macmorris “there is not many of your nation— ” (3.2.123), meaning that rather than clumsily putting his foot in his mouth with some reference to the Irishman’s countrymen, he seems to be stopping himself. As an entirely different interpretation of the scene, the 1945 Laurence Olivier film *Henry V* presents a Fluellen eager to get a rise out of the here morose

Captain Macmorris, smiling conspiratorially at Captain Jamy behind Macmorris' back and soundly falsely affronted when Macmorris finally becomes offended by the reference to his nation.

There is just as much opportunity for physical comedy in Fluellen's role as there is linguistic humor. He first appears onstage in Act 3, scene 2, during the English army's attack on Harfleur, and rouses the cowering Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym from where they have been nervously bantering and singing old drinking songs to avoid entering the fray. Given that his single line "Up to the breach, you dogs! Avaunt, you cullions!" is enough to rouse these three and cause a reply from Pistol that begins "Be merciful, great Duke, to men of mold!" and includes another four lines asking him for mercy, it only makes sense for Fluellen to begin forcibly moving the others back towards the battle. In the 2012 production of *Henry V* for the BBC's television special *The Hollow Crown*, directed by Thea Sharrock, Fluellen is man-handling Bardolph and Nym from the moment he begins speaking, and Pistol's lines "Abate thy rage, abate thy manly rage!" are provoked by the Welsh captain's beginning to kick him forcibly in the rear. In contrast, Branagh's film places Fluellen, isolated and firmly blocking the way to retreat, directly behind the comic trio, delivering his command that they make their way "Up to the breach, you dogs!" with low and measured ferocity and making no gesture of aggression towards the men until, just before the camera cuts away from them, he begins to draw his sword and shout.

The Hollow Crown's Fluellen, played by Owen Teale, is tall and physically imposing, yet it is not uncommon for a smaller man to be cast instead—notably the stockier but equally forceful Ian Holm in Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film *Henry V*—and the choice of a smaller height for Fluellen makes his ferocious behavior here and elsewhere in the play seem incongruous and funny. Esmond Knight, portraying Fluellen in Olivier's 1945 film, is of medium build and not tall, and seems particularly slight when he goes after Pistol in 5.1 to eat a leek while Pistol is in armor and he is not. In the 2012 Shakespeare's Globe production directed by Dominic Dromgoole, the height difference

between Brendan O’Hea as Fluellen and the soldiers he confronted was not significant but was heightened by the costuming choices, with Fluellen in a slightly shorter breastplate than the other characters to give the impression of a smaller torso as well as a uniform with much longer skirts to give him the appearance of having shorter legs. Both of these elements also worked together to make Fluellen’s proportions seem more awkward and stockier than his fellows, and with his singular round helmet and a mustache, Fluellen here was subtly different from all the other English forces in ways even beyond his peculiar speech. Throwing subtly to the winds, the costumes in Olivier’s film make the distinctions between the different “national” captains obvious through the presence of badges on each of their coats—an English rose for Gower, a shamrock for Macmorris, a thistle for Jamy and of course, a leek for Fluellen.

Moving from the physical back to the linguistic, another large part of Fluellen’s buffoonish potential comes from a comically antiquated quality in his very words, a kind of quaintness stemming from his frequent use of references or ideas which are literally antique. Even King Henry recognizes it, observing to himself in 4.1 that Fluellen’s admirable qualities might easily “appear a little out of fashion” (4.1.84). Fluellen compares the Duke of Exeter to Agamemnon, Pistol to Mark Antony, and King Henry himself to Alexander the Great, and the “laws of arms” he is so concerned with properly following are those of the Romans, all of which resonates with Philip Schwyzer’s observations about the sixteenth-century Welsh humanists who at the time of Shakespeare’s writing were making names for themselves in antiquarianism, cartography, and the study of local history and language. The image of the Welsh from which Shakespeare is working may well have been influenced by sixteenth century Welshmen like Sir John Prise, Humprey Llwyd, David Powel, and two different gentlemen named John Davies, whose contributions to humanism, Schwyzer observes,

were “eagerly co-opted for the service of English power.”⁶ Supporting the idea of educated Welshmen, early modern Welsh humanist Humphrey Llwyd asserted in his *Breviary of Britayne* that among the Welsh, “there is no man so poore but for some space he setteth forth his children to schole, and such as profite in studie sendeth them unto the universities,” adding that “you shall finde few of the ruder sorte whiche cannot reade and write their owne name.”⁷ While there is no direct connection drawn in *Henry V* between Fluellen’s scholarly references and some sort of broadly held English concept of the Welsh as concerned with education, the possibility exists that Shakespeare may have transposed some sort of internalized connection between the Welsh and learning into a more unexpected or humorous context. His choice to make Sir Hugh a schoolmaster—pedantic in both the literal and comic senses—comes to mind as well. Fluellen may be a soldier, and not a teacher, but the number of speeches he has explaining or ruminating on classical models of war certainly strike a listener as pedantic.

A friend and fellow captain, Gower, reports that Fluellen does not “speak English in the native garb,” (5.1.78-9), but this doesn’t keep the Welsh captain from rambling into lengthy digressions, speeches which provide that feeling of being on a verbal roll Joan Rees first mentions in relation to Glendower.⁸ Fluellen may choose more prosaic topics of conversation than his own celestially heralded birth, but his words still retain some elements of that “hwyl” which also marked Glendower. One good example of Fluellen’s tendency towards “hwyl” occurs in the eleven lines he spends lauding the Duke of Exeter in 3.6, a theme he warms to and begins to embellish with interestingly poetic devices. In calling Exeter “magnanimous as Agamemnon,” Shakespeare has given Fluellen a moment of subtle internal rhyme and a chiasmic structure (m-ag-ag-m) which

⁶ Philip Schwyzer, “British History and ‘The British History’: The Same Old Story?” in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17-18.

⁷ Humphrey Llwyd, *The Breviary of Britayne*, trans. Thomas Twine, (1573), 42 and chapter 73.

⁸ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 28-29.

increases the beauty of this line while simultaneously creating the possibility for pomposity (3.6.6-7). A few lines later, the same thing occurs when Fluellen calls Pistol as “valiant a man as Mark Anthony,” this time using the assonance of the repeated “a” in addition to chiasmus (ant-m-m-ant) to again suggest Fluellen’s inclination towards verbal grandiosity (3.6.14). In the hands of an actor or a production willing to indulge these tendencies, it should come as no surprise that Fluellen is a large—if not the largest—a source of comic relief in the military scenes of the play.

II. “By Jeshu, I am your Majesty’s countryman”: Fluellen and English domination of the Welsh

A Welsh character’s clown-ish potential, in the context of his nationalized identity as a Welshman and member of a minority group within the “England” constructed by these plays, is often interpreted as an attempt by Shakespeare to represent the Welsh condescendingly.⁹ Interpretations of Fluellen are no exception, with many critics deciding that, in one way or another, Shakespeare’s treatment of him in some way creates negative effects for the Welsh—through presenting him as a mockable stereotype, through actively silencing him, or through appropriating admirable “Welsh” qualities for the English while mocking Welshness in Fluellen. King Henry in fact claims a Welsh identity twice in the play, once when in disguise as an anonymous member of his own army and a second time directly to Fluellen, in response to Fluellen’s seeming non sequitur in the aftermath of the Battle of Agincourt. Immediately after the French herald reports that the English have won the battle, Fluellen asks King Henry to remember an earlier battle won by the English in France, in which “the Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Monmouth caps: which your Majesty know to this hour is an honorable badge of the service,” (4.7.101-5). What follows is a moment of personal connection between the two characters, with Fluellen’s lines recalling the past “good service” of Welshmen and seeking

⁹ Philip Edwards, quoted in Murphy, “Tish ill done,” 214.

reassurance that King Henry himself “takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy’s day” (4.7.105-6) and King Henry, although speaking only one or two lines for every five of Fluellen’s, managing to communicate sincere concern in response. Lisa Hopkins, writing about the performance of the scene in Branagh’s 1989 film, explains that “the ensuing moment becomes one of the most powerful moments in the film, as Fluellen affords his king a vehicle for the expression of celebration” and manages to grant Henry the catharsis the king requires after the battle by “wrest[ing] from him the emotional relief of tears.”¹⁰ Henry agrees that he wears the leek on “Saint Tavy’s day” and adds “For I am Welsh, you know, good countryman” (4.7.108), delighting the Welshman with this seeming note of genuine recognition for the value of his Welsh identity. It can easily be argued that Henry’s line here is far from a simple moment of sympathy, however, as his claim to be Welsh begs the question—should we take this as Shakespeare incorporating Welshness into Englishness?

In analyzing Fluellen’s account of the Welsh soldiers and the origins of leek-wearing, Megan Lloyd takes the time to delineate the battles that Fluellen is quietly conflating in telling this story. Of the battles with leek associations, there are two: the first, taking place in a field of leeks on October 12, 633, is remembered as the Battle of Heathfield or Meigen and is significant for being the first battle in which the Welsh and English fought on the same side—although given the era and the fact that the conflict really pitted a Welsh king of Gwynedd and the king of Mercia against the king of Northumbria, it is somewhat anachronistic to talk about “English” forces fighting; there was no explicitly “English” identity at the time.¹¹ The Welsh association with the leek also has another source, now so distant as to be more legendary than historical, in the story of Saint David enjoining Welsh soldiers to pick leeks from the field around them and wear them in their hats while battling

¹⁰ Lisa Hopkins, “Fluellen’s Name,” in *Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Leeds Barroll (Teaneck, Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 148.

¹¹ Lloyd, “Speak it in Welsh,” 90.

the Saxons. But in his reference to a victory won by the Black Prince of Wales, King Henry's ancestor, Fluellen manages to tie in an entirely different battle—the Battle of Crecy, fought on August 26, 1346, in which the English were outnumbered against the French but were victorious thanks to Welsh archers fighting on their side.¹² While the Welsh impact on the Battle of Crecy connects it to both the situation in 4.7 and to the Battle of Heathfield, there is no historical mention of leek-wearing at Crecy.

Fluellen's jumbling of these different battles and their connections to leek-wearing or Welsh and English cooperation signifies, for Marisa Cull and Christopher Highley, a careful and deliberate choice on Shakespeare's part to "empt[y] the leek of all oppositional and anti-English significance"—such a significance arises from the early myth attributing Welsh placement of leeks in their caps to the instigation of St. David in a battle against the Saxons, who would give their name to the Welsh word for "English" (*W. Saesneg*) and whose invasion of and enmity towards the early Britons is colorfully preserved in works like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regnum Britanniae*.¹³ When looked at this way, both the story of Welsh soldiers doing "good service" for the English at Crecy, and King Henry's declaration that he too wears a leek on St. David's Day as a badge of honor to this Welsh saint and legend, feel contrived to silence the history of conflict or oppression between the Welsh and the English. Michael Faletra suggests that Henry's claim to be a Welshman is no more than a demonstration of glib imperialism, worthy of the nineteenth century critic Matthew Arnold.¹⁴

In his article "Norman bastards, bastard Normans': Anomalous identities in *Henry V*", Andrew Murphy takes the time to outline a variety of the positions on Fluellen which have emerged in the twentieth century, including Cairns and Richards' view that in *Henry V* "the position of the colonized...is seen as one of proud inclusion," meaning that the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish captains

¹² Lloyd, "Speak it in Welsh," 90.

¹³ Highley quoted in Cull, "Staging Cambria: Shakespeare, the Welsh, and the Early Modern English Theater, 1590-1615," diss. (Ohio State University, 2008), 111.

¹⁴ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 3.

are shown to be willingly or loyally integrated into Henry's English army in order to depict a rosier view of relations between the English and the neighbors they frequently attempted to control—as Murphy summarizes, “what could not at this time be achieved militarily is reassuringly produced within the realm of dramatic fiction.”¹⁵

In a related vein, Marisa Cull has argued that because of the political climate of the 1590s and the foreign threats from both Spain and Ireland, English military strength and reputation were enthusiastically supported through theater, with the corollary that “Welsh militarism—that heroic holdover from the ancient Britons—is rendered almost entirely ineffectual.”¹⁶ Cull explains that Fluellen, although representing a tradition of Welsh military prowess which was both “lengthy and admirable,” is nonetheless belittled in *Henry V*: “Henry himself seems intent on keeping Fluellen confined to tasks that limit his militarism to the domestic sphere,” she explains, pointing out that Fluellen's on-stage interactions generally take the form of attempting to rectify the behavior of other English soldiers.¹⁷ When King Henry finds himself engaged in a kind of quarrel with a member of his army, he asks Fluellen to undertake the challenge of fighting with the man, but lies to him and explains that the man Fluellen will be taking on is a traitor and a supporter of the French: “he is a friend to Alençon and an enemy to our person,” Henry tells Fluellen of his potential challenger (4.7.158-9), and Fluellen's response is all earnest enthusiasm for doing a favor for his king: “Your Grace doo's me as great honors as can be desired in the hearts of his subjects” (4.7.162-3). Cull argues that “the lie Henry tells Fluellen is an important one: he is professing Fluellen's task is one related to the war with France, when in fact he has relegated Fluellen to combating dissent within the ranks of the English army.”¹⁸ Given the chance to assist his king in something he perceives as both a way to prove his loyalty to Henry and a way to score a hit against the French, Fluellen is in

¹⁵ Cairn and Richards, quoted in Murphy, “Tish ill done,” 214.

¹⁶ Cull, “Staging Cambria,” 82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

reality given a job that simply “makes him an exaggerated errand boy.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Cull calls Fluellen’s lines during 4.7, the scene just following the Battle of Agincourt—during which he draws King Henry into discussion of a past military victory where the English were assisted by the Welsh—“a little sycophantic” and calls him “content—even ecstatic—to allow Henry to claim Welsh blood, eager to parrot the histories of the English chronicle tradition...Fluellen is, for all his comic earnestness, never permitted the opportunity to be boastful about Welsh marital superiority.”²⁰ She agrees with Christopher Highley, who calls Fluellen “the colonial subject who has internalized English values and subordinated his own provincial loyalties to service the English nation-state.”²¹ Even more than the opportunities for linguistic and physical absurdity, it is Fluellen’s uncritical enthusiasm for Henry and the English supremacy the king represents which indicates to these critics that Shakespeare has, through Fluellen, misrepresented and denigrated the Welsh.

III. The Fringe Benefits of Nonsense

To sum up: *Henry V* as a work of dramatic literature has embedded contradictions, moments of dissonance, and pieces of nonsense surrounding the presentation of its Welsh captain Fluellen and the claims to be Welsh made by King Henry himself. The historical King Henry had only a distant family relationship with Wales, thanks to a mother whose family were Marcher lords.²² Henry’s words to first Pistol and later Fluellen claiming to be a Welshman therefore make little sense—is he indulging in a half-truth based on the fact that he was until recently Prince of Wales? Is he, as Philip Schwyzer proposes, “inherit[ing] his Welshness not from his ancestors, but from his Tudor successors,” the descendants of his wife’s second husband who would hold the English

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cull, “Staging Cambria,” 113.

²¹ Highley quoted in Cull, “Staging Cambria,” 103.

²² Hopkins, “Fluellen’s Name,” 152.

throne during Shakespeare's early life?²³ Next, there is the question of Fluellen's character, with his tendency towards seemingly oblivious wordiness and the text's inability to decide whether he deserves to be taken seriously or not. Modern productions of *Henry V* tend to deal with the difficulties of Fluellen's character by trimming his lines; for example, in Branagh's film, Fluellen's speech about the Duke of Exeter in 3.6 is reduced from the ten lines full of poetic devices ("magnanimous as Agamemnon," "valiant as Mark Antony,") to the two lines needed to communicate the simple message that the Duke "is not—God be praised and blessed—any hurt in the world, but keeps the bridge most valiantly" (3.6.9-10). The film is full of cuts like this: Fluellen's comparison of Henry to Alexander the Great is absent—also missing is Henry's order to kill the French prisoners, so any potential Fluellen may have had for illustrating the flaws in his king is already unnecessary—while the confrontation between Fluellen and Pistol in 5.1 which results in Pistol being force-fed a leek to teach him not to ridicule Welsh tradition is entirely absent. This kind of extreme emendation to the text is unique among the filmed versions to which I have had access, yet productions of *Henry V* which stick closer to the original text show clearly how trimming Fluellen's lines is appealing to modern directors. Dominic Dromgoole's production at Shakespeare's Globe retains essentially all of Fluellen's speeches intact, and reveals the exaggerated humor of, for example, his polysyndeton when celebrating the Duke of Exeter in 3.6: Fluellen delivers his praises of the Duke with arms open wide, eyes heavenward, while every line is played for comic effect. He calls the Duke "a man that I love and honor with my soul, and my heart, and my duty, and my live, and my living, and my uttermost power" (3.6.6-8), and each additional "and" marks a new thought delivered earnestly as though just striking him, while poor Gower grows steadily more exasperated and indeed breaks the fourth wall to share his wry reaction with the audience. Joan Rees, in discussing Branagh's film, connects the editing done to Fluellen's part with the fact that his role is

²³ Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory*, 127.

“felt to cause some difficulty in performance,” and is even marked by a kind of “bumpiness” caused by the combination of comic and loyally patriotic elements.²⁴ Rees has detected the very same nugget of dissonance I have, and which I have chosen to explore more fully by connecting it to broader patterns of nonsense within *Henry V* and Shakespeare’s treatment of the Welsh.

In a feature film like Branagh’s, choices of shot and camera angle can communicate an inner life and personality in a character like Fluellen, meaning that the removal of a substantial portion of his lines does not automatically jeopardize the richness of his character. Ian Holm’s Fluellen may have been rewritten to appear more terse and serious than his stage iterations, but the film still manages to communicate sympathy with his character by capturing several of his eloquent facial expressions, or by filming his reactions to moments such as the discovery of the executed English boys and thereby allowing the audience to participate in his point of view and recognize a degree of depth in his character. But on the stage, distance between actor and audience makes it more difficult to generate the same level of identification with a non-lead character, particularly one whose role does not include a single soliloquy. It becomes necessary for theatrical performances to engage with the contradictory elements of Fluellen’s character if the richness of his role is to be retained: what makes him complicated and nonsensical also makes him engaging. It is crucial that we acknowledge the ways in which Fluellen is a stereotype and a manipulation of Welsh identity, but to choose to pursue only this dimension of the character in performance ignores the ways in which Shakespeare’s construction of Fluellen is paradoxical, nonsensical, and actually effects a much higher degree of sympathy towards him than a straightforward “humorous” or “serious” presentation would.

An audience member without the opportunity to analyze the text, taking in the action of *Henry V* simply visually and aurally, has their opinion of Fluellen unavoidably shaped by the other characters’ reactions to him, by the personality chosen by a given actor in the role, and by the way

²⁴ Rees, “Shakespeare’s Welshmen,” 30-32.

the script is edited or cut. With these variables in mind, it seems equally necessary to account for the moments of advocacy or support for Fluellen in *Henry V*, moments which clash “nonsensically” against instances of his clownishness or subservience but which are just as textual. Hearing King Henry, star and focal point of the entire play, admit in an aside that “though it appear a little out of fashion, /there is much care and valor in this Welshman,” (4.1.84-5), and hearing this same king address Fluellen by name and ask for his report immediately upon entering in 3.6, and again explicitly asking him to contribute to the conversation in 4.7 with a “What think you, Captain Fluellen?” (4.7.133), an audience cannot help but imagine that Fluellen is worth praising, listening to, or consulting. The English soldiers Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol whom Fluellen is called upon to harangue in 3.1 are resistant but nonetheless obey him, and Pistol views him as enough of an influence with the Duke of Exeter to attempt asking for his help begging Exeter to remit Bardolph’s punishment in 3.6. The resolute way Fluellen responds to Pistol’s request that an exception be made to the army’s rules in order to save Bardolph from execution is in its own way evidence in Fluellen’s favor—after stating the position that “for if, look you, he were my brother, I would desire the duke to use his good pleasure, and put him to execution; for discipline ought to be used,” Fluellen stands by his position in the face of Pistol’s rage with nothing but an “It is well” and a “Very good” (3.6.60-62). Even more notably for a play employing language of English exceptionalism and superiority, an audience is presented with a king who claims not once but *twice* to be “kin” and “countryman” to Fluellen, and who identifies himself as Welsh when passing as a common soldier in his own army. For all the political or social motivations that may have resulted in Shakespeare’s giving Henry these lines, for all the suspect implications such claims to Welsh identity have when viewed in the play’s historical context, it is important to realize that there is power in having a king express favor towards a marginalized character or align himself with a maligned identity.

Marisa Cull argues that Fluellen “is permitted moments of valor and even superiority” in the course of the play’s action, largely because of his position among the forces supporting the English king.²⁵ At the same time, she ultimately argues that the play still “subordinat[es] the Welsh military tradition to the English patriotic agenda,” makes Welsh-ness in the form of Fluellen subordinate to English-ness, and casts Fluellen as a servant to the “audience’s taste for comic relief.”²⁶ Fluellen’s clownish potential is undeniable, but there is no requirement to excise all of his humorous words or actions when interested in making him a worthwhile character. Furthermore, the reading that *Henry V* includes Fluellen in order to either construct a narrative of Anglo-Welsh goodwill, or to harness a Welsh tradition of military expertise for English benefit is persuasive and illuminating. However, when staged with the majority of Fluellen’s lines intact, the spoken text and action of *Henry V* do more to generate audience sympathy with and good feeling for its Welsh character than either of these two strands of criticism suggest, resulting in the kind of unacknowledged dissonance I have been calling nonsense. Nonsense, particularly apt in describing the English attitude towards Welsh culture and identity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is here a valuable part of Fluellen’s character and, Stephen Booth would argue, an underlying strength of the entire play.

²⁵ Cull, “Staging Cambria,” 101.

²⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Four
“The fall’n-off Britons”: Nonsensical British and
Welsh Identities in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*

At some level, proposing to discuss nonsense in *Cymbeline* is like deciding to comment on the importance of coal to Newcastle or the wetness of water. Critics have now for generations remarked at the play’s “incongruities” and “absurdity of conduct,” and the way it seems at times to actually approach parody in its abundant use of literary tropes.¹ Stage romance, the genre into which *Cymbeline* best fits, has been criticized for incongruity and absurdity since at least the sixteenth century, with Sir Philip Sidney around 1581 registering his disappointment with the theater of his own day, the “gross absurdities” it exhibited not only by staging multiple locations and sometimes multiple years in a single play but by “mingling kings and clowns,” resulting in “mongrel tragic-comedy” which failed to live up to the definition of either tragedy or comedy as laid out in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.² *Cymbeline* is no better, comprised as it is of several plotlines which converge and resolve neatly by the final scene—by which time an audience has had to take in everything from a wager over a wife’s virtue, to a wicked step-mother, to missing princes raised in obscurity, to a Roman invasion, to several cases of assumed or mistaken identity, the appearance and intervention in the story of the deceased family members’ shades, and a cameo by the Roman god Jupiter. But all of this, right down to the defeat of the Roman army by four individual British fighters and the subsequent agreement by the British ruler to acquiesce to Roman demands anyway, is undisguised absurdity, distinct from the productive and more subtly embedded “precious nonsense” à la Stephen

¹ Samuel Johnson and J.C. Maxwell quoted in Emrys Jones, “Stuart *Cymbeline*,” in *Essays in Criticism*, 11 (1961), 84, and Andrew King, “Howso’er strange...yet is it true?: The British History, Fiction and Performance in *Cymbeline*,” in *Shakespeare and Wales*, eds. Maley and Schwyzer, 160.

² Philip Sidney, “The Defence of Poesy,” in *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 243-4.

Booth that I have been pursuing for its relevance to Shakespeare's Welshmen.³ *Cymbeline* is unique among the plays in this thesis for having arguably no Welsh characters at all; it is its setting in the landscape of Wales, and its questions of the ancient British past as it is shown to both include and exclude Wales, which have drawn me to include this play in my examination. Having begun to look beyond the play's more evident absurdities, I will argue that there are elements of rich, compelling Booth-ian nonsense in equal abundance—the paradoxical way in which it portrays Wales as both quintessentially “British” and simultaneously distinct from Britain, the way that the crucial location Milford Haven manages to be functionally both Wales and not-Wales, the way it presents the identity of its male lead Posthumus as simultaneously British and Roman, the way the characters living in Wales during the action of the play both are and are not Welsh themselves, both are and are not examples of Welsh nobility and worthiness. All of this just goes to show that Marisa Cull's point about Shakespeare and his contemporary English humanists having contradictory or ambiguous ways of handling the Welsh is a strength of the plays which demonstrate it—it makes *Cymbeline* engaging and important and ripe for performance in productions aware of the potential energy embedded in these paradoxes.

Cymbeline's early acts are full of the language of national pride and national identity. Before jumping fully into a discussion of *Cymbeline's* paradoxical approach to Wales and Welsh identity, it will be useful to outline some of the larger discourse about national identities in the play, which includes an interesting parallel dichotomy between Roman versus Italian and British versus Welsh identities. As the play opens, King Cymbeline's court is reeling from the unwelcome marriage of his daughter Imogen to a lower-class man, resulting in the groom's exile from Britain. The unfortunate groom, Posthumus, journeys to Rome where he knows he will be welcomed by a friend of his long-

³ Stephen Booth contends that it is “nonsense that goes unobserved,” the “raw material” which contributes to paradox but which the work has not explicitly identified as paradoxical, which imparts both great pleasure and great power to classic literary works (*Precious Nonsense*, 11-12). For more, please see the Introduction.

dead father; his travel to Italy is mirrored by the arrival in the British court of ambassadors from Rome, demanding that the British kingdom pay tribute to the Roman emperor and acknowledge his dominion over them. The action alternates between Cymbeline's court, identified only as being located nebulously somewhere in Britain east of the Severn river, and Rome; the time period is intended to be that of the *pax Romana*, the first century CE; as Emrys Jones explains, Cymbeline's historically uneventful reign was likely chosen for dramatization for the simple reason that it was during his time as ruler of Britain that Jesus Christ was born.⁴

Given the ancient time period, national loyalty or identification with early modern political entities is jarring, but nevertheless, characters in *Cymbeline* give voice to exactly such anachronistic national identities. While in Italy, Posthumus finds himself arguing for the superiority of his wife Imogen to all the women of France or Italy against an unnamed French soldier, his Italian host Philario, and another Italian named Iachimo, in a demonstration of what John E. Curran, Jr. calls "a kind of naïve patriotism" that rapidly becomes "nationalistic boasting."⁵ The Frenchman and the two Italians demonstrate the appearance of a similarly ahistorical dedication to their homelands, which is surprising particularly in the Italians, who might be expected to be more concerned with being members of the Roman Empire, and whose Renaissance equivalent was a land of independent city states rather than a consolidated nation. There is a strange dichotomy of Italian and Roman operating throughout much of *Cymbeline*, with Iachimo verbally marked as Italian by his reference to "our[s] [ladies] of Italy" (1.4.53)⁶ and by his deceitful actions later in the play distinctly separated from the virtuous Romans as exemplified by Lucius. As another example, Posthumus' loyal serving man Pisanio articulates the play's dichotomous presentation of Italians and Romans quite well when

⁴ Jones, "Stuart *Cymbeline*", 88.

⁵ John E. Curran, Jr., "Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught: British Savages and Historiographical Change in *Cymbeline*," in *Comparative Drama* 31.2 (1997), 296.

⁶ All citations from *Cymbeline* (hereafter cited parenthetically) are taken from The Pelican Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, ed. Peter Holland (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

he expresses worry that his master has been misled by some “false Italian/ as poisonous tongued as handed” (3.2.4-5), but then expresses admiration for the “honorable/ and, doubling that, most holy” Roman ambassador (3.4.177-8).

Perhaps in an effort to uphold the appearance of *Cymbeline*'s ancient setting, Posthumus' patriotism is to the “Britain” ruled by Cymbeline—in itself not perplexing, but important given that Shakespeare was writing *Cymbeline* in England during a period when there was renewed concern with what exactly constituted “Britain.” Posthumus who becomes so indignant and eager to defend his British lady's virtue (and by extension, Britain's worth and the value of his own identity as a Briton) that he accepts a wager with Iachimo to test Imogen's virtue, agreeing that Iachimo travel to Cymbeline's court and attempt to seduce her. Marisa Cull has pointed out that in his 1586 chorography *Britannia* William Camden uses the term “Britain” both as a geographical descriptor of the island of his own day (in a sense conflating its territory with a nonexistent unified civil entity that would include England, Scotland, and Wales), and to refer to the ancient Britain, that “lost nation of antiquity” we may recognize in *Cymbeline*.⁷ With this in mind, it becomes easier to recognize that when in *Cymbeline* Britain is called “a world by itself” and has attributed to it “natural bravery” (3.1.12-13 and 18), it is more than likely that a similar conflation of early modern England with ancient Britain is occurring—a suggestion supported by Ronald Boling.⁸ This then begs the question: what (or where) might be meant by “Britain”, and what is excluded? Huw Griffiths sees the political nature of “Britain” as central to *Cymbeline*'s drama, but agrees that Shakespeare leaves it unresolved and the very existence of this thorny issue largely unaddressed—meaning that it continues to underlie the play's development, an energy-producing piece of nonsense.⁹

⁷ Cull, “Staging Cambria,” 5-6.

⁸ Ronald Boling, “Anglo-Welsh relations in *Cymbeline*,” in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.1 (2000), 35.

⁹ Huw Griffiths, “The Geographies of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*,” in *English Literary Renaissance*, 34.3 (2004), 340.

Another nugget of unaddressed nonsense, working alongside the anachronistic patriotism Posthumus displays, is the fact that when it comes to nationally-based character traits, he frequently seems more Roman than British. *Romanitas*, whether just a quality of having been influenced by Rome or the actual acquisition of Roman culture, is pervasive even in the explicitly British court of King Cymbeline, which Marisa Cull points out is likely a symptom of the popularity of Roman Britain plays in the early seventeenth century, “a side-effect of a period in which Rome and Britain uneasily coexisted as symbols for the Jacobean empire” thanks to James I’s fondness for Roman imagery and allusions.¹⁰ Cymbeline mentions that he himself was raised and educated at the Roman court of Augustus Caesar (3.1.67-8), his daughter Imogen’s bedroom is decorated with images from classical mythology and her personal reading material is the Roman poet Ovid (2.2.44-5), and the stated meaning of Posthumus Leonatus’ name is embedded in its Latin definition: the audience is told that ‘posthumus’ was chosen because of the deaths of his entire family prior to the child’s birth (his mother dying in labor), and ‘leo’ ‘natus,’ ‘lion born,’ as a surname awarded to the family for the military achievements of his father (the honorific is described in 1.1, but its literal Latin meaning is left unremarked until 5.4, when it is suddenly the answer to a divinely given riddle). Posthumus’ speech in 2.5, in which he expresses his rage and betrayal at the idea of Imogen’s supposed lack of virtue and willingness to be seduced by Iachimo, is loaded with classical allusions (2.5.7-12). And even though Posthumus is acknowledged as something of an unknown when he is first mentioned in 1.1, the First Gentleman admitting that he cannot “delve him to the root” (1.1.28), the impressive military reputation of his father Sicilius Leonatus is outlined for the audience. Curran notes that the choice of “Sicilius” for the name of even a minor character is certainly important, because the name is “a throw-away Geoffrey [of Monmouth] used on three separate occasions for pre-Roman kings

¹⁰ Marisa Cull, *Shakespeare’s Princes of Wales: English Identity and the Welsh Connection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 121.

whose names were virtually all he bothered to say about them,” and Curran goes on to say that Posthumus’ father “epitomizes the plethora of royal nobodies inhabiting the pre-Roman section of the British History.”¹¹

The contradiction here—a father who stands for the achievements and nobility of staunchly non-Romanized Britons but who nevertheless earned a Latin surname in much the way that exemplary military feats could earn Romans a *cognomen ex virtute* or honorific surname, is only exacerbated by Posthumus’ literally alternating between the two sides during the Roman invasion of Britain at Milford Haven. For all his earlier pro-British sentiments, Posthumus is present at the battle on the Roman side, having aligned himself with the Roman Philario and basically become a retainer in his household. However, in his desperation to be killed in the battle, he disguises himself as a British soldier on the assumption that the Britons will be the defeated side—but his reckless abandon on the battlefield actually contributes to a British victory. Hearing some British soldiers approaching in the aftermath of the battle, Posthumus switches identities *again* and declares himself to be a Roman, just so that they will take him prisoner and, he hopes, execute him: “for being now a favorer of the Briton,/ No more a Briton,” he decides (5.3.74-5). His death-wish is prompted by the report that his earlier senseless order to have his wife Imogen murdered had in fact been carried out, but luckily for them both, neither has actually died and the pair is reunited, with the layers of misunderstanding resolved, by the end of the play.

In keeping with the repeated distinctions made between “Roman” and “Italian” characters, there is yet another paradox embedded in this play’s use of the idea of “Britons” and the Welsh “villain mountaineers” assumed to live around Milford Haven. Imogen’s observation that “clay and clay differs in dignity/ Whose dust is both alike” (4.2.4-5) is in a way commenting on the suggestion, appearing throughout the play, that a certain, explicitly Roman dignity or *romanitas* can distinguish

¹¹ Curran, “Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught,” 294.

characters otherwise made of the same raw material. Some characters made of Italian clay are by this ennobled, and are called Romans, and some characters of British clay are raised to the level of actual “Britons.” The princes, because they are raised outside the Romanized court of King Cymbeline and do not have the benefit of this civilizing veneer, though not necessarily different in any fundamental way, and indeed lauded by Belarius as exquisitely noble in spite of their “rude” upbringing, may be viewed as differing in nationality from their relatives at court—they are not “Britons,” but Welsh.

The nonsense surrounding Posthumus’ national identity and the paradox of Italian versus Roman are matched and exceeded by the nonsense surrounding the national identities of two other exiles from Cymbeline’s court, and it is here that a discussion of nonsense and a discussion of *Cymbeline’s* treatment of the Welsh fully converge. First, a bit of plot: prior to the action of the play, and as a result of his mistreatment at the hands of the king, a British lord named Belarius decides to kidnap Cymbeline’s two sons. He raises the boys in obscurity, never informing them of their royal origins and allowing the court to suppose that they are dead. Crucially, the setting for the two princes’ rustic upbringing is a cave in Cambria—Wales—not far from the port of Milford Haven, an area which critics have pointed out held many important associations in early modern English minds. George Owen, quoted in Lloyd, calls Milford “the most famous port of Christendom” in his 1595 *Brief Description of Mylford Havon*, while a 1597 account of the English Coastline described its “protected harbor...six or seven leagues round about,” and its “room for countless ships.”¹² At the same time, there was no fortress and insufficient artillery batteries to prevent entrance into Milford’s harbor by unwanted ships, making it “the choice port for invaders...the most accessible, largest, and in some respects, remotest port through which to invade England.”¹³ And the potential for invasion at Milford had been realized not long before Shakespeare’s day, when the port had served as the

¹² Lloyd, “*Speak it in Welsh*,” 122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 123.

landing point for the 1485 landing by the future Henry VII, who marched from Wales to England to defeat Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field and institute Tudor rule in England.¹⁴ Even to mention the name Milford Haven therefore at some level meant invoking the memory of Henry VII, and Megan Lloyd points out that this would have been prudent in the Jacobean period when *Cymbeline* was written, reminding us that James I's claim to the English throne was founded on descent from Henry VII and (quoting Leah Marcus) arguing that "All the play's tangled lines converge upon the point at which the 'Jacobean line' originated."¹⁵

Milford Haven is also where Imogen travels in the hopes of reuniting with her exiled husband Posthumus, and where he has told his serving man, Pisanio, to lead her and then have her killed. The Pembrokeshire countryside surrounding Milford is again chosen to be the setting for disappearance, substantiating the paradoxical idea of Wales as "both safe and dangerous" which Lisa Hopkins suggests the Tudors and Stuarts held.¹⁶ It is a place of safety, a place where those escaping from court can know they will not be pursued, a "green world" comparable to the Forest of Arden, the eventual site for reunion and resolution—but simultaneously a place of danger, in which to venture means becoming as good as dead, and where unwanted outsiders such as Cloten can be summarily beheaded by unknown "mountaineers" (4.2.71).¹⁷ Whether its strange ability to absorb outsiders makes the landscape purely threatening is, however, *also* unresolved: Cloten is a threatening, villainous outsider who has come to Wales expressly to rape and murder Imogen, so his untimely death at the hands of Guiderius, although an example of the wildness of Wales, is justified and is arguably evidence of a kind of savage benevolence on the part of the landscape. The

¹⁴ "King Henry VII," Royal Family History, <http://www.britroyals.com/kings.asp?id=henry7>, accessed April 3, 2015.

¹⁵ Marcus quoted in Lloyd, "*Speak it in Welsh*," 123.

¹⁶ Lisa Hopkins, "*Cymbeline*, the *translatio imperii*, and the matter of Britain," in *Shakespeare and Wales*, ed. Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer, 143.

¹⁷ Lloyd, "*Speak it in Welsh*," 105.

landscape's almost sentient reactions to characters is again hinted at in 5.2, when Iachimo laments that "I have belied a lady/ 'The Princess of this country, and the air on't/ Revengingly enfeebls me" (5.2.2-4). Imogen considers that she has found herself in "heaven," albeit a heaven in which there is sometimes extreme violence (4.2.312).

In a similar vein, there is a paradoxical presentation of rural living as well as the countryside itself. Belarius openly celebrates how the lifestyle he and the princes lead in their cave has enabled them to show more reverence to heaven and is "nobler," "richer," and "prouder" than that at court (3.3.22-4), yet he privately suggests that it is their royal blood and lineage which have actually resulted in the princes' nobility: "[their princely] nature prompts them/ In simple and low things to prince it much/Beyond the trick of others," (3.3.84-6). Based on Belarius' asides, John Curran argues that "the princes are alien to the woods and that their virtue exists because of their royalty and in spite of their savage environment."¹⁸ What does not appear in question is the idea that there has been a physical effect of the landscape on the princes and Belarius, distinct even from the beneficial freedom from the pointless courtly behaviors of "attending for a check," "doing nothing for a robe," and "rustling in unpaid-for silk" which Belarius outlines (3.3.22-4). The physical features of the landscape, from the low cave door which has taught the princes to bow (3.3.3), to the hillsides which teach them the effects of perspective on someone's stature or importance (3.3.11-15), leave their imprint on the characters.

The princes, Guiderius and Arviragus, are therefore ambiguous when it comes to nationality—by birth, they are the children of the British king and so are themselves British, but because of their isolated and rural upbringing, they possess the basic elements of "Welsh" identity as well. Ronald Boling connects the prolonged exposure to weather and elements which has made the princes "hot Summer's tanlings, and / 'The shrinking slaves of Winter" (4.4.29-30), the "sweat of

¹⁸ Curran, "Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught," 284.

industry” which makes their “homely” meals palatable, and the exertions which make it possible for them to “snore upon the flint, when resty sloth/ finds the down pillow hard,” (3.6.31, 34-5), to a contemporary early seventeenth-century description of the privations undergone by the poorer residents of Pembrokeshire, the county in Wales containing Milford Haven.¹⁹ George Owen’s *Description of Pembrokeshire* explains how the young people of this area of Wales “are forced to endure the heat of the sun in its greatest extremity, to parch and burn their faces...and then with the cold, frost, snow, hail...[they differ] from other people that are brought up in warm houses,” and by the age of twenty or so “are they held in such continual labour in tilling of the land, burning of lime, digging coals, and other slaveries,” that they are forever altered in appearance from “the number of personable men”— all of this, when adjusted to account for the fact that the princes and Belarius survive by hunting rather than agriculture or mining, could be easily connected to their lives.²⁰ The princes therefore have much in common with the early modern Welsh who might have been familiar to Shakespeare and his audience, yet the play remains noncommittal about the degree to which they should be really understood as Welsh themselves. They appear to possess a stereotypically Welsh predilection for poetry, to judge from the funerary ode they perform when they mistake Imogen for dead and begin to mourn her, and Guiderius’ readiness to defend himself against sudden, arrogant and violent abuse from Cymbeline’s step-son Cloten and ultimately kill him has been described as a “savage Welsh welcome” by Megan Lloyd, who goes on to explain that just as Cloten is accustomed to a certain treatment, as son of the Queen and step-son of the British king Cymbeline, “Guiderius the Welshman...[also] demands respect and rejects Cloten’s idea that he is a mountaineer or savage.”²¹ That Lloyd should feel comfortable making such an assertion only pages before arguing that “Wales offers [the princes] little besides refuge and anonymity...what they become has more to

¹⁹ Boling, “Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*,” 52.

²⁰ Owen quoted in Boling, “Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*,” 52.

²¹ Lloyd, “*Speak it in Welsh*,” 115.

do with their birth, blood, Belarius' teachings, and their eventual battle experience than anything Wales may offer," is only further evidence of the paradoxical—nonsensical—use of Welsh identities within the play.²²

Belarius made sure to give the boys new names in order to hide their original royal identities, and thus the elder son Guiderius is re-christened as "Polydore," possibly a reference on Shakespeare's part to the 16th century Italian humanist Polydore Vergil whose work began the abandonment of Geoffrey of Monmouth's traditional British history, while Arviragus is dubbed "Cadwal" in an apparent nod to the Welsh name Cadwaladr, which belonged to a legendary Welsh leader.²³ The potential contradiction between the two names—one an allusion to the legendary British history, the other to the scholar known for challenging exactly the same history—only contributes to the play's existing network of nonsense. Curran also makes the connection between Cadwal, the "Cadwallader" listed by Geoffrey of Monmouth as the last British king, and the "Cadwalla" of Wessex mentioned by Bede on whom Geoffrey's Cadwallader is so clearly modeled, arguing that the use of this particular Welsh name evokes one of Geoffrey of Monmouth's more apparent fabrications and, along with Polydore, "denot[es] the fall of Galfridian mythology."²⁴

This "Galfridian mythology" refers to the story of British origins and early history given by the twelfth century monk Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The *Historia* had had a profound influence on the ways the English had understood their early history, and despite its "ambiguities and subterfuges" and passages which are apparent fabrication on Geoffrey's part, it wasn't challenged until the early sixteenth century.²⁵ Polydore Vergil, at the encouragement of Henry VII, undertook in the early 1500s to write a history of England which would command the respect

²² Ibid., 121.

²³ Curran, "Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught," 286; Elissa R. Henken, *Redeemer hero: Owain Glyn Dŵr in Welsh tradition*, 25.

²⁴ Curran, "Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught," 286.

²⁵ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 16.

of the European community and “justify the Tudors to the scholars of Europe,” and in so doing wholly debunked Geoffrey’s history.²⁶ Because the British were proud of and devoted to the Galfridian version of their origins, when first Polydore Vergil, and then English humanists William Camden and John Speed began to assert that the classical Latin authors whose accounts of the ancient Britons were far less flattering were in fact more reliable as history, it was at first a painful adjustment.²⁷

Prior to this debunking, however, the *Historia Regum Britanniae* had spread widely and become “one of the most well-attested secular works of the Middle Ages,” surviving in some 217 manuscripts in various languages including Latin and Welsh.²⁸ Part of Geoffrey’s appeal was the linkage his work made between the early Britons and the history of Troy and Rome; he claimed that the first residents of Britain were Aeneas’ nephew Brutus and his men, adapting the idea from a *Historia Britonum* attributed to an author known only as “Nennius” (or pseudo-Nennius, in an attempt to clarify that this work was misattributed by medieval readers).²⁹ Geoffrey patiently describes the reigns of the British monarchs—including King Arthur—who ruled between Brutus’ time and the eventual Saxon domination of the island, describing them primarily as chivalrous and courtly quasi-medieval monarchs.³⁰ His work also layers the idea of Trojan origins with a concept known as *translatio imperii*, the idea of inevitable and progressive transfer of imperial power from one classical empire (Babylon, Macedon, Carthage, and Rome) to another—in this case, Britain—which he likely encountered in the works of pseudo-Nennius, Bede, and Gildas.³¹ Michael Faletra calls the

²⁶ Denys Hay, “The life of Polydore Vergil of Urbino,” in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 12 (1949), 139.

²⁷ Curran, “Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught,” 279.

²⁸ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 19-20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰ Curran, “Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught,” 279.

³¹ Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 39.

combination of Geoffrey's Trojan material and *translatio imperii* a "truly hybrid historiography" which made the text so powerful.³²

Despite its fall from scholarly grace in the sixteenth century, however, Geoffrey's *Historia* had a lasting impact on conceptions of "British" and "Welsh" identities. After describing generations of erratic British opposition to typically vilified Saxon invaders, Geoffrey concludes the *Historia* by explaining how the Britons had become so weakened and degenerate, through their own "penchant for civil war" as well as prolonged plague and famine, that "through their habitual barbarity, they were no longer called Britons but 'Welsh,' a term derived...indeed from their own barbarity."³³ Going one step further, Geoffrey explains that the Saxons at this time "acted more wisely" and began to institute law, urban and agricultural development, and peace throughout the lands they controlled, "casting aside the power of the Britons."³⁴ As a parting blow, Geoffrey records that "having degenerated from the nobility they had enjoyed as Britons, the Welsh never again regained kingship of the island," an explanation for Welsh marginalization which was as satisfactory to the Anglo-Norman rulers of twelfth century Britain for whom Geoffrey was writing as it was to English writers of Shakespeare's own day.³⁵

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* appeared about fifteen years after William Camden's seminal work of chorography, *Britannia*, had "demonstrate[d] with a newly visual clarity the probable similarity of early British culture to that of other primitive peoples," meaning that there had been some time for Camden's position to settle and gain support from other scholars—and for the emergence of what John Curran has called "an attempt to see something worthy in the new image of the primitive

³² Ibid., 41.

³³ Geoffrey translation by Michael Faletra, qtd. in Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, 24.

³⁴ Ibid., 23

³⁵ Ibid., 24

Britons.”³⁶ With credible humanists such as John Speed demanding that “no man thinke, that the glory of this ancient and warlike nation of Brittaines, is in any wayes disparaged, or made inferiour” by its newly admitted origins in the wild tribesmen described by Tacitus and Caesar, there was indeed the possibility of “royalty unlearned, honour untaught,” and “valour/ that wildly grows in them, but yields a crop” (4.2.177-9). One of the final paradoxes in *Cymbeline*, however, is whether the honest and rugged virtue demonstrated by the princes Guiderius and Arviragus is only as a result of their royal ancestry as sons of king Cymbeline, or can be read as a broader statement about a potential for greatness lurking even in the Welsh mountain-dwellers they greatly resemble.

Cymbeline has no unequivocally Welsh characters, despite the fact that significant events and a large amount of its action take place in land we are told is “Cambria,” Wales. John Curran, Jr., in describing other contemporary Roman Britain plays, points out that *Caradoc, or The Valiant Welshman* (written by an unidentified playwright known only as “R.A.”), in the midst of its dramatization of the deeds of the ancient British leader Caractacus, also introduces a character called Morgan whose presentation is more in-keeping with the stock Welshmen of the early modern English stage, and who according to Curran is nevertheless “grouped with the heroes” of the play and behaves in appropriately heroic ways.³⁷ This just goes to show that Shakespeare could have chosen to add a Welshman to *Cymbeline*’s staging of Wales, but he doesn’t do so— is it Shakespeare’s aim to *avoid* distinction between English and Welsh for the duration of *Cymbeline*? Megan Lloyd makes the choice, in her chapter on *Cymbeline*, to refer to the residents of Cymbeline’s court as “English” and the location of Cymbeline’s court as “England,” but I would suggest that it is in fact more important to recognize that Shakespeare does *not* do this.³⁸ Though differing in degree of sophistication, perhaps representing the two different schools of thought on ancient British history, the Britons of

³⁶ Curran, “Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught,” 279.

³⁷ Curran, “Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught,” 280-1.

³⁸ Lloyd, “*Speak it in Welsh*,” 126, footnote 2.

Cymbeline's court and the Britons living in a cave in Cambria share the same basic origins, and stand together in the face of military threat from a foreign power.

All of the conflicting and paradoxical, basically-the-same-but-actually-distinct national identities, together with the ambiguity surrounding the presentations of the Welsh landscape and the princes and the Romans and the Britons, contributes to the network of sense and nonsense which constitutes *Cymbeline*. Much of this nonsense is under the surface, perhaps only audible enough to cause an audience member to wonder, briefly, why Posthumus has a Latin-sounding name or whether the princes really are as “rude” and “savage” as they are described. With so many plotlines, one would imagine that readers or viewers of *Cymbeline* would benefit from there being only a single line on British identity or the Welsh countryside, a moment such as Imogen's lines in 4.2, “Gods, what lies I have heard!/ Our courtiers say all's savage but at court./ Experience, O, thou disprov'st report!” which might provide clarification to at least one of these conflicts. Yet as counter-intuitive as it may seem, nonsense of the sort we see in *Cymbeline* is a major strength of the play, not a weakness to be resolved at all costs. Hearing lines which seem to run counter to the staged action—as when Iachimo's admission that the Britons are “gods” in battle is followed shortly by a stage direction calling for the British to break ranks and flee, (5.2.11)—inspires a kind of perplexity that leads to greater engagement with the text or the performance. The tension and potential energy bound up in contradiction help to propel the play forward, while at the same time accurately capturing the admittedly conflicted attitudes held by the early modern English towards the Welsh, the ancient British, the prospect of political or cultural union with the Welsh, and nature itself.

Conclusion

IMOGEN Say, and speak thick...how far it is
To this same blessed Milford. And by th' way
Tell me how Wales was made so happy as
T'inherit such a haven. (*Cymbeline* 3.2.56-61)

In the midst of her delight at hearing that her husband is waiting to meet her at Milford Haven, Imogen pauses to wonder how exactly Wales should have ended up in possession of a port good enough to house her beloved. Confusion over Wales—how to account for its venerable past and yet distance it from that past enough to claim superiority, how to handle the recent Acts of Union which made England and Wales one political entity—is noticeable throughout early modern and Elizabethan literature, and the works of Shakespeare are no exception. As dramatic texts intended for performance, however, the confusion—the “nonsense”—about Wales in Shakespeare’s treatment of Welshmen and Welsh identity becomes an opportunity rather than a weakness. Just as it would be irresponsible to overlook the very real power of these Welsh characters to contribute to prejudice against the Welsh at the time the plays were first performed, it seems to me equally myopic to entirely ignore the real power in a character referring to a Welsh rebel leader as “a worthy gentleman” (*Henry IV Part One* 3.1.170) or a beloved English king such as Henry V verbally aligning himself with a population which, at the time of the play’s performance, was both politically and socially marginalized. Shakespeare’s Welshmen are at all times both stereotypes and crucial voices within their plays, and when their lines and actions combine with those of the rest of the play onstage, they create productive and engaging paradoxes to which I have chosen to apply Stephen Booth’s term “nonsense.”

Historiographically, the English of the sixteenth century took a view of the Welsh which deserves to be recognized as contradictory and paradoxical. Dramatically, this same “nonsensical” view of the Welsh appears in Shakespeare’s treatment of the Welsh and Welshness. It is not necessary to smooth or eradicate this nonsense when studying or performing the play in order for the play to be either successful or significant. “Nonsense” can be a benefit in great works of

literature and especially in performance texts, which Shakespeare's works always are: leaning into the nonsense, that is, performing both the contradictory sides of a character with equal dedication and intensity, generates audience engagement, makes the character more complex and therefore of greater realism, and (last but not least) enriches the play as a whole.

Richard Preiss, in his book on clowns and the print history of early modern drama, has stated that, as critics, “we have replaced the formalist fantasy that every play possesses only one meaning with an attention to the *ideological friction* that texts, as culturally embedded productions, continuously negotiate and perform.”¹ Performance confronts audiences with friction which may have lain dormant in the text of the play, a friction which can play as nonsense. A contradiction which may not have stood out during a simple reading of the text may come to light once a character is brought to life on-stage—for example, an actor cast as Sir Hugh will be confronted with both a scripted accent worthy to be played for extreme comedy, and a need to convincingly drive the action in such scenes as 1.1. The structural support embedded in the text of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in scenes when Sir Hugh is the first to speak or in which a line of his affects the direction the rest of the action will take, or in the highlighting when criticism of him comes from an unreliable or corrupted source like Master Ford or Falstaff, will become more noticeable as well. I have used Stephen Booth's concept of productive “nonsense” to explain why the paradoxical English view of the Welsh in the early modern period, rather than a weakness or source of confusion in the plays in which it is employed, can actually be considered a source of value and energy.

The contradictions embedded in Shakespeare's treatment of Welsh characters like Glendower or Fluellen which become apparent in performance not only point to real historical and social trends of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, they result in Welsh characters that are interesting *because* of their contradictions. When Shakespeare's view of Wales appears ambiguous in a

¹ Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4 (my emphasis).

play like *Cymbeline*, this does not automatically become a weakness in the play—rather, it becomes part of the play’s “music of ideas,” the unannounced and sometimes undetected leaps beyond logic which, through the nonsense they create, allow readers or audience members to approximate the most ineffable metaphysical experiences.² We are left, ultimately, to ask whether there may have been an association in Shakespeare’s mind between Wales itself and contradictory or paradoxical ideas—and regardless of the answer, to relish the engaging nonsense embedded in his treatments of the Welsh.

² Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, 122.

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