

**Shakespeare's portrayal of the
Celtic Nations of Scotland and Wales and the changing view of
ancient Britain**

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Abstract

Shakespeare was writing at a time when the English monarchy changed from being in the hands of the 'Welsh harridan' Elizabeth I to the more cosmopolitan Scottish James VI/I, and this was also the time when the ancient British myths were no longer taken as the verbatim source for British history, with a preference for seeing the civilising influence of classical Rome. This then is a watershed period for the relationship between England and its Celtic neighbours, and the writings of Shakespeare can give us an indication of how this change was perceived at the time. I will compare Shakespeare's earlier work from Elizabeth I's reign with his later work under James I to determine if there is a change of approach to, or perception of the Celts. In doing so I will look at his portrayal of the Welsh, the Scots, and at the wider view of 'Britishness', to see how these Celtic nations are portrayed from an English viewpoint. I will also consider Shakespeare's stance on the Antiquarian/Galfridian debate as understanding these two different views of British history, and how Shakespeare chose to use these, ultimately gives us a further insight into his depiction of the Celtic nations.

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Introduction

Shakespeare never used the term Celt, although it was used by some of his contemporaries including Spenser and Drayton, who used it in a Celtic-French context.¹ A contested term then and now, for clarity, it is used here to refer to the people, language, and culture of the ancient British or Celtic nations, conceptionally embodied today in modern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Brittany, and Cornwall.

Traditionally, the key eras for Celtic literature are seen as being Medieval (twelfth to fifteenth centuries), when the oral traditions of the sixth century were written, and the Celtic Revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when a renewal of interest in Celtic works became popular.

Despite not being seen as a key era for Celtic literature, Shakespeare was writing at a critical time for the Celtic nations and their relationship with England. *The Acts of Union* under Henry VIII, whilst still outlawing the use of the Welsh language, had given greater rights and equality to the Welsh, particularly the Welsh gentry, which led to an influx of Welsh immigrants into England and an increase in Welsh influence in many areas of English life.² Elizabeth I then continued the practice of her forebears in using the ancestral links back, through Wales, to the ancient Kings of Britain, to confer legitimacy on the Tudor dynasty. In this they were aligned to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136).

Geoffrey of Monmouth's narrative reflected Brutus history - the settlement of Britain by the Trojan prince Brutus - that was still the conventional foundation myth in Elizabethan England, and included tales of King Arthur in his accounts of Saxon Britain.³ Geoffrey of Monmouth was influential in both political and poetic writings; as Hutson states, before 1603, literary reworkings of Geoffrey of Monmouth's fables could be seen in the *Chronicle* of John Hardyng (1543), in the Briton monuments in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), in John Higgins additions to the *Mirror for*

¹ John Kerrigan, 'Prologue: *Dionbrollach*: How Celtic Was Shakespeare', in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers*, ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Routledge, 2013), pp. xv-xli (p.xxiv).

² John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Penguin, 2007), pp.225-31.

³ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.21.

Magistrates (1574, 1575), Humphrey Llwyd's *Commentarioli Britannicae Descriptionis Fragmentum* (1572), and Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, 1587), all despite its waning credibility as history.⁴ How seriously the Tudors took their Welsh-British roots and links back to ancient legendary kings is questionable, but the Tudors certainly used these tales for political propaganda. Henry VIII following the example of Edward I, used the myths of Brutus' division of Britain to argue for an English overlordship in Scotland,⁵ and had used the regal descent from Brennus as part of his argument for imperial independence from Papal jurisdiction.⁶ The continuing use of the medieval romance of Arthur's legendary devotion to the Virgin was also appropriated by the cult of Elizabeth and was evident in the pageantry of the Accession Day Tilts held annually on the Queen's coronation day.⁷ British myths as made popular by Geoffrey of Monmouth were therefore perceptible in Tudor England but there is no evidence for Arthurian plays by Shakespeare or the Lord Chamberlain's men, and Shakespeare's adherence to Galfridian history in his work is limited. By contrast, the Lord Admiral's Players performed Arthurian romances and in the late 1590s produced a series of chronicle plays, these being *Vortiger* (1596), *Uther Pendragon* (1597) and *The Lyfe and Death of Arthus King of England* (1598), demonstrating that Galfridian myths and Brutus histories remained a popular topic for the theatre.⁸

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were also an era of historical revolution, with the discovery of Roman Britain, the development of cartography, the influence of the exploration of the New World, and the translation of classical authors. The rise in interest in antiquarianism, beginning with Polydore Vergil's *Anglia Historia* (1534),⁹ but spearheaded by William Camden in his work *Britannia*

⁴ Lorna Hutson, *England's Insular Imagining: The Elizabethan Erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.250.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp.14-16.

⁶ Philip Schwyzer, 'British History and "British History": The Same Old Story?' in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by David Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 11-23 (p.15).

⁷ Paul Whitfield White, 'The Admiral's Men, Shakespeare, and the Lost Arthurian Plays of Elizabethan England', *Arthuriana*, 24.4, (2014), pp. 33-47, (p.34). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44697475> [Accessed 24 January 2024].

⁸ *Ibid.* p.33.

⁹ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.51.

(1586), drew scorn on the ancient fables in preference for recorded histories.¹⁰ Camden's *Britannia* compiled evidence from classical historiographers such as Caesar, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius, to paint a historic picture of the ancient Britons that discredited Geoffrey of Monmouth's legendary British history.¹¹

These two competing views of British history were therefore concurrent during Shakespeare's career. As Parry highlights,

The two histories continued side by side in Jacobean writing, with each version having its supporters. Camden's history naturally attracted the learned men of the age, who praised it for its scholarship and painstaking honesty, whereas Geoffrey continued to appeal to writers, especially poets, of an imaginative turn of mind who responded to the richness of the stories and to the glorious aura of antiquity with which they invested the nation.¹²

James' VI ascension to the English throne as James I of England saw an influx of Scottish gentry into London, and whilst James' attempt to unite the two countries into Great Britain was ultimately unsuccessful, with many of his English gentry resenting the influence of his Scottish courtiers, this encouraged consideration in the two kingdoms of England and Scotland of what it meant to be British.¹³ Under James, there is continued evidence of the use of British myths, such as in Anthony Munday's Lord Mayors Show *The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia* (1605),¹⁴ in Ben Jonson's *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610), and in Harbert's 1604 *Prophecie of Cadwallader*,¹⁵ but the antiquarian approach to history was also influential in the writing and propaganda of the day, with a greater emphasis on classical Roman history.

¹⁰ Lorna Hutson, *England's Insular Imagining: The Elizabethan Erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.223.

¹¹ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.60.

¹² Graham Parry, 'Ancient Britons and Early Stuarts', in *Neo-Historicism: Studies in Renaissance Literature, History and Politics*, ed. by Robin Headlam, Wells and others, (Boydell & Brewer, 2000), pp. 155–78 (p.157).

¹³ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.61.

¹⁴ Richard Dutton, "'King Lear, The Triumphs Of Reunited Britannia' and 'The Matter of Britain'" p.140.

¹⁵ Tristan Marshal, *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stages under James VI and I*, (Manchester University Press, 2000), doi:10.2307/j.ctvgd20f.6. p.57.

The reigns of Elizabeth and James therefore saw a changing relationship between England and its Celtic neighbours. My focus here is to look at the impact of this relationship in England, rather than in Wales or Scotland. By reviewing Shakespeare's plays and focussing on his portrayal of the peripheral nations of Wales and Scotland and of a 'Celtic-British' past, I intend to show that Shakespeare not only demonstrates an Anglocentrism, and 'ending centrality of 'Englishness' within Britain'¹⁶ but also that he was less interested in a Galfridian past, which influenced his portrayal of his Celtic characters.

The study of Shakespeare requires a recognition that we do not have a single base version for some of his plays and the versions we do have may differ from the play as performed. Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in his lifetime in Quarto format, but there is no evidence that Shakespeare was involved in these publications, and it wasn't until after his death that the First Folio was published providing access to a catalogue of his plays. Shakespeare's published works demonstrate variations between the editions, reflecting revisions or discrepancies between printed versions, making it difficult to confirm a definitive text. Often there are contemporary references obliquely included that would have added a context or humour for an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience, that may not be understood or recognised today. As a performed work, there are also opportunities to emphasise or manipulate traits or themes, and an emphasis on key words or nuances in look can mean every representation on stage will be different. As Morgan Elizabeth Moore points out,

As anyone who has watched or studied or performed Shakespeare understands, staging and performance can fundamentally affect a character or play's received meaning.¹⁷

Shakespeare's portrayal of the Celtic nations can therefore be viewed in vastly different ways depending on the slant provided by the production. This essay tries to focus on the written word but acknowledges the unconscious bias of past productions seen.

¹⁶ David J Baker and Willy Maley, 'Introduction: An Uncertain Union' in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by David J Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.1-8 (p.6).

¹⁷ Elizabeth Moore Morgan, *How Wales Was Made so Happy: Exploring Nation and Nonsense in Shakespeare's Treatment of the Welsh* (Wellesley College, 2015), p.7
<<https://repository.wellesley.edu/object/ir596>> [Accessed 10 November 2023].

Chapter 1: The Welsh as Integrated Neighbours

Shakespeare was writing at a time that saw an increase in the number of Welshmen in London and in their influence in many walks of life. Whilst Wales had been ruled by England since Edward I's conquest marked the end of Welsh independence in 1284, *The Acts of Union* or *The Laws in Wales Acts* enacted by the English parliament between 1536 and 1543, allowed for Wales to be better integrated into the kingdom of England, and provided the Welsh gentry (at least) with an equality with the English.¹⁸ This initiated a migration from Wales to England and Shakespeare's Welsh characters – an army captain, a schoolmaster parson and ex-courtier – is suggestive of the breadth of integration of the learned Welsh into English society.¹⁹ As Megan Lloyd states, 'With the Tudors on the throne, many Welshmen journeyed to London, enticed by profit, employment, education and adventure.'²⁰

The Tudor monarchy also used their links to Welsh descent to provide a connection to the ancient British kings to help legitimise their reign, in propaganda at least, allowing them to claim to have 'fulfilled the prophecy in Geoffrey of Monmouth that the British blood would one day regain the throne.'²¹ Whilst the Galfridian view of an ancient Briton ancestry linking back to Trojans and Brutus may have been questioned, and actively mocked by the likes of Polydore Vergil, the concept was a useful part of the cultural symbolism employed by the English monarchy. That the Tudors were aligned to the Welsh can be seen in *Richard III*. Richard refers to Henry Tudor as the 'The Welshman' in Act 4 scene 4,²² and thereafter refers to him as the Brittain Richmond and his followers as 'a scum of Brittaines [...] bastard Brittaines' (*Richard III*, 5.3.320-36). His own soldiers in contrast were 'Gentlemen of England'

¹⁸ John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Penguin, 2007), pp.225-31.

¹⁹ Richard Wilson, 'Cackling Home to Camelot: Shakespeare's Welsh Roots' in *Shakespeare and Wales, From the Marches to the Assembly*, ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.191-210 (pp.200-01).

²⁰ Megan Lloyd, 'Rhymer, Minstrel Lady Mortimer and the Power of Welsh Words' in *Shakespeare and Wales, From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.59-73 (p.59).

²¹ Philip Schwyzer, 'British History and 'The British History': The Same Old Story?', pp.11-23, (p.15).

²² William Shakespeare, 'Richard III' (4.4.491) in *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Macmillan, 2007). All subsequent references from Shakespeare's plays are to this collection, incorporated into the text.

(*Richard III*, 5.3.341). Whether here Shakespeare means British or Bretons in his use of 'Brittaine' is a moot point, as both are Celtic in origin and refer to Henry's descent from Ancient Britons, which aligns to Tudor propaganda. Lisa Hopkins goes on to mention the description of Elizabeth I as 'that red-headed Welsh harridan' and attributes this comment to Philip II of Spain.²³ James VI on his succession to the English throne, maintained this link to Trojan-British genealogies through his Welsh ancestors as this legitimised his monarchy by retaining a connection back to the ancient British kings.²⁴

In addition to the Welsh connections ascribed to the monarch, an important influence on Shakespeare would have been his Welsh patronage. Frederick Harries points out that when Shakespeare first arrived in London, one of the notable patrons of licensed actors was Henry Herbert, second earl of Pembroke, and father of William Herbert commonly thought to be the 'W.H' referenced in Shakespeare's sonnets.²⁵

Shakespeare's plays were collected and published in 1623 as the First Folio and the dedication in the Folio is to William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke and Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. Another influential connection would have been to the Salusbury family of Denbighshire. Sir John Salusbury married Ursula Stanley, the daughter of the fourth Earl of Derby who was at one time patron of Shakespeare's company. Shakespeare's poem *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, first published in 1601, may have been dedicated to Sir John as it appears in a collection where the main poem is so dedicated²⁶.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare lists the supporters of Henry Tudor that gathered 'At Pembroke, or at Ha'rfordwest in Wales' (*Richard III*, 4.5.10). This list of supporters is a catalogue of powerful Welsh leaders, some of whom may have had ties to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is here very conscious of his audience and his patronage and Richard Wilson argues that this list of 'great name and worth'²⁷ is a homage to Shakespeare's network of sponsors. The Welsh listed here are:

²³ Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border Crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad*, (Ashgate, 2005), p.15.

²⁴ Graham Parry, 'Ancient Britons and Early Stuarts', p.156.

²⁵ Frederick Harries, *Shakespeare, and the Welsh*, (Forgotten books, 2012), p.49.

²⁶ Ibid. pp.54-55.

²⁷ Richard Wilson, 'Cackling Home to Camelot: Shakespeare's Welsh Roots', p.195.

Sir Walter Herbert, a renowned soldier,
Sir George Talbot, Sir William Stanley,
Oxford, redoubted Pembroke, Sir James Blunt,
and Rhys-ap-Thomas with a valient crew, (*Richard III*, 4.5.12-15).

This list not only shows Shakespeare's link to Welsh nobility but also the importance of the Welsh in Elizabethan England.

The influx and influence of the Welsh is therefore reflected in Shakespeare's plays, and Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer point out that Shakespeare 'never set a play in England without incorporating a significant Welsh element,'²⁸ and in Shakespeare's histories, 'Welsh characters greatly outnumber representatives of England's other neighbour nations.'²⁹ Much of the analysis of Shakespeare's Welsh characters today focusses on how his portrayal is not just the mockery and stereotype assumed in the past but a well-rounded, affectionate portrait, leading to conjecture on his closeness to Wales, either in kin, association or even visits. Going further, Frederick Harris attributes Shakespeare's artistic talents to a Celtic strain³⁰, mirroring Matthew Arnold who describes Celtic traits of artistic temperament, sentiment 'with love of beauty, charm, and spirituality' as part of the genius of Shakespeare's work.³¹ Whilst his portraits are such that, as Rev Rees states 'no Welshman need be ashamed of what Shakespeare says about Welsh character,'³² I contend that these portrayals still reflect an English, outsiders view of the Welsh, be that Shakespeare's own views or those aligned to his main audiences.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the Welsh show them to be integrated into the kingdom of England, but they are still different from the English. His Welsh characters are (overall) domesticated and improved by their links to England; they are portrayed positively, but perhaps a little patronisingly, and they are also portrayed as contemporary Welsh, rather than ancient Celtic in nature.

²⁸ Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer 'Introduction: A Welsh Correction' in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer, (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.1-5 (p.2).

²⁹ Ibid. p.4.

³⁰ Frederick Harries, *Shakespeare, and the Welsh*, p.73

³¹ Matthew Arnold, *The Study of Celtic Literature* (Smith, Elder & Co, 1891), p.97.

³² Rees, Rev T. Mardy, *Shakespeare's Welshmen, Lecture to the Neath Antiquarian Society* 21 March 1932, Neath Public Library. ref: GB 3167 NAS SOC 9/72) p.2.

Sir Hugh Evans, the parson and teacher in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a prime example of this portrait. Sir Hugh is part of the community in Windsor, but is not fully integrated, and demonstrates traits that are recognisable Welsh stereotypes, through which he supplies much of the humour. Sir Hugh Evans may be seen as a comic caricature, with some scholars suggesting that he was ‘a transparent representation of the Earl of Oxford's theatre manager, Henry Evans, a Welshman who taught the ‘Children of Paul's’ troupe.’³³ Others highlight that Shakespeare is likely to have known Thomas Jenkins, a Welshman, who was a headmaster at the Stratford Grammar School in Stratford-upon-Avon (and, as Frederick Harries points out, also acted as chaplain of the adjoining chapel)³⁴ who was therefore another potential source for this character.

Sir Hugh is portrayed as educated and civilized but he is still an outsider, and his Welsh idiosyncrasies are to be humoured. Like most of the Welsh stage characters of this time, the comedy is made from his mispronouncing of the letters ‘b’, ‘d’ and ‘g’ and this is what often made Welsh stage characters popular. Lidh argues that in the 1602 Quarto version of the play, Sir Hugh’s accent is almost non-existent, and suggests that Shakespeare was unlikely to have written Sir Hugh to be portrayed as a foolish buffoon in front of a Queen who considered herself to have Welsh heritage.³⁵ The number of Welsh comic characters elsewhere argues against this however, and Sir Hugh is also of a middle if not lower class and therefore distanced from a royal comparison. It is often the middle or lower classes who are the sources of humour in Shakespeare’s plays and Sir Hugh is no different in this than Pistol, Mistress Quickly or Shallow. Sir Hugh is therefore meant to be a comic character with his Welsh identity being central to his comedic role, but he is treated with much affection.

Sir Hugh’s mangled English sets him apart from his English neighbours and is a source of amusement for them. As Brittani Avalon states, this lost-in-translation effect provides a source of humour in the play, whilst also highlighting

³³ Dr Michael Delahoyde, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
<<https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/shakespeare/mww1.html>> [Accessed 10 Nov 2023].

³⁴ Frederick Harries, *Shakespeare, and the Welsh*, p.15.

³⁵ Todd M Lidh, ‘*The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Elizabeth I: The Welsh Connection’, *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 6 (2006), pp.65-73 (p.68)
<<https://omeka.li.suu.edu/ojs/index.php/woodeno/article/view/126/106>> [accessed 13 November 2023].

the disconnect between the English and the Welsh.³⁶ Megan Lloyd goes on to say that:

Laughter would have been an Englishman's primary response to hearing Welsh. In their history of the Welsh language Geraint H Jenkins, Richard Suggett and Eryn M White observe that the English considered Welsh 'spoken in the main by penurious and ignorant mountain dwellers [...] not in any way a suitable vehicle for political discourse, administrative matters, high culture, or polite social life.'³⁷

Sir Hugh has a stereotypical Welsh accent, and his broken English persists into his Latin pronouncements. In Act 4 scene 1, he mispronounces hinc, hanc, hoc as 'hing, hang, hog' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 4.1.33) during the lesson he conducts with William which causes Mistress Quickly to mistranslate: 'Hang-hog is Latin for bacon' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 4.1.34). Much of the humour in this scene is around the wordplay, but the source of humour here is as much on the English women as on Sir Hugh. In this scene we are laughing at Mistress Quickly's salacious language misinterpretations as well as at Sir Hugh's 'Fritters of English' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 5.5.124), and throughout Sir Hugh is shown to be an understanding schoolmaster, whose shrewdness and kindness prevents him from appearing ridiculous.

Another of Sir Hugh's Welsh stereotypes is his being musical. In Act 3, scene 1, Sir Hugh, whilst waiting for his duel with Caius, the French doctor, sings a song which is a mix of Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* with the opening line of *Psalms 137*. Tom Flanigan highlights that this psalm not only has several references to singing and to the harp (the definitive instrument of Wales) but is also the archetypal psalm of lament in exile:

Evans is a Welshman living in a kind of voluntary (perhaps economically inspired) exile in England. He seems relatively happy, and he is clearly

³⁶ Brittani Avalon, *The Safe Haven of Wales in Shakespeare: Language, Royals, Folklore and National Pride*, p.13

<https://www.academia.edu/5883507/The_Safe_Haven_of_Wales_in_Shakespeare_Language_Royal_s_Folklore_and_National_Pride> [accessed 7 December 2023].

³⁷ Megan Lloyd, 'Rhymer, Minstrel Lady Mortimer and the Power of Welsh Words', p.60.

committed to fitting in, but his outsider's status (continually pointed up by his awkward English) remains evident.³⁸

Sir Hugh is a parson as well as a schoolmaster. Sokol points out that this joint occupancy was an unusual practice in Elizabethan England, despite this being encouraged,³⁹ although it may have been more common in Wales, as G Dyfnallt Owen suggests in his *Elizabethan Wales: The social scene*.⁴⁰ This dual role allows Sir Hugh to reflect the motif of learning within the play and to have a role in attempting to keep the local peace, for, as Kegl points out, church courts remained responsible for trying cases including fornication, adultery, and disputed matrimonial promises. Kegl goes on to suggest that Sir Hugh is ineffectual in resolving his neighbours' disputes because he remains an outsider.⁴¹

Sir Hugh is more Welsh than Celtic, but there is one mythic reference, that being in Act 1, scene 1 when Sir Hugh, when chastising Slender, invokes Cadwalader, the legendary Welsh king mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth. This is however as much to demonstrate the Welsh stereotype of a love of their past, as to invoke the last great king of the Britons, and overall, this play has a contemporary feel that is mirrored by the imagery in the play, with the action culminating in the Herne the Hunter scene. Herne may have had earlier Celtic or Nordic roots, but the imagery here is more of local legends. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not a world of Celtic folklore but a domestic comedy in a very English setting. There is however another nod to Galfridian myths in the inclusion of a Fairy Queen in this scene. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* dedicated to Elizabeth I, draws on the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth for its characters such as Arthur and represents the monarch in the title role. Shakespeare echoes this connection between his 'Fairy Queen' and Elizabeth when Mistress Quickly states: 'Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and

³⁸ Tom Flanigan, 'Parson Evans's Musical Muddle in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*' *The Explicator*, 68.2 (Apr-Jun 2010), pp. 75-79 (p.76), doi:10.1080/00144941003723667.

³⁹ B J Sokol. 'Why Does Shakespeare Give his Windsor Schoolmaster a Double Occupation as an Educator and as a Parson?' *Notes and Queries*, 66.3 (September 2019), pp.430-35 (p.433), doi:10.1093/notesj/gjz097.

⁴⁰ G Dyfnallt Owen, *Elizabethan Wales: The Social Scene* (University of Wales Press, 1964), p.207.

⁴¹ Rosemary Kegl, 'The Adoption of Abominable Terms: The Insults That Shape Windsor's Middle Class', *ELH*, 61.2 (1994) pp.253-78 (pp.269-70) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873269>> [accessed 13 November 2023].

out' (*Merry Wives of Windsor*, 5.5.45). This scene is not however the folklore world of Geoffrey of Monmouth with the Queen far from being the ethereal being of Celtic myth. The whole fairy sequence is tomfoolery. Falstaff, fearing that he would die if he spoke or looked at a fairy, tries to hide in the dirt, then fears his fat will allow the 'Welsh fairy' [Sir Hugh] to 'transform [him] to a piece cheese' (*Merry Wives*, 5.5.82).

Shakespeare's Fluellen in *Henry V* can also be viewed in the tradition of comic stage Welshmen, although more recent studies suggests that his character is more complex than this. William Corbett among others, highlights that Sir Roger Williams (c. 1539/1540 to 1595) may have been the basis for Fluellen and the pair share many verbal similarities of 'sardonic wit, wiles of warfare and thick Welsh accent.'⁴² At the risk of showing 'Fluellenism', both showed 'rash bravado, impulsive action and strict adherence to military discipline,'⁴³ both were born in Monmouthshire, and both became professional soldiers.

Fluellen is present throughout much of the second half of *Henry V* and continually shows Welsh traits. He is interested in history and pedigrees, demonstrates loquaciousness, and is again recognisable and humorous because of his Welsh accent. Like Sir Hugh, Fluellen's challenges with English, exchanging 'b's and 'p's, makes him a focus for mirth. This humour does however allow Fluellen to also act as a foil or fool, adding a commentary on the actions of the king, and recent interpretations of Fluellen see him more as a 'cultural subversion than comic diversion.'⁴⁴ Baker argues that Fluellen in his jokes and ridiculous comparisons results in statements that are 'outside the official line.'⁴⁵ His example is the rambling analogy in Act 4 scene 7, comparing Henry V with Alexander the 'Pig'. This speech starts well – both Henry and Alexander are valiant, but the comparison get more obtuse as Fluellen continues. Both Henry and Alexander are born in cities by rivers,

⁴² William Corbett, *Response* (Review of 'Shakespeare's Welsh' by Sylvia Morris, 2012) <<https://theshakespeareblog.com/2012/11/shakespeares-welsh/>> [accessed 5 September 2023].

⁴³ William Corbett, *Response* (Review of 'Shakespeare's Welsh' by Sylvia Morris, 2012) <<https://theshakespeareblog.com/2012/11/shakespeares-welsh/>> [accessed 5 September 2023].

⁴⁴ Willy Maley, 'Let a Welsh Correction Teach you a Good English Condition: Shakespeare Wales and the Critics' in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.177-89 (p.178).

⁴⁵ David J Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain*, (Stanford University Press, 1997), p.55.

both rivers have salmon, but then it takes a darker turn – both killed their best friends (Alexander killed Clitus, Henry turned away Falstaff). Baker therefore argues for the disruptive influence of Fluellen as a Welshman, whose illogical comparisons may lead to wider questions.

Despite the potential commentary on the king, Fluellen's gallantry, and Gower's remarks in Act 5 (of the Folio version) show Fluellen to be a loyal servant of the crown. Fluellen shows unwavering admiration and loyalty; Baker argues that Fluellen is a Welshman who is to be admired for demonstrating English virtues,⁴⁶ and for Highley, Fluellen represents 'the colonial subject who has internalized English values and subordinated his own provincial loyalties to service to the English nation-state.'⁴⁷

King Henry famously claims Welsh lineage in this play, when he responds to Fluellen with 'For I am Welsh, you know, good countryman' (*Henry V*, 4.7.87). This assertion, based on his birth in Monmouth, perhaps reflects the propaganda of articulating Welsh origins for the later Tudor monarchs, but this play is also often seen as the most English of Shakespeare's histories.⁴⁸ English rhetoric pervades the first half of the play and Henry's famous oration before Harfleur and Agincourt identifies his army as 'Noblest English' (*Henry V*, 3.1.17) and 'made in England' (*Henry V*, 3.1.26). Henry therefore blurs the notions of being Welsh and English and this perhaps reflects the assimilation of Wales into the kingdom of England, but as Fluellen shows in his antagonism with Pistol, this was an uneasy integration, with the differences between the Welsh and English still evident.

Shakespeare shows an awareness of Brutus history in this play and uses Pistol to mock the Welshman's links to such mythology, calling Fluellen a 'Base Trojan' twice. Schwyzer sees Pistol as anti-Galfridian like Buchanan, Vergil, and Languet,⁴⁹ whilst Baker points out that the Brutus history is never referenced by Fluellen himself but by Gower (in the Folio) and by Pistol.⁵⁰ Fluellen instead talks of the

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.57.

⁴⁷ Christopher Highley. *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.147.

⁴⁸ Philip Schwyzer, "I am Welsh, you know": the Nation in Henry V.' in *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.126-150, p.126.

⁴⁹ Philip Schwyzer, 'British History and 'The British History': The Same Old Story?', pp.11-23, p.19.

⁵⁰ David J Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain*, p.59.

classical realms of Greece and Rome, and is an expert on ancient wars, reflecting the influences of antiquarians like Camden, rather than the Galfridian tradition of Welsh myths and the Welsh past.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the Welsh rebel Glendower in *I Henry IV* is less of a comic character and arguably not comical at all. There may be humour in Hotspur's reaction to Glendower's superstitions, but this is not the level of humour of Fluellen or Sir Hugh. As the historic character Owain Glyndŵr, Glendower's adversarial reputation would have been well known by an Elizabethan audience, and he takes his place alongside other known historical figures in Shakespeare's history plays. He is first mentioned in *Richard II*, Act 3 scene 1, when Bolingbroke talks of going to fight with Glendower, then is referenced throughout *I Henry IV* as a key adversary to the king. Falstaff in Act 2 Scene 4, for example, describes him as:

‘He of Wales, that gave Amamon the
bastinado and made Lucifer cuckold and swore the
devil his true liegeman upon the cross of a Welsh
hook— (*I Henry IV*, 2.4.248-50).

This shows the reputation of the Welsh rebel, but it is in Scene 1 of Act 3 of *I Henry IV* where we finally see Glendower on stage. This scene is set in Wales at the Archdeacon's house in Bangor, and through his interaction with Hotspur and Mortimer, we get to see how Glendower is viewed by his English companions. Glendower shows Welsh traits; he is magical, superstitious, verbose, and demonstrates hwyl 'that exalted rhetorical pitch commanded by fervent Welsh speakers at the height of enthusiasm'⁵¹ but he is countered by the blunt speaking northerner Hotspur, who in his own way reflects a provincial stereotype. Glendower believes in his own supernatural powers and in this is perhaps the most Galfridian of all Shakespeare's Welsh characters. He claims that wonders in the heavens were observed at his birth, that he can command the devil, and that he has caused storms to rise three times against the English. Hotspur is dismissive of each event. Whilst Hotspur is a practical northerner, reflecting the evidence-based approach of

⁵¹ Elizabeth Moore Morgan, *How Wales Was Made so Happy: Exploring Nation and Nonsense in Shakespeare's Treatment of the Welsh*, p.28.

antiquarians like Camden, Glendower is a Celtic warrior of the Galfridian mythic past.

Whilst many Welsh traits are in evidence, at the same time Glendower is proud that he was 'trained up in the English court' (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.122). Shakespeare therefore once again shows a Welshman but one who has been educated in England, one who is a 'worthy gentleman' (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.165), refined by his connections to English society. Glendower is another lover of music, saying of himself that he 'framed to the harp | many an English ditty lovely well | and gave the tongue a helpful ornament' (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.127-30). Glendower here is therefore another Welshman civilised by his time in England. Baker quotes Thomas Wright as saying of the Welsh:

When they come to London, are very simple and unwary, but afterward, by conversing a while and by the experience of other men's behaviours, they become wonderful wise and judicious.⁵²

Shakespeare's characterisation of Glendower is not the traditional English view found in his sources including Raphael Holinshed's *The third volume of Chronicles* (1587). Baker goes on to elaborate:

The hostility and contempt that Glyn Dwr got from these English chroniclers, historians say, was transmuted by Shakespeare's humanizing touch'The portrait is shot through with insight, sympathy, and a human warmth altogether lacking in the one-dimensional narratives of the [earlier] historians' offers R.R. Davies. 'It took the genius of an Englishman to create the first credible, even attractive, characterisation of the Welsh leader.'⁵³

Arthur E Hughes suggests that Shakespeare is inconsistent in his portrayal of Glendower in this play and argues that this reflects a shift in Shakespeare's perception of the Welshman's character as he was writing.⁵⁴ I think this is more of a

⁵² David J Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain*, p.30.

⁵³ David J Baker, 'Glyn Dwr, Glendouer, Glendourdy and Glendower' in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.43-57 (p.46).

⁵⁴ Arthur E Hughes, *Shakespeare and His Welsh Characters*, Joint Meeting of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and the Shakespeare Association at a Meeting held at King's College, on May 24th,

contrast of how the Welsh character is talked about, how his reputation has been built on hearsay and others' views, and the real Glendower when we are finally allowed to see him. The resulting portrait is however an English view of Glendower; Shakespeare has domesticated a formidable historic character and has made him less threatening as a result.

We have a second Welsh character in *I Henry IV*, that being Glendower's daughter who is married to Mortimer. She appears in just the one scene and has no scripted lines, but Lady Mortimer provides an intriguing portrait of a Welsh woman. Lady Mortimer is often presented as a doting wife, who 'Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties highly penned | Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower' (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.215-16). She is certainly a loving, faithful wife and accomplished musician, but Lady Mortimer can also be read as a warrior Celtic woman. In Act 1 scene 1, Westmoreland, when describing the capture of Mortimer by Glendower, talks of:

And a thousand of his people butchered.
Upon whose dead corpse there was such misuse,
Such beastly shameless transformation.
By those Welshwomen done, as may not be
Without much shame retold or spoken of: (*I Henry IV*, 1.1.42-46).

This is an image that cannot but be remembered when we meet Lady Mortimer, particularly as Lady Mortimer shows courage in wanting to accompany her husband – 'She'll be a soldier too, she'll to the wars' (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.195). It is easy to wonder if she would behave in such a violent way as the Welsh women mentioned earlier. What is most striking about Lady Mortimer, however, is that she speaks no English. As a character she has been marginalised or removed from some productions because of this or is seen more as a mirror for Glendower than a character in her own right, but this is to misread her strength and importance. Megan Lloyd points out that:

Combining pure, unadulterated Welsh language, not Welsh English [...] through Lady Mortimer, Shakespeare presents neither a quaint interlude nor a respite from battle, but a forceful oral reminder of Welsh resistance.⁵⁵

By not using 'Welsh English', Lady Mortimer is not someone for the audience to laugh at but may be dangerous because she is different. J Zawadzinski reviews the portrayal of the Duchess of York, Lady Mortimer, and Katherine in Shakespeare's second tetralogy and highlights that whilst each woman either literally or figuratively speaks a different language from her husband, each makes her views heard. She argues that Lady Mortimer violates the ideal of a good sixteenth century woman, by being outspoken, outwardly passionate, and by displaying this passion in song.⁵⁶ Lady Mortimer is not displaying the civilised behaviour of her English counterparts by refusing to be silent and obedient, and she is doing so whilst speaking and singing in what was deemed a forbidden language by *The Acts of Union*. Kate Chedgzoy argues that Lady Mortimer provides a positive cultural interlude through the music and romance in this scene,⁵⁷ but Lady Mortimer remains an outsider for the Elizabethan audience as much for her behaviour as her language. Glendower has benefitted from being educated and refined in the English court; his daughter has not had these advantages and appears more remote as a result. Indeed, at this point, many of Shakespeare's audiences would have shared Mortimer's incomprehension at his wife, aligning their viewpoint with that of the Englishman.

The Welsh characters in Shakespeare may therefore be more three dimensional and nuanced than many of the stage Welshmen dramatized at the time but they still do not reflect the Welsh of Elizabethan Wales, but rather the stereotypes of the Welsh as known to Shakespeare's audience, reflecting the view of the Welsh in England, particularly London, and as Christopher Ivic describes, reflecting 'Wales's status as an awkward neighbour within the kingdom of England.'⁵⁸ They have their

⁵⁵ Megan Lloyd, 'Rhymer, Minstrel Lady Mortimer and the Power of Welsh Words', p.62.

⁵⁶ J Zawadzinski, *Raising Their Voices: Women, Articulation and Power in Shakespeare's Henriad*, The College Of William And Mary, 2001 pp.20-26
<<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5271&context=etd>> [accessed 12 October 2023].

⁵⁷ Kate Chedgzoy, 'Shakespeare's Welsh Grandmother' in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.14-15

⁵⁸ Christopher Ivic, Bastard Normans, Norman Bastards: Anomalous Identities in the Life of *Henry V* in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p.75.

idiosyncrasies, and the portrayal can be humorous, but they are domesticated and Welsh rather than Celtic, with little reference back to Galfridian myth. Even their names – Glendower and Fluellen are English versions of Welsh names - reflect that these are Welsh outsiders trying to integrate into English society. As Schwyzer highlights:

What makes Shakespeare unusual among his English contemporaries is not that he wrote a good deal about Wales, but that he wrote about Wales from the perspective of an outsider.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Philip Schwyzer, 'Thirteen Ways of Looking like a Welshman: Shakespeare and His Contemporaries' in *Shakespeare And Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp.21-41(p.41).

Chapter 2: The Celtic Scots as Savages

Geoffrey of Monmouth's history was, as Kim Gilchrist suggests:

The official English account of the past, bolstering English interests and competing with a rival, and amusingly different, Scottish account of ancient Britain.⁶⁰

This history had long been used by English monarchs in their attempts to dominate Scotland. Edward I had argued overlordship of Scotland through the Bruton division of Britain as part of his justification for his invasion of Scotland (1296 to 1306)⁶¹ and Henry VIII had used the same argument in his *Declaration* (1542), published alongside his attempt to conquer Scotland between 1542 and 1550.⁶² The policy of English supremacy over Scotland continued overtly in Elizabeth's reign, particularly during the handling of the Mary Queen of Scots deposition and the resulting Scottish constitutional crisis of 1567 to 1573.⁶³

The desire for domination resulted in an English perspective of Scotland as a hostile adversary and this is reflected in the way that Shakespeare portrays the Scots. During Elizabeth's reign, we have very few Scottish characters in Shakespeare's plays and overwhelmingly, when the Scots appear, or are mentioned, they are seen as a martial race. In *Henry V*, Henry is concerned to leave England undefended from the Scot who may come:

Pouring like the tide into a breach
With ample and brim fullness of his force
Galling the gleaned land with hot assays (*Henry V*, 1.2.149-51).

The marauding Scots are a threat and a force to be reckoned with. Moreover, the Scottish were seen as a nation with a reputation for providing effective mercenaries. Vimala C Pasupathi describes the 'perception of the Scottish soldier as a fiercely

⁶⁰ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.13.

⁶² Lorna Hutson, *England's Insular Imagining: The Elizabethan Erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.16.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.119.

capable combatant whose martial loyalty is both highly desirable and dangerously unfixed.⁶⁴ He goes on to highlight that by 1583:

The number of Scottish soldiers augmenting resistance to English rule in Ireland was so large that Queen Elizabeth was forced to ask James VI to prohibit Scottish highlanders from entering there at all.⁶⁵

Where we have Scottish characters in Elizabethan Shakespeare, these are seen in their roles in the army, such as Captain Jamy in *Henry V*. Critics including Andrew Hadfield have suggested that Jamy could be identified with James VI, implying the possible negative outcomes of being ruled by a Scottish King, as it is Jamy who sparks off the argument between the Welshman Fluellen and the Irishman MacMorris.⁶⁶ Others have commented that Jamy may be a nod to James I of Scotland who was part of Henry V's military campaigns including the Siege of Melun in 1420, where his presence was used by Henry as a pretext for executing a Scottish contingent for treason, for fighting against their uncrowned king.⁶⁷

Jamy appears in just one scene, that of the four captains in Act 3, which is missing from the Quarto version of this play. What we know of Jamy comes from the description of him by others and Fluellen describes him as 'a marvellous falorous gentleman' (*Henry V*, 3.2.76-77). He is also deliberately referenced as Scottish. In the Folio text of *Henry V*, the speech prefixes for Jamy and MacMorris are Scot and Irish respectively, whilst Fluellen's prefix fluctuates between his name and Welsh. In contrast the Englishman is always called Gower. This implies that Shakespeare wanted to emphasise the nationality of these Celtic characters. Having a Scottish captain in his army demonstrates that Henry is growing his ranks with mercenaries. Despite being a hired soldier, Jamy is valiant – he vows to do 'gud service, or Ill lig I'th'grund for it; ay, or go to death; and I'll pay as valorously as I may' (*Henry V*, 3.2.115-18). He also intervenes as a peacemaker between Fluellen and MacMorris

⁶⁴ Vimala C Pasupathi, 'The Quality of Mercenaries: Contextualising Shakespeare's Scots in I Henry IV and Henry V', in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and The Borderers*, ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Routledge, 2013), pp.35-59 (p.38).

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.43.

⁶⁶ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.151.

⁶⁷ Lorna Hutson, *England's Insular Imagining: The Elizabethan Erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.191.

but as Pasupathi points out, there is perhaps indifference to their quarrel and the cause for which he fights.⁶⁸

Our other key Scotsman is Douglas in *I Henry IV*. Archibald, Earl of Douglas is one of the major conspirators in the play and is shown as a fearsome fighter. Early in the play Douglas tells Hotspur ‘There is not such a word | Spoke of in Scotland as this term of fear’ (*I Henry IV*, 4.1.84-5). Douglas is captured twice, first by Hotspur who vows to keep Douglas and all his other Scottish prisoners. Douglas then forges an alliance with his former captor, and by fighting for someone other than his own monarch against the monarch of another country, acts as a mercenary. When King Henry praises Hotspur’s achievements in Act 3 scene 2, he does so by highlighting the martial acumen of the Scotsman he has captured:

What never dying honour hath he got
Against Renowned Douglas! – Whose high deeds
Whose hot incursions and great name in arms
Holds from all soldiers chief majority
And military title capital
Through all the kingdoms that acknowledge Christ (*I Henry IV*, 3.2.107-12).

In the Battle of Shrewsbury, Douglas shows a singlemindedness in his attempt to seek out and kill the King. His involvement and subsequent capture are used to heighten Hal’s glory. Hotspur says, ‘O Douglas, hadst thou fought at Holmedon thus | I never had triumph’d upon a Scot’ (*I Henry IV*, 5.2.15).

Despite this bravery, valour and martial links, there is still some humour to be had with Douglas. As Ursula Moore points out:

Douglas appears rather ridiculous as he runs about killing counterfeits of King Henry, and when he fights with Falstaff, Falstaff falls and pretends to be dead. At the end of the battle of Shrewsbury, Douglas runs, falls, gets bruised and is captured.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Vimala C Pasupathi, ‘The Quality of Mercenaries: Contextualising Shakespeare’s Scots in *I Henry IV* and *Henry V*’, p.56.

⁶⁹ Ursula J Moore, ‘Celtic Themes in Shakespeare’s Play’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 1 (1981), pp.91–94 (p.92) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20557105>> [accessed 10 November 2023].

Compared to the profusion of Welsh characters, we therefore have a limited number of Scottish characters under Elizabeth, and all appear in a military capacity, as aggressive and as outsiders.

In 1603, the Scottish King James VI ascended to the English throne on the death of Elizabeth, becoming James I of England. James, like Elizabeth, appropriated the Galfridian myths to reflect his right to rule and used such myths to calm concerns over the attempted unification of the realms of England and Scotland. In doing so, James was touted in propaganda and pageantry as a new Brutus reuniting an ancient imperial kingdom of Britain. The accession of James therefore saw a rebirth in Brutian material as a popular motif.⁷⁰

Despite James being king of both realms, Scotland, unlike Wales, was not integrated with England. As Hadfield states:

The hostility directed towards James's court after 1603, his cultivation of favourites and the perceived advantages distributed to the entourage who had followed him from Scotland indicate that the English were not yet ready to consider the possibility of a British union.⁷¹

From an English perspective, much of the concern over the union with Scotland was the fear of the influence of the Scots on English life. Galfridian myths had been used to reinforce a long-held English attitude of superiority, a stance James echoed in his speech to both houses of Parliament in March 1607, where he likened England to the greater and richer partner, the husband in the union and the conqueror.⁷² But this was to avoid the fact that Scotland, unlike Wales, was not subdued and integrated into England, but was a Kingdom in its own right, whose king was subsequently also the King of England. As Waurechen highlights, English commentators were never wholly comfortable in approaching the Scots as a subordinate people as they did

⁷⁰ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.28.

⁷¹ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.3.

⁷² 'His Maiesties Speech to Both The Houses of Parliament, in His Highnesse Great Chamber at Whitehall, The Day of the Adiournement of the Last Session, Which was the Last Day of March 1607', *Early English Books Online 2*, <<https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A68249.0001.001>> [accessed 25 May 2024].

with the Irish and Welsh.⁷³ The attitude to the Scots in Shakespeare's Jacobean plays is therefore very different from his portrayal of the Welsh under Elizabeth.

In Shakespeare's plays from James' reign, Scotland couldn't be ignored, and James was patron of Shakespeare's company, but contemporary references were best couched in obscure terms. *Macbeth*, the 'Scottish play' is set in the distant Celtic past and once again, there is a nod to the benefits of a civilising English influence, but unlike with Wales, this assimilation is not yet complete.

Macbeth is set in the Highlands, often seen as a remote land even by the native Scottish Lowlanders. Highlanders remained alienated from their increasingly English-speaking Lowland cousins and were seen as less civilised as a result. As James Hunter describes,

By James VI time [...] the Highlands and Islands, far from being regarded as the cradle of Scotland's nationhood were viewed by most Lowlanders – including the king himself – as irredeemably foreign.⁷⁴

Holly Faith Nelson goes on to confirm that James highlighted the inferiority of the Highlanders:

In *Basilikon Doron* he writes, 'as for the Highlands, I shortly comprehend them all in two sorts of people: the one, that dwelleth in our mainland, that are barbarous for the most part, and yet mixed with some show of civility; the other, that dwelleth in the Isles, and are utterly barbarous.'⁷⁵

Most of the violence in *Macbeth* occurs in the Highlands, with the initial rebellion being from the Western Isles and the Thane of Cawdor being from Inverness. Macbeth commits his murderous acts once made Thane of Cawdor in turn, and presumably these also take place in the North. *Macbeth* therefore reflects an accepted view of northern Scotland, and this is not a cosy setting; here we find a blasted heath, weird sisters, murder, and ghosts. The atmosphere of the play is aided

⁷³ Sarah Waurechen, 'Imagined Polities, Failed Dreams, and the Beginnings of an Unacknowledged Britain: English Responses to James VI and I's Vision of Perfect Union', *Journal of British Studies*, 52.3 (2013), pp.575–96 (p.596) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41999352>> [accessed 8 February 2024].

⁷⁴ James Hunter, *Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, (Mainstream, 2000), p.175. <<https://archive.org/details/lastoffreemillen0000hunt/mode/2up>> [accessed 10 December 2023].

⁷⁵ Holly Faith Nelson, 'Macbeth, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 47.2 (Spring 2007) pp.379-401 (p.395), doi:10.1353/sel.2007.0011.

by Celtic motifs that evoke a sense of a pagan, ancient past. Whilst Shakespeare's primary source was once again Holinshed, H'uebert mentions William Camden's *Britannia*, and Caesar's observations about the Celts as other potential sources for this play.⁷⁶ Whether mythic or historic, Jeff Boice focusses his analysis on the fact that:

Macbeth is the tale of a Scottish king, and in many ways the story itself is essentially Celtic. Ill-fated, magical encounters with the Otherworld, riotous forces of nature, dangerous women, bloody battles, and the sense of chaos that comes from living in a world where fair is foul and foul is fair and the line between being and non-being is as thin as the edge of a knife, are all attributes of Shakespeare's tale which are themes common to the Celtic tradition.⁷⁷

Looking in detail at the Celtic motifs, the sense of otherness is introduced from the earliest scenes. Act 1 scene 1 opens with 'Thunder and Lightning, Enter three Witches' (*Macbeth*, 1.1.1). Whilst critics highlight that no one in the play calls them witches but weyard sisters, these are women who live beyond the margins of civilised society and act as sybils, or creatures linked to other worlds who can prophesy the future. This may be a nod to James' treaty *Daemonologie*, which argued for the existence of witches, but witches were not of Celtic origin and the terminology here may be due to additions by Thomas Middleton (author of *The Witch*, who may also have introduced the character of Hecate into the play).⁷⁸ Gleeson agrees that it's not easy to find a Celtic origin for the witches; however, the representation of the triple goddess Sidhe is in keeping with Celtic beliefs, with female deities often being shown as the maiden, the mother, and the hag.⁷⁹ What is more aligned to Celtic mythology is that, right from the start, this play is set in a

⁷⁶ Ronald H'uebert, 'The Paganism of *King Lear*', *Dalhousie Review*, 56.3 (1976), pp.429-47 (p.433) <<http://hdl.handle.net/10222/59930>> [accessed 15 November 2023].

⁷⁷ Jeff Boice, *A Strange and Uncouth Woonder': Celtic Motifs in Shakespeare's Scottish Tragedy*. (Unpublished: Harvard University, 1998), p.2 <https://www.academia.edu/8690775/_A_strange_and_vncouth_woonder_Celtic_Motifs_In_Shakespeare_s_Scottish_Tragedy> [accessed 18 November 2023].

⁷⁸ *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Macmillan, 2007), p.1860.

⁷⁹ M Gleeson, 'Celtic Undertones in *Macbeth*', *Proceedings of the II Conference of SEDERI* (1992), pp.123-34 (p.136) <<https://www.academia.edu/27080561/>> [Accessed 7 December 2023].

landscape where natural and otherworldly beings meet. Gleeson highlights the atmosphere in which Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches is typical of encounters between the mortals and the otherworld folk and Celtic tales were preoccupied with boundaries between the worlds, often accompanied by fog or mist.⁸⁰ In the third branch of the *Mabinogion* for example, Manawydan, Pryderi and their wives Rhiannon and Cigfa are separated from their home and court when they are transported to another world in a blanket of mist.⁸¹ Shakespeare would not have had a translation of the *Mabinogion* as a direct source, as this was not produced by Charlotte Guest until 1838 to 1845, but as critics such as Harries point out, with Welsh actors in his company, and his likely association with Welsh people in Stratford and in London, it is likely that he would have known similar tales from Welsh folklore.⁸²

The weather motif in this play goes further with descriptions of darkness, storms and earth tremors reflecting the natural order of things being out of kilter. One of the key Celtic concepts reflected in this play is the link between the Celtic king and the health of the land. This idea of the well-being of the land being tied directly to the well-being of the king is present in Celtic literature from the earliest tales of the seventh century. Gleeson highlights that the sacred bond between the king and the land was:

particularly strong among all Celtic peoples and was closely identified with the idea of fertility: when the king became old, the land became wasted, desolate, and barren [...] With the new king, the land became fertile again. In so far as a good king brought happiness and prosperity to the land, a bad king, young or not, would bring desolation and misery.⁸³

In Celtic mythology the relation between the ruler and the land was more than just a reflection of health. The king was wedded to the land to ensure fertility of the land and success of the reign. That James used the rhetoric of wedlock in his speech to parliament in 1607, when talking about the joining of the kingdoms of Scotland and England, reflects this Celtic tradition of a marriage between a king and the land. In

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.137.

⁸¹ *The Mabinogion* translated by Sioned Davies (Oxford World Classics, 2007), pp.36-37.

⁸² Frederick Harries, *Shakespeare, and the Welsh*, pp.15-75.

⁸³ M Gleeson, 'Celtic Undertones in *Macbeth*', p.133.

Macbeth the sickness in the land reflects the disturbance in the natural order of things once Macbeth has seized the throne.

A more antiquarian Celtic motif is reflected in the references to decapitation. Macbeth at the start of the play is described as taking the head of the defeated Macdonwald and placing it on a pole, and at the end of the play this is mirrored when Macbeth's head is struck off and presented by MacDuff to Malcolm. In Celtic myth the head was regarded as the vessel of the soul, and it was customary to take the heads of those beaten in battle as trophies. Strabo tells us how warriors would ride home from victory with the heads of their foe hanging from their horses' necks.⁸⁴ Decapitation as a motif occurs with other Celtic characters elsewhere; Shakespeare has MacMorris, the Irishman in *Henry V* threaten to cut off Fluellen's head and Guiderius, brought up in Wales in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, beheads Cloten.

The character of the Porter not only reflects the Mystery plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but can also be traced back to Celtic references to gatekeepers and porters. The Porter's opening comment is 'If a man were porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the key' (*Macbeth*, 2.3.2-3). The Porter goes on to imagine the admittance of a farmer, an equivocator, and an English tailor, which were allusions to contemporary events. The reference to a farmer for example, may be a link to the Midland Riots that resulted from a dearth of corn and hoarding by some farmers. These are therefore contemporary nuances embedded in a Celtic motif. This motif can be seen in *Preideu Annwfn* within *The Book of Taliesin*, when Arthur and his band embark on an ill-fated raid of the Underworld in search of various magical items. In this poem the door to the underworld is referred to as hell's gate, which is the same phrase as used by the Porter at the opening of his scene. A second Welsh poem '*Pa Gur Yv Y Porthaur?*' also describes an encounter between Arthur and Glewlwyd, a gatekeeper whom most scholars have interpreted as being the gatekeeper of Annwyn or hell. Boice highlights that the Porter's character does not exist in Holinshed's *Chronicles*,⁸⁵ but this Celtic motif occurs at a turning point in

⁸⁴ T W Rolleston, *Celtic*, (Senate,1994), p.40.

⁸⁵ Jeff Boice, '*A Strange and Uncouth Woonder*', p.24.

Shakespeare's play when Macbeth has become the new king through the murder of Duncan and the castle has become an embodiment of hell.

Moore mentions many traditional Celtic motifs within Macbeth:

the violation of hospitality as a tabu, supernatural help offered to a future King, an unsexed female ruler (cf. Medb and Lady Macbeth), the downfall of a king told in riddles, etc. Cauldron, Horses, decapitation.⁸⁶

This list reflects the motifs found in Celtic folklore and stories that would have survived via oral tradition, but the description of the Celts as included in classical sources were as much an influence as mythological fables. Lorna Hutson argues that Holinshed derived his version of Scottish history from Boece's *Scotorum Historia* (1527) by way of a translation by John Bellenden. This in turned had taken information and influence from the Roman historian Livy, taking Tarquin the Proud as a model for Macbeth, thus making this a more classically influenced source for Shakespeare.⁸⁷

Turning to the main characters of this play, these can be shown to reflect the stereotypes of the Scots at the time but also the characterisation associated with the Celts. As Jennifer Paxton points out, Macbeth is:

A perfect example of how Celtic sensibilities came to seem alien to later people who had been influenced by English political and cultural norms. Macbeth was a very Celtic ruler, but he was stigmatized later as a villain in order to make the ruling house look less Celtic and thus less barbaric.⁸⁸

Jessie Douglas Montgomery works hard to find specific Celtic traits in Shakespeare's portrayal of Macbeth. She cites, among other traits, a natural tendency towards refinement and culture, a love of ornate language, superstition, a desire to be

⁸⁶ Ursula J Moore, 'Celtic Themes in Shakespeare's Play', p.93.

⁸⁷ Lorna Hutson, *England's Insular Imagining: The Elizabethan Erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 2023) p.285.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Paxton, 'Scotland From *Macbeth* to *Braveheart*' in *The Celtic World, Course Guidebook* (The Great Courses, 2018), pp.173-83, (p.182)
<https://archive.org/details/TheCelticWorld_423/page/n181/mode/2up?view=theater> [accessed 10 December 2023].

thought well of and military courage and skill.⁸⁹ These traits are equally shown by Shakespeare's Welsh characters particularly Glendower. Where the characters differ however is that with Glendower, we see the man away from the violent acts he is reported as undertaking in the history plays. The key act undertaken by Macbeth – the murder of Duncan to seize the throne - is depicted as an act of transgression against the state and God. As Dr Alawi points out, Shakespeare reinforces the idea of Duncan as the divinely appointed king, reflecting James' own belief in the idea of the Divine Right of Kings.⁹⁰ Heinous as it was, his initial act is followed by further killings as Macbeth looks to consolidate and protect his position. By the end of the play, Macbeth is a fatalistic warrior, who knows his soul is lost because of his actions and faces his own death in battle. This is the character as inherited from Holinshed and translated into a seventeenth century English portrayal influenced by English cultural norms. As Nelson explains:

On one level, Macbeth does appear to be a conventional barbarous, disloyal, and duplicitous Scot, and his ultimate defeat by Malcolm, a Scot whose actions imply consent to an English hegemony, suggests that Scotland's barbaric impulses need to be contained by England's civilizing forces.⁹¹

Nelson goes on to argue that Macbeth's ambition was a trait that many English attributed to the Scots, 'envisioning, as Leah Marcus puts it, hordes of 'beggarly Scotsmen swarming across the border and devouring England's prosperity.'⁹²

In the ninth to eleventh centuries, the concept of succession in Scotland was not via primogeniture and therefore did not automatically move from father to son but was based on the law of tanistry which would be a choice amongst a group of close male relatives. The competitive nature of this succession meant kings were often slain in battle and the various factions often fought amongst themselves. The historic Macbeth killed Duncan in battle to succeed to the throne, and in Shakespeare's play,

⁸⁹ Jessie Douglas Montgomery, 'Macbeth, Considered as a Celt, *The National Review*, 13 (1889), pp.181-190 <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2928949&seq=189>> [accessed 12 December 2023].

⁹⁰ Alawi, Dr. Jamal M. Al-Sayed, 'The Kinship and the Political Background of Shakespeare's Tragedies: *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*', *Research Ambition*, 7.III (Nov. 2022), pp.8-10 (p.9) <https://www.academia.edu/114414434/The_Kinship_and_The_Political_Background_of_Shakespeare_s_tragedies_Hamlet_and_Macbeth?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper> [accessed 20 March 24].

⁹¹ Holly Faith Nelson, 'Macbeth, The Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union', p.382.

⁹² *Ibid.* p.383.

it is his subsequent actions whilst king that makes Macbeth a tyrant. However, by having Duncan murdered in bed, and as a guest in Macbeth's home, Shakespeare is further adding to the horror of this act, taking away any heroic element that could be portrayed. Macbeth can therefore be seen as a Celtic savage, but like many of Shakespeare's characters, he is not one dimensional. In demonstrating his inner turmoil as he tries to deal with the consequences of his drive to protect his position, we can also see Macbeth as a flawed but tragic character.

Boice highlights that Lady Macbeth is an unusual female character for Shakespeare⁹³ and a subject of much critical debate, although I would argue that all of Shakespeare's Celtic women are feisty, resolute women. Much has also been made of the potential for Lady Macbeth to be an allegorical representation of Elizabeth I. Certainly, both were powerful female rulers, and both portray masculine traits to wield that power. Lady Macbeth's cry in scene 5 of Act 1 illustrates this:

Come you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, Unsex me here.
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty (*Macbeth*, 1.5.38-41).

This can be seen to align with Elizabeth I's appropriation of an androgynous if not masculine persona to enforce her political authority. Whether or not Shakespeare was deliberately alluding to Elizabeth in this play from early in James's reign, or just reflecting the patriarchal society and attitudes of early modern England in which the monarch, like the head of domestic households, was expected to be male, there are clearly many influences on the character of Lady Macbeth. One of these influences may have been the stereotypical view of the female Celtic warrior queen.

In both classical text and Celtic myth, women were shown to be defiant characters. Boice highlights that Holinshed in his introduction to *Chronicles*, comments on the strength of Celtic women:

In these daies also the women of our countries were of no lesse courage than the men [...] when they saw their own blood run from them in the fight, they

⁹³ Jeff Boice, 'A Strange and Uncouth Woonder', p.14.

waxed neuer a whit astonished with the matter, but rather doubling their courages with more egerness, they assailed their enimies” (*Holinshed* 181).⁹⁴

The classical writers Diodorus Siculus and Ammianus Marcellinus also describe Celtic woman as physically as strong as their husbands, and their equal in courage and rights.⁹⁵ Plutarch relates a tale of a decapitation of a Roman centurion undertaken and told to Polybius by the Celtic queen Chiomara,⁹⁶ and there are equally many examples of resolute women in Celtic literature. In the fourth branch of the *Mabinogion* for example, Blodeuwedd conspires with her lover to kill her husband Lleu, and Aranrhod, niece to Math, clashes with Gwydion the sorcerer but is treated as an equal and is shown as an independent woman managing her own estates. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is a driving force in Shakespeare’s play. In her ambition and her influence over Macbeth, Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth may reflect the masculine language used by Elizabeth 1, but these traits are also quintessentially Celtic.

After the murder of Duncan, his eldest son Malcolm escapes Scotland to live in exile in England but by the end of the play, he returns and with the help of English soldiers, secures his throne. Michael Bogdanoc poses the question, ‘What deal did Malcolm do with the English king to get the loan of ten thousand troops?’⁹⁷ It turns out that the price he has agreed for this support, is the introduction of an English influence in Scotland. In Act 5 he says:

My Thanes and Kinsmen
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour named (*Macbeth*, 5.6.107-09).

Malcom brings back with him more than troops; he brings back a culture that has influenced him in his time at the English court and leads to the transition of Scotland into a land inexplicitly linked with England. Bogdanoc sees this as a pivotal moment that:

⁹⁴ Jeff Boice, ‘*A Strange and Uncouth Woonder*’, p.16.

⁹⁵ Peter Berresford Ellis, *A Brief History of the Celts*, (Robinson, 2003), p.82.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.84.

⁹⁷ Michael Bogdanoc, *Shakespeare, The Directors Cut*, (Capercaillie books, 2013), p.146.

prefigures the rule of Scotland from Westminster, the court of James VI [...] and most clearly marks the transition of Scotland from a feudal power to a subservient colony.⁹⁸

It is also telling that Malcolm is an Anglo-Scot, more aligned to the Lowlands, and nephew of Siward, Earl of Northumberland, and therefore akin to the propaganda that placed a more positive view of the Lowlanders who had been influenced through their border contact with England. As with his Welsh characters, Shakespeare is therefore once again showing the civilising influence of the English on their Celtic neighbours.

Much has been made of the identification of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a Gunpowder Play, and therefore arguably one of Shakespeare's most English of works, yet the play is also relevant in demonstrating the relationship between Scotland and England. Just as the Tudors recalled Galfridian myth as part of their right to rule, Shakespeare alludes to James' descent from Banquo via the wayward sister's prophecy, to reinforce the idea of James being divinely appointed to become the king of both England and Scotland. This relationship between the two nations is however shown from an English perspective. If Galfridian myths are in use here, it is through the legality they conferred on English supremacy, and overlordship over Scotland, as articulated by Edward I, Henry VIII and more overtly by Elizabeth I, and reflected in the English support for Malcolm. As Andrew J Power highlights,

Edward, Siward, Malcolm, and the Earls, are Anglicized as much as possible in many ways; Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the witches are made all the more Scottish by their association with recognizable motifs from Celtic history.⁹⁹

Macbeth is, therefore a Celtic tale, of an eleventh century Scottish king in which Shakespeare uses motifs derived as much from classical sources as Celtic myth, to provide the distance necessary to explore contemporary views of the seventeenth century English reign of James.¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare reflects an English view of the highland Scot, as uncivilised and brutal, demonstrating many of the Celtic traits

⁹⁸ Ibid. p.147.

⁹⁹ Andrew J Power, 'Why Should I Play the Roman Fool, and Die/On My Own Sword?' The Senecan Tradition in *Macbeth* in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and The Borderers* ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Routledge, 2013), pp.139-56 (p.155).

¹⁰⁰ Jeff Boice, 'A Strange and Uncouth Woonder', p.27.

inherent in Classical and Celtic sources, and ultimately defeated by the 'just intervention and help from a friendly England'.¹⁰¹ As Bogdanoc states, Macbeth is a play about Scotland at a time of political transition, 'The battleground may be rooted historically in the Scotland of 1100, but the political action is firmly in James VI and I's English court.'¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Tristan Marshal, *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stages under James VI and I* (Manchester University Press, 2000), p.63.

¹⁰² Michael Bogdanoc, *Shakespeare, The Directors Cut*, p.145.

Chapter 3: The British Question

It would be remiss in this discussion on Shakespeare's portrayal of the Celt and Celtic nations to ignore his 'British Plays' of *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*. As many critics have pointed out, under James, Shakespeare's plays were less English domestic in reference to Celtic nations but far more British (with a nod to James's interest in the union of England and Scotland into Great Britain). Shapiro explains that the word 'England' appears two hundred and twenty-four times in Shakespeare's Elizabethan plays, but only twenty-one more times in his works written under James.¹⁰³ In contrast, Schwyzer notes that of 'the roughly three dozen references to "Britain", "Britons" or "British" in Shakespeare's plays, almost all occur in *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*'¹⁰⁴ and indeed, Shapiro points out that Shakespeare never uses the word 'British' in his Elizabethan plays.¹⁰⁵ This is of course to ignore the sixteen references to Bretons or Brittany in the History plays written before 1603, as this term was equally applicable to mean Britons as well as those from Brittany. Brittany, which was previously known as Armorica, was renamed after its colonisation from Britain, so both realms were therefore inhabited by descendants of ancient Britons and can be considered home to Celts.

King Lear, like *Macbeth*, is set in a distant past which allows the play to reflect on contemporary events, and critics often focus on how the play relates to James' attempts to unite Scotland and England into Britain between 1603 and 1608. Shapiro for example, contextualises the play by referencing back to James' *Basilikon Doron*, written for his son in 1599, in which he warns of the dangers of dividing kingdoms.¹⁰⁶ When reprinted in 1603, the work included an additional reference to the division of his kingdom by Brutus, the king from whom the Tudors and James claimed descent. The timing of *King Lear* as a play about the division of kingdoms therefore makes it a topical part of the debate upon the union. Moreover, the setting of the play in Britain's ancient Brutan past was a common trope for propaganda and

¹⁰³ James Shapiro, *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (Faber and Faber, 2015), p.48.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Schwyzer, A Scum of Britons? *Richard III* and the Celtic Reconquest in *Celtic Shakespeare The Bard and the Borderers* ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane, (Routledge, 2013), pp.25-34 (p.30).

¹⁰⁵ James Shapiro, *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*, p.48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* pp.39-40.

comment. As Gilchrist points out, ‘Genealogies and Brutan timelines were invaluable to James VI and I’s self-legitimation and union project.’¹⁰⁷

King Lear is described then as a British play, yet the word British occurs only three times in the Quarto text, twice in the Folio, and the word Britain is never mentioned. To try to place any label on *King Lear* is equally difficult. It is a complex play, with many motifs, and as Colie summarises ‘*King Lear* is made up of so much that to isolate one strand of its meaning is dangerously to oversimplify its multifoliate richness’.¹⁰⁸ *King Lear* as a play is made more enigmatic by a change in Shakespeare’s narrative style. As Reibetanz argues, the emblematic technique of *King Lear* with its structure characterized by a quick succession of strong scenes rather than a progressive, narrative structure, leaves little room for backstory, background or descriptive scene setting.¹⁰⁹

What we do see however, is a setting in an undated pagan past, where the action moves from palaces and castles to uncultivated wasteland and woods, and locations and distances collapse. Parry argues ‘it does not appear that Shakespeare was imaginatively engaged in the ancient British world in this play.’¹¹⁰ Dutton however highlights that the ‘three supposed ‘corners’’¹¹¹ of Britain are represented in the names of Albany (Scotland), Cornwall (Southwest) and Kent. *King Lear* is set at a time before the emergence of Wales, Scotland, and England, but by invoking all three points of the ‘triangle of Britain,’¹¹² Lear’s kingdom can be seen to encompass the whole of Britain. Shakespeare does however hint at an English bias with, what can be assumed to be the central, English area (that which should have been Cordelia’s portion) described as a ‘third more opulent’ (*King Lear*, 1.1.78). Shapiro also suggests the use of the term British, (rather than Englishman) as first uttered by

¹⁰⁷ Kim Gilchrist, ‘The Wonder is, he Hath Endured so Long’: *King Lear* and the Erosion of the Brutan Histories’, *Shakespeare*, 16.1 (2020), pp.40–59 (p.47), doi:10.1080/17450918.2018.1561503.

¹⁰⁸ Rosalie L Colie, ‘Reason and Need: *King Lear* and the ‘Crisis’ of the Aristocracy’ in *Some Facets of ‘King Lear’: Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, ed by Rosalie L Colie and F.T. Flahiff, (University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp.185–220 (p.190).

¹⁰⁹ John Reibetanz, ‘Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*.’ in *Some Facets of ‘King Lear’: Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, ed by Rosalie L Colie and F.T. Flahiff, (University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp.39–58 (p.41).

¹¹⁰ Graham Parry, ‘Ancient Britons and Early Stuarts’, p.170.

¹¹¹ Richard Dutton, ‘*King Lear*, The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia’ and ‘The Matter of Britain’ *Literature And History* 12, (1986), pp.139-51 (p.142).

¹¹² *Ibid.* p.142.

Edgar as Poor Tom in the amended rhyme ‘Fie, Fo, and Fum, I smell the blood of a British man’ (*King Lear*, 3.4.161-62) could be a wry nod to political correctness.¹¹³

Set in the ancient past, Shakespeare's play is named after and based on the mythical accounts of King Leir, one of the ancient Kings of Britain referenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth and later included in Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* as well as the anonymous play *King Leir*. Shakespeare therefore uses a Galfridian myth for his plot, and in this play, we also have Celtic motifs. This is a pagan world, where characters believe in the influence of astrology, and in multiple gods and goddesses. Ronald H'uebert works hard to distinguish pagan Celtic deities within this play, whilst acknowledging Christian interpretations. One example is that, according to Camden, the Celts worshipped Taranis, who was aligned to the classical god Jupiter, was the revenging god of war and is invoked in *King Lear* through the images of thunder.¹¹⁴

Lear calls on the gods throughout the play including in a crucial scene set on a blasted heath, this time when Lear rails against the storm, and this reflects, like in *Macbeth*, the link between the health of the land and the ‘health’ of kingship. Lear compares the fury of the storm to ‘the tempest in my mind’ (*King Lear*, 3.4.1). The storm is therefore a counterpoint to Lear's mental turmoil, and his sense of betrayal at his daughter's reduction of his retinue and foretells the chaos within the kingdom, caused by Lear's initial actions.

Thomas G Olsen argues that the use of a retinue as a representation of Lear's dignity is ‘Galfridian to the core’¹¹⁵ but recognises that Shakespeare is using this differently from previous versions, allowing the reduction of knights to rob Lear of a sense of value and authority. The importance of Lear's retinue as a symbol of Kingship and respect was, as H'uebert highlights, reminiscent of its symbolism for ancient Celts:

Following Caesar's account, Camden records that Celtic noblemen were required by tradition to retain ‘a traine of servants and dependants, whom they called Ambacti’. The size of this entourage would indicate the status of

¹¹³ James Shapiro, *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (Faber and Faber, 2015), p.52.

¹¹⁴ Ronald H'uebert, ‘The Paganism of *King Lear*’, p.433.

¹¹⁵ Thomas G Olsen, ‘How Many Knights Had King Lear?’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 82.2 (2019), pp.193–220 (p.206) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26899355> > [Accessed 12 May 2024].

their leader; indeed, the band of retainers 'was the one/y grace, countenance, and port they carried.'¹¹⁶

The women in *King Lear* again represent ancient Celtic women who are warrior like, who can and do take control of situations, and who are equal to their male contemporaries. In Goneril and Regan we see a reflection of the aggressive, proactive Lady Macbeth, and like her, they are embroiled in violence. Regan is part of the physical cruelty in the blinding of Gloucester, plucking at his beard and when a servant comes to Gloucester's aid, she kills the servant. Act 3 scene 7 is made more shocking in its violence as Gloucester repeatedly reminds his attackers that they are guests in his house, reminiscent of the killing of Duncan in *Macbeth*. This allusion is made even more evident as Gloucester reflects the porter scene when he says, 'If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time | Thou shouldst have said 'Good porter, turn the key'' (*King Lear* 3.7.66-67). Goneril is another violent, proactive Celtic woman, in that she plots the death of her husband and poisons her sister in her rivalry for Edmund, and once again, offstage, like Lady Macbeth, she takes her own life. Even Cordelia is proactive and takes control of the armed forces of France.

The division of Lear's kingdom can be viewed to replicate not only the division of his kingdom by Brutus, but the Welsh tradition of *cyfran* where land would be divided equally among the father's sons on his death. Whilst women could not normally inherit land under Welsh law, they could do so if there were no surviving sons. Lear's division of his kingdom could therefore be seen to reflect the laws as documented in the reign of Hywel Dda that were in place until they were replaced by *The Laws in Wales Acts* of 1535 and 1542. As in *Macbeth*, a system of succession other than primogeniture plays a part but is not the sole cause of the tragedy.

Shakespeare uses Galfridian myth as the basis for his main plot, but he also includes other explicit references to Galfridian legends. In the opening scene Lear exclaims 'come not between the Dragon and his wrath' (*King Lear*, 1.1.116) which may be a reference to the dragon of Britain, the emblem of Arthur, used by Henry VII. When Kent meets Oswald, he threatens him 'Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain/Id drive ye cackling home to Camelot' (*King Lear*, 2.2.66-67). Sarum or Salisbury plain was

¹¹⁶ Ronald H'uebert, 'The Paganism of *King Lear*', pp.442-43.

the site of Arthur's last battle, as well as being a well-known haunt of rogues. Finally, the fool's prophecy in Act 3 Scene 2 (in the Folio version) finishes with 'This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time' (*King Lear*, 3.2.94). Cherrell Guilfoyle goes further and comments on the similarities to Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485), not least being in the use of Dover as a landing place for the invading troops.¹¹⁷

Shakespeare is therefore demonstrating an awareness of Galfridian legends but in its setting of storms and blasted heaths, in its use of animal imagery and in its violent acts, the play shows a savagery that suggests a more primitive time. Butler argues that whilst Shakespeare's contemporaries did not portray Galfridian myths as primitive or barbaric, modern critics often see the savagery in *King Lear*. For Butler however, the play reflects not the savagery and barbarism of ancient times but reflects a Jacobean England 'collapsing into decadence after the death of Gloriana'.¹¹⁸ Shakespeare may be portraying a kingdom which becomes more savage as the king loses control, in order to reflect the inherent dangers of division at a time when James was attempting to unite his two kingdoms, but the antiquarian view of history may also have been an influence. Shakespeare's depiction of ancient Britain may reflect an antiquarian view, or reflect the decadence of the Jacobean court, but it is certainly a less idealistic view of an ancient society than would be expected in romanticised Galfridian myths.

Richard Dutton also compares *King Lear* with Anthony Munday's Lord Mayors Show *The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia* staged in 1605.¹¹⁹ Whilst not going as far as to propose that one would have influenced the other, he goes on to argue that Jacobean audiences would have understood the motifs within the mythical tales of Britain and recognised these as allusions to contemporary events. Certainly, Shakespeare's use of Galfridian myth remains fragmentary, and his audiences would have been expected to be familiar with these tales, yet Shakespeare's *King Lear* differs from those of his sources and Bruton history by having the characters of Lear

¹¹⁷ Cherrell Guilfoyle, 'The Way To Dover: Arthurian Imagery in *King Lear*', *Comparative Drama*, 21.3 (1987), pp.214-28 (p.215). < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41153287>> [accessed 9 February 2024].

¹¹⁸ Guy Butler, '*King Lear* and Ancient Britain', *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 65 (1985), pp.27-33 (p.31) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41801735>> [Accessed 19 April 2024].

¹¹⁹ Richard Dutton, '*King Lear*, The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia' and 'The Matter of Britain' p.140.

and Cordelia die. In his sources, Cordelia inherits from her father, and it is Cornwall and Regan's son Cunedagus who becomes the future king and ancestor of James. Shakespeare's willingness to take liberties with his source material suggests that he may be dismissing the Galfridian myths in favour of a more antiquarian view of British history.

Finally, any discussion on *King Lear* needs to be mindful that there are three early versions of the text of this play, the most significant being the 1608 Quarto (Q1), and the First Folio (F1) published in 1623.

The variation between the Quarto and Folio versions is telling, particularly at the end of the play with a change to who gives the final speech. Traditionally the last word would be spoken by the person who will become the future ruler. The choice here is between Edgar, (in the Folio version) an Englishman with a very Anglo-Saxon name, and the northern Duke of Albany, (in the Quarto), a title traditionally held by the King of Scots. The Duke of Albany is a peaceful man, much to Goneril's disgust, who recognises the cruelty and savagery being undertaken on Lear and Gloucester. The characterisation and nod to him being a worthy man and fit to rule may have been to flatter James when performed at court in December 1606, and reflects the inheritance of an English realm by a Scot. The Folio version however, in portraying Edgar as the final speaker, may also be hinting at an alternative reading, with this play reflecting more explicitly the movement away from Brutian history. Dutton highlights the distinction of King Edgar being the first 'historical (as distinct from mythological) King of Britain.'¹²⁰ Shakespeare therefore ends the play by wiping out the royal line, and Brutian history with it, but retains a nod to James' ambition for a reunified Britain, as in both versions, the play ends with a single ruler. Regardless of whether it is Albany or Edgar, Galfridian or historical, Britain is once again united. Willy Maley may be right therefore to call *King Lear* 'Shakespeare's most British play'¹²¹ but this is a British play told from an English perspective where

¹²⁰ Richard Dutton, 'King Lear, The Triumphs of Reunited Britannia' and 'The Matter of Britain', p.148.

¹²¹ Willy Maley, 'This Sceptred Isle' - Shakespeare and the British Problem' in *Nation, State, and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.1-29 (p.11).

Celtic motifs are used to highlight a primitive view of the past and reflect contemporary Jacobean concerns.

British history remained a popular subject in James' reign with Galfridian tropes being used as propaganda to justify James's unification efforts and to reiterate his genealogical lineage. As Joseph Bowling argues:

Recent scholarship on Geoffrey's history has challenged the prevailing view that his fabulous tales became irrelevant after the rise of humanistic historiography, which discredited the *Historia's* veracity.¹²²

Cymbeline is often seen as Shakespeare's most 'British' play with characters derived, via Holinshed, from Geoffrey of Monmouth's tales. The history of *Cymbeline* is however rudimentary in these sources, and in his play, Shakespeare diverges in plot (attributing actions from Guiderius' reign into that of his father) and includes subplots from a variety of alternative sources, meaning that Galfridian myth is more of a framework for his broader narrative.

Cymbeline is set in ancient Britain, at a time when Cymbeline ruled the Catuvellauni tribe in the south-east of England, prior the Roman invasion and contemporary with the birth of Christ. Unlike in *King Lear*, the word Britain and derivations thereof are a continual refrain in this play. England is not mentioned but Britain here reflects an Anglocentric world ruled from London and one that is part of a wider European society as much as part of an ancient British past.

Whilst England is not mentioned, from Act 2 onwards, much of the action takes place in Wales, and specifically near Milford Haven (which is referenced sixteen times by five different characters). Shakespeare's sources for *Cymbeline* did not set their stories in Wales; indeed, as Irving Ribner, points out, the story of the battle in the lane is said to come from 'the account of the Scottish King Kenneth's war with the Danes, a matter completely unrelated to the *Cymbeline* story'.¹²³ James however continued to emphasise his Welsh ancestry and his links to British kings, and the play's references to Milford Haven can be seen as a celebration of the Tudor and

¹²² Joseph Bowling, 'Part Shame, Part Spirit Renewed': Affect, National Origins, and Report in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, *Renaissance Drama*, 45.1 (2017), pp.81-106 (p.82), doi:10.1086/691194.

¹²³ Irving Ribner, 'Shakespeare and Legendary History: *Lear* and *Cymbeline*.' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 7.1 (1956), pp.47-52 (p.52), doi:10.2307/2866114.

Stuart past by alluding to Henry Tudor's landing there in 1485, which led to the establishment of the Tudor Dynasty. Setting elements of the play in Wales may also be a nod to the investiture of Henry Frederick as Prince of Wales in 1610. Lisa Hopkins goes further to argue that by locating much of the action in and around Milford Haven, Shakespeare may be reaffirming the 'centrality of Wales to British rule' at a time when James' union project erased Wales from political discourse.¹²⁴

Wales in *Cymbeline* can be seen to be like the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*; it is a place of sanctuary to flee from the dangers in court, filled with civilised gentlemen playing at rural life. However, the use of Wales, rather than another Forest of Arden, provides a clear distinction in this play between the civilised British nobility and the rural Welsh. As Huw Griffiths points out, 'Wales was traditionally thought of as the last location of the Britons in the British archipelago. Nowhere could be more British than Wales,'¹²⁵ yet Wales is here isolated and separated from Cymbeline's British court and remains a periphery to his kingdom. Geographically, getting to Milford Haven is a challenging journey, one that requires guides and maps. This therefore remains a dangerous and inaccessible landscape, separated from the civilisation of the British court. This distinction might reflect the ambiguous place Wales still held alongside England; as we have previously seen with the portrayal of Welsh characters in Shakespeare's Elizabethan plays, Wales was subsumed within the realm, but the Welsh were still very much seen as outsiders.

In this play there is therefore a disconnect between the ancient Britons and Wales despite this being part of the same kingdom. In addition, whilst much of the action takes place in Wales, none of the characters are Welsh by birth. The 'Welsh' princes – Guiderius, Cymbeline's eldest son who is raised under the name of Polydore, and Arviragus, raised as Cadwal, are both brought up in Wales but are Britons, and Belarius is similarly British but disguises himself as a Welshman who calls himself Morgan.

¹²⁴ Lisa Hopkins, 'Cymbeline, The Translatio Imperii, and the Matter of Britain' in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Ashgate Publishing, 2010) pp.143-55 (p.152).

¹²⁵ Huw Griffiths 'The Geographies of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*', *English Literary Renaissance* 34.3 (2004), pp.339-58 (p.340)

<https://www.academia.edu/295067/The_Geographies_of_Shakespeares_Cymbeline> [accessed 12 March 2024].

The princes' pseudonyms are telling. Polydore suggests Polydore Vergil, a vocal critic of British History, whilst Cadwal recalls Cadwalladr, the British king in Brutus history who received the prophecy that the British dynasty would return.

Shakespeare may here be recognising the debate between historiography and Galfridian traditions, showing both side by side, but by having the elder son and heir representing historicity, this could indicate the pre-eminence of this stance.

I have alluded earlier to the growing contempt for Galfridian tradition and British origin myths and by this time, classical history suggested the ancient Britons were 'a wild band of naked, painted heathens, [...] unacquainted with architecture and agriculture.'¹²⁶ This antiquarian view was reinforced with the comparisons being made between the ancient Britons and the indigenous people of the New World. De Bry's version of Thomas Harriot's *Report*, for example, includes illustrations of Picts and their neighbours to show how the inhabitants of Britain had once been as savage as the Indigenous population of Virginia.¹²⁷ Jean E Feerick argues for a broader reading of *Cymbeline* in suggesting Wales stands in for Virginia in this play, as Milton Haven was a port of departure for the New World, and two of Shakespeare's primary patrons, the Earls of Pembroke and Southampton, were members of the 1609 Council of the Virginia Company of London.¹²⁸ Lisa Hopkins further suggests that Shakespeare shows an awareness of the exploration of the New World in Act 1 of *Cymbeline*, when Cloten states:

'If Caesar can hide the sun from us with a blanket, or put the moon in his pocket, we will pay him tribute for light' (*Cymbeline*, 3.1.41-4).

Hopkins argues that this comment alludes to Columbus' prediction of an eclipse to pacify the native Jamaicans, which reinforces the association of Cloten, as an ancient Briton, with a primitive culture.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Peter A Parolin, *Anachronistic Italy: Cultural Alliances and National Identity in 'Cymbeline'* (The Free Library, 2002) <[https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Anachronistic Italy: cultural alliances and national identity in... -a093135732](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Anachronistic+Italy%3A+cultural+alliances+and+national+identity+in...-a093135732)> [accessed 26 November 2023].

¹²⁷ Hadfield, Andrew, 'Bruited Abroad: John White and Thomas Harriot's colonial representations of ancient Britain' in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature* ed. by David J. Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.159-177 (p.166).

¹²⁸ Jean E Feerick, 'Cymbeline and Virginia's British Climate' in *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance*, (University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 78-112 (pp.105-6)

¹²⁹ Lisa Hopkins, 'Cymbeline, The Translatio Imperii, and The Matter of Britain', p.144.

That Shakespeare was intentionally reflecting New World colonisation could also be argued in the fact that he depicts Wales as a land of primitive hardiness in contrast to a decadent English culture depicted by characters in ‘Luds town, and in Renaissance Italy. The benefits of such a pure abstemious culture were used in the propaganda for the New World colonies. As Feerick highlights:

The [Virginia] Company promoted tracts and sermons that warned Englishmen against living too comfortably off the ‘fat and feeding ground of their natiue countrey’ and of living licentiously in a state grown ‘ripe and rotten’ [...] the Company urged Englishmen to retrieve the ‘corporal hardnesse’ of their forebears and to ‘shake off that dull and lazie humour ... into which our nation is now degenerate.’¹³⁰

In *Cymbeline*, Cloten is an example of a doltish degenerate and lover of luxury. Camden summarised Tacitus in observing that the Romans subdued their empire by diverting the natives with leisure activities and encouraging idleness¹³¹ and Cloten’s preoccupation with bowling, betting and finery reflects such a decline, reinforcing Innogen’s later observation that ‘Plenty and peace breeds cowards’ (*Cymbeline*, 3.6.21). Posthumus is similarly shown to be corrupted by the decadent Italian society that bred the indolent Iachimo, who seems to reflect the degenerated modern Italian in contrast the ancient Roman Lucius. Guiderius and Arviragus, by contrast, have been brought up in a Welsh cave. Whilst they show the natural tendencies and potential for refinement because of their noble birth, they remain, as they say themselves, ignorant and beastly. Because of this, they are superstitious, and the beheading of Cloten by Guiderius shows a Celtic savagery. Andrew Escobedo emphasises the barbarity of an uncultured Wales and suggests (anachronistically) that at worst, Guiderius and Arviragus are ‘noble savages’ languishing in the wilds across the Severn.¹³² However, the Princes are also strong, and without guile, removed from the corrupting influences of the court. Guiderius and Arviragus may feel stifled by their simple life, but this is not to diminish the positive influence of being raised in a wilderness away from luxuries. Belarius certainly continually

¹³⁰ Jean E Feerick, ‘*Cymbeline* and Virginia’s British Climate’, p.108.

¹³¹ Ibid. p.99.

¹³² Andrew Escobedo, ‘From Britannia to England: *Cymbeline* and the Beginning of Nations’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59.1 (2008), pp.60–87 (p.82). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210246>> [Accessed 8 Mar. 2024].

highlights the natural pre-eminence of the British Princes to repudiate their lowly upbringing, and they may be being shown in a positive light partly as a tribute to the Welsh genealogy of the King. Shakespeare therefore depicts an ancient British simplicity and fortitude that may reflect the emphasis placed on the moral benefits of austerity, mirroring the propaganda surrounding New World colonisation.

As a play that is said to reflect James's unification attempts, many critics have also looked to see how Scotland may be represented. Alongside the Iane episode coming from Holinshed's *Scottish Chronicle*, Mary Floyd-Wilson has argued that the play amalgamates Scottish and English histories recasting Cloten and the Queen as rebellious Scots.¹³³ This is to ignore the point that the Queen, like Lady Macbeth, is given no name nor past. Butler meanwhile agrees with Marcus in suggesting that Posthumus represents the Scots, and in particular the post-Nati Scots born after James had ascended to the English throne, who from 1608 could become citizens entitled to recourse at English law despite their continuing ties to Scotland. He argues that Posthumus is in Cymbeline's court but not of it and held in low esteem through his lack of family ties. In losing his position in court on his marriage he reflects the loss suffered by Scottish citizens when James assumed the English crown.¹³⁴ Posthumus and Innogen's marriage can therefore be seen to represent the challenges of the union between England and Scotland, resolved and reunited at the end of the play.

Innogen (or arguably Imogen, misprinted in the First Folio) is a Celt explicitly linked to Brutan tradition (although not to King Cymbeline) and named for the legendary wife of Brute. She represents the positives of Britain and there are still traces of Celtic origins in her character. Innogen is the king's daughter but with the disappearance of her brothers has become his heir – something that would have been possible in Celtic society. She is a force of nature, and she takes control of her situation. She marries Posthumus against her father's wishes, defies the queen, leaves the court, and disguised as Fidele, joins the Roman army. Innogen is therefore another resolute Celtic woman. Jodi Mikalachki argues that Innogen's

¹³³ Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'Delving to the Root: *Cymbeline*, Scotland, and the English Race, in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by David J. Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.101-15 (p.108).

¹³⁴ Martin Butler, 'Introduction' in *Cymbeline* (Cambridge University Press), pp.1-74 (p.40).

transformation from Innogen to Fidele represents her assuming the civilizing model of Rome as opposed to British savagery¹³⁵ but her character prior to taking on this identity is not savage. Rather her virtue is ever present, she is brave, and she is sensible enough to recognise the true nature of Cymbeline's Queen and Cloten's character. Innogen as Fidele does 'improve' but this can be argued to be by the move away from the court and the experience of a simpler life once in Wales. When Innogen first meets the princes for example, she offers them money for the food she had eaten, but Arviragus rejects her coins saying:

All gold and silver rather turn to dirt
so 'tis no better reckoned but of those
Who worship dirty gods (*Cymbeline*, 3.6. 57-59).

The princes have little use for the trappings of civilisation. Innogen learns thereafter to interact in a more helpful manner, and with her root-characters and broth sauces provides a feminine civilised touch. This can be argued to be another example of the positive benefits of a simple society espoused by colonial propaganda, although Boling suggests that Innogen brings English culture to the princes and makes them more self-conscious of their lack of refinement, which spurs on their eagerness to get involved in the battle later.¹³⁶

Cymbeline's un-named Queen is the other powerful female character in the play but is very much the opposite to Innogen. She demonstrates Celtic stereotypes of being warlike, with a love of genealogy, but she is also Machiavellian, marrying for power (unlike Innogen) and dabbling in poisons and schemes. Mikalachki highlights the Queen's resemblance to Voadica or Boadicea in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, reflecting an ancient British Celtic stereotype and nationalism,¹³⁷ and by the end of the play, like Lady Macbeth and Goneril, she dies (possibly by suicide) off-stage.

¹³⁵ Jodi Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: *Cymbeline* and Early Modern English Nationalism.' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46.3 (1995), pp.301-22 (p.320-21), doi:10.2307/2871120.

¹³⁶ Ronald J Boling, 'Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51.1 (2000), pp.33-66 (pp.58-63), doi:10.2307/2902322.

¹³⁷ Jodi Mikalachki, p.309.

Cymbeline's queen has also been seen as a distorted memory of Elizabethan past,¹³⁸ and a demonized version of Elizabeth I.¹³⁹ In Act 3, Scene 1, she gives one of the most evocative nationalistic speeches of the play, recalling Britain's noble past, and arguing for a British independence from Rome. This is in response to Lucius who has invoked the memory of Caesar's invasions of Britain which recalls the antiquarian argument that British history began with classical text such as Caesar's *History of the Gallic Wars*. The Queen responds by recalling Britain's line of kings, reiterating Galfridian legends to argue for an insular Britain. Once again, we therefore have a representation of the conflicting approach to British history. However, by having one of the 'villains' of this play give this speech, Shakespeare is depicting the Queen's rhetoric and therefore the Galfridian view of British history as an old-fashioned view, out of favour in a Jacobean society that saw itself as more classical and as a successor to Rome. This speech may also reflect the martial rhetoric of Henry Frederick, focussing on the insular nature of Britain as an island (or as Willy Maley argues, an Elizabethan model of nationalism)¹⁴⁰ which was at odds with the pacifist internationalism espoused by James, although Mottram argues that this is to overlook that James too talked of the natural bravery of the British.¹⁴¹

In marked contrast to the insular Galfridian rhetoric of the Queen, Innogen, in response to Pisanio's comment of 'If not at court | Then not in Britain must you bide' (*Cymbeline*, 3.4.147-48) says:

Where then?
Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day? Night?
Are they not but in Britain? I' th' world's volume
Our Britain seems as of it, but not in't:
In a great pool, a swan's nest: prithee think
There's livers out of Britain (*Cymbeline*, 3.4.149-154).

¹³⁸ Martin Butler, 'Introduction' in *Cymbeline* (Cambridge University Press), pp.1-74 (p.43).

¹³⁹ Leah S Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (University of California Press, 1988), p.128.

¹⁴⁰ Willy Maley, *Nation, State, and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.36.

¹⁴¹ Stewart Mottram, 'Warriors and Ruins: *Cymbeline*, Heroism and the Union of Crowns' in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers*, ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Routledge, 2013) pp.169-83 (p.171).

Innogen is therefore also identified with Britain, but here demonstrates a cosmopolitan sentiment adopted by James. As Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen indicate, ‘The end of the play heralds an ‘Augustan peace’ in which Britain is imagined as the equal of Rome.’¹⁴²

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account of Cymbeline also acknowledges the Roman influence in Britain, and as Gilchrist points out, Cymbeline’s reign was the ‘historic moment when the incompatible Bruton and Roman histories overlapped.’¹⁴³ Both in Shakespeare’s sources and in this play, Cymbeline is brought up in Caesar’s household in Rome, and throughout Shakespeare’s play Roman rather than British deities are invoked. Lucius, the Roman ambassador, and leader of the Roman troops, is depicted as honourable, treating Fidele with kindness and consideration. Whilst Posthumus argues that Britain is now more than a match for Rome, and so it proves as the battle unfolds – albeit thanks to the martial savagery of the princes - the underlying implication is that Rome had been superior to ancient Britain, providing a civilising culture to the native people. At the end of the play, by agreeing the truce, Cymbeline is controlling the narrative, showing his kingdom to now be the equal and cultural successor to Rome.

Cymbeline is then as much a Roman play as British. Cymbeline was a contemporary of the Emperor Augustus, and James liked to be identified as a second Augustus, and used his accession medal of 1603 to style himself, through his depiction as a Roman Emperor, as emperor of the whole island of Great Britain. As Peter A Parolin points out,

the basis of James's comparison of himself to Augustus was their common commitment to peace, a commitment that, within the play, is shared by another British King, Cymbeline, a contemporary of Augustus who can also be seen as an avatar of James.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Macmillan, 2007), p.2243.

¹⁴³ Kim Gilchrist, *Staging Britain's Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), p.22.

¹⁴⁴ Peter A Parolin, *Anachronistic Italy: Cultural Alliances and National Identity in 'Cymbeline'* (The Free Library, 2002) <[https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Anachronistic Italy: cultural alliances and national identity in... -a093135732](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Anachronistic+Italy%3A+cultural+alliances+and+national+identity+in...-a093135732)> [accessed 26 November 2023].

As Maley summarises, ‘Lear had divided the ancient kingdom of Britain with disastrous consequences, Cymbeline preserves its integrity while keeping the peace with Rome.’¹⁴⁵ The play therefore seems to evoke James’s interest in not only the unification of his realms but also his association with Imperial Rome, and promotion of international peace. James continued to use the Brutus myths in his propaganda, and *Cymbeline* may be seen as a ‘British’ play, but once again Shakespeare does not fully adhere to the Galfridian myths. Shakespeare’s sources on Cymbeline are rudimentary but with his subplots and embellishments he once again undermines Galfridian traditions. By the end of the play, the Queen and Cloten who argued for the Brutan past are dead, the princes have given up their uncivilised, savage lives in Wales (and therefore the last vestiges of being ancient Britons) for the society of an English court, and Britain is part of a wider empire and an equal to Rome. Shakespeare is therefore rejecting the Brutan past, and the antiquarian history is in ascendance. This play can be seen to reflect a growing desire in England to distance itself from the myths of ancient Britons and instead to be seen in a more classical light but one where Jacobean Britain is the successor to Rome.

In *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, his two most British Plays, Shakespeare therefore uses Galfridian myths as the basis for his plots, but he does not adhere to these and does not reflect the glory of a Brutan past but reflects a more antiquarian stance. Parry refers to Camden’s description of the earliest inhabitants of Britain as:

A sturdy, warlike nation was displayed, barbarous in its dwellings and habits, but quick and spirited in action.¹⁴⁶

This more closely aligns to the characterisation of the ancient Britons found in Shakespeare, than the more traditional, glamorised heroes of Galfridian legend.

¹⁴⁵ Willy Maley, ‘Postcolonial Shakespeare: British Identity and Formation and *Cymbeline*’, *Shakespeare’s Late Plays: New Readings*, ed. by Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 145–57 (p.151), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrkfq.15>> [Accessed 13 March 2024].

¹⁴⁶ Graham Parry, ‘Ancient Britons and Early Stuarts’, p.155.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Shakespeare was not the only author of his time to question the Galfridian myths. Spenser has been shown to be aware that his work reflected imagination more than historical fact (replacing some Galfridian elements in his section on Roman Britain) and Holinshed can also be seen to recognise the debate, placing rival versions of stories side by side and highlighting Galfridian errors.¹⁴⁷ Drayton's poem *Poly-Olbion* published in 1612, combined lyric descriptions that call on Galfridian myth, with notes by the antiquarian John Selden that refuted these tales.¹⁴⁸

Shakespeare uses Galfridian myths sparingly, although more evidently in his later plays, where he can be seen to take liberties with its use. More provincial and primitive than noble and nostalgic, his portrayal of ancient Britons, Welsh and Scots provides an English view of the Celtic nations that reflects not only a more antiquarian view of those nations but the changing relationship of those nations with the change of monarchy.

Shakespeare's depiction of Welsh characters occurs predominately during Elizabeth's reign and reflects an affectionate if condescending portrayal, implying that the Welsh were inferior to the English but improved by association. Wales may have been integrated into the Kingdom of England, but the Welsh remained outsiders despite the Tudors use of Welsh ancestry in propaganda. This seems to mirror how the Welsh in London were perceived at this time.

There are very few Scottish characters in Shakespeare under Elizabeth, and these are shown in a military capacity. Under James, Shakespeare produces *Macbeth* and his British plays, distancing these in time to allow reflections on contemporary events. The Anglocentric view in these plays of the twelfth century Scots and ancient Britons as savage and inferior, continues the implication of English superiority and

¹⁴⁷ Curran, John E. 'Spenser and the Historical Revolution: *Briton Moniments* and the Problem of Roman Britain', *Clio: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History*, 25.3 (1996), pp.273-92, (p274) <https://epublications.marquette.edu/english_fac/534> [accessed 25 January 2024].

¹⁴⁸ Parry, Graham, 'Ancient Britons and Early Stuarts', in *Neo-Historicism: Studies in Renaissance Literature, History and Politics*, ed.by Robin Headlam Wells and others, (Boydell & Brewer, 2000), pp. 155-78, (pp.162-165).

reflects a xenophobic mistrust. The portrait also reflects a more European outlook, and a growing acceptance of an antiquarian view of history, where the ancient Celts were seen as less civilised, more akin to the natives of New World, and less like the nostalgia of Galfridian myth. This is not a completely negative image, with the positive aspects of a purer life, away from the luxuries and indolence of courtly society perhaps reflecting the arguments made for the Virginia colonies, but this is not the nostalgic image of a glorious past that could flatter the Celtic peripheral nations.

Shakespeare therefore represents his Celtic characters in a way that reflects the mood of his time and the changing interpretation of the past. He also provides a mirror to the views of a predominately English society in London, rather than displaying the views of the Celtic nations themselves. As Gerald Porter states, what it meant to be 'English' was achieved by emphasising the difference to the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh.¹⁴⁹ We see in these plays how the Celtic nations were seen by their English counterparts and this is, as Schwyzer states, a British history as exposed by fictional Welshmen (and Scots and Ancient Britons), authored by an Englishman.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Gerald Porter, "Who Talks of my Nation?": The Role of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland in Constructing 'Englishness' in *Imagined States*, ed. by Gerald Porter and Luisa Del Giudice, (University Press of Colorado, 2001) p101.

¹⁵⁰ Philip Schwyzer, 'British History and 'The British History': The Same Old Story?', p.21.

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