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# Transtextuality, (Re)sources and Transmission of the Celtic Culture Trough the Shakespearean Repertory

Céline Savatier-Lahondès

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**University of Stirling – Université Clermont Auvergne**

**Transtextuality, (Re)sources and  
Transmission of the Celtic Culture  
Through the Shakespearean Repertory**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D) AND DOCTEUR DES UNIVERSITÉS (DOCTORAT)**

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**8 November 2019**

*For Philippe and Nicolas*

*For Zof, and Fred*

# ABSTRACT

Key words: Shakespeare, Celtic, Motifs, (Re)sources, Antiquity, Rhizome

This dissertation explores the resurgence of motifs related to Celtic cultures in Shakespeare's plays, that is to say the way the pre-Christian and pre-Roman cultures of the British Isles permeate the dramatic works of William Shakespeare. Such motifs do not always evidently appear on the surface of the text. They sometimes do, but most often, they require a thorough in depth exploration. This issue has thus far remained relatively unexplored; in this sense we can talk of a 'construction' of meaning. However, the cultures in question belong to an Ancient time, therefore, we may accept the idea of a 'reconstruction' of a forgotten past. Providing a rigorous definition of the term 'Celtic' this study offers to examine in detail the presence of motifs, first in the Chronicles that Shakespeare could have access to, and takes into account the notions of orality and discourse, inherent to the study of a primarily oral culture. The figure of King Arthur and the matter of Britain, seen as the entrance doors to the subject, are studied in relation to the plays, and in the Histories, the analysis of characters from the 'margins', i.e. Wales, Ireland and Scotland provides an Early Modern vision of 'borderers'. Only two plays from the Shakespearean corpus are set in a Celtic historical context – *Cymbeline* and *King Lear* – but motifs surge in numerous other works, such as *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale* and others. This research reveals a substrate that produces a new enriching reading of the plays.



# RÉSUMÉ

Mots clés: Shakespeare, Celtic, Motifs, (Res)sources, Antiquité, Rhizome

Cette thèse explore les résurgences de motifs liés aux cultures celtiques dans les pièces de Shakespeare, c'est-à-dire la manière dont les cultures pré-chrétienne et pré-romaine des îles britanniques imprègnent l'œuvre théâtrale de William Shakespeare. Ces motifs n'apparaissent pas toujours de manière évidente à la surface du texte. Cela arrive parfois, mais ils requièrent souvent une analyse précise et approfondie. Cette question est jusqu'à présent restée relativement inexplorée ; en ce sens nous pouvons parler d'une construction de sens. Cependant, les cultures en question appartenant à un passé antique, il est possible d'accepter l'idée d'une 'reconstruction' d'un passé jusque là oublié. Basé sur une définition rigoureuse du terme 'celtique', cette étude examine en détail la présence des motifs, tout d'abord dans les chroniques auxquelles Shakespeare a pu avoir accès, sans oublier les notions d'oralité et de 'discours', inhérentes à l'analyse d'une culture avant tout orale. La figure du roi Arthur et la matière arthurienne, perçus comme la voie d'entrée dans le sujet, sont étudiés en relation avec les œuvres du dramaturge, et dans les pièces historiques, l'analyse des personnages venant des 'marges', i.e. le Pays-de-Galles, l'Irlande et l'Ecosse informent sur la vision pré-moderne de ces 'frontaliers'. Seules deux pièces sont situées dans un contexte historique celtique : *Cymbeline* et *Le Roi Lear*, mais de nombreux motifs surgissent aussi dans d'autres œuvres telles que *Macbeth*, *Le songe d'une nuit d'été*, *La tempête*, *Le Conte d'hiver* et d'autres. Ce travail de recherche révèle un substrat qui produit une nouvelle lecture enrichissante des œuvres de William Shakespeare.



# FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This investigation was encouraged by Professor Danièle Berton-Charrière, from the Université Clermont-Auvergne, whose research on the Celtic domain herself together with Professor Jean Berton provided an impetus, and by Professor John Drakakis, from the University of Stirling, who is currently involved in the revision of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*.

Humans cannot live without stories. We surround ourselves with them; we make them up in our sleep; we tell them to our children; we pay to have them told to us. Some of us create them professionally. And a few of us – myself included – spend our entire adult lives trying to understand their beauty, power, and influence (Stephen Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve*, 2017, p. 2).

I would like to express my eternal gratitude and acknowledgment to my tutors Danièle Berton and John Drakakis, and to my husband, Philippe Lahondès.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## WORKS BY SHAKESPEARE

<i>AYL</i>	<i>As You Like It</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
<i>Cym</i>	<i>Cymbeline</i>
<i>Ham</i>	<i>Hamlet</i>
<i>1H4</i>	<i>King Henry IV, Part 1</i>
<i>2H4</i>	<i>King Henry IV, Part 2</i>
<i>H5</i>	<i>King Henry V</i>
<i>2H6</i>	<i>King Henry VI, Part 2</i>
<i>H8</i>	<i>King Henry VIII</i>
<i>KL</i>	<i>King Lear</i>
<i>LLL</i>	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>
<i>MA</i>	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
<i>Mac</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
<i>MND</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
<i>MV</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
<i>Per</i>	<i>Pericles</i>
<i>R2</i>	<i>King Richard II</i>
<i>RJ</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Tem</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>
<i>TN</i>	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
<i>WT</i>	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>

## OTHER

<i>AD</i>	Anno Domini
<i>BC</i>	Before Christ
<i>BSA</i>	British Shakespeare Association
<i>CSL</i>	Céline Savatier Lahondès
<i>eDIL</i>	<i>electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language</i>
<i>EHEP</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i>
<i>Fol.</i>	Folio
<i>GPC</i>	<i>Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru</i>
<i>HRB</i>	<i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>NPG</i>	National Portrait Gallery
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>TYP</i>	<i>Trioedd Ynys Prydein</i>



# INTRODUCTION

## The transmission of Celtic cultural myths, (re)sources and transtextual relations

In 1926, in *The Sources of Hamlet*, Sir Israel Gollancz issued this statement about the origin of the story of *Hamlet* as we know it from the Dane Saxo Grammaticus:<sup>1</sup> “Notwithstanding high authority, I am convinced it will ultimately be conceded that the story developed (as I attempted to show) under Celtic influences” (Gollancz 1967 (1926), preface ix). In a detailed and thoroughly documented demonstration, Gollancz pointed out that the *Hamlet* tale, although it was much told in Northern countries, had little that connected it with Northern mythology (p. 33), but that its origin was to be sought in the Celtic speaking countries of the Western Isles. He also expressed hope that further academic study would emerge to support his speculation.

Initially, his inquiry led him to the *Prose Edda*,<sup>2</sup> in which a poem by the Icelandic skald Snaebjörn refers to *Amloði's* or *Hamlet's mill* (an equivalent of the Maëlstrom, the most terrible whirlpool in the ocean). This led some scholars to think that “Hamlet” could be associated with an ocean giant,<sup>3</sup> or at least an ancient sea hero (p. 7). Reading Gollancz’s comment on the last lines of Snaebjörn’s poem and especially the last phrase “lið meldr”,<sup>4</sup> it appears that the whirlpool is described as taking everything, people and ships as grist to its

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<sup>1</sup> Saxo Grammaticus’s *Amleth* as told in the Third and Fourth Books of his *Gesta Danorum*, completed at the beginning of the thirteenth century, is acknowledged as “source” for Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, according to the classification terminology of Geoffrey Bullough in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Volume VII (1973).

<sup>2</sup> The *Prose Edda* was written by the Icelandic chieftain, poet, and historian Snorri Sturluson, probably in 1222-1223 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Edda#ref173112> (accessed 12/05/19). The poem sung by the skald Snaebjörn in the *Skáldsparmál* (“The Language of Poetry”) section of the *Prose Edda* would date back to the tenth century (Gollancz, p. 9).

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Snaebjörn’s poem, Gollancz invites us to consider the mythic dimension of the ocean and notes a parallel between Aegir, the Scandinavian ocean god and his “much harassed”, “Celtic brother-monarch” – Lear (p. 4). Lir is indeed the name of the ocean god in Celtic mythology (Irish and Welsh). Gollancz also suggests that Cordelia, Lear’s younger and kinder daughter could be linked to Aegir’s daughter named “the dove”. This is interesting in so far as it points to the potentially godly and mythic nature of King Lear in Shakespeare but it is also highly speculative.

<sup>4</sup> Obsolete Icelandic “meldr” meaning “flour or corn in the mill” and “lið” either “a host, folk, people” or “ship”, or the masculine “liðr”, “a joint of the body” (Gollancz, p. 6).

mill; and according to a cosmic myth, the primaeval giants' limbs served as grist in Hamlet's mill (p. 6-7). In Saxo, Hamlet, passing by the sea, refers to the "meal", this time meaning "the sand" and also to the fact that it has been "ground small by the hoary tempests of the ocean" (Grammaticus, tr. Elton, 1905, p. 210, and Gollancz, p. 19). Although achieved through paronomasia (the close vowel sounds between "mill" and "meal") and a metaphoric transfer from the people and ships to the grains of sand, the transtextual reference to Hamlet's mill, as explained in the *Prose Edda*, which grinds everything it engulfs, seems apparent. Thus, through this reference, Saxo's Amleth acquires a psychological characteristic similar to the activity of the terrible whirlpool that will destroy those who dare trigger his anger. The character is indeed merciless when it comes to getting rid of his uncle Fend's friend, sent to spy on him. He kills him, butchers him, boils him and feeds the body to the swine. The monstrosity of the method, the ability to go to extremes in horror has a metaphorical equivalent in the gigantic proportions of the Maëlstrom and constitutes a possible link between Amleth/ Hamlet and Northern mythology.

Furthermore, Gollancz suggested that Snaebjörn the Boar, a tenth-century Arctic adventurer, whose deeds were related in the *Landnáma Bók*, "The Book of Iceland Settlements", may be reasonably assumed to be the same person as Snaebjörn the poet of the *Prose Edda*. Gollancz showed that the noble and mixed ancestry of the Arctic seafarer came both from Ireland and Iceland, thereby suggesting a close connection between the two countries (the Vikings raided Northern England and Ireland where they established kingdoms from the eighth to the eleventh centuries AD and even later in Scotland). This pathway of transmission between Scandinavian and Celtic cultures has been investigated by numerous scholars, as Gollancz observed: "The mutual influence of the Celts and the Scandinavians has received increased attention at the hands of scholars. Vigfusson boldly recognized the non-Icelandic character of many of the Eddaic songs" (note 1, p. 56). It is important to note that stories could circulate and influence each other despite and even because of the barrier of the troubled ocean, and that Celtic elements could radiate beyond the sphere of Celtic speaking areas.

Gollancz noted that in *Amleth*, Saxo Grammaticus's influence included Northern elements although Roman history<sup>5</sup> was also significant, as Saxo, the learned Dane, was "emulous of the great Roman historians" (p. 15). However, Gollancz also observed that the Fourth Book showed an entirely different type of legendary matter. He attempted to

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<sup>5</sup> Some elements in *Amleth* are strikingly similar to the Classical tale of *Lucius Junius Brutus* (Gollancz p. 27).

demonstrate the original relation of the story with reference to an Anglo-Norman romance called *Havelok*,<sup>6</sup> a story of the Hamlet type (p. 37-42) set between Norfolk, Lindsey and Denmark, after King Arthur's destruction of the Dane kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Cuheran-Havelok is a poor but handsome British-bred youth who, as the story unfolds, turns out to be King Gunther of Denmark's son (similar to *Hamlet*, the hero who is a Danish prince).

In addition to Gollancz's argument concerning the Celtic origin of the Hamlet story to which that of Havelok-Cuheran is likely to be related, it is worth noting that an element of magic is attached to the hero, Cuheran. While he was a servant and King Edelsi of Lindsey's fool<sup>8</sup>, Argentille, daughter to Aldric the Dane, the late King of Norfolk, was given to him in marriage by her mean uncle. Edelsi and Aldric were brothers-in-law and the former, intending to seize his niece's inheritance, gave her away to a moneyless spouse. The lady felt degraded until one night, after having had a dream-vision in which she saw wild animals (bear, boars, foxes, and lions) fight for her husband and obey him,<sup>9</sup> she also saw "a marvelous flame coming from Cuheran's mouth" (Gollancz p. 40). This led Argentille to seek for Cuheran's origin and the couple learnt that he was in fact Dan Havelok, the prince of Denmark. He had fled with his mother after the king his father was killed when King Arthur conquered the land. The presence of Arthur in the story's background is already an indication of possible Celtic ancestry since, as Helen Cooper has observed: "Legends about Arthur had been circulating for some time in the Celtic [speaking] areas of Britain before Geoffrey developed them into full biography" (Cooper 2004, p. 27). Arthur's exploits are supposed to have taken place during

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<sup>6</sup> The story is first attested in Geoffrey Gaimar's *Lestoire des Engleis* (c. 1135-1140).

<sup>7</sup> This fits in the Galfridian account of King Arthur's legend according to which the hero conquered the Scots, the Picts, the Irish and much of Northern Europe, with extreme brutality, before setting out for Rome (Geoffrey, trans. Lewis Thorpe 1966, p. 219-223): "They scattered the rural population and continued to give full licence to their savagery until they had forced all Norway and all Denmark, too, to accept Arthur's rule" (p. 223).

<sup>8</sup> Gollancz also demonstrated that the notion of foolishness on the part of the hero, of playing the fool, pretending utter lack of wit is a common trait to all the *Hamlet* type stories he investigated. This aspect appears to be inherent to the name of Hamlet itself, such as Gollancz's detailed onomastic account showed (p. 59). To give an example, "fool" being "amlhair" in Irish, the close connection between the two name forms also reinforces the link with Celtic culture and accounts for the behaviour of the character.

<sup>9</sup> Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles*, p. 7-8, ll. 195-240. The "taming" of the animals recalls the Orpheus type story, as in the Middle English Breton lay of *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1330-1340), for example, in which the harping consoles the hero and subdues the wild animals around him. This tradition, according to Laskaya and Salisbury "goes back to shamanistic origins in pre-Christian material as well as to the Classical Orpheus and the Biblical David" (Laskaya- Salisbury 2001, p. 52). There is no harping in *Havelok* but commanding the animals especially bears, boars and lions is a sign of power worthy of a king. By the time *Havelok* was written (1280-1290), the lion had replaced the bear as symbol of kingship. Before the Medieval period, the bear was considered to be king of animals in Northern Europe (see M. Pastoureau, *L'ours, histoire d'un roi déchu* and P. Walter, *Arthur, l'ours et le roi*). It is significant that in Argentille's dream-vision in *Havelok*, the bear is killed first. He was the animal that attacked with his army of foxes, and the boars, and the lion rescued Havelok. Summed up in a nutshell, what we have with this fight between the animals is the passage from ancient to Medieval times, from one symbol of kingship to another. This relationship between the king and the bear will be developed in chapter 6, in relation to the character of King Lear.

the era of the Saxon invasions, which occurred from the middle of the fifth century onwards, but it also contains elements from the pre-Roman and pre-Christian Iron Age. Therefore what we have in *Havelok* is possibly the sign of a Late Antiquity resource, together with traces of a more ancient past. Additionally, the supernatural quality attached to the character of the young Danish prince is, as Cooper also noted, one of the characteristic features of the Celtic material, “associated [...] with certain areas of subject-matter, especially magic and the supernatural” (Cooper, p. 27).

However, Saxo Grammaticus did not re-employ the supernatural. In *Amleth*, the cunning of the character, and his ability to pretend are sufficient to satisfy the development of the plot. In Shakespeare, although none of the types of magic such as subduing animals and the flame coming out of the mouth present in *Havelock* are relevant to Hamlet, the supernatural does exist in the presence of the ghost and in Hamlet’s ability to see, hear and converse with it.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Shakespeare used an element that was absent in Saxo but present in the older version suggesting that the magic in Shakespeare is Christian and not Celtic. The ghost in *Hamlet* follows the Medieval Catholic tradition of spirits coming from Purgatory: “I am thy Father’s spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confined in the fasts of fire<sup>11</sup> / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away!” (1.5.9-13, Folio 1623). Shakespeare’s ghost illustrates the madness of the revenger which recalls Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) and the *Ur-Hamlet*, but it also points to the gap between Catholics and Protestants, a live issue in Early Modern England. Indeed, the story is set in Protestant Denmark, and Hamlet is educated at Wittenberg (2.4.9 in Q1, 1.2.113 in Q2, 1.2.111 in F), the famous university founded in 1527 from which Martin Luther issued his ninety-five theses against the selling of indulgences, that was the starting point of the Protestant reformation in 1517. The audience would have noticed the reference together with the fact that Purgatory does not exist in Protestant doctrine. The Early Modern religious debate appears anachronistically in a play set in the Early Middle Ages. However, using magic, an element that had disappeared from Saxo’s narrative, through the figure of the ghost and Hamlet’s ability to interact with it, Shakespeare appropriates this part of an Ancient narrative and effectively brings it into alignment with an Elizabethan sensibility. Early Modern, Medieval, Early Medieval and Ancient times connect and interact via the motif of magic which in Shakespeare appears altogether necessary to the narrative and linked to religious discourse.

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<sup>10</sup> Marcellus, Barnardo and Horatio can also see the ghost but do not speak with him.

<sup>11</sup> “in flaming fire” 5.4 in Quarto 1 (1603).

In the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the play text itself does not overtly bear the signs of ancient culture, but it is the multiple "sources" of the play which give some indication of an origin in the Celtic domain. This is an instance of hidden reference, unearthed by Sir Israel Gollancz as a result of thorough investigation. Citing other studies, he also asserts that the character of Havelok-Cuheran is identical to that of Anlaf Curan, a famous Viking of the house of Ivar, who became king of the Northernmen of Ireland at the beginning of the tenth century AD (p. 43). According to Gollancz, there was a transfer of the name of the hero "Anlaf" from "Habloch, or Aballach, Avallach, Abloyc", the sixth son of the semi-mythical Cunedda of the oldest Welsh annals (p. 47). Gollancz states that "the legend must have originally been developed among a Welsh-speaking population", with reference to the Welsh kingdom of Strathclyde (p. 47). Therefore, the context of the stories that lie at the origin of *Hamlet* is to be found in Anglo-Hiberno-Danish history and also in Welsh culture, with hints of a presence in Scandinavian Scotland at the end of the first millennium, since the heroes Havelok and Anlaf both marry the Scottish king's daughter.

The earliest occurrence of the name "Hamlet" in literature, Gollancz adds, is in the *Irish Annals of the Four Masters* under the form "Amhlaide" (p. 51), transcribed in English as "Amhlaeibh" (*Annals of the Four Masters*, ed. O'Donovan, vol. 2, year 917, p. 597).<sup>12</sup> The character, who emerged around the year 917, would have been Anlaf Curan's father. In the *Annals*, the Irish poetess Gormflaith sings a lament upon her husband's death, as he was slain by Amhlaide. The other early instance is, as we have seen, in the *Prose Edda* of the tenth century Icelandic Snæbjörn (Gollancz, p. 57), who must have encountered the story at an early stage of its development (p. 56). According to Gollancz's hypothesis, even the important aspect of the apparent simplicity or pretended madness of the character "may have been brought to Iceland from Ireland, whither the Vikings had originally taken the story of Orwendill's son"<sup>13</sup> (p. 56). This confirms the setting of the story at the conjunction of both Celtic and Northern cultures.

Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn at this stage. Firstly, the potential ancestor of Hamlet evolved in a semi-historical, semi-legendary context, which is another characteristic feature of Celtic mythology. Other cultures also have this feature but in Celtic myths, it is particularly prescient. Except for the high gods and goddesses like Lug or Danu,

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<sup>12</sup> *The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* is a seventeenth century compilation based on older manuscripts undertaken by Michael O'Clery from 1632 to 1636. This narrative recapitulates yearly dated events concerning the history of Ireland from prehistory to the year 1616.

<sup>13</sup> Orwendill or Hormendil in Saxo, is Hamlet's father.



for whom we do not have any particular narrative frame, the protagonists are generally euhemerized deities. They behave like men and women (some of whom may very well have existed) and they have a specific aura, strength or magical capability, with the result that the frontier is blurred between history and myth. This is the case with Arthur, but also with the majority of Irish tales. Secondly, Gollancz concludes, as we have seen, that the origin of the Hamlet tale very possibly lies in the Celtic speaking countries of the Western Isles:

The story of “Hamlet” in Saxo certainly owed a great debt to this Hiberno-Danish history; and the accretions from this source grafted upon the older mythical story, especially the late matter to be found in Saxo’s Fourth Book, may now easily be accounted for. Indeed, the evidence here adduced seems to point to the Celtic West, more particularly the Scandinavian kingdom of Ireland, as the locality where the Northern tale of “Hamlet”, as we know it from Saxo, was finally developed some time in the eleventh century – about the same time that Welsh minstrels in Strathclyde were forging their tale of Havelok. (p. 55-56)

Gollancz’s investigations led him to an ancient substrate of myth to which subsequent layers of history were attached, revealing intricate links between Scandinavian and Celtic cultures (Irish, Welsh and Scottish). Therefore, the story that inspired Shakespeare’s tragedy stands at the crossroads of these two close Indo-European influences. Gollancz also mentioned another element in particular, the Roman culture, which cannot be ignored. From this, it can be inferred that no matter how big or small their presence, Celtic motifs or, to put it differently, elements of Celtic culture, have to be envisaged as operating in competition or in conjunction with other cultures. Scandinavia and Rome, the Saxons and the Christian religion too, stand as unavoidable cultural ‘neighbours’ and influences. Without being led astray by too close an examination of already well documented narratives, what is important and of concern to the present argument are the points of contact and the way these cultures act as potential filters in the evolution of texts. When Roman influence ended around 410 AD, early Christian religion entered into the British Isles in the midst of an agitated Breton context between the growing return of paganism and clan wars (De Séchelles 1957, p. 150). Germanus and Augustine were sent in turn, as Bede wrote, to: “preach the word of God to the English race [...] to a barbarous, fierce and unbelieving nation whose language they did not even understand” (Bede 731 AD, ed. McClure and Collins 2008, p. 37). As a result, after undergoing Roman, Christian and Saxon influences, and concomitant prejudices, the Celtic culture very often remains beneath the surface of the text and its presence can only be detected through the

modifications effected on more powerful cultural traits, in the same way that an invisible star can be observed through the shadow it casts on a neighbouring planet.

According to Gollancz sometimes, the ‘motifs’ or ‘sources’ that refer to the Celtic domain can be hidden thus making the links obscure. This requires thorough investigation and necessary speculation, along with the elaboration of hypotheses. The aim is to open possibilities and shed light on a domain of source studies of Shakespeare’s work which has remained thus far relatively unexplored. Sir Israel Gollancz is one of the few to have detected the presence of Ancient Celtic culture in Shakespeare. His statement at the beginning of his book published in 1926 is certainly an invitation to engage in further investigation.

Before proceeding, a number of terms have been used in this introductory section of my argument which require more precise definition. The first of these terms is ‘Celtic’ since together with Shakespeare’s plays, it is the focal point of the present research. The definition of the adjective and the realities it stands for are far more complex than may seem to be the case and the use of the term therefore demands caution. This will enable us to define the chronological and geographical boundaries of our subject along with another term of importance: ‘myth’. In what sense are we using this term? What meaning did it have in the early modern period and how could ancient Celtic myths be transplanted into Shakespeare’s drama? This general introduction will eventually discuss the difficulties and limitations of the present research, the available data, and the methodological tools used.

## **1. Definitions, chronology and geography**

The following discussion of the term ‘Celtic’ is fundamental to the process of defining the contours of our subject, given the extreme complexity of the concept in academic discourse as well as in the popular perception of the term. The aim is to grasp the notion as comprehensively as possible in all its different dimensions. However, to be able to identify and analyze the presence of Celtic culture in Shakespeare’s plays, it is necessary to engage analytically with the variety of meanings and approximations associated with the term in order to avoid uncritical replication of the contents of fantasy and ‘myth’.

Firstly, we will envisage the term in its Early Modern context and determine the number of Shakespeare’s plays set in a historically Celtic period. The historical ‘Celts’ being an oral culture, the only written sources available are the Ancient Classics, among them Herodotus, and Caesar. Their frequently biased accounts offer much information. Lastly, the

term has to be considered in its contemporary uses both at the academic, but also at the social and political levels.

### 1.1 Definition of the term ‘Celtic’<sup>14</sup>

Collis notes that the modern identity of the Celts was developed in turn by a Scotsman, a Breton and a Welshman: George Buchanan, Paul Yves Pezron and Edward Llyud (Collis 2010, p. 11). Pezron and Llyud were 17<sup>th</sup> century linguists and Buchanan was an Early Modern scholar and poet. In his *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (*The History of Scotland*), published in 1582, Buchanan was the first to suggest that the origin of some of the population of Ireland and the British Isles was Celtic [Gauls].<sup>15</sup> A number of competing ideas existed concerning the origins of early British history among which Brutus and the Trojans were believed to be the historical ancestors of the British people (Collis p. 40). Buchanan dismissed this as a “British fable”, since he did not see how a few Trojans who had landed on the island could have peopled it in only one generation (Buchanan, transl. Aikman, p. 72). He wrote that according to Bede, the Britons came from Armorica, and that Greek grammarians claimed they were named after Britannus, the son of Celtus. He added “at least in this they [Bede and the Greek grammarians] agree, that the Britons had descended from the Gauls” (Buchanan p. 83). In a clear-cut scientific approach<sup>16</sup> which corresponds at some points with the views of modern archaeologists, Buchanan’s vision rejected all fables and attributed the first population of the British Isles to colonization from the continent. He also acknowledged a common linguistic branch although different dialects were used by different peoples whom he named precisely enough to distinguish the differences between them. A renowned scholar in all Europe but also controversial in his own country, Buchanan is sometimes regarded as a probable source text for Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. It was through his work that the playwright

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<sup>14</sup> See also Céline Savatier-Lahondès, “The reconstruction of an Ancient past in Shakespeare’s drama”, in *Études écossaises* 20, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> By Gauls, it is generally understood Celts, a people who “possessed the third part of gaul” (Buchanan, p. 79), spread to Spain (Celtiberi, Celtici, Gallicians), to Italy where they took different names and also further to Thrace, Macedonia, Greece, Bithynia (Gallo Gracians in Asia) (p. 80). They also spread to Germany and extensively around Britain, Scotland, Wales and Ireland (p. 82-102). Buchanan also notes that Britain, Wales and Scotland “preserve the indelible marks of Gallic speech and affinity” (p. 103).

<sup>16</sup> Collis notes that contradistinctly to other writers of the time who indulged in myth and conjecture, Buchanan’s theories were based on “an extensive and systematic assembling of the data, with theory made explicit, and interpretation logically based on observations, the sort of scientific breakthrough we associate with Francis Bacon and the major scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (2010, p. 43). This is a late recognition for Buchanan, while his time saw the public burning of his books in Oxford until 1683 (p. 40).

may have encountered the term of “Celt” and become familiar with the notion of “Celtic” (or Gallic) antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

Also in the Early Modern period, the third chapter of *The First Booke of the Historie of England* of the 1587 edition of Holinshed entitled “Of the ancient names or denominations of this Iland” informs us that “at the first it [i.e. the Island of Britain] seemed to be a parcel of the Celtike kingdome, whereof Dis otherwise called Samothus, one of the sonnes of Iaphet was the Saturne or originall beginner, and of him thenceforth for a long while called Samothea” (Cap. 3, p. 3, col. 1, ll. 57-63). Then, the Chronicle mentions “Britain under the Celts 341 years”, that is to say nine generations of Celtic princes who reigned over the Ancient kingdom. Holinshed’s confusion is maintained insofar as the appellation of the first people of the Island is concerned, adding a mythological dimension (“Saturne”) to the names of ‘Celts’ and ‘Samotheans’. The Celts are mentioned again three times in the same chapter as a people living somewhere on the continent between Spain and Italy, their king being Lucus. Mythology is noticeably present in Holinshed as a means of describing the origins of Britain, as if it were a necessary component of long lost periods of time. Shakespeare could also have come across the term “Celtic” there, attaching a notion of myth to the Antiquity he discovered in thinking about some of his plays. This mythic dimension is present to a certain extent in *King Lear*, a play that is explicitly set in Ancient Celtic times.

Developed in the Middle Ages, the Brutus fable of origins was favoured by royalty during the latter part of the sixteenth century as interest grew in establishing a narrative history of Britain. Holinshed’s compilation Chronicle situates the ancestry of the ‘Celts’ in the pre-Brutus period, before 1116 BC (p. 4), when Britain was still called Alba, named after Albion before being renamed after his successor, Brutus. Therefore, the term equates with obscure times when euhemerised classical deities such as a personified Saturne could easily evolve alongside pseudo-historical heroes. None of Shakespeare’s plays is contextualised in quite such a remote and mythological period. Except for *Troilus and Cressida* set during the Trojan wars (dated 13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century BC), *King Lear* is the most ancient according to the chronology of kings that appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth where Lear is the tenth generation

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<sup>17</sup> In *Britannia*, first published in 1586, William Camden drew on Buchanan to explain the origin of the British but chose the term “Ancient British” instead of “Celtic”. Camden’s terminology remained in use until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains still today in archaeological literature (Collis 2010, p. 42). The term of “Ancient British” is satisfactory because of its relative precision concerning place and time. It refers to the British Isles (but not Ireland and Scotland) in a pre-Roman and pre-Christian period. Thus it enables differentiation between Ancient British, Ancient Scottish, Ancient Irish and Ancient Welsh.

after Brutus who himself supposedly lived at the time of Troy's downfall.<sup>18</sup> In our approximate hypothetical dating, this would situate the action in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, around 1010, in the Bronze Age. However, Shakespeare's king belongs to olden times which more or less resemble the Middle Ages, and the name of "Gallia", used in Holinshed and in the anonymous *King Leir* (1605),<sup>19</sup> was modernised as "France", thereby dropping an appellation which according to Buchanan referred to a generic Celtic group of people who colonised the British Isles around 600 BC (Collis 2010, p. 40). We may speculate therefore that *King Lear*'s setting is in the later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age<sup>20</sup> while *Cymbeline*, which is the second play given a Celtic historical context, is set in Roman Britain. However, neither of the terms "Celtic", "Proto-Celtic" or "Romano-Celtic" is used in Shakespeare's contextualisation for these plays.

Although he did not use the term as such, Shakespeare could also have been aware of a certain notion of what "Celtic" referred to as it appears in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596). At the beginning of Book II, Canto X, where the poet is recounting the "famous auncestries of [his] most dreaded soueraigne", he refers to "[her] fathers and Great grandfathers of old" and to an old genealogy ("in that old mans booke they were in order told"), thus set in the scene in a remote past. Spenser deals with the land of the Britons, which "in antique times was saluage wilderness, vnpeopled, vnmanurd, vnprou'd, vnpraysd" and which was not an Island then, but, some thought, was derived from the "*Celtioke mayn land*". Britain and the continent's common ancestry is here established and we suppose that this "Celtioke mayn land" equates to Gaul, thus confirming the parallel between 'Gauls' and 'Celts' according to the Early Modern conception. Even so, the Celtic period in *The Faerie Queene* is part of the early creation myth when giants peopled the land of the Britons, before Brutus arrived.

Aside from the mythic element and the remoteness and obscurity attached to it, historically speaking the Celts did actually exist. Long before the early modern period, about three hundred and fifty Ancient Greek or Latin geographers, historians, philosophers, lawyers and poets quoted or commented on the Celts (Buchsenschutz 2015, p. 4), extending over a

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<sup>18</sup> Scientific data show that the archaeological site of Troy situated on the Hissarlik hill in present day Turkey underwent a long occupation which makes stratigraphic data complex to analyze. However, archaeologists have evolved a hypothesis concerning the chronology of Troy's downfall. According to Jean Bérard, level VII A would correspond to the great fire which destroyed the city, as Erathostene described it. Although the actual dating remains uncertain, Bérard agrees that the burnt strata carbon dates from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, around 1290 (Jean Bérard 1950, p. 357).

<sup>19</sup> *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> We will see that according to some specialists, the Proto Celtic period dates back to the third millennium BC.

period from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Collis 2010, p. 13). Copies of the ancient texts began to multiply during the 14<sup>th</sup> century but spread more widely in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when scholars like Buchanan drew on them, as part of the Renaissance process of the rediscovery of Ancient texts. The most important legacy can be traced to Julius Caesar who drew upon Poseidonius of Apameia (135-151 BC)<sup>21</sup> to describe the living habits of the Gauls in his *Commentarii De Bello Gallico* (*Commentaries on the Gallic War*) (58-52 BC). Following Julius Caesar, Strabo, Titus-Livius and Tacitus provided the most substantial accounts (Buchsenschutz, *ibid.*). Collis identifies Polybius as one of the three writers who actually travelled in the territory of the Celts, together with Poseidonius and Caesar (p. 25). Most writers did not provide eye witness accounts of the Celts since they were written by people who had never had any contact with them, and even some of Caesar's statements may be doubtful.

One of the first to refer to the existence of a people called "Keltoi" was the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 490/480-424 BC). Part of a general geographic confusion common among Ancient writers, added to errors of transcription and translation,<sup>22</sup> is Herodotus's location of the source of the river Danube in the Celts' territory in the Pyreneans. According to Herodotus "the Celts live beyond the Pillars of Heracles, next to the Cynesians who are the most westerly people of Europe" (Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, 2003 (1954), p. 108). A further reference in *The Histories* (p. 256) confirms the western position of the Celts, perhaps on the Atlantic coast as Collis suggests (2010, p. 17); he also reiterates the geography of the Danube, splitting Europe in two from South to North. Aristotle (384-322 BC), drawing on the same source as Herodotus<sup>23</sup> continues the confusion and is one of the first to describe the Celts as barbarians: "homosexual relationships, fearlessness and crazed mentality; [while] Plato refers to their drunkenness" (Collis, p. 17).

Both Buchsenschutz and Collis agree that the Classical sources generally were the result of political bias "writing from the attitude of civilised upper-class Greeks and Romans about uncivilised barbarians" (Collis, p. 14) and this served to increase the savagery of the Celts since their distance from Roman provinces helped justify the reluctance to colonise remote countries inhabited by unstable, fierce populations (Buchsenschutz, p. 5).

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<sup>21</sup> Collis argues that the work of Poseidonius de Apameia did not survive but was extensively quoted by Classical writers such as Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and even Caesar. He adds that Poseidonius's comments on the Celts were based on personal travelling in Gaul where he collected "many of the standard stories of the Celts, of the display of human heads, or the role of the Druids in human sacrifice, the power of the Arverni and their king Luernios, the identification of the Cumri with the Cimmerians, and techniques of fighting" (2003, p. 20).

<sup>22</sup> Camille Jullian, "Les Celtes chez Hérodote", in *Revue des Etudes Anciennes*, Tome 7, n° 4, p. 377.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the accounts were often written retrospectively, which adds to the instability of the ancient texts. To this uncertainty must be added the potential for error attributed to the Medieval copyists who sometimes did not understand what they were writing, and could thus easily transmit mistakes. This gives an idea of the complexity and vagueness that existed in accounts of the ‘Celts’ that an Early Modern learned commentator might have seen. The rediscovery of these classical texts and the high value placed on them suggests that the portrait of insular ancestors that emerged was not entirely favourable. This may explain why the Brutus myth, which accompanied the enthusiasm for Classical Antiquity, could supplant actual history, notwithstanding the level of confusion that existed in the sources.

Nowadays, the need for precise focus comes from the fact that the adjective ‘Celtic’ and the noun ‘Celt’ are widely used by scholars and by the general public alike to refer to a multiple range of ‘realities’. A number of academic disciplines use the term Celtic, ranging from archaeologists to ancient and modern historians, linguists, art historians, musicology and literature scholars. In the 1990s, the term became the focus of a discussion concerning its academic relevance, with some Celtic studies specialists thinking it was no longer serviceable. Indeed, Professor Thomas Owen Clancy from the University of Glasgow claimed that “caught between what Patrick Sims-Williams of Aberystwyth University called ‘Celtomania and Celto-scepticism’, most scholars just stopped using the C-word and got on with their work” (Clancy 2015, online). However, scholarly publications in the 2000s<sup>24</sup> continued to use the term, and the XVIth International Congress of Celtic Studies that included a gathering of experts in all the domains of Celtic Studies cited above was held in Bangor University in Wales in July 2019. In other words, despite the triggering of the controversy surrounding the adjective ‘Celtic’, the term continues to be used in academic circles, and is worthy of attention because the debate that it generated in ancient and early modern times remains unresolved in ours.

The controversy surrounding the validity of the term, “Celto-scepticism” is also worth considering because it has helped to redefine essential aspects of the concept, even for Celtic specialists. Clearly described by Clancy (2015, online), it developed among British and Irish scholars, especially archaeologists, primarily because the term ‘Celtic’ had been used “lazily and unthinkingly” (Clancy, 2015); as John T. Koch explained in 1990:

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<sup>24</sup> A few examples: John Haywood, *The Historical Atlas of the Celtic World* (2001, 2002 for its translation into French); John Collis, *The Celts, Origins, Myths and Inventions* (2003); D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in Northern Britain, Celts and Romans, Natives and Invaders* (2004); *Actes du colloque du Musée royal de Mariemont, Les Celtes, aux racines de l’Europe* (2009) ; Olivier Buchsenschutz (ed.), *L’Europe celtique à l’âge du fer* (2015); Luc Baray, *De Carthage à Jéricho, Mythes et réalités du mercenariat celtique* (2017).

On both sides of the Irish sea, the whole efficacy of a united, philologically defined Celtic studies is openly questioned. To what extent can the notion of the ‘Celtic’ be validly extended beyond the Indo-European family tree? How meaningful is this concept – as opposed to a separate Irish, Welsh, etc. – when we talk about Celtic literature, Celtic culture, Celtic history, is Celtic an arbitrary shotgun wedding between nations profoundly different from, and ambivalent about, each other? (Koch, 1990, p. 35)

Koch’s questioning acknowledged the validity of the term Celtic as a means of naming the Celtic branch<sup>25</sup> of the Indo-European languages family tree,<sup>26</sup> while at the same time he denounced its lack of efficacy in rendering the specificities of each culture. In other words, the term was validated in relation to the philological and linguistic elements of Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Breton, Cornish, and Manx, but it couldn’t possibly refer to the real histories and archaeologies of these cultures; moreover, Ancient Gaul and most parts of modern Europe would also have to be added to this list, if we consider the zone of expansion of Celtic languages in the first millennium BC. Hence the expression: “arbitrary shotgun wedding” used by Koch.

Indeed, the blanket use of the term simplifies in the extreme historical origins and evolutionary paths that were probably highly complex. Vanceslas Kruta expressed strong reservations concerning any attempt to establish “a relationship between anonymous cultures, themselves defined through complex associations of archaeological vestiges, and through languages hypothetically reconstructed from more recent data” (2009, p. 13, tr. CSL).<sup>27</sup> Yet,

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<sup>25</sup> A relevant Celtic family of cognate languages was scientifically discovered by Edward Llyud (1660-1709), a scholar of Welsh origin and one of the first curators of the Ashmolean museum in Oxford. He published the results of his research in *Archeologia Britannica* (1707) identifying two subdivisions within the Celtic branch of languages: the P-Celtic (Brythonic) and the Q-Celtic (Goidelic), from which respectively spawned the Welsh, Cornish and Breton languages on one hand, and the Irish and Scottish Gaelic on the other hand. Although Llyud listed all the Celtic languages that existed at the time, including Manx and Cornish which have since disappeared (but are in the process of being revived), he used the adjective ‘Celtic’ sparingly. Today, another subdivision must be added in the Celtic branch: ‘Lepontic’ or more appropriately ‘Celto-Etruscan’, according to Vanceslas Kruta (Kruta, 2009, p. 12) who is also very cautious concerning the elaboration of the theoretical linguistic pattern of the evolution of Celtic languages into two branches, Goidelic being supposedly more ancient than Brythonic (*ibid.*).

<sup>26</sup> The similarities between the ten branches of the family tree were discovered over time and especially from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when people started studying Sanskrit. In 1786, Sir William Jones officially acknowledged the connections between Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, thus expanding the geographical area and giving its name to the Indo-European family of spoken languages. Nineteenth century linguists broadened the family to include Slavic groups and others, and Celtic was added around the year 1814 by the Danish philologist Rasmus Rask. The Indo-European family counts ten language branches today: Anatolian, Indo-Iranian, Greek, Italic, Germanic, Armenian, Tocharian, Celtic, Balto-Slavic, and Albanian. These families are ranked here according to the age of their oldest substantial texts. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indo-European-languages> (accessed 21/05/19).

<sup>27</sup> Tr. CSL: Throughout the whole document, this mention indicates that it is my translation.



insisting on the speculative aspect of such an enterprise, he ventured to seek a common denominator for the different groups of Celtic peoples looking backward into the Indo-European period, when the first Proto-Celtic Indo-European peoples settled.

The reason for tracing the history back to the ‘sources’ in the third millennium BC was, Kruta suggests, that research had been incomplete or erroneous, sometimes focusing too much on texts and omitting particular elements of the history such as the Lepontic or Celto-Etruscan branch of Celtic languages (p. 12-13). Furthermore, the Hallstattian and Latenian radial models<sup>28</sup> of Celtic origins and expansion could no longer be sustained. They consisted of an expansion of Celtic culture spreading from a nucleus in central Europe. Kruta also expressed disagreement with the hypothesis recently defended by Colin Renfrew, which identified a large colonization of Europe by farmers coming from Asia-Minor in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (p. 16).<sup>29</sup> In 2009, Kruta’s necessarily hypothetical but subtle and nuanced conclusion argued that the Celts were the latest stage of a millenary progressive fusion of Neolithic substrates with a central-occidental branch of already differentiated Indo-Europeans. They formed groups linked through cognate languages, some shared religious beliefs and probably also a predilection for an agricultural model in which the pastoral occupied a predominant place. However, these groups were differentiated by some traits of their material culture probably imposed by their surrounding environment (p. 25):

Les Celtes auraient donc été issus d’un processus millénaire de fusion progressive de substrats néolithiques avec une branche centre-occidentale d’Indo-Européens déjà différenciés. Ils formèrent des groupes apparentés par leurs langues, certains aspects essentiels de leurs croyances religieuses et probablement aussi la prédilection pour une économie agricole où la composante pastorale jouait un rôle prédominant. Cependant, ils se distinguaient entre eux par certains traits de leurs cultures matérielles, imposés probablement par la nature du substrat et le milieu environnant.

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<sup>28</sup> The discovery of archeological remains in Hallstadt (Austria) and La Tène (Switzerland) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century enhanced and substantially modified the available data about the Celts that was transmitted through Latin and Greek writers (Kruta, 2009, p. 11). Subsequent to these discoveries, it was established that in the first Iron Age (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), the ancestors of the Celts expanded from a central nucleus spreading over the North-East and East of today’s France, the South of Belgium, Southern Germany, Switzerland, the occidental part of Austria and Bohemia (p. 13). Another ‘wave of migrations’ was said to have occurred during the Latenian phase, from Central Europe (today’s Switzerland) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. This radial pattern of migrations has now been abandoned, a process of gradual cultural impregnation being preferred, but it may still be found in maps published in the 1990s.

<sup>29</sup> Maps illustrating both theories available in Haywood’s *Atlas historique des Celtes*, 2002, p. 29 (original title: *The Historical Atlas of the Celtic World*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2001).

[The Celts would thus have been issued from a millenary process of progressive fusion of Neolithic substrates with an Occidental branch of already differentiated Indo-Europeans. They formed groups that were affiliated by their languages, certain essential aspects of their religious beliefs and probably also the predilection for an agronomic economy in which the pastoral component played a prominent role. However, they distinguished from one another through certain traits of their material cultures, probably imposed upon them by the nature of the substrate and surrounding milieu]. (Kruta, 1990, p. 25, tr. CSL)

This statement acknowledges similarities and differences, and a common origin necessarily diluted over time.<sup>30</sup> As John Collis noted in his book, *The Celts, Origins, Myths and Inventions* (2003), during the 2000s, the “Celts” have become “a symbol of European unity as well as of regional identity” (p. 10). Kruta’s nuanced model does not prevent the one and allows the other. Although common European ancestry was largely diffused over time it existed; however, local differences have to be acknowledged so that the Celts are not described as one single people. This was the second aspect of the controversy advanced by British and Irish archaeologists in the 1990s whose criticism was extended to “call into question the political and social motivation behind the use of the term more widely” (Clancy, 2015).

When dealing with the term ‘Celtic’ today, most people refer to the ‘Celtic Fringe’ (Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Brittany), where Gaelic (or Goidelic) and Brythonic languages continue to be active. This refers to the modern awareness of Celtic identity that, according to Haywood, originated in Wales as a reaction to the notion of ‘Britishness’. Haywood notes that the Welsh had always considered themselves as ‘British’,

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<sup>30</sup> With the Ancient Britain and the Atlantic Zone (ABrAZo) project launched by the University of Wales in 2008, John T. Koch and Barry Cunliffe developed another model which challenged the central European one, as Koch explained: “the Proto-Indo-European parent language reached Europe’s Atlantic façade as Proto-Indo-European and then evolved into Celtic there. It did not undergo the sound changes defining Celtic (such as weakening of \*p) in some other place (such as central Europe) and then moved west” (Koch, 2015b, slide 7). He added that Celts “expanded back towards west-central Europe, preceding the historical expansions, and onward to Cisalpine Gaul and Anatolian Galatia” (*ibid*, front slide). Their research was published in *Celtic from the West: Alternative Perspectives from Archaeology, Genetics, Language and Literature* (2010). The period coincides with Kruta’s model, much earlier than the common Central European model which focuses on the Iron Age. However, part of their aim was to find common elements in genetic components of Atlantic areas (Western Iberia, Armorica, Ireland and Western Britain) and as Collis emphasised “one must remain skeptical about the value of DNA for identifying mass migration and population change” (Collis 2003, p. 222). The different conceptions and the research of archeologists and linguists show that the definition of the identity of the Ancient Celts is not settled and remains complex.

meaning descendants of the first inhabitants of Great Britain,<sup>31</sup> but after the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707, the term was diverted from its original meaning and came to designate the whole of the new British nation. It is to reaffirm their prior rights over the land of Britain that the Welsh began to label themselves ‘Celtic’ (Haywood 2002, p. 138). The notion of Celtic identity also developed in Scotland and in Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, against the notions of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Englishness’ and in response to colonization, especially in the case of Ireland.

This movement came to be called the Celtic Revival and was accompanied by a wave of ‘celtomania’ from the eighteenth century onwards, which expressed itself mainly in literature and the arts. The Romantic aesthetics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its emphasis on nature found a resonance in the representation of the Ancient Celt which had been, in Haywood’s words, “submitted and pacified along the ages and whose archaic values of honor, courage and hospitality seduced European intellectuals” (Haywood, 2002, p. 128, tr. CSL). From the negative stereotypical vision instituted by the Greco-Roman world in which the ‘Celt’ was the ultimate barbarian, violent, proud, undisciplined and superstitious, the dangerous savages transformed themselves into good savages and ‘celtomania’, the literary and artistic passion for all that was Celtic, was born (Haywood, p. 129). Apart from popular enthusiasm, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the Celtic Renaissance gave rise to numerous rediscoveries, transcriptions and translations of Celtic texts from Medieval manuscripts undertaken by Welsh, Scottish and Irish academic societies (Buchsenschutz 2015, p. 16-17), providing invaluable material to further academic research. In Ireland, along with creative works from of writers like J. M. Synge or W. B. Yeats, the revival took on a highly political turn and an idealized Celtic past was used to recreate a national identity which ultimately led to Irish independence in 1922 (Haywood, p. 129-130).

Since then, Haywood notes that a new wave of ‘celtomania’ has appeared from the 1970s up until the present. The general public is attracted by the notion of the good savage and by a nature that is opposed to the post-industrial materialistic world. Haywood invokes ecological preoccupations, the rapid decline of institutional religion and the feeling of guilt following the dissolution of the British Empire as some of the many reasons for the recent fascination with the ‘Celts’ (p. 130). The focus turns inward towards localised pasts instead of looking outward to the former colonized world. However, the issue here is not the real

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<sup>31</sup>As the *OED* states, originally, the adjective “Welsh” was used to characterize people “belonging to the native British population of England, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxons”. It is in later use that the word came to define the population “belonging to Wales by birth or descent; forming (part of) the native population of Wales” (*OED*).

historical identity of the Celts but rather the idealized, invented Celts, who were the product of the Romantic imagination. French archaeologist Olivier Buchenschutz describes this phenomenon:

Le public est avide de connaissances sur un peuple qui lui semble représenter une partie de son propre passé et sur une culture assimilée successivement à l'état de nature, au romantisme, à l'indépendance nationale. La culture des Celtes suggère pour lui une alternative au classicisme, à la raison d'état, voire au christianisme ou à la mondialisation. Les Celtes sont du domaine de l'utopie, fût-elle réduite à un unique village gaulois ; on a parfois l'impression que, pour le public, leur insertion dans la succession normale des civilisations historiques détruirait inutilement un rêve agréable.

[The general public yearns for some knowledge of a people which seems to represent part of their own past and on a culture which is successively assimilated to the state of nature, to romanticism, to national independence. For them, Celtic culture suggests an alternative to Classicism, to the reason of state, or even to Christianity and globalization. The Celts belong to the domain of utopia, be it reduced to a single Gaul village; for the general public, it sometimes feels that inserting them into the normal succession of historical civilizations would amount to uselessly destroying a very pleasant dream]. (Buchenschutz, 2015, p. 3, tr. CSL)

The whole concept has become idealized and mythologized<sup>32</sup> as a part of nostalgia for a past when things were assumed to be simpler, better, or even preferable to a more complex present. Furthermore, as Eamonn P. Kelly<sup>33</sup> suggested in a documentary for Channel 4 in 2006, the term provides a very appropriate publicity argument that all branches of the 'Celtic Fringe' have sought to capitalize on. The very term can be envisaged as a powerful argument in favour of a fantasized bond between people over the centuries, and this creates passion. But the critical analysis of popular enthusiasm, however interesting it may be from a sociological point of view, is beyond the scope of the present project.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the articulation of national identities through particular myths has already led to extremist political regimes; especially in early twentieth-

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<sup>32</sup> In the second sense of "myth" in the *OED*: "A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the truth".

<sup>33</sup> Emeritus Professor and former keeper of Irish Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

<sup>34</sup> See Lauren-Anne Killian-Brancaz, doctoral thesis on *The Survival of Celtic Identities, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, University of Aberdeen, University of Grenoble, 2014.

century Germany.<sup>35</sup> Thus, as Collis stated: “We all agree that the way in which we use terms like ‘Celtic’ has to be applied carefully or it can lead to outcomes that are neither academically or politically acceptable” (Collis 2003, p. 34).

In conclusion, Eamonn Kelly has provided us with a reflection that encapsulates all aspects of the problem, while at the same time acknowledging the insular antiquity of some aspects of Shakespeare’s work:

The term ‘Celtic’ has a useful meaning when used to describe ‘Celtic’ Art or ‘Celtic’ languages. It is the use of the term ‘Celtic’ to define a race of people which is problematic. It is well known that Shakespeare drew on Irish, Welsh, Scottish and Ancient British traditions and folklore to inspire his drama. Indeed, he may even have drawn on some Breton traditions [...]. Some of these traditions are inter-related and some are not. One might apply the term ‘Celtic’ to this material in order to distinguish it from English or Anglo-Saxon traditions, however, to use the term suggests a uniformity that is not demonstrable. If you can establish the various sources of Shakespeare’s material why not name it as Welsh, Irish, Scottish, etc. After all no ancient Irishman, or Scotsman or Welshman ever conceived of themselves as ‘Celtic’ nor would the term have been current in Shakespeare’s time. It’s a term that has only come into vogue since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Kelly, 2016, personal email correspondence, reproduced with kind authorization of the author)

In other words, the focus of our study considers the philological aspect of the general concept of the term Celtic as applied to the ancient past of the British Isles and Ireland<sup>36</sup> and also possibly at times to parts of Continental Europe that are neither Germanic nor Classical. Thus, the appellation ‘Celtic’ refers to the literary and mythological corpus related to the languages of the Celtic branch that is to say mostly the corpus of Irish, Welsh and Scottish Medieval manuscripts, the only ones remaining from the Celtic Indo-European branch. The term may

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<sup>35</sup> The Nazi research organization Ahnenerbe constructed the fantasy of the German origin of all peoples on earth in order to express their theory of a German master ‘race’. The concept of ‘race’ dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific theories and is not relevant to humans according to recent discoveries in biological sciences. Collis explains in what terms such a concept in relation to the Celts was used by the Nazi regime: “Using nineteenth-century concepts of race, it is assumed that the Celts were a distinctive racial group whose origin and expansion can be defined by using archaeological data. These ideas were developed by Gustaf Kossina and adopted by the Nazi party as a foundation of the concept of a German master race. The interpretation of the expansion of the Germans and the Celts use identical methodologies, and are unacceptable” (Collis 2003, p. 223). Thus, the model of expansion of a single people originating from Central Europe and radiating in all directions is erroneous and improper.

<sup>36</sup> The term British Isles is generally understood as comprising Great Britain and Ireland, but we choose to specify the term according to present boundaries.

be used without inverted commas since despite controversy it is still used at an academic level, not only in Archaeology but also in Celtic Studies dealing with language, linguistics and literature. Moreover, some of the texts under scrutiny may be in Latin, Norman, French or Middle English and yet contain Celtic motifs. This is where a degree of complexity remains since what is nominally identified as a non-Celtic corpus can contain references to Celtic matter.

The appellation ‘Celtic Antiquity of the British Isles and Ireland’ seems relevant as a collective term because it provides a name for the targeted geographical and historical context which can be subdivided into ‘Ancient Welsh’, ‘Ancient British’ and ‘Ancient Scottish’. It also differentiates itself clearly from Classical Antiquity and is well enough known by the general public to attract attention. Finally, the term refers to a period that extends from the Iron Age and possibly the late Bronze Age, to the end of the Roman political influence on the British Isles (410 AD)<sup>37</sup> and the fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD).<sup>38</sup>

Although the definition we have provided does not pretend to be comprehensive, the term has been studied in its Early Modern forms, showing that it was not in current use in Early Modern England. The concept of ‘Celt’ was imprecise, amounting to remote, timeless periods that owed more to mythology than to history. Historically speaking, only two of Shakespeare’s plays are set in a Celtic historical time and he himself never used the term. Historical Celts actually existed but the majority of the written sources available, the Ancient Classical sources, often showed imprecision and a political bias in their accounts. In the present day, despite the controversy surrounding the adjective ‘Celtic’, the term is still used at an academic level; however, attempts to define and determine what is ‘Celt’ are ongoing. The general public was, and still is, fond of the term and its political treatment has to be considered with care. However important these issues are from a sociological point of view, our focus remains historical and cultural.

Historically and culturally, the object of our study is to identify the past of what was a fragmented British Isles in the pre-Roman and pre-Christian era, before the Saxon and Viking invasions and investigate the transmission of this ancient British, Irish, Welsh and Scottish cultural heritage through the work of William Shakespeare. We will see that there are limitations to such an enterprise and that it is impossible to reach that far back without

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<sup>37</sup> 410 AD corresponds to the refusal of Emperor Honorius to come and aid the *civitates* of Britain against the Saxon invaders. This officially ended Roman influence over Britain. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions_01.shtml) (accessed 30/05/2019).

<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding the transitional period of Late Antiquity, the deposition of the last Roman Emperor Romulus Augustus traditionally marks the end of Ancient times and the beginning of Early Middle Ages (about 500-100).

considering the periods between the Iron Age and Shakespeare's time since they incorporate necessary elements of transmission. As such they are never neutral, and the filters they add to Ancient motifs have to be taken into account. This culture can be labelled under the generic term of Celtic as in the case of many other European cultures. However, the British Isles and Ireland are the only geographical areas that have retained a Celtic language and a culture that includes a substantial mythological component, which although saturated in the current languages of politics and religion remains available for analysis.

The notions of myth and mythology, used so far in various contexts and central to the present research, now need further definition.

## 1.2 Myth

The definition will consider the Early Modern usages of the term also in relation to the notion of 'legend', as well as the different meanings it retains in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. We will emphasize the patterns and archetypes available as tools in myth studies, in order to explain why and how the transmission of an ancient oral past can have occurred and been transplanted into Shakespeare's text.

Angus Vine notes that in Early Modern England, it was a requirement for prospective schoolmasters to comprehend "a proper knowledge of mythology". He cites Erasmus who, in his *De Ratione Studii* (1512) acknowledged Homer as "the father of all myth" and stressed the equal importance of Ovid (Vine 2014, p. 103). The paternity of mythology was thus to be found in the Greek and Roman worlds whose huge corpus fed English Renaissance scholars in their task of rediscovering and translating Ancient texts. Poetry was also first and foremost classical or derived from classical inspiration and was part of the grammar schools' curriculum. Students had to memorize their lessons and the use of either history or mythology made them appealing. This extensive practice of exposing students to mythology explains the conspicuous presence of Classical culture in the Early Modern World, according to Vine: "Furthermore, the importance afforded to memorization in that schooling may explain why classical myth continued to exert such a hold over the early modern imagination; why so many writers who were the products of a grammar school education continued to draw on a stock of mythological stories that they had learnt in their youth" (Vine, p. 104). References to Classical Antiquity in Shakespeare and other contemporary writers are countless and a

number of specialists have dealt extensively with the subject.<sup>39</sup> However, no mention has ever been made explicitly of the Irish or Welsh mythological corpus as such at an academic or at a popular level.

The Galfridian and Arthurian legends which appealed to the general public at the time contained Celtic mythological elements but were not recognized as such. Instead, they were qualified as “legends”<sup>40</sup> and sometimes as “true legends” as in Chester’s *Loves Martyr* (1601), which was published, as Vine notes: “with the true legend of famous King Arthur, the last of the nine Worthies, being the first Essay of a new Brytish Poet: collected out of diuerse Authentick Records” (p. 107). Therefore, the term ‘legend’ here points to a historically grounded ‘authentic’ narrative about King Arthur. In contemporary parlance, one could employ the expression the ‘myth’ of King Arthur to define a narrative that has retained a certain aura but whose historical origin remains uncertain. Yet, this was not the case for Arthur in Medieval times since people and kings believed in his historicity which began to be contested only in the Renaissance. The matter of Britain in general (Arthurian and other romances, prophecies, ballads) was widely popular but was not designated under the term of ‘mythology’ and recognized by scholars as a valuable corpus that could be taught in school. However, Vine remarks that antiquaries became more and more interested in the popular oral tradition of the British Isles and began to collect it (Vine p. 116);<sup>41</sup> but what was called mythology was mainly Classical and was much less important in popular than in learned culture, while the concept of myth itself was not consciously developed.

As Vine notes, the word ‘myth’, although it was written in Latin by Erasmus, was not much in use in the Early Modern period (Vine, p. 105), and its perception was very different from the contemporary definition of the concept which interests us. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘myth’ as “a traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology [i.e. analysis of causes], or

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<sup>39</sup> Colin Burrow dealt especially with Shakespeare in his monograph *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 2013, Oxford University Press. For a general overview, Vine cites H. David Humble, “Let Us Make Gods in Our Image: Greek Myth in Medieval and Renaissance Literature”, in Roger D. Wooddard ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 407-424; and Jane Kingsley-Smith, “Mythology”, in Michael Hattaway ed., *A new Companion to English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2010), p. 134-149.

<sup>40</sup> In his quest of unearthing the less familiar, imperfectly understood importance of myth for Early Modern popular culture (p. 104), Vine notes that aside from Classical Antiquity, what existed in a number of texts, from dramatic works to antiquarian collections was the notion of legend, rather than myth, especially in relation to Arthurian and Galfridian matter. The term “legend” evolved from Medieval times to the Renaissance and took three meanings, from a hagiographic narrative to the pejorative sense of something inauthentic and unbelievable to finally refer to an old historical tale (Vine, 2014, p. 107).

<sup>41</sup> William Camden’s *Britannia* is among the most prominent antiquarian works of the period (Vine, p. 116).



justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon” (*OED*<sup>1</sup>). Myths synthesize, digest and reconstitute the study and the analysis of causes of a particular social event, and they render it under the form of a perennial, long lasting narrative. Myths are endowed with the capacity to transmit important cultural elements over time. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* also defines ‘myth’ as “a widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of truth. Also: something existing only in myth; a fictitious or imaginary person or thing” (*OED*<sup>2</sup>). This sense refers to fabrication of something that is factually untrue, an invented fable which built up over time that implies deception, conscious or otherwise. If myths deceive, and if they are just “false stories” then, Laurence Coupe asks: “why do we keep telling them?” (Coupe 1997, p. 1).

Of course, from the point of view of the social sciences, myths are much more than ‘false stories’ since they provide explanations for the early stages of human history. This is what concerns us since the presence of elements identified as belonging to Celtic mythology within Shakespeare’s work can potentially lead us to a better understanding of the ancient cultural strata inherent to the plays. Philippe Walter, from the CRI (Centre de Recherche sur l’Imaginaire) developed the explanation of the concept in *Arthur, l’ours et le roi* (2002):

Pour l’esprit commun et la pensée vulgaire, un mythe est une croyance fautive. [...] Mais pour les sciences dites humaines, le mythe est devenu un moyen privilégié de connaître l’homme et la société à la fois. Il est la forme la plus accomplie et la plus complexe de l’imaginaire qui nécessite, pour être comprise, la collaboration de plusieurs disciplines. Le mythe se trouve au carrefour de différents savoirs et il met toujours en échec l’unique savoir (historique ou psychologique ou sociologique) qui prétendrait l’expliquer.

S’intéresser aux mythes, ce n’est pas seulement explorer la substance même de l’imaginaire humain, c’est aussi se préparer à mieux comprendre l’histoire car, selon l’expression de Gilbert Durand, le mythe est un “module de l’histoire” et les mobiles de l’homme engagé dans l’histoire sont, plus souvent qu’on ne le pense, d’ordre mythique, étrangement mythique. (Walter, 2002, p. 11-12)

[For common thought and usual conception, a myth is a false belief. [...] But for the human sciences, myth has become a privileged means to know man and society altogether. It is the most accomplished and complex form of imagination that requires the collaboration of several disciplines to be understood. Myth

stands at the crossroads of different forms of knowledge and it always defeats it when one unique expertise (historical, psychological or sociological) pretends to explain it.

Being interested in myths is not only to explore the very substance of human imagination, but it also equates to better preparing oneself to understand history because, as Gilbert Durand put it, myth is a “module of history” and the motives of men engaged in history are, more often than not, mythical, strangely mythical]. (Walter, 2002, p. 11-12, tr. CSL)

Walter stresses the need for inter-disciplinarity in mythological studies and points to the close connection between myth and history. This is particularly relevant to Celtic mythology since the corpus of texts most often mixes both fields. Indeed a character like Queen Maeve (also present in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*) presents all the characteristics of a historical queen together with the traits of a powerful goddess. It is sometimes ambivalent to the point that we do not know where to place the boundary between history and myth. Although not under this appellation, the concept of euhemerized deities<sup>42</sup> was known in the Early Modern period in relation to Classical mythology (Vine 2014, p. 111), but it appears to be a lot more subtle in the Celtic domain in which characters may be endowed with extraordinary powers but are rarely presented as ‘gods’ and ‘goddesses’.

Myth and folklore studies have issued classification patterns that help identify various types of narratives and describe their structures. An essential tool in Folklore Studies is the Aarne Thompson Uther classification<sup>43</sup> which provides a system to organize, classify and analyze popular tales. Vladimir Propp also provided a model for Folklore Studies in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928, English translation 1968). Some of this methodology could be applied here in relation to popular tales in Shakespeare; although it would be an extension of the present argument. Laurence Coupe cites Don Cupitt, philosopher and theologian, who issued a list of features that help characterize myth. The overall interest of being aware of such characteristics is that they describe myth and provide a tool to detect mythic elements in narratives. The advantage of Cupitt’s method, according to Coupe (1997, p. 5), is to avoid the most frequent contradictory definitions of the term, since the presence of each element is not

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<sup>42</sup> Euhemerism comes from the name of Euhemerus, a Sicilian (c. 316 BC), who maintained that the gods of Greek mythology were deified men and women. In use since 1846, the term refers to the method of interpretation which regards myths as traditional accounts of real incidents of human history (*OED* 1968, p. 639).

<sup>43</sup> Started in 1910 by Aarne, it was developed in 1928 by Thompson and re-edited in 2004 by Uther.

required for a narrative to be considered mythic. So, a myth according to Cupitt may have the following traits:

- Traditional sacred story
  - Anonymous authorship
  - Archetypal or universal significance
  - Recounted in a certain community
  - Often linked with ritual
  - Tells the deeds of superhuman beings: gods, demi-gods, heroes, spirits or ghosts
  - Set outside historical time, in prima or eschatological [i.e. last, ultimate] time or in the supernatural world or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history
  - The superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic [i.e. humanly formed] ways although their powers are more than human
  - Often the story is not naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams
  - The whole body of a people's mythology is often prolix [i.e. lengthy, wordy], extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies
  - The work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide or to legitimate
- (Adapted from Cupitt 1982, p. 29, in Coupe 1997, p. 5-6).

Some of these characteristics apply to the Celtic mythological corpus and also inform certain aspects of Shakespeare's plays, in relation to issues such as the question of time, or ghosts and spirits, and characters such as Lear. Miranda Jane Green, Archaeologist, Emeritus Professor at Cardiff University and specialist in the Celtic world, provides a definition which insists on the religious aspect in myth:

A useful definition involves the perception of a myth as a symbolic story, similar to a parable, a means by which human imagination can express a concept whose meaning is too complex and profound to be conveyed by simple verbal messages. In this way, myths can deal with fundamental issues such as who we are, why we exist, what happens when we die: universal concerns which are unanswerable in terms of the rational explanations born of human experience. Myths can explain the phenomena of the natural world – the behaviour of the sun, weather, drought and flood – in terms of the supernatural. Thus myths exist by virtue of their link with the divine and with cult. They contain traditions of sacred beings – gods and heroes – and their association with mortals, which contributes to the framework of belief-systems. (Green 1993, p. 7)

This definition emphasizes a concept – the divine – which can be envisaged in plays like *King Lear*, or *Macbeth*, as continuity between pagan Celtic religion and Christianity although a transformative process at work necessarily modified the way the divine materialized itself in the different religious forms over time. The divine is also a focus of anthropological approaches like Mircea Eliade's, Claude Levi Strauss's or Sir James Frazer's, which have to be considered as part of the methodological inter-disciplinarity advocated by Walter. The point is to remain attentive to any resurgence of the mythic and to question it as regards its time and context.

The issue of the transmission of cultural myths over lengthy periods of time and among oral cultures requires further detailed attention since it raises questions and may appear as a limitation to our project.

## **2. Difficulties and limitations<sup>44</sup>**

As we will see, the focus on orality and the obvious difficulties which accompany the study of such a topic may account for the fact that this research was not undertaken before, but it is not the only reason. The lack of available written data from Celtic Antique sources constitutes an impediment to the investigation. Also, the notion of Celtic itself, and especially the vague perception Early Modern culture had of it, is probably an obstacle. One could advocate that if Celtic motifs were to be found in Shakespeare at all, then they would already have come to light. So what prevented the study from taking place?

### **2.1 Celtic motifs in Shakespeare: why not studied before?**

In response to this, a few arguments can be advanced. First, as John T. Koch indicated in his note on philology and philologists, “Celtic scholarship has always been at pains to justify its existence in, for example, universities like Oxford and Harvard and even to the Celts themselves with their ingrained sense of cultural inferiority and irrelevance” (Koch, 1990, p. 34). Although we can now observe here the inappropriate usage of the term ‘Celt’ as referring to people, there seems to have been a certain amount of difficulty for Celtic Studies to be recognized as a valuable scientific domain. Koch also points out that “the status of the Celts as subjugated minorities in the English-speaking world” is “absolutely

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<sup>44</sup> Some arguments in this section have been published in *Études Écossaises* n° 20, “The Reconstruction of an Ancient Past in Shakespeare's Drama” (2018, [online]).

fundamental”, arguing that “Celtic had first to give ground before England and the English language could come into being” (p. 31). He alludes to the Angle and Saxon invasions which relegated Celtic speaking people to the margins: Wales, Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland. The notions of struggle and obliteration dominate his arguments throughout and account for the fact that Celtic Studies were late in being accepted in universities. Koch describes the experience of Sir John Rhŷs who was appointed as the first Professor of Celtic at the University of Oxford in 1877. The chair, founded some years before bore the name of “‘Philologists of Germany and the first occupants of this island’ in that order of precedence”, Koch explains (1990, p. 32). Certainly, German languages from which English developed, and Latin and Greek were favoured by the academic world. Rhŷs ended his career as Principal of Jesus College Oxford, a knight of the Privy Council and he attracted Celtic scholars to Oxford; for him, Philology was the key to recognition:

The function of philology in Rhŷs’s success was as the science which afforded incontrovertible proof that the highly prestigious Greek and Latin, and the newcomer Sanskrit, were made of the very same stuff as his despised native language; likewise, that the overlooked Celtic literature could and should stand shoulder to shoulder with the canonized monuments of the mainstream of Western civilization. With the secret weapon of philology, Rhŷs shattered the persistent prejudice that minority ethnicity must be shed to ‘get on’ in the greater world. (Koch 1990, p. 32)

A language and the culture can easily be neglected if other cultural models are advanced as more valuable and prestigious. Noticeably, since the Renaissance, the Classics have attracted most attention. It is comparative linguistics and philology which enabled Rhŷs to compete with mainstream studies. However, Celtic appeared as a relatively new domain which suggests that a lot had to be done to advance it, before even thinking of applying any comparative model to Shakespeare’s work. As seen in the very first part of the introduction, Sir Israel Gollancz, who had approached the subject in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, did not easily convince his peers and no further study followed his at the time. Besides, Shakespeare had long been considered as an iconic English figure, the reserve of intellectual elite, while Celtic Studies were still victim of a residual “persistent prejudice”, with the result that the connection between the two seemed unlikely.

To illustrate further the claim of ‘backwardness’ attached to Celtic culture, it is worth considering the archaeological domain and pausing over the perception of Celtic art. In

“L’ethnogénèse des Celtes et son rôle dans la formation de l’Europe” (2009), Kruta underlines the importance of the study of art for pre-literate societies. For him, art is largely regarded as “ornamental”, with little or no valuable content; yet, it reflects a spiritual substance which is not easily accessible through writing. This offers another possible angle of approach to our research and indicates that art has to be considered as “text” to be read using an appropriate methodology. The problem with Celtic art is that it has been largely misunderstood, victim of a subjective appreciation infused with contemporary aesthetics (p. 20). In his abstract to the conference given in 2015 in Oxford, Laurent Olivier described the specificity of Celtic art:

The careful observation of the images of Celtic Art reveals that their construction is based on a series of principles that have nothing to do with those of optical visualization developed by Classical Art. Here, shapes are not perceived as volumes, but as *assemblages of planes*. Therefore, things and beings are not represented through perspective, but by the « unfolding » of these visual planes and surfaces. (Olivier 2015, [online])

The fact that this art is largely based on geometrical figures and often expressed proportions in a two-dimensional perspective unlike in the Classical world, led people to regard it as the product of a backward culture. However, a two-dimensional representation in Celtic art was thought to lead to geometrical exactitude because it permitted the viewer to see an object in all its proportions, and it also contained “monsters and chimeras” alongside non-mythical but highly symbolical figures. Olivier’s useful study of Gallic art revealed the complex and significantly different Celtic mind set:

Le monde qu’ils représentent est un univers de correspondances, de symétrie, de polarités. Celui-ci s’exprime plus particulièrement par les monstres et les chimères, qui fusionnent les contraires et les mettent en mouvement. Les identités, les qualités, ne sont pas contenues ; elles circulent dans les réincorporations, les retours ; elles s’introduisent sous la forme de possessions et d’hybridations.

[The world they represent is a universe of correspondences, of symmetry, of polarities. It is expressed in particular by monsters and chimeras, which merge the contraries and set them in motion. Identities, qualities are not contained, they

circulate in re-incorporations, in turnabouts; they insert themselves under the form of possessions and hybridations]. (Olivier 2015, p. 16, tr. CSL)<sup>45</sup>

This description conveys a complex vision of the world that cannot be judged according to the standards of the Classics. Olivier argues that this mode of thinking was discredited and marginalized by the rise of the knowledge inherited from Classical tradition, with the inscription of knowledge in writing. He adds that this thought “bien que restée muette, son importance cognitive, comme formalisation du ‘langage du monde’ [...] est d’une portée considérable” [albeit it has so far remained mute, its cognitive importance as the formalization of the ‘language of the world’ [...] is of considerable significance] (2015, p. 18, tr. CSL). The argument here sheds light on a neglected part of archaeological studies, namely the interpretation of Celtic art in relation to a lost mode of thinking. For Olivier,

Il ne s’agit pas non plus d’inverser la proposition et d’affirmer que les créations d’Art celtique seraient intellectuellement supérieures à celle des arts classiques d’inspiration hellénistique, si pauvrement descriptive. Il s’agit plutôt d’une autre vision du monde, non point inférieure à celle des civilisations méditerranéennes, mais qui en est surtout *différente*.

[The purpose is not to reverse the tendency and claim that Celtic creations would be intellectually superior to those of Hellenistic inspiration so poorly descriptive; but the aim is to realize that representations in the Celtic domain proceed from another vision of the world, not at all inferior to that of Mediterranean civilizations but overall *different*]. (Olivier 2019, p. 17, tr. CSL)<sup>46</sup>

The study of Celtic art is beyond the scope of this project but this insight provides a glimpse of the spectrum to be considered as a background and confirms the view that Celtic culture has been generally neglected.

The next argument which might explain the lack of scholarly interest in Celtic culture insofar as the Shakespearean oeuvre is concerned is indebted to the work of Walter Ong. It has to do precisely with the fact that we are dealing with a primarily oral culture. Oral culture

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<sup>45</sup> The author notes that this extract is issued from the modified and augmented version (2015) of a chapter to be published in Morrison W., Martin T. (ed.), *Barbaric Splendour, the Use of the Image Before and After Rome*. Full article by Laurent Olivier available [online]: <https://www.academia.edu> (accessed 11/06/2019).

<sup>46</sup> The author notes that this extract is issued from the modified and augmented French version (February 2019) of a chapter to be published in English in Chittock H., Nimura C., Hommel P., Gosden C. (ed.), *Art in the Eurasian Iron Age: Connections and Scale*. Full article available [online]: <https://www.academia.edu> (accessed 11/06/2019).

has been deemed difficult or impossible to study because, by definition, it is not easily documented. Furthermore, its particularities could not be fully grasped until the advent of the digital era, as Ong puts it:

Our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age, not earlier. Contrasts between electronic media and print have sensitized us to the earlier contrast between writing and orality. The electronic age is also an age of ‘secondary orality’, the orality of telephones, radio, television, which depends on writing and print for its existence. (Ong, 1982, p. 3)

It means that the nineteenth century and early twentieth century scholarly focus on the text neglected the study of oral culture as Shakespeare was concerned. The stabilising of Shakespeare’s texts became the focus of scholarly attention and the aim was to reconstruct what was perceived to be the most faithful version of each play text.<sup>47</sup> Ong argues that the electronic age (and with it the digital era) have made scholars more sensitive to issues linked to orality. Consequently, a number of publications have appeared which deal with orality in the Early Modern period and characteristics of oral/aural cultures have come to light.<sup>48</sup> This enables us to consider the various forms of orality that existed in Early Modern society which were largely inherited from the Middle Ages; and from there it might be possible to extrapolate and speculate on Ancient oral forms that could have survived in the Renaissance. Of course, in Shakespeare’s time, writing and printing developed rapidly as comparatively new technologies, so the “primary orality” (Ong, p. 11) associated with the Celtic speaking peoples of the British Isles was fast disappearing, but Ong argues that “still, to varying degrees, many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality” (p. 11). Therefore, to a certain extent it is possible to claim that some characteristics of the Ancient Celtic oral society were preserved, but transformed, in limited proportion, in the cultural markers of the English Renaissance. Furthermore, we can estimate that the “high-technology” environment, i.e. the writing and printing processes at

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<sup>47</sup> Editors encountered difficulties with establishing the stability of these texts, but the emphasis on the figure of the author and the desire for textual stability was dependent upon literary criteria. Where more than one substantive text existed, as in the cases of *Hamlet* or *King Lear* separate lines of origin were established with a view to guaranteeing their independence (I wish to thank John Drakakis for this remark).

<sup>48</sup> For example, Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England, Attending the O Factor* (1999); Antony Welch, *The Renaissance Epic and the Oral Past* (2010), and Terence Hawkes dealt with the subject of oral language in relation to Shakespeare in *Shakespeare’s Talking Animals* (1973). Furthermore, Jack Goody tackled the relationship between orality and literacy from an anthropological point of view in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (ed. 1968) and *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (2010).



work at the time, enable us to gain access to part of the Ancient oral form. Paper was a medium used to commit Shakespeare's plays to writing and in some of the quartos, processes of memory recollection are visible.<sup>49</sup> This is something much more fundamental than the claim made for the states of some Shakespearean texts as 'memorial reconstructions', as it is often asserted of the first quarto of *Hamlet* (1603).

## 2.2 Speculation on oral culture

Cultural myths are transported from generation to generation in oral cultures. Australian Aborigines have managed to transmit narratives of their ancestral beings over thousands of years through various 'dream tracks'. Indeed, several stories of the great flood, like the one recounted in the *Dream of the Chaffinch*, part of the immemorial *Time of Dream*, have been corroborated by archaeological findings.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps some of the oldest religious/ mythical stories in the world, these accounts, regarded as authentically derived from observation stand out by their uniqueness. While recalling that orthodox scholarship usually considers that oral traditions are rarely able to survive for more than a thousand years, Nick Reid and Patrick D. Nunn explain why and how Australian Aborigines could have transmitted stories of the flood from such deep time (between 9000 and 13000 years):

The isolation of Australia is likely to be part of the answer. But it could also be due to the practice and nature of contemporary Aboriginal storytelling. This is characterized by a conservative and explicit approach to "the law", value given to preserving information, and kin-based systems for tracking knowledge accuracy. This could have built the inter-generational scaffolding needed to transmit stories over vast periods, possibly making these stories unique in the world. (Reid and Nunn, 2015, [online])

Part of a ritual of repetitive intergenerational storytelling, oral transmission seems to have been an efficient means to perpetuate culture. In our study of the British Isles, we are not dealing with as remote an antiquity, although in fact we do not know exactly how ancient this 'Celtic' past may have been. The interesting element of comparison with Australian

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<sup>49</sup> See the introduction of Allen and Muir, *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto*, 1981.

<sup>50</sup> The reference to this dreaming is in Cane, Scott, *First Footprints*, 2014; and the longest narrative about flooding stories is available [online] at: <https://theconversation.com/ancient-aboriginal-stories-preserve-history-of-a-rise-in-sea-level-36010> (accessed 13/06/19). I am indebted to Professor Peter Veth from the University of Western Australia for these references.

Aborigines is ‘the island factor’ which provides sufficient isolation to enable myths to survive longer. Contrary to Australia, the Island of Britain knew many invasions, although Wales, Scotland and Ireland remained relatively more ‘intact’. Considering the different layers which formed accretions over time, only traces may have survived, but we consider the tracking of motifs that remain from the lengthy process of transmission possible.

Storytelling is also part of the Western culture. Family clusters and kin-based systems existed until recently to transmit stories, songs and dances from generation to generation but in the Celtic domain, it was accompanied by a highly developed bardic system. The extremely sophisticated Welsh poetry, for instance, could have emerged from pre-literal oral processes. In this respect, the essentially oral Medieval period provides a crucial means to account for the transportation of cultural motifs over time, assisted by their inscription in the written productions that have survived. Chronicles and annals capture in written form some of the myths associated with oral culture. This is the way in which the Celtic material survived and was transmitted to Early Modern English culture, when the development of the printing press provided an even wider access to the residual oral contents that were circulating at the time.

In *The English Romance in Time, Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (2004), Helen Cooper observes that in the tradition of Medieval romances, debates, thoughts, discussions, replications and adaptations were encouraged and gave rise to the creation of what she calls “memes”, that is to say “plot motifs” to replicate and be recognized by audiences and readers (p. 13). Cooper defines the meme as “an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, and also on occasion to adapt, mutate and therefore survive in different forms and cultures” (p. 2), and she remarks the capacity of memes to “latch onto the mind” and circulate across cultures (*ibid.*). Cooper’s study of the romance genre incites her to mark out the origin of the meme in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the birth of the genre in which these memes existed, while we would argue that such longstanding motifs may very likely date back to more ancient times, having replicated themselves over the ages at least for the most persistent of them.

Cooper goes on to emphasize the link between the Middle Ages and Early Modern times,<sup>51</sup> stating that the phenomenon of the meme sustained itself not only in Medieval Romance narratives but also in their extensions in Renaissance drama, with reference to courtly and popular storytelling (p. 13). She offers the example of Shakespeare’s *Pericles* that begins with the figure of Gower as Chorus who announces: “To sing a song that old was sung

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<sup>51</sup> “The continuities between Medieval and Renaissance culture in England are exceptionally strong by comparison with France and Italy, but they are remarkably little studied” (Cooper 2004, p. 5).

/ From ashes ancient Gower is come” (*Pericles*, 1.1-2). The Medieval author Gower, resurrected from “Ancient time”, is about to sing an old song, which sets the Medieval – or even older – context for Shakespeare’s romance-play. It would appear that the Middle Ages provide an important link between the Celtic orality and the Renaissance, and its mode of repetition a crucial element of the transmission process; but how is it that some motifs strike people more than others so as to require repetition? How is the process of selection and choice – if it is a choice – made?

This phenomenon has been extensively explained by specialists in myths studies. In *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l’Imaginaire*, Gilbert Durand, co-founder of the C.R.I. (Centre de Recherche sur l’Imaginaire) at Grenoble Alpes Université expressed the utter necessity to engage with the anthropological aspects of culture in order to study symbolism (Durand 1992 (1969), p. 37). As in the case of Walter after him, he advocated a pluri-disciplinary approach to analyse the “complexes de culture” [cultural complexes]<sup>52</sup> that describe man, charting an anthropological path that crosses “la psychanalyse, les institutions rituelles, le symbolisme religieux, la poésie, la mythologie, l’iconographie ou la psychologie pathologique” [psychoanalysis, ritual institutions, religious symbolism, poetry, mythology, iconography, or psycho-pathology] (p. 40, tr. CSL). It is not our aim to enter the domains of psychoanalysis or psychology, but however, some of the concepts they deploy may also be used in literary studies, such as symbols and archetypes. These terms stand at the crossroads between the disciplines cited above and are included in any anthropological approach.

Durand suggests that Jung borrowed the notion of archetype from Jakob Burckhardt and equated it with the idea of “primordial image”, “engramme”,<sup>53</sup> “original image” or “prototype” (p. 62). He goes on to note that although Jung insisted on the collective and innate character of archetypes, he also evidenced their ‘anthropological path’ when he wrote:

L’image primordiale doit incontestablement être en rapport avec certains processus perceptible de la nature qui se reproduisent sans cesse et sont toujours actifs, mais d’autre part il est également indubitable qu’elle se rapporte aussi à certaines conditions intérieures de la vie de l’esprit et de la vie en général...

[The primordial image must indisputably be in relation to certain processes in nature which constantly repeat themselves and are always active, but on the other

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<sup>52</sup> Term borrowed from Gaston Bachelard, *L’Eau et les Rêves*, 1942, p. 26, in Durand 1992, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> “Trace, imprint left on the brain by a former event and susceptible of revivification; memory”. <https://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/engramme> (accessed 13/06/2019, tr. CSL).

hand it is equally undeniable that it is also related to certain conditions exterior to spiritual life and to life in general...]. (Jung, in Durand, p. 62, tr. CSL)

Therefore “primordial images” or “archetypes” are useful tools since they potentially contain age-old information, but also, in their evolution they necessarily take into account the characteristics of their environment. It is this aspect that will be of importance in recent analysis. In fact, archetypes are the “substantification” of primordial gestures that Durand, after Sartre and Kant, calls “schèmes”: “Le schème est une généralisation dynamique et affective de l’image, il constitue la factivité et la non-substantivité générale de l’imaginaire” [The schème is a dynamic and affective generalization of the image; it represents the factivity and general non-substantivity of the imagination] (p. 60, tr. CSL). Therefore, images and archetypes are important because they pertain to the unconscious daily gestures of men which once substantified, that is to say, identified and named, constitute the basis of the elaboration of myths, and stories.

As far as we are concerned, art in general, and more precisely stories, permit and encourage the resurgence of images. In the middle of a process of creation, an author deploys images that have been imprinted on both his conscious and unconscious mind. Only the most serviceable images will be retained and transmitted and they find their way into writing, for example, a play. If we consider the theatrical process in its etymological sense, ‘drama’ means “to do, act, perform”; therefore a play is a series of images set in motion.<sup>54</sup> It is perhaps one of the most complete artistic forms since not only the text but also the sound, light, smell maybe, and the staging all contribute to the creation of new images which will again generate further thoughts, actions, creations...in the audience. The performative function of images was described by C. G. Jung in these terms: “L’image fraie la voie. [...] L’image fait impression mais elle oriente aussi l’action. [...] Elle est une ‘forme fonctionnelle’” [The image opens up the way. [...] The image impresses but it also orientates action. [...] It is ‘a functional form’” (Elie Humbert, *Jung*, 1983, p. 102, tr. CSL). Therefore oral forms of storytelling, either bardic or dramatic, like written forms, carry images, some of which may be archetypes. This is how we can speculate on the derivation of Ancient oral forms of culture and demonstrate how some of them might have been transported into Shakespeare’s work.

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Movement-Image*, (*L’image Mouvement*, 1983), adapted to cinema criticism, Gilles Deleuze developed the concept of movement-images influencing a subject who then reacts in action-images.

### 2.3 Available data

As it has been noted, there is almost no contemporary data on the subject of ‘Celtic sources’ in Shakespeare, apart from Gollancz’s work on the Celtic ancestry of *Hamlet* in 1926 and Mary Gleeson who, more recently, wrote an article entitled “Celtic undertones in *Macbeth*” (1992);<sup>55</sup> a Welshman, Frederick James Harries had written that “there are many Celtic elements in Shakespeare’s plays” in *Shakespeare and the Welsh* (1919, p. 6);<sup>56</sup> but no serious comprehensive study has since been undertaken.

Because we are dealing with a virtually pre-literate culture which therefore did not commit its traditions to writing, indirect sources (i.e. written sources) have to count as the most important available data. Miranda Green notes that extant evidence falls into three categories which sometimes contradict each other: the chronicles of contemporary commentators from the Classical world; the later vernacular documents of Ireland and Wales; and the results of archaeological study. For want of time and space, and with the aim of limiting the corpus, we will use the Classical sources in this research or proceed via the works of specialists such as Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux. Furthermore, English Medieval Chronicles and Annals, and the matter of Britain in general, are worth considering insofar as they also contain Celtic motifs, as will be developed in chapter one of this dissertation.<sup>57</sup>

As a direct source of information, archaeology provides material evidence in relation to common habits, it also addresses the sacred, rituals, burials, epigraphy (the study of ancient inscriptions generally carved on hard material such as wood or metal)<sup>58</sup> and iconography (the study of images under the form of sculptures, figurines, or coins). These types of source have inherent limitations due to the fact that the discoveries of archaeologists are subject to interpretation. They can only deal with what has survived after thousands of years and they have to infer from this the modes of thinking, beliefs and spirituality. Furthermore, Green notes that much of the material found relating to Celtic religion dates from Roman times and

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<sup>55</sup> In *Proceedings of the II Conference of the Spanish Society for English Renaissance Studies; Actas del II Congreso de la Sociedad Espanola de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses* (SEDERI), 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur Hughes wrote an unfinished account, *Shakespeare and his Welsh Characters* in 1918.

<sup>57</sup> We systematically used translations of texts, and occasionally referred to Latin, Gaelic or Welsh originals.

<sup>58</sup> The Celtic culture was non literate but transcriptions of its languages were found in Etruscan, Greek, Iberian or Latin. In Italy, occurrences attest to the presence of a Celtic language as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. In Chamalières, Puy-de-Dôme, France, the lead tablet dated 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, found in a sacred spring, offered about sixty words in a cursive Latin writing of a Celtic language. The text had a magic character. Furthermore, there was the Ogham system of writing, only attested in insular regions that remained relatively untouched by Romans influence (Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, and the Isle of Man). It consisted of a system of linear vertical, horizontal or diagonal strokes carved on stone (or probably wood). It is only suitable to short inscriptions, essentially on burial stones and is relatively late, dated 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.

it is sometimes “difficult to disentangle Celtic symbolism and belief from the Roman tradition with which it became so closely intertwined” (1993, p. 12). However, Green points out that there is also substantive “free” or pre-Roman data, related to Celtic religion such as druidic evidence, evidence of votive offerings, rituals and sacrifice). Few carved stones or metal images of the gods have been discovered but once the interaction with the Roman world began to develop, the representation of gods which did not belong to the Greco-Roman pantheon increased. Cultural interaction revealed aspects of Celtic culture which had previously been hidden since Celtic sanctuaries were often situated in natural locations such as holy lakes, woods, springs or open air enclosures (p. 14).

Green notes that links between archaeology and literature are rare but they do exist nonetheless: “There are some features common to both, which are too idiosyncratic to be due to chance: the sanctity of the ‘three’; the symbolism of cauldrons; the supernatural power of the human head; beliefs in the Otherworld similar to earthly life are a few of the traditions which bridge the gulf between the two main strands of testimony for Celtic Myth [i.e. archaeology and literature]” (1993, p. 14). These particular points are relevant to the study of Celtic motifs in Shakespeare, as we will see. They were mainly present in vernacular sources which are grouped mostly around Ireland and Wales, although there are also some manuscripts in Scotland, that derived mainly from the Irish tradition. They are all prose tales in Irish and Welsh, committed to writing in the Middle Ages by monastic scholars. Consequently, care is required if we want to use these stories as a link to approach the Celtic world that is assembled using archaeological data. Furthermore, Green notes that these writings relate specifically to Ireland and Wales (p. 9). However, we accept the hypothesis that they contain stories belonging to a period in which England was also Celtic and as such drew on virtually the same mythological matter.

Guyonvarc’h states that although there is no proper Celtic literature in the modern sense of the term, because the tradition was mainly oral, the transcribed Irish Medieval literature is quantitatively as well as qualitatively important (1980, p. 13). There are more than a thousand documents in the Irish corpus, of which about three hundred are mythological and epic narratives, and that are transcriptions of oral narratives (*scél*, plur. *scela*) from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards. They are grouped in several manuscripts and, as Guyonvarc’h observes, “un manuscrit ne contient jamais un seul récit et, corrélativement, un même récit figure souvent dans plusieurs manuscrits de dates différentes” [a manuscript never contains one single narrative and, correlatively, a narrative often appears in several manuscripts of distinct dates]

(1980, p. 15). In what follows, we have used translations and have occasionally referred to originals in the vernacular language. The three major collections of Irish tales all relate to the world of the supernatural. The first corpus is the ‘Mythological Cycle’ which comprises two manuscripts, both compiled during the 12<sup>th</sup> century:<sup>59</sup> the *Leabhar Gabhála Éirenn* (*The Book of Conquests of Ireland*) and the *Dinnsenchas* (*History of Places*). The first and most prominent of the two describes the Creation myth and successive invasions of the island before the Flood culminating in the coming of the Gaels or Celts. This narrative first originated in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century, compiled by Christian monks whose purpose seems to have been to constitute a Creation myth and a ‘history’ of Ireland in order to account for the presence of the Celts (Green 1993, p. 9). The result is a syncretism between Christian motifs and elements of the Celtic pantheon, such as the numerous gods and goddesses of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the divine ‘race’ of Ireland.

The second Irish corpus is referred to as the Ulster Cycle, an extensive body of narratives infused with supernatural elements, in which the most famous collection of stories is the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*).<sup>60</sup> The oldest manuscript was compiled in the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the monastery of Clonmacnois, but the story is much older. Scholars believe that the language of the oldest version belongs to the 8<sup>th</sup> century with some passages possibly being several centuries earlier than that (Green 1993, p. 10).

The third group in the Irish corpus is designated as the ‘Fionn Cycle’, a collection mostly compiled in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>61</sup> which relates the deeds of the hero Finn and the Fianna, his heroic war band, all of who have supernatural status. Green notes that the interest of these

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<sup>59</sup> “The various manuscript witnesses of the Lebor Gabala are typically subdivided into a number of classes according to the recension or redaction to which these copies are thought to belong (A, B, M and C). This does not mean that the manuscripts texts of each recension present a uniform, homogeneous picture. In fact, these often exhibit innovations (interpolations, cross-examination, rearrangement, etc.) that come with the scribe or that have been adopted from the exemplar. [...]The earliest references to the invasions tradition are in the Cambro-Latin compilation *Historia Brittonum*, and the poem *Can a mbunadas na nGaedel* by Máel Muru Othna, both dated to the 9th century” [https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Lebor\\_gab%C3%A1la\\_%C3%89renn](https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Lebor_gab%C3%A1la_%C3%89renn) (accessed 21/06/19) .

<sup>60</sup> Manuscripts that contain the story are, in three different recensions: Recension I: a section of the Yellow Book of Lecan (14th-15th c.) Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318 cols 573-958, beginning missing, p. 17a-53a (facsimile) cols 573-644; the *Lebor na hUidre* or Book of the Dun Cow (11th-12th c.), Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25 (1229), ff55a-82b, interpolated by H end missing; MS Egerton 1782 (1516-1518), London, British Library, ff. 88r-105v, interpolated, end missing; MS C 1, Maynooth, Russell Library (1587), p. 1-76, interpolated, beginning and end missing. Recension II: the Book of Leinster (12th c.) Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2. 18), ff. 53b-104b; MS C vi (740) (17th c.), Dublin, Royal Academy, ff. 28ra-65vb. Recension III (Early Modern Irish version): MS Egerton 93 (15th c. ?), ff. 26r-35v, fragment; MS 1319 (H 2. 17) (various), p. 336-347, 334-335, 111-114, 348-349, 115-118, 350-351, fragment. [https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/T%C3%A1in\\_b%C3%B3\\_C%C3%BAailnge](https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/T%C3%A1in_b%C3%B3_C%C3%BAailnge) (accessed 21/06/19).

<sup>61</sup> The list of poems related to the Finn Cycle, compiled by Kuno Meyer in 1910 comprises texts dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, although some of the early dating appears controversial: [https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Category:Finn\\_Cycle#tab=Kuno\\_Meyer\\_27s\\_handlist](https://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Category:Finn_Cycle#tab=Kuno_Meyer_27s_handlist) (accessed 21/06/19).

narratives is not so much the mythical aspect but the close connection with the natural world and the supernatural creatures that inhabit it. She adds that this animistic relationship to nature is corroborated by archaeological evidence derived from the study of the Celtic religion (p. 10).

Beside the three main cycles of Irish literature, there is a parallel cycle generically called the *Cycle of Kings*, composed of miscellaneous semi-historical, semi-legendary stories related for the most part to Conn Cetchathach king of Connaught who according to the *Annals of the Fours Masters* (*Revue Celtique* 43, 1926, p. 2), reigned around 170AD and to his grandson Cormac mac Airt, high king of Ireland from 227 to 266 AD. The *Annals of the Four Masters* is an extensive compilation Chronicle of Irish history from prehistory to 1616. Its collection began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a publication in eight volumes was issued between 1848 and 1851 by John O'Donovan.

The main transcriptions and English translations were published from 1880 onwards in collections such as *Irische Texts* (five volumes between 1880-1905 by Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch, critical edition of the texts with and English or German translation), *Irish Texts Society* (forty-seven volumes, 1964, text and translation with notes), and *Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series* (five volumes, 1980, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, transcription only, no translation). A certain number of journals completed these collections, among them *Ériu* (since 1904), *Celtica* (since 1946), *Studia Hibernica* (since 1961), notwithstanding the major *Proceedings of the royal Irish Academy*. France produced a few translations in *Revue Celtique* (54 publications, 1870-1934), replaced in 1936 by *Études Celtiques* (published by CNRS éditions since 1980), as Guyonvarc'h notes (1980, p. 21).

Green states that although less extensive, the Welsh corpus also contains rich mythological material:

All the tales chronicle the activities of euhemerized supernatural beings whose divinity is not overt but is betrayed by their physical and mortal stature. The myths of Wales abound in enchanted or magical animals; metamorphosis from human to animal form; heads with divine properties; and cauldrons capable of resurrecting the dead. There is a pagan Underworld, Annwn, presided over by Arawn, perceived as similar to life on earth and indeed very akin to the Otherworld described in the Irish tradition. (Green 1993, p. 12)

The Welsh corpus generally shows greater evidence of later modification compared to the Irish corpus because it often refers to the Christian religion. Furthermore, the Welsh and



Continental Arthurian cycles show parallels and continuities. As a consequence of the late transcriptions of Welsh mythic tradition, it is difficult to find connections with the Ancient Celtic past and the line of transmission is blurred. Yet motifs subsist in what Green notes as “the most relevant and the earliest material”: the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, sometimes known as the *Mabinogion* (11<sup>th</sup> century), together with *The Tale of Culhwch and Olwen* (10<sup>th</sup> century), and *The Dream of Rhonabwy and Peredur*. Two collections preserve the early Welsh tradition: the *White Book of Rhydderch* (written about 1300), and the *Red Book of Hergest* (later 14<sup>th</sup> century). Much of the traditions present in these collections appear to be much older than the time of their transcription and links exist between Irish and Welsh myths like “shape-changing, animal-affinities, magical cauldrons” (Green 1993, p. 11-12).

Therefore, archaeological data, links between archaeology and literature, Classical accounts, and especially Irish, Welsh and Scottish Medieval literature constitute our most important corpus, not to forget the Medieval and early Modern Chronicles, themselves often repositories of Celtic motifs: Bede, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Holinshed, Buchanan, but also emblem books, antiquaries, handbooks, broadside ballads and prophecies, pageants and progresses, masques and the theatre, all comprise an extensive corpus of available data. Shakespeare’s texts also retain some of the intrinsic instability characteristic of the oral, and a reasonable amount of philological work on them has been necessary, even though we mainly base our research on the Arden third editions of the plays. Furthermore, Renaissance paintings are also likely to provide evidence of certain aspects of cultural transmission, such as the portrait of Sir Henry Lee, one of Queen Elizabeth’s courtiers, who wears the ‘True Lovers’ Knot’, a Celtic interlacing, on his sleeve as a decoration (NPG, London). The polysemiotic approach we have mentioned is necessary in an investigation based on an oral tradition that has been committed to writing at a later time. A clearer perception of the methodological tools employed will now be provided.

### **3. Methodological tools<sup>62</sup>**

In this section we have identified some methodological issues which allow us to locate the Antique insular Celtic stratum in Shakespeare’s texts; these involve mobilizing – links

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<sup>62</sup> Some arguments in this section have been published in *Études écossaises* n°20, “The Reconstruction of an Ancient Past in Shakespeare’s Drama” (2018, [online]). John Drakakis’s chapter entitled “Inside the Elephant’s Graveyard: Revising Geoffrey Bullough’s *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*” (2018) provides a clear methodology as regards the new approach to Shakespeare’s ‘sources’ and contains much of the elements advanced here.

between literature and archaeology, comparative mythology, religious, historical or social interpretative filters, mythological and legendary motifs from the most obvious to the more diffuse, and discourse as ‘con-text’. One could argue that Shakespeare probably did not know about Celtic texts, therefore the elements that are cited here cannot be considered as ‘source’. Yet, it appears that, there are many ways of considering the ‘sources’ of a given text.

### **3.1 Transtextual relations and the notion of con-text: Genette, Barker and Hulme, Lake, Maingueneau**

#### **3.1.1 Genette**

So far, source studies have mainly used the notion of ‘intertextuality’ developed by Julia Kristeva in *Sèmiôtikè*<sup>63</sup> (1969) and after.<sup>64</sup> For example, focusing on imitation and borrowing, Janet Clare, in *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic* (2014) deals with the notion of source mainly to refer to the presence of a text A in a text B thereby emphasizing a type of transtextual relation<sup>65</sup> that Gérard Genette defined in *Palimpsestes, la littérature au second degré* as ‘intertextuality’: “une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c’est-à-dire eidétiquement et le plus souvent, par la présence effective d’un texte dans l’autre” [a relationship of co-presence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another] (Genette 1982, p. 8, tr. Newman Doubinsky 1997, p. 1-2). The range of possible intertextual references according to Genette goes from quotation, the most obvious and acknowledged link, to plagiarism, a literal but undeclared borrowing and allusion, connected to the perception of one text in another (*ibid.*).

In her chapter entitled “Troublesome reigns, intertextualities” (2014, p. 40-48), Clare provides a comparative study of Shakespeare’s *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* by Robert Peele. Although according to Drakakis Clare’s book is “perhaps the most thorough application of the concept of intertextuality to Renaissance drama” (2018,

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<sup>63</sup> *Sèmiôtikè* was translated into English in 1980 under the title: *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford, Blackwell).

<sup>64</sup> Graham Allen observes that in *Revolution in Poetic Language* the term ‘intertextuality’ was first understood as “the passage from one sign system to another” and afterwards, he goes on to note: “Keen to avoid the reduction of intertextuality to the traditional notions of influence, source-study and simple ‘context’, Kristeva [dropped] the term intertextuality in favour of a new term, transposition” (Allen, p. 52).

<sup>65</sup> According to Genette’s definition, a transtextual relationship defines the text as “tout ce qui le met en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d’autres textes” [all that sets the text in a relationship whether obvious or concealed, with other texts] (Genette 1982, p. 7; tr. Newman Doubinsky 1997, p. 1).

p. 64), it remains within the ‘classical’ discourse of research in source studies.<sup>66</sup> As an instance of obvious intertextual reference we may cite Holinshed, a major Shakespearean resource, sometimes found word for word in *King Henry VIII*, for example. These intertextual relationships may also be termed “verbal echoes” (John Drakakis), in which the ‘verb’ itself, that is to say the word, appears verbatim in the playtext and designates its ‘source’. The work being done today in source studies seems to amount to research in intertextual relationships, very much in line with Genette’s definition of the concept. It often amounts to comparing one text with another. The technique remains useful of course and crucial information arises from the comparison between texts, especially when dealing with differences, absences or voids that exist between a text and its source. However, in *Palimpsestes*, Genette describes four other types of transtextual relationships, thus enlarging the number of tools at hand.

The second category of transtextual relationships is ‘paratextuality’, which identifies the elements that surround the text in its close environment: title, sub-title, preface, postface, illustrations but also pre-text (draft, sketch...) all inform or question the text, establishing a form of transtextual relationship. The third category is ‘metatextuality’ which creates a relationship most commonly qualified as “de commentaire, qui unit un texte à un autre sans nécessairement le citer (le convoquer), voire à la limite sans le nommer. [...] C’est par excellence la relation critique” [commentary, which unites one text to another without necessarily citing it (summoning it), even possibly without naming it. [...] It is criticism par excellence] (1982, p. 11, tr. CSL). The fourth type is ‘hypertextuality’, defined as “toute relation unissant un texte B (que j’appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte A (que j’appellerai bien sûr *hypotexte*) sur lequel il se greffe d’une manière qui n’est pas celle du commentaire” [any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of a commentary]. He adds that in this type of relationship it may happen that text “B ne parle nullement de A, mais ne pourrait cependant exister tel quel sans A, dont il résulte au terme d’une opération que je qualifierai, provisoirement encore, de *transformation*” [B does not speak of text A at all, but is unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates through a process I shall provisionally call *transformation*] (p. 13, tr. p. 5). The fifth and last category ‘architextuality’ comprises the first four and is the most abstract and implicit form of relationship: “une relation tout à fait muette [...] de pure appartenance taxinomique” [a

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<sup>66</sup> J. Lynch’s *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Selected Sources and Plays* (1998) and Murray J. Levith’s *Shakespeare’s Cues and Prompts* (2007) both address intertextual issues but also remain on the side of traditional source studies (see Drakakis 2018, p. 61-62).

relationship that is completely silent [...] of a purely taxonomic nature] (p. 12, tr. p. 4). Related mainly to genre, it leaves the discussion open as a matter for the reader and does not claim responsibility for it in any way except through paratextual elements, and is left to critical analysis. Genette adds that the five categories of transtextual relationships are by no means hermetic and can be conjugated with each other in different ways.

However, he differentiates between textual transcendence and extra-textual transcendence, another kind of transcendence that unites the text to extra-textual reality but an issue that he declines to pursue further (1982, note p. 11). This concept of extra-textual reality was taken into account by New Historicism, a critical practice that incorporated historical and also social, political and anthropological material into the interpretation of literary works.<sup>67</sup> This was developed and articulated with the notions of ‘discourse’ and ‘context’, although the latter was redefined outside New Historicism in the notion of ‘con-text’ by Francis Barker and Peter Hulme.

### 3.1.2 Discourse, con-text and confluence

Integrating extra-textual relationships as text, Francis Barker and Peter Hulme have argued that:

Intertextuality, or con-textualization, differs most importantly from source criticism when it establishes the necessity of reading [a play] alongside congruent texts, irrespective of Shakespeare’s putative knowledge of them, and when it holds that such congruency will become apparent from the constitution of discursive networks to be traced independently of authorial ‘intentionality’.  
(Barker and Hulme 1986, p. 196)

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<sup>67</sup> Kristi Siegel notes: “New Historicism (sometimes referred to as Cultural poetics) emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, largely in reaction to the lingering effects of New Criticism and its ahistorical approach. “New” Historicism’s adjectival emphasis highlights its opposition to the old historical-biographical criticism prevalent before the advent of New-Criticism. In the earlier historical-biographical criticism, literature was seen as a (mimetic) reflection of the historical world in which it was produced. Further, history was viewed as stable, linear, and recoverable – a narrative of fact. In contrast, New Historicism views history skeptically (historical narrative is inherently subjective), but also more broadly; history includes all of the cultural, social, political, anthropological discourses at work in any given age, and these various “texts” are unranked – any text may yield information valuable in understanding a particular milieu. Rather than forming a backdrop, the many discourses at work at any given time affect both an author and his/her text; both are inescapably part of a social construct. Stephen Greenblatt was an early important figure and Michel Foucault’s [...] intertextual methods proved very influential”, available at: <http://kristisiegel.com/theory.htm> (accessed 18/08/19).

And they add that “[i]t is not an easy concept to grasp because discourses are never simply observable but only approachable through their effects” (p. 197). Thus, Barker and Hulme’s argument opposes any form of fixity in historical approach and takes into account the social fluctuations of the word. They coined the term con-text: “with a hyphen, to signify a break from the inequality of the usual text / context relationship. Con-texts are themselves *texts* and must be *read with*: they do not simply make up a background” (note 7, p. 236). In our task of unearthing Celtic motifs, we encounter different discursive con-texts that sometimes struggle with each other and create “discursive conflicts” (p. 194). For example, the Christian and Classical discursive networks interact with the Celtic sphere and create meaning. As Barker and Hulme claim: “Any reading must be made *from* a particular position, but is not *reducible* to that position” (p. 193). It is the interaction and conflict with prevalent layers of interpretation that facilitate the positionality of Celtic motifs. Thus, according to Barker and Hulme discourses reflect the “natural language of the age” in all its interactions, with the idea of a master discourse that can be observed as occupying a prominent position in a discursive hierarchy (p. 197).

In *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage* (2016), the historian Peter Lake’s method pays homage to and is a reaction against ‘New Historicism’ practiced by Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Adrian Montrose and others, but it is not a return to (old) Historicism of Lily B. Campbell, or E. M. W. Tillyard. The relation between text and context is not static, nor is it unidirectional, but rather it integrates the notions of influence and confluence, acknowledging a whole range of possibilities simultaneously. Lake’s method considers: “the ways in which these plays invoke, stage and interrogate many of the structuring assumptions of late Elizabethan religion, society and culture” (Lake 2016, p. 15). The analysis includes rather than excludes fields like aesthetics, politics and history as compatible elements to be discussed as part of a particular historical conjuncture.

Dominique Mainguenu’s approach in *Le Contexte de l’Oeuvre Littéraire* (1993) considers the cultural community background. For example, Shakespeare used interpolations (insertions) that appealed to the audience as in *The Winter’s Tale*, when Mopsa the shepherdess says: “I love a ballad in print, a- / life, for then we are sure they are true” (4.4.258-259). She refers to broadside ballads that were hung on walls in public places and that dealt with topical subjects. This reference in *WT* shows that broadside ballads were available in Shakespeare’s time and were appreciated by the public.<sup>68</sup> Such interpolations

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<sup>68</sup> See Hindley, *The Roxburghe Ballads*, 1873, p. iv.

were not rare and constituted a means to remain, in Maingueneau's terms, part of the discursive community.

Beyond the importance of acknowledging the presence of Celtic references in Shakespeare's play texts, it is relevant to examine their function within the whole play. Colin Burrow elaborated a theoretical approach applied to Classical Antiquity which is in part transferable to Celtic references.

### **3.2 Of the function of references to Antiquity in Shakespeare's drama: Colin Burrow**

In his presentation entitled "Shakespeare's Authorities"<sup>69</sup> at the Biennial British Shakespeare Association Conference in 2014 in Stirling, Collin Burrow argued that "unlikely", "sideways" and sometimes "oblique" references to Classical Antiquity literature or philosophy – which he calls "authorities" rather than "sources" – could "feed the argument of the play" in which they were used. By argument, Burrow means "the theme of a work (*OED*)<sup>6</sup>" or "the plot summary"; for example *Measure for Measure* (1604-1605) is a story about the devolution of authority (Burrow, 2014, p. 6). These categorisations do not fit Geoffrey Bullough's system of classifications in *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957); as Burrow observes,

A peripheral and incidental 'non-narrative source' for a play, such as Montaigne's Essay of names can become an authority that feeds back into the plot. It can enable Shakespeare to create a character and an episode which is not in his source play but which reflects and refracts the larger argument of his own play. [...] Shakespeare could often use texts which lie outside Bullough's category of 'narrative and dramatic sources' to widen and deepen the argument of a play. (Burrow, 2014, p. 9)

All the examples he invokes come from Classical Antiquity, either directly or indirectly via contemporary authors such as Montaigne. Having read these authors at school or under other circumstances, some features would emerge from the writer's memory, and rise to the surface of the text. In *Measure for Measure*, Plutarch and Montaigne contribute to the shaping of

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<sup>69</sup> Part of the lecture has been published in *Shakespeare and Authority*, Katie Halsey and Angus Vine (eds.), 2018, p. 31–54, and part of it was published in "Montaignian Moments: Shakespeare and the Essays" in *Montaigne in Transit*, 2016, p. 239–252. The quotes used here are drawn from the text of the lecture given in Stirling, with kind permission of the author.

Pompey the Great, whose character “becomes part of the play’s larger concern with the delegation of authority to people who might be no better than the law breakers they punish” (p. 8). Indeed, the clownish Pompey the bawd becomes the executioner’s assistant and endeavours to give a list of names which consequently fills Vienna’s jail with people. Thus, a figure whose name comes from Roman history, Pompey, echoes the figure of Angelo, the tyrant to whom the Duke officially delegated his authority in his absence, and “this obliquely evoked authority feeds the argument of the play” (p. 13). Burrow gives other examples to support his demonstration, all of which are related to Classical Antiquity, and all of which reflect and refract the main theme of the play. This, as Burrow states, appears as “a deep feature of Shakespeare’s compositional practices; from the later 1590s onwards he tended to multiply authority figures and shadow the larger argument of the play among peripheral characters” (p. 10). This approach is also of some relevance in relation to anecdotal elements and non-diegetic characters that issue from another type of Antiquity: the Celtic one.

An example showing the pertinence of Colin Burrow’s theory in relation to Celtic Antiquity occurs in *Romeo and Juliet*. The play is set in early Renaissance Verona, therefore nothing approaching insular Antiquity, yet, as it has often been observed, the presence of the mythic Irish Queen Mab<sup>70</sup> is inserted into the Italian setting of the play. In what resembles a digressive vision, she is invoked by Mercutio who, observing the sad look on the face of his friend Romeo, imagines that the queen has come to discuss a story of love, war and death with him. However, love, war and death are major ingredients of the plot of the play:

MERCUTIO

O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.

She is the fairies’ midwife, and she comes

In shape no bigger than an agate stone

On the forefinger of an alderman,

Drawn with a team of little atomi

Over men’s noses as they lie asleep.

Her chariot is an empty hazelnut

Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,

[...]

And in this state she gallops night by night

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<sup>70</sup> Some have argued that because the spelling is different from the Irish Medb, it could not be her (See W.P. Reeves, “Shakespeare’s Queen Mab”, 1902, p. 10-14). This argument cannot be received firstly because spelling is not considered as fixed at the time, especially between English and Irish names, and secondly because the character described here bears some of the traits of the mythic queen.

Through lovers' brains, and they dream of love;  
[...]  
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,  
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,  
Of breaches, ambuscades, Spanish blades,  
[...] (1.4.53–85)

Although Mab is seen as a diminutive fairy queen on a chariot drawn by a company of insects, and although she is a “midwife”, one of the characteristics of fairies, some of the qualities of the Ancient mythic queen filter into the depiction that Shakespeare provides. Queen Mab has the ability to ride on a chariot, like the Ancient queen of the Iceni tribe Boudicca who led a revolt against the Romans in 60–61 AD; she has the capacity to induce war and to encourage her warriors, and she is endowed with the power of sexual attraction, like the mythic queen Medb:

Medb rode her chariot around the field of battle, encouraging her soldiers, inducing quarrels, bribing warriors (even using her own daughter Finnebair) to take up arms against friends and relatives as well as against the Ulstermen. Thus Medb was not simply fighting for the supremacy of Connacht: she gloried in war, bloodshed and destruction for their own sake; she was the essence of death. She was sexually active, mating with nine kings, and allowing no man to rule at the royal court of Tara unless he slept with her. (Green, 1995, p. 40)

Behind the anecdotic episode of Queen Mab, there lingers the powerful force of the original Medb. The character does not contribute to the diegesis of the play but feeds its main themes. Her presence, enticing lovers to “dream of love” and soldiers to “dream of cutting foreign throats” is performative and proleptic in that right at the beginning of the play, this oblique reference informs the events to come and the theme of the tragedy as a whole. It also shows that the Elizabethan audience was likely to be receptive to such an image which, although deformed and minimized still encapsulates some remnants of the Ancient past of the British Isles.

To conclude we will argue that if Burrow's notion of “the classical” in Shakespeare is far from being “restrained and decorous” but is “a whole world of unruly authorities fighting together to spit out passion” (2014, p. 23 and 2018, p. 50), the same is true of Celtic Antiquity. Reference texts and archaeological data are available to demonstrate the presence of Ancient insular “authorities” within the Shakespearean corpus, which contributes to the



strengthening and enriching of meaning and interpretation. Some elements are visible, *verbatim*, in the texts of the plays, but some require more in-depth analysis, and that study is in its early stages. In other words, the cultural motifs are there, as part of the Elizabethan and Jacobean collective culture and are not necessarily subject to conscious authorial control. Shakespeare had no access to any original ‘Celtic material’ in print – he certainly did through Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England and Scotland*, – but the motifs that are to be found in his work do not require any clearly identified ‘source’ in Bullough’s sense of the term in order to exist. Their richness and complexity show on the surface, or can be located *via* a symptomatic reading because they are embedded deeper within the fabric of the text. The concept of ‘rhizome’, described by Deleuze and Guattari helps to define the process more clearly.

### 3.3 Rhizome: Deleuze and Guattari

Our subject area is so vast, it encloses so many areas of study that we proceed by concentric circles, narrowing the focus little by little on each zone it encompasses: Celtic literature and culture broadly speaking, Shakespeare and Early Modern literature, society and history, but also the Classics, the Roman and Saxon eras, and the Middle Ages. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’ provides an analytic tool which makes it possible to develop an overall view of the subject of Shakespeare’s source studies, and of Celtic resources in Shakespeare.

In *Rhizome, introduction* (1976) or in its extended version *Mille Plateaux* (1980, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, 1987), Deleuze and Guattari oppose the dichotomic and hierarchical tree structure with its purely genealogical root system and branches, to the circular, heterogeneous, non-hierarchical rhizomatic structure that is an anti-genealogy linked to the wide expanse of multiplicities. The theoretical concept of rhizome integrates the notion of inexactitude, in the sense of imprecision, suggesting that: “l’inexactitude n’est nullement une approximation, c’est au contraire le passage exact de ce qui se fait” [anexactitude is in no way an approximation; on the contrary it is the exact passage of that which is under way]<sup>71</sup> (1976, p. 60; tr. p. 20). This is useful insofar as it is rarely possible to trace Celtic transtextual relations *verbatim* in resource texts, which automatically implies a certain amount of ‘anexactitude’ and hypothesis as far as the ‘origin’

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<sup>71</sup> In the 1980 extent edition, Deleuze and Guattari used the term of ‘anexactitude’, between ‘exactitude’ and ‘inexactitude’, so that all reducing commentary can give way to open, free speech.

of the resource is concerned. Thus, aspects that have not been ‘proved’ by research can be advanced as hypotheses and explored without being arbitrarily dismissed.

The concept also implies the notion of extending open cartography. Applied to Shakespeare studies, it allows the integration of already existing and well verified research together with emerging lines within a broad map that Deleuze and Guattari name ‘plateau’. The ensemble is constantly moving, open to change, filled with multiplicities, a wide variety of ‘semantic chains’ (1976, p. 19-20). Thus, a whole map could be envisaged to provide a clear vision of Shakespeare’s (re)sources, and an interactive digital map could constitute an ambitious future academic project. The tool appears useful insofar as it promises a clear and simple view of a highly complex system. Deleuze and Guattari offer what we would call a dynamic surrealist theoretical concept, inherited from post-modernism. Profoundly organic, inspired as it is by Nature, it fits the explanation of complex and subtle notions, together with being topical in our time of environmental preoccupations and digital techniques.

Because they are often buried and hidden, part of sub-strata that exist under more prominent (re)sources of Shakespeare’s texts, Celtic motifs require an adapted tool. Because they are so Ancient, it is complex to unearth them, like long lost, forgotten, undiscovered objects. It is a slow process which takes time and care, using a soft brush as in an archaeological dig, which makes each discovery, no matter how small, of particular importance.

Deleuze and Guattari encourage us not to be afraid of meeting the kind of difficulty that this sort of enquiry throws up. They encourage us to pursue abstraction and complexity, to follow the rhizomatic structure – the ‘rhizome’ they simply call it – in all its ruptures, to make the lines of flight (see diagram in annex) longer and prolong them, even to the point of abstraction, accepting to produce the most tortuous lines with  $n$  dimensions and broken directions. The method is a reassuring and academically safe way of venturing into the world of complexity and provides a means for exploring unknown territories. It is safe also because it provides limits and a step by step path of progression, always quantifiable and mapable in a concrete way. In its organic dimension, the method permits the enquirer to measure results scientifically. As we have seen, Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizome’ helps to envisage and augment the concept of ‘source’ in a much more detailed way than the orthodox study of source permits.

### 3.4 Of the notion of (re)source: John Drakakis

In *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature* (1983), David Quint states that in the Renaissance, the concept of source refers to a single unity, the source of origin and authority, that is also linked to print culture: “[t]he source topos is significant, for the topos which posits an original unity underlying multiplicity can be read as the emblem par excellence of the tendency of a bookish culture to impose on experience the closed form and internal coherence of a book” (1983, p. xi). Although a certain multiplicity is considered, the concept of source implies a single topos of origin with a hierarchical and fixed system flowing from it. The term as used at the time does not fit the need for expansion required in source studies today and seems inappropriate considering its meaning in Early Modern times. Furthermore, using the example of *In Praise of Folly*, Quint adds that in the Renaissance the notion referred to a “spatial representation” that was necessarily “outside of time itself”, because the source always has a source, which leads to an endless mise-en-abyme. This, as a consequence, Quint goes on to add, traces “back to the sources of the Christian dispensation and to a godhead characterized as an eternal fountain” (p. 24). This single unity and the accompanying concept of ‘authority’ are not satisfactory for John Drakakis who counsels the use of a different terminology in the field of source studies:

We can only surmise about what attracted Shakespeare to the Hamlet story, and the closer we look at what we used to call sources, the more we identify a complexity that defies hierarchical organization, and extends well beyond the linearity that would allow us to invoke the exclusive privilege of ‘authority’. Indeed we may need a more neutral term such as *resources*. (Drakakis 2018, p. 74)

Therefore, Bullough’s classificatory terminology of what Genette calls hypotexts or intertexts as: ‘source’, ‘probable source’, ‘possible source’, ‘analogue’, ‘probable historical allusion’, and ‘possible historical source’ appears restrictive in the light of Drakakis’s new theory of Shakespeare’s ‘sources’. Furthermore, as Drakakis goes on to note, Bullough’s method was centered on intertextual relations between text and ‘source’ and *de facto* established a hierarchical relationship and an authority between hypotexts and hypertexts. His emphasis was on plot and narrative content and only implicitly on cultural context (2018, p. 58). The notions of discourse and con-text, but also new deterritorialized rhizomes, now have to be

considered in the innovative approach of Shakespeare's (re)sources. Drakakis confirms the need to employ a more suitable terminology arguing that:

The term source, with its hierarchical, and theological implications, is now wholly unsuited. The sheer scope of the material to which Shakespeare would have had access, and the circumstances in which he utilized it, indicate firmly that terms like source and authority lean too firmly in one direction, and that a term like 'resource' is much more suited to describe the variety that inheres in this important aspect of Shakespeare's complex processes of composition. (Drakakis, *op. cit.*, p. 75)

Shakespeare's resources include a large spectrum of polysemic fields of data in which, we will argue, Celtic traditions occupy a particular place, especially the native culture of the British Isles and Ireland.

## **Conclusion**

Gollancz invited us to continue what he started, although, apparently, he only envisaged *Hamlet* as a possible substrate of Celtic studies. What we will endeavour to do here is to demonstrate that other plays also contain valuable elements of insular Celtic Antiquity, even though they are overshadowed, hidden, behind more prominent influences.

The adjective Celtic remains a complex polysemic term whose definition would demand a much larger section. Yet, we have attempted to define it with sufficient precision as regards the application of the term, in its relation to literature, philology, linguistics, and also, to a lesser degree to archaeology. When it comes to dealing with people, however, it is advised to name them by their precise origins, such as Welsh, Irish or Scottish. The main temporal and geographical focus remains on the British Isles, in pre-Roman and pre-Christian times, with a consideration of the interim periods which act as 'transmitters' of Ancient Celtic culture. This is possible because myths bear in themselves the capacity to transmit narratives over time.

The project has not been undertaken before partly because oral culture frightens scientists as an unreliable area of study and because Celtic Studies have never acquired the same professional aura as the Classics in relation to Shakespeare. The available data accumulated in the Middle Ages and rediscovered from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards make this study possible, together with an interdisciplinary approach involving Medieval studies and

Archaeology. The subject is vast and can be approached only with patience and care. The knowledge of Celtic languages and Latin would be a necessary asset and the fact of not mastering them obviously constitutes a limit, even though efficient translations are available.

Our thesis is that Celtic material can potentially be detected in various media circulating in Early Modern England: literature, pamphlets, broadside ballads, antiquarian books, and oral forms such as theatre plays. We detected the presence of the legendary matter of Britain in those locations where popular culture has the chance to transmit its knowledge over time. An authorial dimension and intentionality are not of primary concern as determinants for the transmission to exist. The notions of discourse and context, however, are central to the study therefore the 'author' is not the source but uses resources that he transmits, much like a 'passeur'.

In his talk on "Continuities and Discontinuities" at the Université Clermont-Auvergne (2016), Roger Chartier evoked the concept of latency, as articulated by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in *After 1945- Latency as Origin of the Present* (2013), in order to argue that all the possible interpretations of literary works are not necessarily activated at, or confined to, the time of writing. A context is required for a specific interpretation to become the major component of a work. As an example, he evoked Don Quixote, which today has generated at least four different productions of meaning, but only one of which it was possible to activate in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (the grotesque, the burlesque). Therefore, latent possibilities exist which can only be developed within a given historical context. The important point to remember, Chartier insisted, is that rigour is necessary, and to avoid giving in to phantasmagoria. Aided by efficient methodological tools, thanks to the benefit of hindsight that followed on from the Celtic Revival, the extensive amount of philological work accomplished in the transcription and translation of Celtic texts, the available archaeological data, the anthropological consideration for oral cultures, the academic insights developed in relation to Shakespeare and the Celtic domain and the new impetus given to Shakespearean source studies by the re-edition project of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957-1975), the context now seems appropriate for the consideration of the Celtic resources of Shakespeare's plays.

## General outline of the thesis:

As a preliminary study, the first chapter introduces the character of Arthur in the Chronicles and deals with the construction of his aura, in order to measure the amplitude of his presence in Shakespeare's plays by comparison. Celtic motifs like the white hind and the deer hunt, or the giant, are present in the Chronicles and in Shakespeare's plays, which allows us to establish a first link between Celtic Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Early Modern England, and to uncover an initial avenue of transmission, along with all the necessary nuance that the topic requires.

Detailed references to the Arthurian legend in Shakespeare will be discussed in the second chapter since such gestures towards the matter of Britain are at the core of the research project. This aspect is crucial to the Celtic element of Shakespeare's work. The most striking details first appeared in *King Lear* in which, for instance, the magician Merlin is cited, but there are other references to the Arthurian world in this and other plays. The investigation offers an insight into the status of such elements in the Early Modern period. Devalued, Arthur, the former powerful native hero appears relegated to the margins, in some ways like the Ancient culture to which he belonged.

What came to be called the margins, that is to say Celtic speaking Wales ('Marches'), Scotland and Ireland are represented in some detail in plays like *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Macbeth*. The third chapter examines these plays and focuses on the vision that the English Renaissance had of borders and borderers, depicting characters and their social status, as well as the language they use to express themselves. This vision is closely related to the society of the time, and to the development of particularly dramatic characters. Between the time when Shakespeare wrote the second tetralogy (1595-1599) and *Macbeth* (1606), a Scottish king, James I of England and VI of Scotland, ascended the English throne, with the result that the perception and treatment of the representation of Scottish characters changed.

The question of politics requires attention to be directed to the growing development of English nationalist feeling which accelerated under Elizabeth I. In this respect, *Cymbeline*, first performed in 1611-1612 is relevant in suggesting the form in which this national spirit was articulated. Set in a Romano-Celtic context, the play sheds light on the way the native Ancient past was represented in the Early Modern period, in competition with the residual power of the Roman Empire that continued some ten centuries after its dissolution. It also reveals the fact that insular Celtic Antiquity was not confined to the regions that have retained

a Celtic language today but included the whole of the British-Irish territory. The Chronicles of Bede, Geoffrey and Buchanan depict the British Isles as made up of a number of different kingdoms. It is only with the 16<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers, Holinshed especially, that things started to become united, and this developed further when James came to the throne.

In *Macbeth*, the Gaelic etymology of characters' names reveals an oxymoronic structure opposing dark and light sides, 'foul' and 'fair'. The dark side of the fairy world and the figure of the triad are both illustrated in the characters of the Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth*, some resonances of which can also be found in *King Lear*. The fifth chapter explores the dark traits attached to what came to be a sub-terranean Ancient past. However, although the dark traits prevail in the tragedy of *Macbeth*, its oxymoronic structure also invites its opposite luminous side to emerge and this will be studied in the same chapter, following a Celtic tradition that includes dual perspectives in one single unity. The fantastic creatures of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon, Puck, Titania and the fairies living in their forest dwelling bring to life the popular belief in fairies, current in the Middle Ages and extending into Early Modern time. Does this belief have a specific relation to Ancient culture or is it just simply a characteristic feature of folktales? The figures of the fairy and the magician are particularly worth studying in this respect, since both underwent multiple transformations over time. In his treatment of the binaries of magic and tricks, savage war and fairy lore Shakespeare invokes Ancient powers that add strength to the dramatic narratives he produces, and these features have a connection with Celtic themes.

Lastly, the sixth chapter speculates on a Celtic reading of *King Lear*, focusing on the figure of the king and the concept of loss. After studying the notion of the bear as symbolic of kinship in Celtic culture, it is argued that the loss of Lear's kingdom is linked to his queen's death, which typically brings into focus the Celtic connection between the king, the woman and the land. The notion of kingship and sacrifice is also explored together with the concept of the Celtic Otherworld.

In Shakespearean texts, the Celtic motifs can be classified in a range proceeding from the most obvious to those that are most diffuse or hidden. In the first category, some elements of the Arthurian matter appear word for word at a manifest level in the text of *King Lear*, thereby providing an opening for a study of the Celtic matter in Shakespeare's drama.

# CHAPTER 1

## Arthur's aura in the Chronicles,

### A preliminary study of Celtic motifs

This chapter envisages the Arthurian matter as an open door to the study of Celtic motifs in Shakespeare's works because Arthurian motifs, especially as they appear in *King Lear*, triggered this research. This opening, although wider than the purely Shakespearean matter, leads to the realization that the subject of Celtic motifs cannot be circumscribed solely within Shakespeare's attested sources but that it has to include a number of more wide-ranging potential resources, all of which appeared in the written form some time in the Dark Ages or in the Middle Ages, in Chronicles that weaved a network of influences, in Maingeneau's term. The Celtic origin of the Arthurian matter, also called the matter of Britain, has been recognized by numerous scholars:<sup>72</sup> "Tout laisse croire que celui-ci [le mythe arthurien] est issu du bardisme, héritier des traditions héroïques primitives dont l'essor fut considérable au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, car en dépit d'une teinte chrétienne nécessitée par les circonstances, sa nature païenne ne fait aucun doute" [Everything suggests that it [the Arthurian myth] descends from bardism, inheritor of primitive heroic traditions whose expansion was considerable in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, for despite a Christian tone required by circumstances, its pagan nature is beyond doubt] (De Séchelles 1957, p. 147, tr. CSL). Arthur's legendary cycle appears in some of Shakespeare's plays as the paradoxically understated yet obvious presence of the remote past of the British Isles, thereby opening the door to an in-depth study of Ancient native motifs within Shakespeare's work. This first chapter also allows us to situate our textual and

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<sup>72</sup> In France, scholars like Philippe Walter, Jean-Marc Pastré, Jean-Guy Gouttebroze and Christian J. Guyonvarc'h. For instance, about the Arthurian literary cycle, Guyonvarc'h notes that "Les textes fondamentaux sont tous celtiques insulaires mais les thèmes arthuriens débordent largement sur les littératures française, anglaise et allemande" [The founding texts are all Insular Celtic but the Arthurian themes largely overflow on French, English and German literatures], 1986, p. 365, tr. CSL (Throughout the whole document, this annotation signals that the English translation is mine).



discursive (re)source materials in time, and permits an initial insight into the ideological emphasis in Renaissance England upon heroic figures like Brutus, Arthur and Lear. It also provides an introduction to the following chapters as regards various issues such as the use of direct and indirect references, archaeology, the tripartite nature of Indo-European social organization, the numerological motif of ‘three’, the bear, Celto-Roman relationships, prophecy and the romance genre, and it makes it possible to deal with some subsidiary motifs, such as the (white) deer or the giant as seen in the Celtic corpus and in Shakespeare’s plays.

From the ancient Chronicles to the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Chrétien de Troyes, the Arthurian legend underwent multiple transformations, both in the content of its narrative elements and in its public reception over time. Of course, the religious context was important, especially during the reformation, and by the time of the Early Modern period, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table had lost the magnificent aura that writers like Geoffrey and Malory had helped to create. Therefore, the Arthurian motifs visible as direct references in *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *King Lear* must be treated according to the various filters they have accumulated over time, in order to speculate upon their original meanings. Some other motifs appear as indirect references to the Arthurian narrative and may be found in more diffuse ways, sometimes carrying meanings more appropriate to Renaissance discourse, thereby obscuring the link to the Celtic matter almost to the point of invisibility. Thus, the diachronic evolution and transmission of texts and narratives exist alongside an ambient synchronic discursive formation that is dependent on the ways in which ideas circulated in the society of the time.

Furthermore, although the Arthurian material is “construit sur les vestiges d’une ancienne mythologie celtique” [built upon the vestiges of an ancient Celtic mythology] as Philippe Walter stated in a lecture in Lorient in 1995, one has to bear in mind that it flourished within a whole tradition of Medieval romance, which was still comprehensible in Elizabethan and early Jacobean societies, albeit in its declining phase, as Helen Cooper states:

The early seventeenth century forms the logical stopping-point, since the generation into which Spenser and Shakespeare were born was the last to be brought up on an extended range of Medieval romances in more or less their original forms, and which therefore had access to the full range of their generic codings and intertextualities. A number of the stories continued to be disseminated into the nineteenth century through the medium of broadside ballads and chapbooks, but they largely ceased to fertilize the active production of new imaginative literature. (Cooper, 2004, p. 23)

The romance genre is still very much present in Shakespeare's plays, sometimes fully as in *Pericles* and sometimes partially, where only a few elements belonging to the Medieval romance genre appear in a tragedy such as *King Lear*. Since Spenser and Shakespeare were part of the last generation to have been immersed in romance culture, they can be considered as the "passeurs" of a precious vernacular culture in the sense that the codes of romance and the multiple forms of transtextuality bore in themselves a connection to the ancient culture of the British Isles. Originally, the word "romance" itself designated the vernacular language of France, as opposed to Latin. In later use it also extended to related forms of speech, such as Provençal and Spanish, and then became a generic or collective name for the whole group of languages derived from Latin (*OED*). English itself is not a Latin derived language, although some forty percent of its lexicon today comes from French, Latin or Greek. However, what is interesting is that the term "romance" has come to point to vernacular culture in general, albeit in its popular or literary forms. Thus, romance patterns act as the missing link between Celtic culture and Shakespeare and open the way to the contemplation of potentially ancient motifs, native to vernacular insularity (although some motifs may also be present on the continent).

Before the birth of the French romance, Geoffrey of Monmouth is regarded as the begetter of the Arthurian matter, yet, as Cooper suggests, "Legends about Arthur had been circulating for some time in the Celtic [speaking] areas of Britain before Geoffrey developed them into full biography" (Cooper, p. 27). There are links with Wales at the origin, and later with Brittany through Chrétien de Troyes, and as Cooper goes on to observe: "He and Chrétien show abundant signs of using Celtic material, from the outer fringes of Britain and Mainland Europe" (*ibid.*). One of the characteristic features of the Celtic material in question is that it "was associated not only with particular varieties of romances, or particular heroes, but with certain areas of subject-matter, especially magic and the supernatural" (*ibid.*). Thus, magic and the supernatural arise as two of the fundamental constituents of the present study, with their acknowledged link to pre-Christian practices.

In his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1135), a probable source for Shakespeare according to Bullough's classification, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was very likely Welsh, and therefore accustomed to the culture of a Celtic-speaking Wales, cites other writers who preceded him. One of them, another Welshman named Gildas, is known as the earliest insular 'historian'. In his *De Excidio Britanniae*,<sup>73</sup> that appeared in 540 AD, Gildas deals with the

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<sup>73</sup> Full title: *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (*On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*).

coming of the Romans and of Christianity, as well as with a certain Ambrosius Aurelianus<sup>74</sup> and the battle of Badon Hill which took place around 496 AD (Weiss, 2002, p. xiv). There, possibly, lay the origins of the historicized character of Arthur. Badon Hill, or Mount Badon, Mons Badonicus in Gildas, in the South-West of (Great) Britain is said to be the last battle fought by the ‘historical’ Arthur. One of the theories of his historical identity supports the view that he was a war chief of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century who was thought to have died in a civil war which occurred after a period of peace some twenty years after Badon Hill. His figure remained in people’s minds and children were named after him. This is how little by little, he became a major figure in Welsh literature (Adderley and Gautier, 2010, p. 185). His aura came to radiate over all Europe in the Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance Shakespeare was not immune from this influence. Let us see how this character developed and what may connect him to Ancient Celtic times.

In the present chapter, which traces the first written forms of the Arthurian matter and the evolution of its aura down to the English Renaissance, we will be able to understand the way some transtextual references present in Shakespeare evolved overtime. The proposition is that the location of Arthurian motifs in Welsh poetry and in the Chronicles will subsequently permit a better appreciation of the proportion of Arthurian elements remaining in Shakespeare’s work. The Welsh poem *Y Gododdin* in which the figure of Arthur is hinted at also offers typically mythological motifs which will be of use throughout the present study. Then, Bede and especially Nennius will be evoked as the first references to Arthur, King of the Britons. Nennius also first dealt with Arthur’s chief competitor in terms of aura, the Mediterranean Brutus, but a closer study will be devoted to Geoffrey’s oeuvre since he was the one who actually developed both Arthurian and Brut matter, notwithstanding that he appears as a possible source for Shakespeare. A fourth part will lead us to discover a further link between archaeology and Arthurian literature, in order to realize concretely the Ancient character of the matter under study. Finally, this introductory chapter will be able to consider the construction of Arthur’s character and aura in order to better appreciate the transformation they underwent in Shakespearean drama, which will be the object of our second chapter. Let us begin our preliminary study with a motif in the early Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*.

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<sup>74</sup> “In the last part of his chronicles, Gildas introduces Ambrosius Aurelianus, the last Roman soldier remaining in Britain, as the leader of the British during the Saxon invasion”, in Bayard-Massot, *A Study of the Medieval Arthurian Literary Cycle*, Chapter II “Pseudo-historical books”.

## 1. Y Gododdin, the valiant warrior and the crow of battles

In their detailed account of six theories dealing with the possible origins of King Arthur, Adderley and Gautier mention the heroic and elegiac poem *Y Gododdin*<sup>75</sup> (or *Canu Aneirin*), written by the Welsh bard Aneirin around 600 AD. We will briefly introduce three of the poem's motifs which will be of use later in the study of Shakespeare's texts, albeit transformed and disguised: the complete tri-functional leader, the crows of battle and the number three.

In *Y Gododdin*, the name of Arthur is used as a gold-standard with which one of the Britons, a valiant soldier of the northern kingdom of the Gododdin<sup>76</sup> is compared. This has led some scholars to regard this reference as an indication that "a figure called Arthur was so famous at the time of the poem's original composition that a warrior could be praised simply by comparison" (Echard, *Y Gododdin*).

He pierced three hundred, most bold,  
He cut down the centre and the wing.  
He was worthy before the noblest host,  
He gave from his herd horses in winter.  
He fed black ravens on the wall  
Of the fortress, although he was not Arthur.  
Among those powerful in feats [?]  
In the front rank, a palissade, Gwawrddur. (Aneirin, *Y Gododdin*)<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "*Y Gododdin* is the earliest surviving Welsh poem. While the manuscript in which it is preserved, commonly called the *Book of Aneirin*, dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is generally agreed that it preserves a much older text. It is composed of a series of elegies for the men of the Gododdin, who died at a battle in Catraeth – now thought to be Catterick in Yorkshire – around the year 600. The poem is thus an account of the fighting which opposed the Saxons and the Britons at the time of the Saxon invasions. One of the early consequences of that invasion was the cutting off of the kingdoms in the north from those in the southwest (Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem*); this poem seems to report on a failed attempt to regain some of that lost ground" (Echard, *Y Gododdin*).

<sup>76</sup> Gododdin is a British kingdom of the 6<sup>th</sup> century in south-east Scotland.

<sup>77</sup> *Y Gododdin*, translation by Siân Echard from the Early Welsh:

"Ef guant tratrigant echassaf  
ef ladhei auet ac eithaf  
oid guiu e mlaen llu llarahaf  
godolei o heit meirch e gayaf  
gochore brein du aruur  
caer ceni bei ef arthur  
rug ciuin uerthi igdisur  
ig kynnor guernor gaurdur". (Aneirin, *Y Gododdin*)

Echard suggests that this may be an early reference to King Arthur, whose existence is formulated in contrast to that of another warrior. What we have here in one single stanza is the portrait of a man who is praised for being strong in battle as well as for his generosity in providing horses from his herd. Moreover, the reference to feeding ravens (or bringing crows in Clancy's translation) on the wall of the fortress may indicate a relationship with the Morrigan herself, the crow of battles, or the Morrigna, the triad of goddesses of battle<sup>78</sup> whose attribute was, among others, to be able to turn themselves into black crows. As Miranda Jane Green states, "their presence during a campaign could encourage those whom they supported and they were harbinger of death for those they did not" (Green, 1995, p. 42). The fact that the hero described above could feed the crows shows that they responded favourably to him, and that he had the goddesses of battle on his side.

In a nutshell, the warrior described above, "although he is not Arthur", nonetheless shows all the characteristics of a powerful leader. According to Dumézil's classification of the tripartite structure of Indo-European ideology,<sup>79</sup> he is a great warrior, capable of generosity, he is a purveyor who meets his people's needs and, endowed with spirituality he can interact with the gods or goddesses. This identification of the three functions will help describe the characteristics of rulers like King Lear in their shortcomings as much as in their qualities as regards the regal function, according to Celtic characteristics. The crows of battle, illustrated in the triad of the Morrigna, will be developed further, in relation to *I Henry IV* where Welshwomen roaming the battlefield are said to have performed "such misuse, / Such beastly shameless transformation" (1.1.43-44) on the English soldiers' corpses. The motif of three is also present in the composition and characterization of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* and of Lear's daughters. It appears as what Helen Cooper would call a 'meme', a motif that is reproduced and also integrates transformation over time. At the basis of the social structure in the Indo-European world, this tripartite pattern is also foundational in Celtic myths and social

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<sup>78</sup> "They were simultaneously one goddess and three: the entity of the Morrigan may be tripled or Bodbh, Nemhain and Morrigan may be combined to become the triadic Morrigna. The goddesses combined destruction, sexuality and prophecy. They were prognosticators of doom [...]" (Green, 1995, p. 42). One cannot but think of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*.

<sup>79</sup> Georges Dumézil discovered and specialized in the tripartite organization of Indo-European ideology and society. He developed his theory in *Mythe et Épopée* (1955, (1968)) in which he compared the trifunctional ideology in Indian, Celtic or Scandinavian myths. The ideology proved fruitful in works of scholars such as Guyonvarc'h or Walter who dealt with Celtic myths. It reckons that three functions regulated and organized the Indo-European societies: the sacerdotal function (religious people), the war function (warriors) and the nourishing function (farmers and producers). These functions were, as Walter writes "les piliers d'une conception globale du monde indo-européen" [the pillars of a general conception of the Indo-European world] (2002, p. 33, tr. CSL). He adds that the ideology, "À défaut de régler effectivement le fonctionnement réel de la société, elle imprégnait les mentalités, les récits et les mythes" [if not effectively regulating the actual organization of the society, it impregnated mentalities, stories and myths] (*ibid.*).

environment. From a methodological point of view, the presence of a trifunctional structure in other cultures is not incompatible with the development of an analysis centered on its appearance in Celtic traditions, in the same way that any motif may have developed in parallel in a number of different civilizations. Following a chronological line, Bede and Nennius's Chronicles provided references to what was to become the Arthurian cycle.

## 2. Bede and Nennius, the monk and the antiquary

More than a century after the poem *Y Gododdin*, in 731, Bede or Saint Bede the Venerable, a Benedictine monk in the kingdom of Northumbria, wrote his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>80</sup> This Chronicle deals with the end of the Roman influence, the subsequent chaos that occurred in Britain, the Christianization of the British people and the Saxons and the latter's defeat of the British. The name of Arthur is not mentioned but Vortigern, the war chief who will become Arthur's enemy in the Arthurian cycle is, thus establishing the context of Arthur's intervention as the savior of the British people. Later, the 9<sup>th</sup> century *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the Britons*), compiled c.820 and generally attributed to the Welsh antiquary Nennius, provides the earliest-known written reference to the British King Arthur. Aside from other narratives concerned with English origins, Welsh folktales and genealogies, the compilation contains an account of the famous twelve victories ascribed to Arthur (Weiss, 2002, p. xv, and *britannica.com*).

Several versions<sup>81</sup> of the *Historia Brittonum* also recount the founding myth of Brut, Brutus or Britto and the Trojans, of whom King Lear is supposed to have descended. No historical record can be found that might connect Brut and Lear, but Brut is nevertheless at the origin of a foundation myth of Britain, hence the etymological connection 'Brut' and 'Britain'. In one of the versions, which proved the most successful of the *Historia Brittonum*, and drawing on Virgil's *Aeneid*, Brutus is said to be the descendant of Aeneas, who is himself descended from Dardanos and the god Saturn (Alamichel, 2013, p. 237). Following a westward movement of textual transmission,<sup>82</sup> 9th century Britain already recognized the Mediterranean Trojan myth, with Brut as a founding hero, and the aura of this fantasized

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<sup>80</sup> Full title: *The Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (The History of the English People)*.

<sup>81</sup> For three variant versions of Brutus's story in different manuscripts of the *Historia Brittonum*, see Marie-Françoise Alamichel, 2013, p. 235.

<sup>82</sup> This "translatio studii", acknowledged by Chrétien de Troyes, "remained a point of national pride into the sixteenth century and beyond, and provided a context for exploration still further westward" (Cooper, p. 72 and p. 74).

myth resonated, captivated, and somewhat federated the peoples of Europe.<sup>83</sup> But also, the romance tradition that originated from the continent in the 12<sup>th</sup> century rapidly assimilated and rewrote stories from the British Isles, the legend of Arthur being one of them.

### 3. Geoffrey of Monmouth: Brut and Arthur

According to Helen Cooper, Geoffrey of Monmouth's tour de force is "the rescuing of a shadowy Celtic hero named Arthur from the hinterlands of oral legends to the full light of a biography of conquest carried to the very walls of Rome, so establishing a legendary imperial past for Britain that reversed the direction of Brutus's westward retreat" (Cooper, p. 24). The inverted parallel Cooper draws between Arthur and Brutus is thought-provoking, the two characters being placed on an equal footing as far as stature is concerned. The founding garment with which Brutus is adorned becomes attached to Arthur who becomes himself a founder, a native British figure, with the same stature as his exotic predecessor. Drawing on Nennius but largely amplifying his work (Alamichel, p. 237), Geoffrey relates Brutus's narrative up to the point of his landing on the island of Albion and his death twenty years later in the first part of his chronicle (Geoffrey, trans. Thorpe, 1966, p. 53-74). It is worth focusing on Geoffrey's Brutus epic first because Shakespeare may have been exposed to this version. The Chronicles create a network of influences, using Mainguenau's terminology, which feed in the Shakespearean rhizomatic structure. Furthermore, although the story begins in a Mediterranean setting, some characteristic Celtic elements are present and worth noticing in the chronicle, which also find repercussions in Shakespeare. This transposition of setting is a major element of our study: Shakespeare himself created exotic settings for his plays, but this does not prevent the inclusion of intermingled Celtic elements, as evidenced in *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Winter's Tale*. Finally, investigating the Brut matter is important to understand the extent of the character's aura and to compare it with Arthur's, because this allows us to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the contraction of the founding Arthurian

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<sup>83</sup> As Danièle Berton Charrière notes, a lot of nations drew on the destruction of Troy to create their founding myths. Among them were the French, the Turks and the British, respectively with their heroes Francion, Turcus and Brutus and "au Moyen-Âge et à la renaissance, le mythe troyen est le mythe d'anoblissement par excellence" [In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, 'the Trojan myth is the ennobling myth par excellence' (Poucet, conclusion)] (Berton-Charrière, 2009, p. 51, tr. CSL). Besides, "À partir du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il commença à faire l'objet de critiques croissantes, se heurtant parfois à d'autres mythes naissants et concurrents, comme ce fut le cas en France [...], avec le mythe gaulois; il suscite aussi des réflexions plus générales, presque philosophiques" [From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it is increasingly exposed to criticism, sometimes colliding with new competing myths, as it was the case in France [...] with the Gaul myth; it also triggers more general, almost philosophical thinking] (*Ibid.*, tr. CSL). See Alamichel, 2013, p. 233-234.

motif operates in Shakespeare's texts. In Geoffrey, Brutus's story encapsulates motifs of magic and the supernatural, and one of these narratives, involving prophecy, is also linked to Shakespeare.

### 3.1 Prophecy

Before Brutus's birth, "soothsayers", or "magis" as they appear in the Latin manuscript of the *Historia* (Monemutensis, 1176, f. 4r), uttered a prophecy indicating that he "would cause the death of both his father and mother; and that after he had wandered in exile through many lands the boy would eventually rise to the highest honour" (Geoffey, trans. Thorpe, 1966, p. 54). Prophecy was still very much present in the society of Renaissance England, albeit occasionally deformed, and was often used to spread rumour. It is also a major characteristic of Celtic literature, as Green suggests: "It is clear from the comments both of classical authors and from the early mythic tradition of Ireland that prophecy was an important function of religious officials in the pagan Celtic world" (Green, 1995, p. 147-148).

In the story of *Deirdre and the Sons of Usna*, before Deirdre's birth, the royal assembly that was gathered in a banquet in Feidlimid's house<sup>84</sup> heard a shriek coming from her mother's womb. In order to alleviate everybody's concern, the druid Cathbad, the "seer", said that inside Feidlimid's wife's womb was a woman of great beauty, a woman "for whom there will be many slaughters among the chariot-fighters of Ulster" (*Book of Leinster*, 12<sup>th</sup> c., trans. Hull, 1949).<sup>85</sup> He predicted the exile of the three sons of Usna followed by their downfall, and he also announced that Deirdre's story would be "a famous tale" (*ibid.*); the death of the warriors of the House of Usna ensued, as foretold. This provides an instance of prophecy in Irish literature similar to what Geoffrey wrote as regards Brutus, a non-Celtic hero, thus showing that a transposition of contexts is possible while at the same time allowing the culture of the writer to express itself.

The following example prophesies the life of a future hero, not of a destructive heroine, a factor that brings us closer to Arthur. To the birth of Sétanta, the future great warrior Cú Chulainn, referred to as the "Irish Achilles" (Nutt, 1900, title page), is attached an aura of magic since in some versions his real father is the god Lug, who is both the sun god and the master of arts and crafts in Irish mythology. This feature points to the characteristically intimate relationship of Celtic heroes (and heroines) with gods and humans

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<sup>84</sup> Feidlimid is Deirdre's father and King Conchubor's storyteller.

<sup>85</sup> <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T301020B/index.html>, sections 4 and 5, (accessed 27/07/18).



at the same time. Here is the prophecy uttered by the wise Morann, a lawman (who can be assimilated to a druid), once the boy Cú Chulainn was born:

Morann broke out in a prophecy of the future greatness of the child, and on his prowess on behalf of Ulster. 'His praise', he cried, 'will be in the mouths of all men; charioteers and warriors, kings and sages will recount his deeds; he will win the love of many. The child will avenge all your wrongs; he will give combat at your fords; he will decide all your quarrels. (Hull, 1898, p. 19-20)

Under the strong influence of a prediction, protagonists acquire some sort of a magic aura, together with the burden of an inescapable destiny since once the druid has pronounced the words, nobody, not even he himself, can undo their performative power. A major Celtic element, the motif of the prophecy, will be developed further in chapter 2, in relation to Merlin and the Fool's utterance in *King Lear*: "This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time" (3, 2, 79), and of course also in relation to Macbeth and the Weïrd Sisters. As far as Brutus is concerned, since our present preoccupation is to investigate the character's story and aura, almost everything narrated in the continuation of his journey happened as foretold.

Brutus's mother died in childbirth and fifteen years later, Brutus accidentally killed his father during a hunt. He had to leave Italy, his former dwelling place, and went in exile to Greece where he discovered the descendants of Helenus, Priam's son and other Trojans who were held as slaves by Pandrasus, the king of the Greeks. Distinguishing himself by his feats of arms, he acquired the favour of "kings and princes more than any young man in the country" (Geoffrey, p. 55). His aura was such that it was said of him:

Among the wise he was himself wise, and among the valiant he too was valiant. All the gold and silver and the equipment which he acquired he handed over to his soldiers. In this way his fame spread among all peoples. The Trojans began to flock to him and beg him to become their leader, so that they might be freed from their subjection to the Greeks. They said that this could easily be done, for they had now increased in number in the country to such an extent that there were reckoned to be seven thousand of them, not counting the women and children. (Geoffrey, p. 55-56)

Like the hero of *Y Gododdin*, Brutus appears as an accomplished leader, and according to Dumezilian analysis, brilliantly occupies three functions: he is wise ("inter sapientes sapiens")

therefore thoughtful, he is a valiant warrior (“inter bellicosos bellicorus”) and he is lavish, distributing his wealth to his men, as stated in the extract from the 1176 manuscript of Geoffrey’s *Historia* presented in annex. Therefore, Brutus bears the characteristics of a king promised to the “highest honour” as the prophecy had indicated.

Arthur, his insular equivalent, is a great king too, which renders the diminution of his character in Shakespeare all the more conspicuous. The need to create a founding hero who is not insular is very telling, notwithstanding the fact that he bears the name the country still has today (Brut, Brutus, Britannia, Britain). The already extant but Ancient Welsh war chief Arthur could not impersonate the whole country; rather, following a Medieval tendency, Mediterranean Brutus was considered to offer a more prestigious explanation of origin. Arthur was chosen as a valuable ancestor by some, but in a later period. Among his followers were the Tudors starting with Henry VII and the Stuarts James IV and V of Scotland, but it was not sufficient to please Henry I, for whom Geoffrey was writing his *Historia*. The new King of England was Eleanor of Aquitaine’s husband and the trend on the continent was to identify the Trojans as a lineage of ancestors. It was perfect timing for Geoffrey to develop the already existing story. Thus we observe a competition between two heroes to illustrate the grandeur of Britain, one coming from the Classical world and the other a native of the British Isles, a competition between two worlds which, to a certain extent, continued to engage in a silent combat in Shakespeare.

Continuing to follow Brutus’s journey in Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, there are other motifs which are of interest because they are potentially Celtic and because some illustration of them can be found in Shakespeare: the deer, or hind, white or brown, hunted or hunter, that has a major significance in Celtic mythology and cosmology.

### **3.2 The white hind and the deer-hunt**

Shakespeare developed the deer hunt motif in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, while the white hind motif that appears in Geoffrey’s Brut epic as well as in other Medieval stories shows the presence of Celtic motifs well into the Medieval period. The presence of ancient motifs in Geoffrey, to which Shakespeare may have had access, suggests a possible way of transmission through writing, or at least the possibility that a Medieval way of thinking still lingered on in the Early Modern period, and brought along with its discursive mode a series of motifs. Another major source for Shakespeare, Holinshed’s 1587

compilation also incorporated the matter of the Brut; but let us explore the white hind in Geoffrey and Medieval texts in order to get closer to the Celtic matter, and then proceed to investigate the emphasis on the deer-hunt in Shakespeare.

Leading the Trojans, Brutus defeated king Pandrasus and although he was victorious, he chose to leave, after marrying Ignoge (Innogen),<sup>86</sup> the king's daughter. Their journey led the Trojans to "a certain island called Leogetia" (Geoffrey, p. 64). There, in an abandoned city, they entered the temple of Diana in which "there was a statue of the goddess which gave answers if by chance it was questioned by anyone" (*ibid.*). The Trojans suggested to their leader that he should offer a sacrifice to the goddess and ask her for the name and place of "a safe and permanent dwelling-place" (*ibid.*, p. 65). Brutus, accompanied by the Augur<sup>87</sup> Gero and twelve<sup>88</sup> of his men among the eldest, went to the temple and prepared for the sacrifice:

When they reached the place, they wrapped fillets round their brows and, according to the age-old rite, they set up three sacrificial hearths to the three gods: to Jupiter, that is, to Mercury and to Diana. To each in turn they poured a libation. Brutus stood before the altar of the goddess, holding in his right hand a vessel full of sacrificial wine mixed with the blood of a white hind, and with his face upturned towards the statue of the godhead he broke the silence with these words: 'O powerful goddess, terror of the forest glades, yet hope of the wild woodlands, you who have the power to go in orbit through the airy heavens and the halls of hell, pronounce a judgement which concerns the earth. Tell me which land you wish us to inhabit. Tell me of a safe dwelling-place where I am to worship you down the ages, and where, to the chanting of maidens, I shall dedicate temples to you'. This he said nine times; four times he proceeded round the altar, pouring the wine which he held upon the sacrificial hearth; then he lay down upon the skin of a hind which he had stretched before the altar. Having sought for slumber, he at length fell asleep. (Geoffrey, p. 65)

Then, in the third hour of the night, he had a vision of the goddess who, standing before him, told him he would find an island in the sea once occupied by giants and that there he would

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<sup>86</sup> The name of Cymbeline's daughter in Shakespeare's eponymous play.

<sup>87</sup> The augur in Roman history is "A religious official, who interpreted omens derived from the flight, singing, and feeding of birds, the appearance of the entrails of sacrificial victims etc., and advised upon the course of public business in accordance with them" (*OED*, 1968, p. 123). Hence, in 1593, the word acquired the meaning of "soothsayer, diviner, or prophet generally" (*ibid.*).

<sup>88</sup> Twelve is a frequently used number in Irish myth: Nessa's twelve tutors, Vortigern's twelve druids, and it is also a 'Christian' number related to the twelve apostles, which may show an overlapping of the Christian narrative here.

found a second Troy and produce a “race of kings”. Numerous details are noteworthy here, in what appears to be a mixture of Roman, Christian and Celtic motifs: particularly, the profusion of figures, especially ‘three’ – three gods (and Diana herself being the threefold goddess in Roman culture), three hearths, the third hour, nine times which is three times three – but also the white colour of the hind.

In Celtic mythology white animals are viewed as messengers from the Otherworld and the Middle-Ages retained the white hind or the white stag as a powerful symbol of the supernatural. In *The First Branch of the Mabinogi*, Pwyll prince of Dyfed gets lost hunting the stag and finally discovers that another pack of hounds brings the animal to ground. The hounds he saw “were a gleaming shining white and their ears were red” (*The Mabinogion*, trans. Davies, 2007, p. 3). Davies explains that “Red and white are colours traditionally associated with the supernatural in Welsh and Irish tradition” (*ibid.*, p. 228). Indeed, consequently, the story has Arawn king of Annwn (the Otherworld) appear before another adventure begins. Later on, after a feast, Pwyll walks up and sits on a mound (a magical one), from which he and his retinue can observe “a woman wearing a shining golden garment of brocaded silk on a big, tall, pale-white horse coming along the highway that ran past the mound” (*ibid.* p. 8). Pwyll sends several of his men to find out who she is but none of them can catch up with the rider, not even Pwyll himself, until he has asked the right question. Obviously endowed with magical qualities, the lady is Rhiannon, whose name is associated with that of the Celtic goddess Rigantona, meaning ‘the Great, or Divine, Queen’ and whose close association with horses led some scholars to postulate a connection with the Celtic horse-goddess Epona (p. 230). In the Middle English Breton Lay of *Sir Launfal* (14<sup>th</sup> c.), Dame Tryamour, the fairy lady from the Otherworld arrives at Arthur’s court mounted on a white palfrey accompanied by white hounds (Laskaya and Salisbury, 2001, p. 236-237). This illustrates the connection between the white animal and the Otherworld which will be discussed further.

The motif of the white hind is also to be found in Marie de France’s *Lai de Guigemar* (12<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>89</sup> in which the hero, who was an excellent knight, suffered a severe flaw: “la Nature avait commis une faute en le formant: il était indifférent à l’amour” [Nature had made a major mistake in his composition: he was indifferent to love] (*Lais*, 1990, p. 29, l. 57-58, tr. CSL). While Guigemar was hunting, he saw a white hind with stag’s antlers and tried to kill her but the arrow bounced off her forehead and wounded Guigemar in the thigh. Then, the hind

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<sup>89</sup> “Marie de France claims that her ‘lais’ were translations of ancient Celtic tales of love and magic which she heard the Bretons sing” (Laskaya and Salisbury, 2001, p. 201).

uttered a prophecy saying that only a woman would be able to heal the wound and that the hero would know love and would suffer from it too. Once more, the white animal appears linked to magic and the supernatural, and is also capable of prophesying. Highly knowledgeable and being associated with the Otherworld, no reality of this world escapes his/her sight. This type of story makes Celtic motifs visible, but the symbol of the white hind also has some aesthetic value.

In the Middle-Ages, the symbol was so powerful that it was used as a royal emblem: the white stag was Richard II's badge, as shown in the Wilton Diptych (1395-99). In this tempera painting, Christian and pre-Christian traditions seem to enjoy echoing links. The stag is wearing a golden crown-shaped collar to which is attached a gold chain. He is crouching in a submissive position which suggests that the human regal has tamed him. He has been removed from the wilderness, and everything linked to the natural savage animal condition has disappeared, except for his magnificent antlers. The whole scene suggests that the Medieval king Richard II rules over all forms of bestial existence and, if we consider the whiteness of the animal and its link to the Otherworld, over the realms of the supernatural and the spiritual too. Altogether, by mastering and literally enchaining the symbol, the Medieval Christian monarch is thought to have dominion over Ancient pagan practices and religion, while retaining the spiritual element attached to the white stag, which is appropriate for this portable altar.

In Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1598), when the Princess hunts the deer in 4.1 and when Holofernes and Nathaniel discuss the nature of the deer she hunted in 4.2, the allusions are never spiritual but always sexual. Throughout both scenes, there is a pervasive metaphor of love as hunting, in which the deer designates a male lover while the women are huntresses. Horns are seen as sexual attributes (4.1.104-105), to "hit" is an onomatopoeic sound indicating successful sexual intercourse (4.1.117), and the very precise nature of the deer/man is also evoked – either a "pricket" (young, in its second year), "a sorel" (a buck in its third year), "a sore" (buck in its fourth year), "a buck of the first head" (in its fifth year, when the antlers first appear) or "sanguis" (mature) (4.2.3-55 and notes p. 109-112). The horns do not necessarily only refer to the cuckold's horns, but also to the male sexual organ. The princess is said to "kill horns" that is to kill the deer, but also metaphorically to diminish male desire,<sup>90</sup> and there is also paronomasia in the pun on "deer-dear" (notes p. 107). The imagery equates the man, the deer and the horns in what appears to be a playful love hunt. All

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<sup>90</sup> This also refers to the post-coital 'petite mort' that John Donne evokes in some of his poems, and is part of the discursive field as it appears in *LLL*.

the characters in these two scenes illustrate – through wordplays and innuendoes– the link between carnality and the image of the deer, which serves to secularize and sexualize the symbolic feature attached to the ancient Celtic god Cernunnos. The god is literally “the horned” (Kruta, 2000, p. 534), “the guardian of wild nature [and] the lord of natural abundance and fertility” (Green, 1998, p. 233, p. 234). Green discusses the presence of the horns, linking them to sexuality and differentiating the Celtic vision of the horned gods from the Christian vision of Satan:

The possession of horns by gods who were not warriors was probably meant to emphasize aspects of the fertility and prosperity of their cults. The addition of the attributes of a bull, ram or goat to an anthropomorphic image gave it the power of that animal, as surely as Cernunnos’s antlers endowed him with the force of the wild woodlands and the qualities of its most prominent creature, the stag. What is clear is that the horned beings did not represent the power of evil. In Christian contexts, horns have been associated with Satan. [...] But certainly, as far as the Celts were concerned, evil connotations were entirely absent from their horned deities, although it is true that sexuality implied by fertility was undoubtedly part of the symbolism of the horned gods. (Green, 1998, p. 237)

The playful sexual language in Shakespeare’s text mainly involves nature and youth. Ironically and comically enough, only the pedantic schoolmaster and the curate miss the significance of the nature of the deer the princess has hunted. Turns of language reveal that the young men undoubtedly bear the qualities of the strong animal, well-known especially at the time of rutting. Furthermore, Green adds that “it is possible that Cernunnos was a skin-turner or shape-shifter, able to vary his outward form from human to animal at will” (p. 234), which conjures up the figure of the Celtic god behind the analogy of man-deer in Shakespeare’s text. The motif shows through, in a contemporary treatment that a Renaissance audience could enjoy, but perhaps without any detailed knowledge of its Ancient implications.

The motif is here hidden and the means of transmission remains uncertain except as explained through orality and the human unconscious; that is to say that some motifs can remain alive in the cultural memory of the community, albeit they are transformed over time. We may think of this as an example of indirect reference to Celtic motifs. Looking for this kind of transtextual link requires in-depth scrutiny but also a degree of freedom from the usual linear pattern of literary interpretations of Shakespeare’s text. In this type of example,

Jung's theory of archetypes proves helpful in order to explain the transmission of a motif without any necessary conscious formulation but with an immediate and vibrant cultural recognition on the part of the audience; and the terms of 'motif' and 'meme' being more malleable, integrate the modifications operated by cultural pressures over time. Thus, the stag, represented as Cernunnos, especially in Gaul but also in Britain, the Ancient benevolent god of prosperity and fertility, finds itself in a Renaissance play in which young men and women are involved in a love game, as in a dance reminiscent of the celebrations of May festivities, themselves inherited from the Beltane feasts in Celtic culture.

However, contrary to Brutus's or the Irish and Welsh stories noted above, the white colour is definitely absent from the deer-lover metaphor in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, which anchors it in a purely carnal context. Although if we envisage the purely discursive plan, the use of language does of course elevate the whole scene from purely carnal concerns, since language itself, elaborate as it is here, is an intellectual tool and is capable of being a lot more spiritual than carnal.<sup>91</sup> Amongst other motifs coming from Classical culture and Christian faith, the white hind image in Brutus's epic reveals a correlation of the story with Celtic motifs. As Danièle Berton-Charrière advocates, "Tronc commun, la légende de Brut et de son ascendant Enée recèle en son sein des épisodes de l'Histoire des Grecs, de Romains et des Celtes. Chaque branche peut, de droit, s'en revendiquer tout en insistant sur sa propre spécificité" [A *core curriculum*, the legend of Brut and his ascendant Aeneas contains episodes from the History of the Greeks, the Romans and the Celts. Each branch can rightfully claim this while insisting on its own specificity] (Berton-Charrière, 2009, p. 49, tr. CSL). Geoffrey, himself genuinely absorbed into Welsh culture, drew on the works of other Welshmen<sup>92</sup> as well as on oral Celtic legends (Alamichel, 2013, p. 238) and therefore touched the roots of ancient Celtic culture which he then amalgamated with other elements such as the coming of the Saxons, the Romans, Christianization, and the Trojans. Nevertheless, the motifs encapsulated in his narrative prove perfect elements of transmission, and the rhizomatic structure elaborates itself including the Medieval Chronicles and their embedded Celtic motifs. Proceeding with Brutus's epic in Geoffrey, one of them demands

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<sup>91</sup> The carnal and the spiritual aspects of 'Love' are recurrent points in Shakespeare, as it appears in Sonnet 129 and in Hermione's exchange with Polixenes at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale*.

<sup>92</sup> In his introduction to his translation of the *Historia*, Lewis Thorpe underlines the numerous borrowings Geoffrey makes from the *De excidio Britanniae* of Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius and points out that "his debt to these two early chroniclers is certainly a considerable one" to the point that "some scholars have suggested that our search for sources might well begin and end there" (p. 19).

attention because it is also situated at the crossroads of Celtic, Classic, Medieval and Shakespearean routes: the figure of the giant.

### 3.3 Giants

Through Geoffrey's *Historia*, Holinshed's chronicle, Classic narratives, Anglo-Saxon and Irish texts, the aim is to study a single word – giant – in order to discover the cultural implications that lie behind the term, and relate them to Shakespeare's development of the notion. Classical and Celtic Antiquity has told tales of giants, and so has Geoffrey in recounting the following story of British origins in his *Historia*.

After the episode at Diana's temple, and following her advice, the Trojans sailed toward the West. They landed in Africa, were attacked by pirates and by sirens, and found another group of Trojans led by Corineus, with whom they continued their journey. In Aquitaine, Brutus waged a war against Goffar the Pict, king of the Aquitanians and although twice victorious, he decided to leave "while the greater part of his comrades were still safe, and then to seek out the island which divine prophecy had promised would be his" (Geoffrey, p. 71). The Trojans landed in Britain at Totnes, on the river Dart in what was to be Corineus's share of Albion, Cornwall. Contrary to what the goddess Diana had predicted, the island was inhabited by a few giants, with whom Brutus and especially Corineus were delighted to fight. This was the case with Gogmagog, who ended up falling "on to a sharp reef of rocks, where he was dashed into a thousand fragments and stained the waters with his blood" (p. 73). This is the summary of the continuation of Brutus's journey, which varies slightly according to the different versions.

The presence of the giant motif in the unfolding of the action is inconsistent with the prediction of the goddess who had assured Brutus, when he came to her temple, that the island was "once occupied by giants [...but] now it is empty and ready for your folk" (Geoffrey, p. 65). Either an anomaly in the overall logic of the writing or an amusing gesture towards the potential failure of the Classical gods, the occupation of the island of Britain by giants recalls the founding insular mythology, such as that retained by the Irish corpus in *The Book of the Taking of Ireland (Lebor Gabala Érenn)*<sup>93</sup>. The motif is also present in the Classical world

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<sup>93</sup> In *Textes mythologiques irlandais*, 1980, Guyonvarc'h uses R.A.S Macalister's edition of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*: Macalister, R.A.S, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The book of the taking of Ireland*, 5 vols, Irish Texts Society 34, 35, 39, 41, 44, Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1938-1956. There are eighteen Medieval original manuscripts containing the events of *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, the most renowned being *The Book of*



where giants are not necessarily oversized beings but warriors endowed with great strength and aggressiveness. This vision corresponds to the fact that, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's narrative, Corineus carried Gogmagog on his shoulders and travelled to the coast where he threw him into the sea: "He heaved Gogmagog up on to his shoulders, and running as fast as he could under the weight, he hurried off to the nearby coast" (Geoffrey, p. 73). Or, what we have is a demonstration of Celtic magic since Gogmagog's weight appears abnormal compared to Corineus's physical strength. Holinshed's compilation discusses this particular aspect of the definition of the giant in the *Chronicles* (1577, Vol. 1, p. 3, and 1587, Vol. 1, p. 8),<sup>94</sup> whether they were named "Gigas or Nephilim [...] rather for their tyrannie and oppression of the people, than for their greatnesse of bodie, or large steps [...] or because their parents were not known, for such in old time were called Terrae filij; or wether the word Gigas dooth onlie signifie Indigenas, or homelings, borne in the land or not" (1587, Vol. 1, p. 8, l.15-22). Although their height is questionable, the fierce character of the giants remains a common trait in both Classical and Celtic mythologies.

In the Classical narratives, the giants are the progeny of Gaia (the earth), who engendered them – or re-engendered them, depending on particular versions – from the blood of their father, Cronos when it touched the earth. They fought with the Olympian gods in the battle known as the Gigantomachia. Ovid describes the giants' revolt against Jove in *The Metamorphoses I* writing that "This offspring eke against the Gods did beare a native spight, / In slaughter and in doing wrong was all their whole delight. / Their deedes declarèd them of bloud engendred for to bee" (Ovid, tr. Golding, 1567, ed Rouse, 1904, p. 24, l. 183-185). Their character, deeply evil and bloody, accords with the way they were created, that is literally from their father's blood. Through their characteristics, the Classical giants fuse with the description of the Biblical and the Irish ones, in what appears to be a common Indo-European motif which does not necessarily involve borrowing but may suggest independent evolution in each different culture from a single origin.<sup>95</sup> The rhizome extends beyond the Celtic semantic field and crosses other cultural areas.

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*Leinster, The Book of Ballymote, The Book of Fermoy, The Book of Lecan* and MS Rawlinson B 512 (Guyonvarc'h, 1980, p. 3).

<sup>94</sup> [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1577\\_0044&text2=1587\\_0060#p56](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1577_0044&text2=1587_0060#p56) (accessed 14/08/18).

<sup>95</sup> Philippe Walter argues that a theory explains this phenomenon: "les analogies thématiques entre les récits et les ressemblances linguistiques entre des langues relevant d'une même sphère (indo-européenne) s'expliquent plus par une source commune que par une imitation de ces langues entre elles ou des emprunts de ces récits entre eux" [thematic analogies between stories and linguistic resemblances between languages belonging to a same sphere (Indo-European) can be explained more by a common source than by an imitation of these languages among themselves or by borrowings between stories], 2008, p. 33, tr. CSL.

The Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* offers another example of the fierce monster in the figure of Grendel, “a hellish fiend [...] a gruesome creature [...] notorious prowler of the borderland, ranger of the moor, the fen and the fastness; this cursed creature lived in a monster’s lair for a time after the Creator had condemned him as one of the seed of Cain” (*Beowulf*, trans. Crossley-Holland, Oxford, 1999, p. 5). He evolved among a horde composed of “monsters and elves and spiteful spirits of the dead, also the giants who grappled with God for a long while” (*ibid.*). After a fierce fight, and after having beheaded Grendel’s mother, Beowulf managed to decapitate Grendel with “an invincible sword wrought by the giants” (p. 52).<sup>96</sup> Only a sword crafted by giants could have defeated the giant-like Grendel. Although it is not openly revealed in the text, this feature indicates a certain kinship between Grendel and the evil monsters in pre-Christian narratives – the giants. The Old-English epic *Beowulf* combines Ancient pagan mythology and Christianity, with the monster Grendel aligned with Cain after the murder of his brother Abel. This indicates how a pagan motif might be subsumed into a Christian narrative as the one gets historically incorporated into the other.

In some translations, *The Bible* has the Nephilim assimilated to giants (*Genesis* 6.4),<sup>97</sup> while in Celtic mythology in general giants are associated with the Fomoiré,<sup>98</sup> the first inhabitants of the island of Britain, as Guyonvarc’h explains:

La bataille contre les Fomoiré est une constante de toutes les invasions. Mais les Fomoiré échappent à la norme des vainqueurs et des vaincus. C’est une tâche toujours recommencée que de les vaincre et de les soumettre. Démons noirs maîtres de la terre et oppresseurs difformes, génies du mal et de l’obscurité souterraine, ils n’ont jamais eu besoin d’arriver en Irlande : ils y ont toujours habité et font partie intégrante de son sol et de ses eaux.

[The battle against the Fomoiré is a constant of all the invasions. But the Fomoiré escape the norm of the vanquisher and the vanquished. It is an ever repeating task to overcome and subdue them. Black demons, masters of the earth, deformed oppressors, evil geniuses of the underground darkness, they never had to come to Ireland: they have always inhabited it and are an integral part of its soil and waters]. (Guyonvarc’h, 1980, p. 17, tr. CSL)

<sup>96</sup> The motif of the sword recalls Arthur’s magic weapon, Excalibur, given to him by the Lady of the Lake.

<sup>97</sup> *King James Bible* has “There were Giants in the earth in those daies” (*Genesis*, 6.4, 1611).

<sup>98</sup> *Dictionnaire des symboles*, 1982, p. 474.

One of the most remarkable chiefs of the Fomoiré is the giant Balor, whose poisonous eye, once opened, can weaken a whole army. He is killed by Lug, his grandson, who casts a stone in his open eye, at the Second Battle of Mag Tured (Guyonvarc'h, 1980, p. 57).<sup>99</sup> The episode is here transcribed from the Irish and translated into English by Whitley Stokes (1891):

IMmacomairnic de Luc[h] 7 di Bolur Birugderc esin cat[h]. Suil milldagach le *suide*. Ni horscailtie inn soul *acht* ir-roi cat[h]ænamma. Cetrar turcbaud a malaig die sol *conu* drolum omlithi triena malaig. Sluoac[h] doneceud *darsan* sól nin-geptis *fri* hocco cie pidis lir ilmili. Es de boi inn nem sin fuirri. i. *druit*[h] a adhar botar oc fulucht draidechtæ. Tanaic-seum 7 ruderctarsan fundeoiç, co ndecheid de en foulachtæ fuithi, gonid *forsan* suil dodecaid nem an foulachta iersin. *Condrecait* ierum Luc[h].

[Lugh and Balor of the Piercing Eye met in the battle. An evil eye had Balor. That eye was never opened save only on a battle-field. Four men used to lift up the lid of the eye with a polished (?) handle (which passed) through its lid. If an army looked at that eye, though they were many thousands in number they could not resist [a few] warriors. Hence had it that poisonous power. His father's druids were concocting charms. He came and looked over the window, and the fume of the concoction came under it, so that the poison of the concoction afterwards came on the eye that looked. Then he and Lugh met]. (tr. Stokes, 1891, p.100-101)

In the second version<sup>100</sup> of *The Second Battle of Mag Tured*, in which the battle between Balor and Lug is described in more detail, it is said that twenty-seven men were needed to open the giant's poisonous eye (Guyonvarc'h, 1980, p. 69). It is to be noted that in the same way as the giants fought the Olympian gods in Classical Greek mythology, the Fomoiré faced

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<sup>99</sup> Guyonvarc'h uses *Cath Maige Turedh an scél so sis ocus Genemain Bres Meic Elathain 7 a righe*, (*The Battle of Mag Tured is the forthcoming story, and the birth of Bres, son of Elatha*), edited by Whitley Stokes, *The Battle of Moytura*, in *Revue Celtique* XII, 1891, p. 52-130, from the unique manuscript Harleian 5280 (early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Gaelic, British Library, London). Guyonvarc'h adds that Stokes omitted some passages at the end of some paragraphs, missing parts of which were published by R. Thuyssen in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* xii, 1918, p. 401-406. These paragraph endings being almost entirely incomprehensible, due to deformation, bad cut, omission or cacography, Guyonvarc'h translated the very rare fragments that could be translated (*Textes mythologiques irlandais I*, 1980, p. 47).

<sup>100</sup> "This second version, entirely different, of *The Second Battle of Mag Tured*, is contained in manuscript 24 P 9 of the Royal Academy in Dublin, ff 65-97. The text was published by Brian O'Cuiv, *Cath Muighe Tuireadh, The Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin, 1945, 80 pages, [...] with no translation, which explains that the manuscript has so far remained almost unnoticed" (Guyonvarc'h, 1980, p. 60, tr. CSL). Guyonvarc'h notices that the manuscript is precisely dated from 1651-1652.

the Túatha Dé Dánann, the Irish race of gods, and it is Lug, the Polytechnician, who killed Balor.

Balor's Welsh equivalent is Yspaddaden Penkawr, in *The Mabinogi of Culhwch and Olwen*. Besides being giants, their only common point is that they both need men to raise their eyelids. No mention is made of any poisonous gaze on the part of Yspaddaden. The latter is a king, protective of his daughter, Olwen, whom Culhwch, Arthur's cousin, covets. The giant gives Olwen forty tasks to accomplish in order to win his daughter, and it is Arthur and his valiant soldiers who help Culhwch accomplish his task. Arthur possesses a great aura in the Welsh tradition, and his court is large. In comparison, the word gigantic also corresponds to the huge number of knights of Arthur's courthouses, the list of all the names stretching through five complete pages of the book (*The Mabinogion*, ed. Davies, p. 184-189) (the enumeration of names is a major feature of Celtic narrative since the protagonists' genealogy is always regarded as highly important). In Geoffrey's *Historia*, Arthur himself defeats a fierce giant who had taken refuge in the Mont-Saint-Michel after abducting a young maid and her nurse in Spain (p. 237-240). The king had previously killed another giant named Retho, on Mount Arvaius (p. 240).

Shakespeare used the word "giant" on many occasions in his plays, mostly to refer to the notion of abnormal height, sometimes playing with it, by contrasting it with dwarfishness in the oxymoron "giant-dwarf" as in *Love's Labour's Lost* (3.1.157) for instance. Apart from height, there is also a reference to the fierceness of the character in *Measure for Measure*, when Isabella says to Angelo: "O, it is excellent/ to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous / to use it like a giant" (2.2.109-110). There is a transfer of analogical meaning from the adjective "tyrannous" onto both the figure of Angelo who is the tyrannical substitute for the Duke of Vienna in the play, and the giant designated in the metaphor. The natural cruelty of the giant is therefore implied, not voiced, thus appealing to the common knowledge of the audience. It is however impossible to say conclusively whether any elements of Irish or British antiquity are present in Shakespeare's text in this particular instance. According to J.W. Lever, the reference here is to Ovid where "the revolt of the giants against Jove was a familiar myth" (*Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever, note, p. 45) and in which the giants had "the divine attribute of strength [but] without divine wisdom or forbearance, their actions were tyrannous" (*ibid.*). Giants are mentioned in Geoffrey and Holinshed, so the motif may have come both from the knowledge of the Classical text or from insular Chronicles, and via them from Celtic narratives.

However, another ‘gigantic’ character, belonging to a 13<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Norman romance, famous in England and France until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, appears word for word in Shakespeare’s *King John* (1.1.225) and *Henry VIII* (5.3.20).<sup>101</sup> It is Colbrand the Giant, a champion of the Danes who comes to invade England, and who is confronted by the English hero Guy of Warwick in the eponymous story. In *Guy of Warwick*,<sup>102</sup> he is described as coming from Africa, a mighty devilish creature, associated with blackness:

A geaunt he [the Danish king] haþ brouzt wiþ him  
Out of Aufrike stout and grim. (Zupitza, ed., Part III, p. 577-578)  
A Geauntstyf and stronge [...]  
Blake visage he hathe to-fore  
In bateyle men dredyn him more  
Than sixty knyztis that armyd wore.  
Colbrond ys hys name. (p. 579)  
Hyt was the devyllys as men seyde.  
Many a man was of hym a-drad:  
All was blake that he onhad. (p. 597)

This description mixes traits reminiscent of the fiendish Fomoir of the Irish *Book of Conquests* together with Moorish characteristics. *Cymbeline* too has exotic giants, with “impious turbans on” (3.3.6) about whom Valerie Wayne notes that “Early modern romances often associated giants with Saracens, hence the reference to *impious* (irreverent) turbans through a misleading confusion of pagan with non-Christian cultures” (*Cymbeline*, note p. 243-244). The devilish character of the giants is displaced onto the enemy of the time of the crusades resulting in a syncretism which indicates that the motif travelled through the Middle Ages. Yet, a note of Ancient insularity remains despite the Early Modern fondness for exoticism. In *Cymbeline*, the three characters in act 3 scene 3, namely Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus, known as Morgan, Polydore and Cadwal, enter “from a cave” (3.3 and 4.2) the mouth of which must be visible to the audience during a performance.<sup>103</sup> The scene is set in Wales, where the characters have taken refuge, and evinces an atmosphere of ancient tales and legends, the cave being the dwelling of giants or fairies, or an entrance to the fairy world. Therefore, more than simply an association of the characters with “primitive people [...] ‘fit

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<sup>101</sup> Holinshed also mentions the Giant Colbrand (*Henry VIII*, p. 420, note 20).

<sup>102</sup> *The Legend of Guy of Warwick*, from the Auchinlek Manuscript, 1330-40 (the Advocates’ Library, Edinburgh) and from MS. 107, 1470s (Caius College, Cambridge).

<sup>103</sup> This recalls the hell-mouth at the Valenciennes mystery pageants in 1548.

for the mountains and barbarous caves' (TN, 4.1.47)" (*Cymbeline*, note p. 243), they appear as creatures from ancient lore:

A goodly day not to keep house with such  
Whose roof's as low as ours. Stoop, boys, this gate  
Instructs you how t'adore the heavens and bows you  
To a morning's holy office. The gates of monarchs  
Are arched so high that giants may jet through  
And keep their impious turban on without  
Good morrow to the sun. Hail, thou fair heaven!  
We house i' th' rock, yet use thee not so hardly  
As prouder livers do. (*Cymbeline*, 3.3.1-9)

Worshippers of heaven and the sun, the men have become close to nature, in a way of life reminiscent of Ancient peoples. Moreover, in this cue, Shakespeare creates an antithetical architecture of low-roofed and high-arched dwellings, the low cave belonging to the exiled men and the gigantic palace to monarchs. Yet, Arviragus and Guiderius are princes, King Cymbeline's sons, and they are thus giants in a small cave, obliged to stoop. The antithesis turns into an oxymoronic analogy of the type of Berowne's "senior-junior, giant-dwarf" in *Love's Labour's Lost* (3.1.157). The princes are young, therefore dwarfish, but they are from a royal family, therefore also gigantic in status. This paradox expresses some diegetic tension since the princes do not know they are Cymbeline's sons, abducted by Belarius in revenge for royal injustice. Belarius's comment on the social status of monarchs is echoed on the walls of the cave like verbal frescoes, in a manner that diffracts meaning, nourishes the psychological depth of the characters and conveys the image of the long lost giants from ancient lore who remain hidden beneath the exotic surface of Early Modern romance.

Whether Classical or Celtic as we have seen, the giant motif belongs to mythology. It was used throughout the Middle Ages and also in Shakespeare's plays. However, such types of motifs being clearly mythological, they are not easily traceable in history which makes it difficult to provide a dating element to resource texts. To counter this, the matter of Britain offers a precise example, visible in both archaeology and literature, to help us situate further the origin of the Arthurian legend in time. In *The Mabinogi of Culhwch and Olwen*, besides the obvious presence of the giant Yspaddaden, there are specifically Celtic elements, like magic or the triad, the specific musicality of the writing too, but there is also one detail which

is found in archaeology and whose presence in the text reveals the attachment of the Arthurian matter to the Celtic or Romano-Celtic time: the torc.

#### 4. The “golden-torqued ladies”

Acknowledging the place of Arthur in the Celtic world through a concrete and precise example will help measure the quasi-archaeological or literary-archaeological trace of this world within Shakespeare’s text whenever Arthurian elements appear. In other words, if A is in B and B is in C, then at least traces of A are present in C. This syllogism suggests that Celtic elements (A), the torc in our example, adjoin Arthurian elements (B), here king Arthur’s presence in the story of Culhwch and Olwen, so that when Arthurian motifs (B) are present in Shakespeare (C), Celtic elements, or at least traces of them, also appear in the plays. The torc is a valuable example because it provides one of the rare links between archaeology and literature, in which a Celtic cultural and artistic object potentially from the Iron Age appears as though parachuted anachronistically, in a Medieval text. In the story of Culhwch and Olwen, in the king’s court, women of high rank are described as “the gentle, golden-torqued ladies of this island” (*The Mabinogion*, p. 188). The original Welsh is “yr mwyn merchet eur dyrchogyon yr ynys honn” (*Red Book of Hergest*, Rhys 1887, p. 112), “eurdorhog” or “aurdorhog” meaning “wearing a golden torque”.<sup>104</sup> The word “torque” (also spelt “torc”) in Davies’s translation indicates the metal necklace, an insignia of rank worn by both men and women from the Hallstadt period onwards (and sometimes even before, in the Bronze Age) (Kruta, 2000, p. 843).<sup>105</sup> The fact that the ladies at Arthur’s court wear torques thus indicates a princely assembly and the presence of Gwenhyfar (Guinevere) as “chief queen” (*The Mabinogion*, ed. Davies, p. 188) confirms it. Archeology has revealed ornaments such as the Great Torc, “one of the most elaborated objects of the ancient world” (British Museum). The ornamentations on the torc are a British La Tène style of Celtic art: the swirling embossed curves and the incised hatched texture create an intricate design offset with empty spaces.<sup>106</sup> The torc was found in Snettisham, Norfolk, where lay the territory of the

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<sup>104</sup> <http://www.geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html> (accessed 23/6/18)

<sup>105</sup> A rigid necklace, the ‘torc’ (or ‘torque’) can be either open or fastened. Its noun comes from the Latin *torques*, associated to the twisted pattern, however, torques are not always twisted although they are generally represented as such (Kruta, 2000, p. 843). Torcs were commonly worn in Britain and in Europe, especially during the Iron Age. They were sometimes very heavy (*The Great Torc* weighs more than 1kg) and were potentially used only on special occasions (British Museum).

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/oct/04/celts-great-torque-snettisham-ward-british-museum-alice-roberts> (accessed 07/08/18).

Iceni,<sup>107</sup> the tribe who resisted the Roman army during the invasion, led by their warrior queen Boudicca in 60-61 AD, although the necklace was buried in 100 BC, before the great queen lived. Another torc was found a little later, as part of the very subtle jewellery of *The Winchester Hoard* which was probably designed for people of high rank, perhaps a king and a queen. The period is that of Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul and his invasion of Britain in 55-54 BC. The design of the necklace and brooch is different from that of the torc of Snettisham (see annex) and it was possibly created by a Roman craft worker, which shows the interaction between insular and Roman cultures (British Museum). This particular detail is of importance as a means of locating the actual historical period in which Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is set, even though the awareness that the playwright and his audience had of Celtic-Roman time remains to be determined.

All in all, one very specific nominal compound, "golden-torqued", suggests the ancient aura of the Arthurian matter. It is insular Antiquity that surfaces through the ages via the Welsh *Mabinogi*, but also via Geoffrey, and if torcs do not exist in Shakespeare's texts, the matter of Britain itself does, through the presence of Celtic motifs within Arthurian narratives. The latter, present in Shakespeare's texts, although in a diffuse way, drag along with them elements of the ancient culture of the British Isles. The method here is to locate Celtic elements by observing the traces they leave in Early Modern narratives that are closer to us in time. The image of the torc remains obscured in Shakespeare, but its presence shines through the figure of Arthur himself who resisted the passage of time because the resplendence of his character paralleled the brilliance and durability of Ancient golden jewellery, and perhaps for political reasons too. This metaphor illustrates the fact that his aura was tremendous, to the point that the story of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was believed to be historically true throughout the Middle-Ages (much like Brutus's narrative was thought to be factual) and that some, like the Scottish kings James IV and V, but also the Tudors, claimed to be of Arthurian descent as will be developed in the third part of chapter two.

## 5. The construction of Arthur's aura

The *Historia* was certainly political, since it provided the newly installed Norman king, Henry I (1100-1135) and later Stephen (1135-1154), with reasons why England, whose glory

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<sup>107</sup> <https://theheritagetrust.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/before-heavy-ploughing-threatened-our-past/> (accessed 07/08/18).



was enhanced by its Trojan roots, continually fell into the hands of invaders. Geoffrey suggests that despite prestigious origins, intestine family quarrels have always imperiled the realm. Brutus and Lear divide the land, thus potentially dividing their unity and strength to resist enemies, and Arthur dies in mortal combat with his nephew, Mordred. However, according to Geoffrey, by the time of his death, King Arthur had activated a policy of conquest worthy of the Roman Empire.

Conceived through the intervention of magic, Arthur was born from Uther Pendragon and Ygernia, Duchess of Cornwall. He succeeded his father at the age of fifteen and as king of Britain\*<sup>108</sup> he began a determined and aggressive policy of conquest. He opposed the Saxons, Picts and Scots, first on the river Douglas and then in York a city that he besieged but was forced to abandon. With the help of the king of Brittany, Arthur repeatedly beat the Saxons, the Picts, Scots and Irish in a battle at Loch Lomond, in Scotland. He then restored York, sailed to Ireland, defeated King Guilmaurius and the Irish and conquered Iceland while Gotland and the Orkneys also submitted to him. After a twelve-year period of peace, Arthur's aura had spread and he was feared by all, which "encouraged him to conceive the idea of conquering the whole of Europe" (Monmouth, trans. Thorpe, 1966, p. 222). With his knights, he sailed to and conquered Norway and Denmark, and gave the former to his brother-in-law, Loth:

Once they were sure of their victory, they invested the cities of Norway and set fire to them everywhere. They scattered the rural population and continued to give full licence to their savagery until they had forced all Norway and all Denmark, too, to accept Arthur's rule. As soon as he had subdued these countries and raised Loth to the kingship of Norway, Arthur sailed off to Gaul. (Geoffrey, p. 223)

This depiction is far from that of the courtly hero envisaged by French romance, and is closer to the ethos of the war chief. In K. H. Jackson's *A Celtic Miscellany*, an unknown Irish author in the 9<sup>th</sup> century describes the atmosphere of a destructive battle which took place in Magh Mucraimhe, a plain in County Galway, and in which a prince named Art took part:

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<sup>108</sup> For greater clarity, where a doubt might be introduced between the Ancient and the Modern senses of the terms 'British' or 'Britain', an asterisk will be added to notify a reference to Antiquity, such as 'British\*' and 'Britain\*', referring to the native Welsh, and English, cultures of the British Isles. However, quotations will not be modified by the addition of an asterisk.

There were no angels there, except only two, and they were above the heads of Art wherever he went in the army, because of the just character of that rightful prince. Then either of the two armies made for the other. Fierce was the onslaught they made on either side. Bitter sights were seen there – the white fog of chalk and lime going up to the clouds from the shields and targes as they were struck with the edges of swords and the points of spears and arrows, which were skillfully parried by the heroes; the beating and shattering of the bosses as they were belaboured with swords and stones; the noise of the pelting weapons; the gushing and shedding of blood and gore from the limbs of the champions and the sides of the warriors. (Jackson, 1971, p. 186)

Once more, a glimpse of early Medieval texts makes it possible to catch echoes from ancient times, which reveal surprising details such as the whitewashed early Irish shields (Jackson, note p. 186). Arthur's ferocity as depicted by Geoffrey lies not in contradiction with the way an ancient Irish battle might have taken place. The protagonist evolved over time from a bloody warrior king to a romance hero. His name itself is of major importance as far as the Celtic language is concerned, and it will be of importance in our demonstration especially in relation to King Lear, as we shall see in chapter 6. As Philippe Walter argues in *Arthur, l'ours et le roi [Arthur, the Bear and the King]*,<sup>109</sup> the philological root of the first name Arthur, or Artus, Artu in French manuscripts, is Art, like the prince in the extract above, which is “un ancient nom de l'ours” [an ancient name of the bear] (2002, p. 79-80). Walter explains that in Middle and Modern Breton, ‘bear’ is *arz*; in Old Breton and in Irish, there is the form *art*, in Gaulish *artos* and in Welsh *arth*. He also cites the work of C. J. Guyonvarc'h in this respect:

Il existe dans toutes les langues celtiques une série de mots archaïques dérivés du thème \*arto-‘ours’. Ils sont très tôt sortis de l’usage mais ils ont subsisté en gaulois et il en est resté jusqu’à la fin du Moyen-Age dans un nombre appréciable de toponymes et d’anthroponymes irlandais, gallois et bretons. Le principal est le nom du roi Arthur qu’il est inutile de vouloir expliquer par un anthroponyme latin Artorius. Il ressort en effet que le nom de l’ours a fait l’objet d’une métaphore appliquée au roi.

[In all the Celtic languages, there exists a series of archaic words derived from the theme \*arto-‘bear’. They very early went out of use but they survived in Gaulish and some remained until the end of the Middle-Ages in an appreciable

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<sup>109</sup> Tr. CSL.

number of Irish, Welsh and Breton toponyms and anthroponyms. The most prominent one is Arthur, which it would be useless to explain by a Latin anthroponym Arturius. Indeed it appears that the name of the bear was the object of a metaphor applied to the king]. (Guyonvarc'h, *Celticum*, 16, 1967, p. 238, in Walter, 2002, p. 80, tr. CSL)

To support his argument, Walter then cites marginalia observed by Edmond Faral, which is noted in a Latin manuscript of the *Historia Britonum*: “Artur, latine translatum, sonat ursum terribilem”, which means “translated into Latin, the name of Arthur designates the terrible bear” (Faral, 1929, t. 1, p. 134, n. 3 and p. 138, n. 3, in Walter, 2002, p. 80). Walter develops his argument further, but without going into too much detail at this stage it is worth noting that the bear was associated with kingship much before the lion was, since for a very long time in Europe he had been the king of animals. The lion only supplanted the bear in the Middle-Ages when the Church endlessly sought to fight him because of his wild nature. This is exactly what Michel Pastoureau sets out to explain in *L'Ours, histoire d'un roi déchu [The Bear, History of a Fallen King]*<sup>110</sup> (2015). Arthur's wild and fearless nature<sup>111</sup> is expressed in the early Chronicles such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's and this is profoundly attached to him, inscribed in the signification of his own name.

In Gaul, the king went on to fight, this time with the Roman Tribune Frollo, who ruled in the name of the Emperor Leo. In his army, he had all the men of the countries he had vanquished plus a part of the army of the Gauls that he had bought with gifts. Little could be done to resist the British\* king as Geoffrey says. The story reads fluently and Frollo's death is told in a lyrical style: “At this blow, Frollo fell to the ground, drummed the earth with his heels and breathed his soul into the winds” (p. 225). Arthur then subdued the whole of Gaul, held courts in Paris and a plenary court at Caerleon in Glamorganshire (Glamorgan is now divided into three counties, and the ruins of Caerleon are now in Monmouthshire), in South Wales (p. 226). However, through the mediation of an envoy, Rome informed Arthur that his tyrannical behaviour in Gaul had insulted the Senate “to which the entire world owes submission” (p. 231). Furthermore, Arthur had refused to pay the money tribute due to the Empire since Julius Caesar had conquered the country (this aspect is of particular importance in *Cymbeline* and will be dealt with in chapter 4). As a consequence, Arthur was summoned to Rome, to be tried and punished for all his wrongs. Refusing to submit to Roman law, he

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<sup>110</sup> Tr. CSL.

<sup>111</sup> This aspect and the relationship between the king and the bear need much more development, which will be done, as stated above, in chapter 6, dealing with King Lear's nature and kingship.

successfully talked his men into rebelling and set out for the continent (p. 232-233) where he was involved in a series of battles against Rome; Arthur also “hacked off” (p. 255) the heads of two kings and killed the dragon at the Mont-Saint-Michel. This motif of the severed head appears in *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline* and will also be evoked in chapter 4.

After the winter season spent in Gaul, he set out for Rome, and while crossing the mountains, he heard of the treachery of his nephew, Mordred, whom he had entrusted with the rule of the kingdom in his absence. The young man had crowned himself king, and as Geoffrey wrote: “what is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage” (p. 257). Geoffrey’s style, plain and direct with carefully chosen vividly realized descriptions, must have been very appealing to those who read or heard his narrative. The oral quality of the account shows through in the following example: “About this particular matter, most noble Duke, Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing. He will, however, in his own poor style and without wasting words, describe the battle which our most famous King fought against his nephew, once he had returned to Britain\* after his victory” (p. 257-258). The direct address suggests an oral trajectory for the narrative. Moreover, Geoffrey describes battles in a very engaging way which to some at the time must have been as engrossing as it is today to play video games such as *For Honour* or *Skyrim*. Eventually, Arthur had to abandon his attack against Rome and go back to Britain\* where, in a fatal combat against his nephew’s army, he “was mortally wounded and carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that the wounds might be attended to” (p. 261). Nothing more is heard of Arthur.

The legendary hero Geoffrey created was endowed with an aura that was equivalent to that of Brutus, the latter facilitating the creation of a founding mythology for Britain, and Arthur demonstrating an incredible strength which led his exploits to be compared with the conquests of the Roman Empire. He did not vanquish Rome completely because he missed the opportunity to march on the capital of the Empire, but he mounted a resistance which freed his people from any submission to the Romans, thereby acquiring the aura of a powerful British\* hero, who was ultimately vanquished by quarrels provoked by family grudges.

A few years after Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his *Historia Regum Britanniae* around the year 1136, Wace issued a translation in the “romanz language of Anglo-Norman” (Cooper, p. 24). He used two versions of Geoffrey’s *Historia* to write his *Brut*, an embellished and amplified translation which was to lead to the 12<sup>th</sup> century romance later called the Arthurian cycle. Arthur’s aura as a complete war chief was already established in Geoffrey

who wrote that “the fame of Arthur’s generosity and bravery spread to the very ends of the earth” (*Historia*, ix.11, p. 222), to the extent that people wanted to imitate the “code of courtliness” (*ibid*) he had developed in his households, as well as the way his knights were armed and dressed (*ibid*). The king and his most faithful knights were raised to the rank of heroes and became role models yet it is Wace who added the motif of the Round Table and its fellowship of knights, thus opening the way to the emergence of many subsequent reimaginings. Among them, were Layamon’s *Brut* (c. 1200),<sup>112</sup> Chrétien de Troyes’s works from 1165 onwards, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, dating from the thirteenth century and attributed to Walter Map, in the fifteenth century, Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*, and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596). Also, the oral tradition produced broadside ballads which subsequently appeared in print, as Lacy observes: “The history of the broadside ballad has been intertwined from the first with that of the Arthurian tradition. The earliest broadsides in England, dating from the last two decades of the fifteenth century, were the work of the presses of William Caxton, the first editor of Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*” (Lacy, 2013, p. 55). This tradition was responsible for the dissemination of the Arthurian matter to new generations and for prolonging its legacy, although its aura had lost some of its momentum by the time of Shakespeare.

Holinshed, another of Shakespeare’s resources also dealt with the narrative of Arthur. The *Chronicles* give the dates of 516 or 517 for the accession of the young fifteen-year-old successor of Uther Pendragon, thus confirming all the other histories which situate Arthur’s battles during the Saxon invasions era. In her account of the tradition of the *Brut* chronicles that spread from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Marie-Françoise Alamichel explains the faithfulness of the authors of the various histories to their sources, saying that they were pleased to (re)tell well-known stories mainly because they believed in the historical truth of their writings: “the contents are, on the whole, always the same with very minor differences. Only the length of the episode varies a lot from one version to another. The main explanation for this faithfulness to the sources can be found in the genre itself of our texts, for our authors or compilers never doubt the historical truth of the chronicles they translate or adapt” (Alamichel, 2013, p. 266). Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, published much later than the Medieval *Brut* narratives, discuss several issues such as the original presence of giants on the island of Britain\*, or the very aura of King Arthur: “Of this Arthur manie things are written beyond

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<sup>112</sup> M. F. Alamichel notes that if Layamon tended to suppress the courtly references present in Wace, his direct source, he often added references belonging to the matter of Britain, to the tradition of Celtic legends. In <http://layamon.free.fr/index.html> (accessed 30/06/19).

credit, for that there is no ancient author of authoritie that con|firmeth the same: but surelie as may be thought he was some woorthie man, and by all likelihood a great enimie to the Saxons, by reason whereof the Welsh|men which are the verie Britains in déed, have him in famous remembrance” (The *Chronicles*, 1587, *The Fift Booke of the Historie of England, The State of the Britains under the British kings*, chapter 12, p. 90).<sup>113</sup> Although the compilation acknowledges a certain exaggeration in the depiction of King Arthur, or the claim that no author can finally confirm the authenticity of what was said about him, no real doubt is expressed about his actual historical existence.

Yet, in this time of the re-publication of Holinshed in 1587, Arthur still appears as a Welsh hero and has not been integrated as an English one. The people of Wales are regarded as being closer to the ancient “Britons”, the “verie (true) Britains”, and Arthur is their kin, the English having opted for another means to explain their ancestry. The *Chronicles* present a much shorter version of Arthur’s high deeds than Geoffrey’s *Historia*, and if the main traits are the same, a considerable amount of doubt is introduced together with an historiographical analysis that attempts to find reasons why the Welsh exaggerated the performance of their champion:

And if he had not béene reuoked and called home to resist his coosen Mordred, that was sonne to Loth king of Pightland that rebelled in his countrie, he had passed to Rome, intending to make himself emperor, and afterward to vanquish the other emperor, who then ruled the empire. But for so much as there is not anie approued author who dooth speake of anie such doing, the Britains are thought to have registred mere fables in sted of true matters, vpon a vaine desire to aduance more than reason would, this Arthur their noble champion, as the Frenchmen haue done their Rouland, and di|uerse others. (1587, vol. 2, p. 89)<sup>114</sup>

Thus, the Welsh have developed a reputation for telling tales, “fables”, or fictional narratives, as opposed to “true matters”. The chronicler probably refers to the Welsh authors of former histories, Monmouth, Nennius and Gildas, or to the Welsh Arthurian matter in general, but “the Welsh” can also be understood as the ‘race’ of people in general. They are the others, living elsewhere, on the margins of the kingdom, and are also associated with pre-historic times, being the “verie Britains”, the descendants of the people who fought the Saxons, and the first inhabitants of the Isle of Britain. As the *OED* states, originally, the adjective “Welsh”

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<sup>113</sup> Also available at *The Holinshed Project*, [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0203](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0203), (accessed 19/08/18).

<sup>114</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0203](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0203) (accessed 28/09/19).

was used to characterize people “belonging to the native British population of England, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxons”. It is in later use that the word came to define the population “belonging to Wales by birth or descent; forming (part of) the native population of Wales” (*OED*). According to the Chronicle, the Welsh (of the origins) have assimilated stories of olden times that were part of their culture, while the English had quasi-scientific alternative explanations to offer. The chronicler seems to separate the English from this ancient past, as if some kind of backwardness was associated with it. Thus, together with the Welsh, Arthur has been relegated to the margins.

Therefore, an evolution in the reception of mythological histories is confirmed. As the following review argues, in her chapter entitled “Holinshed and Mythological History” Laura Ashe explores the King Arthur of *The Chronicles*:

The chapter examines the *Chronicles*' treatment of King Arthur, who is both historical figure and contemporary ideal and justification, equally present in the chronicled past and in the present landscape. It concludes that although late sixteenth-century historians, chorographers, and antiquarians were a long way from discarding the origin myths of Britain's ancient past, the material, techniques, and attitudes which would make it possible to do were already in place. (oxfordhandbooks.com, accessed 19/08/2018)

At the end of the sixteenth century, Arthur's reputation as a great king was ready to be debunked. Although his story was as familiar as the legends of Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton<sup>115</sup> and Robin Hood (Cooper, 2004, p. 33), in Shakespeare's time, a paradoxical decline in his reputation was observed alongside the reference to the great hero.

Together with superimposed layers of meaning, Arthurian transtextual references in Shakespeare carry with them a fragment of insular antiquity, as we have attempted to demonstrate. Not only is Arthur part of the creation of a later Medieval mythologizing of national identity, together with his competitor, Brutus, but also, he appears to be one of the first “Welsh” heroes, that is to say, one of the most ancient of the British Isles. The common use of magic attached to his character and stories makes him a perfect representative of Celtic narratives. Even though the Arthurian period is thought to be that of the era of the Saxon invasions, it is not beyond possibility that some details present in the narratives may have

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<sup>115</sup> Bevis of Hampton (of Southampton), the legendary warrior, is mentioned in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, when Norfolk describes the meeting and wrestling of King Henry of England and Francis of France at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. He says that seeing these two kings fight gave credit to the very existence of the “former fabulous story” of Bevis (1.1.28-38).

been inherited from earlier times, with some, like the torc, dating from as early as the Iron or even Bronze Age.

So far we have explored the extent of Arthur's aura, mainly in the British Isles, which has allowed the measuring of a hidden dimension contained in such references in Shakespeare's time. Let us now investigate in more detail the reasons for Arthur's downfall and the treatment of further Arthurian references in Shakespeare's texts, and discuss the paradoxical use of such references in Early Modern England, divided as they were between admiration and derision.





## CHAPTER 2

# Arthur's dimension and downfall in Shakespeare's plays

This chapter focuses on the study of Arthurian motifs with a view to enhancing the Celtic aspect of the matter of Britain and its visibility in Shakespeare's texts. In addition to the Chronicles and Celtic mythological literature, the plays selected for discussion will be *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *King Lear*.

The absence of King Arthur from the Pageant of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost* (5.1.95 and 5.2.527-528) is worth noticing. The tradition of the Nine Worthies is of Medieval origin and usually presents three groups of famous figures, composed of three Christians, three Jews and three pagans (*LLL*, note 5.1.95, p. 179). King Arthur was traditionally part of the group of the three Christians. Although substitutions were common, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, only five worthies appear in the pageant: Pompey, Alexander, Judas Maccabeus, Hercules and Hector. Arthur was not chosen to represent "the heroic, active life [...] of the summit of heroism and chivalry, associated with 'worth' and 'praise'" (*ibid.*). While it is probably better for Arthur's glory not to appear in this parody of the Nine Worthies, the playwright's decision to omit him indicates that in Elizabethan England, the indigenous once praised character has given way to more exotic, either Biblical or Classical, alternatives.

The humanist trend, following the rediscovery of Latin and Greek literatures, tended to focus on the East and on the Classics, in a general movement that relegated traditional romances and ballads to a secondary importance, and with them, the native elements they contained. Furthermore, the religious factor was also significant in this decline. Helen Cooper emphasizes the fact that it became customary to deride traditional romances after the Reformation because they belonged to an unwanted popish tradition. She observes:

The reformation added a new danger to the reading of the traditional romances, for they had been written, as Ascham noted, ‘when Papistrie, as a standing poole, covered and overflowed all England’. [...] The texts promoted a Catholic ideology, but that in turn had become socially dangerous. The romances were condemned for not conforming to the new theology, to the new requirements for pious and Protestant reading, or (in the eyes of cultural critics such as Thomas Nashe, perhaps their worst failure) to the new humanist standards of rhetorical excellence. It became fashionable to sneer at them. (Cooper, 2004, p. 38)

Cooper adds that despite the humanist and the protestant trends, these now neglected texts continued to circulate and remained familiar. Clearly, and in part, the oral tradition kept these narratives alive while their written versions continued to fill the imaginations of young pupils such as Robert Ashley, born in 1565 and who was writing in 1614, with enthusiasm:

‘I remember how when I was a boy and my masters kept me at hard work, if by chance some book fell into my hands that contained some fabulous and useless fictions such as were told about Bevis of Hamtoun or Guy of Warwick, or the history of Valentine and Orson, or the life of Arthur king of Britain and his knights of the Round table, or portents and monsters of a kind that never existed, or else indeed were useless and vain things surpassing all belief added in by monks with nothing better to do (made up in an earlier age to entrap the ignorant common man and ensnare him with pleasures)’ he would abandon play, sleep and work to read them. (Ronald S. Crane, ‘The reading of an Elizabethan Youth’, *Modern Philology* 11, 1913-14, p. 3, in Cooper, 2004, p. 444)

Ashley’s words intensify the paradox between the popular fondness for romance stories and the ambient discourse regarding such works: they were old fictions, designed “to entrap the ignorant”; they were created by monks who had “nothing better to do” and were not considered as didactic and edifying works. Moreover their ancient origin in insular Celtic culture is lost as the awareness of an older indigenous culture, older than Catholicism, becomes obscure to writers like Robert Ashley and probably to others too.

Some biographical details lead us to think that William Shakespeare, born in 1564, could have been in a similar situation to the young Robert Ashley. Stephen Greenblatt speculates that William’s father, John Shakespeare, could have been “the official who helped to hire the Catholic schoolmasters Hunt, Jenkins, and Cottam” at Stratford school (Greenblatt 2004, p. 102). These recusant teachers could have favoured certain readings mentioned above,

or together with those generated by Protestant dogmatists. Greenblatt advances the idea that John Shakespeare was split between an official public persona as a Protestant and one who harboured recusant Catholic inclinations. Could Shakespeare the playwright have introduced into his own writing part of what he may have read at school, or at home? In any case, as Greenblatt further argues: “the sly blend of displacement and appropriation, the refashioning of traditional materials into secular performance, and the confounding of the sacred and the profane are characteristic of virtually the whole of Shakespeare’s achievement as dramatist and poet” (p. 112). Shakespeare the poet did render some elements of a traditional past in his work and maybe Thomas Jenkins, schoolmaster of Welsh origin at Stratford grammar school from 1575 to 1579 (Maguin, 1996, p. 67) encouraged young William to discover the writings of Geoffrey and the romances.

Caught in a paradoxical move of rejection and attraction, such works also constituted the bulk of a native culture and could, as Helen Cooper suggests, be useful in the “great Elizabethan creation of a distinctively national culture and literature [...] [while] Virgil and Ariosto and Heliodorus could not” (Cooper, p. 39). Nevertheless, the transformation and derision of indigenous romances – notwithstanding their often continental origins or influences – suggest that the culture they transmitted remained partially obscure, or not explicitly acknowledged. Cooper goes on to suggest that “it was not humanism nor Protestantism that finally drove such works out of high cultural visibility but satire” (*ibid.*). Thus, satire or the public ridicule that these indigenous tales attracted can be seen as having sounded the death-knell of romances. Yet, to mock the romance motifs and characters is also a way of transmitting them. What has to be taken into account is that romances underwent an evolution, as Cooper explains: “From being the reading-matter of kings, the stories became the amusement of the semi-literate, the provincial, and children: they were re-absorbed into the popular culture from which the early romance writers had been so keen to distinguish themselves” (Cooper, p. 40). Yet, much in the same way as he appeared in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (first published in 1590) the character of Arthur was also the subject of high society drama in Elizabethan times.

The title of the play by Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*,<sup>116</sup> performed for the Queen at Greenwich in February 1587 in the thirtieth year of her reign, seems to lay the emphasis on an unfortunate hero who is not even presented as king in the title of the play. The

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<sup>116</sup> The references are from *The Misfortunes of Arthur* by Thomas Hughes and Others, London, Robert Robinson, 1587 (reproduced in facsimile in 1911 by The Tudor Facsimile Texts).

play argues that ill luck ('misfortune') and family quarrels absorbed this once mighty sovereign, who was betrayed by his own descendants:

See heere the store of great Pendragons broode,  
The t'one quite dead, the t'other hastening on,  
As men, the Sonne but green, the Sire but ripe,  
Yet both forestalde ere half their race were run.  
As kinges the mightiest monarches of this age,  
Yet both supprest and vanquisht by themselves

(T. Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, Epilogus, ed. Payne Collier 1828, p. 79)

As a tragedy drawing mainly on Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, the greatness of the Pendragons was acknowledged in this play, which flattered the Tudor interest in King Arthur (Henry VII called his eldest son Arthur, a significant name for an heir to the throne).<sup>117</sup> The fact that it was presented to the Queen and that even "Maister frauncis Bacon" participated in the project – it is mentioned in the conclusion of the play that he "partly devised" the "dumbe showes" (p. 83) – indicates that the character was still held to be of some importance, at least at court. However, as we approach the end of the epilogue of the play, the character of Arthur becomes nothing but the shadow of what he once was: "Him, whom Morning found both stout and strong, / the Evening left all groveling on the ground" (Epilogus, p. 79). It is the character in the story who is "groveling on the ground" because of the mortal wound inflicted upon him by his son Mordred, but, metadramatically, it is also King Arthur's aura which gradually shrinks after a long existence in the exhausting world of storytelling. Shakespeare did not write a whole play about Arthur, but references appear, scattered here and there in several of his plays.

Let us consider what remains of Arthur lie in Shakespeare's texts, how they are exploited and how indicative they might be of an Ancient British past. This analysis will primarily involve *King Lear* although three other plays include references to the Arthurian world: *1 Henry IV*, also refers to the prophet Merlin, *2 Henry IV* hints at "Arthur's court" and "Arthur's show", while *Love's Labour's Lost* refers to Queen Guinevere. Therefore, we will first devote our attention to the king's court, and his dwelling, Camelot, and from there proceed to an analysis of the multi-layered motif of the goose related to the Arthurian world

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<sup>117</sup> John Buxton, *Elizabethan Taste*, 1963, p. 11.

of women, concluding with the prophetic Merlin as an example of the druid's role within a primarily oral culture, yet also deeply anchored in the Early Modern world.

## 1. Arthur

### 1.1. Camelot

Camelot, Arthur's famous legendary castle is mentioned once in *King Lear* by the earl of Kent. The latter, always a faithful servant, has been banished by the king, and comes back into royal service disguised as a gruff retainer. Charged with the mission of delivering a letter to the king's daughter, Regan, Kent arrives at Gloucester's house where she stays with her husband and meets Oswald, Goneril's servant, who has also come to deliver a letter to Regan. Kent recognizes the servant as being a traitor to the king and the whole of act 2 scene 2 consists of a series of insults issued by Kent to Oswald, which finally leads to him being put in the stocks. Kent's last direct address to Oswald is: "Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain, I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot" (2.2.81-82).

Firstly, the reference seems to serve in structural terms as a culmination of a series of invectives since a similar line opens the scene when Kent says: "If I had you in Lipsbury pinfold, I would make thee care for me" (2.2.9-10). The identical structural patterns, beginning with "if" clauses followed by verbs in the past tense and accompanied by the use of the conditional "would", are the only two examples of this usage in the scene. In both cases, Oswald is associated with an animal, a goose in the former reference, an apostrophic metaphor we will return to, and a stray or distrained animal, possibly cattle, in the latter. Then, both lines mention places, which are of considerable interest in connection with our argument.

The note to the R. A. Foakes's Arden Third Series text mentions that "Lipsbury pinfold" is "usually taken to mean 'trapped between my teeth', Lipsbury [being] lips-town, and a *pinfold* is a pound for stray animals" (note p. 225). There is no place called Lipsbury but apparently there is no place called Camelot either. The lines echo each other, delivering an implicit message of doubt as to their existence. Yet, there is a third geographical location to be considered: "Sarum plain", which actually does exist. Its presence in the text tips the scale in favour of a possible location of Camelot, or at least, it raises a doubt. Sarum plain (Salisbury plain) and the site of Old Sarum, are situated near Salisbury (New Sarum), in

Wiltshire, in the South of England. The new town was created in the 1220s with the building of the new cathedral, while the old site at Old Sarum was gradually abandoned as a major administrative site and the old cathedral, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was demolished.

The site of Old Sarum, that began as an Iron Age hill-fort (around 400BC), was constantly reutilized over time, successively by the Romano-British\*, the Anglo-Saxons, by the Normans and during the reigns of Henry I and II. Then, as English Heritage mention on their website: “the castle seems to have limped on as an administrative centre into the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the end finally coming in 1514, when Henry VIII made over the ‘stones called the castle or tower of Old Sarum’ to Thomas Compton, together with the right to carry away the material”.<sup>118</sup> The stones were reused as building material and the site was abandoned. By the time the antiquary John Leland visited the site, around the year 1540, nothing much remained of it, yet he was able to sense what it once was:

The cite of Old-Saresbyri standing on a hille is distant from the new a mile by north weste, and is in cumpace half a mile and more.

This thing hath been auncient and exceeding strong: but syns the building of New-Saresbyri it went totally to ruin.

[...] now ther is not one house nother [with]in Old-Saresbyri or without in[habited].

[...] Ther was a right fair and strong castelle within Old-Saresbyri [...] Much notable ruinus of this castelle yet ther remaynith.

The diche that environed the old toun was a very deepe and strong thyng.

*(The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543, Part III, ff. 59-60, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, 1907, p. 260-261)*

The site, which retained its administrative use until 1832 despite its lack of population, was obviously known in Shakespeare’s time when antiquarianism was in vogue. Leland wrote some years before Shakespeare’s birth, but the ancient character of the place appeared to him, although he was not precise. Thus, by using the name of “Sarum”, Shakespeare added a note of olden times to his play which helped situate it in a past that, although quite vague, was likely to correspond to the period in which he set his *King Lear*. Consequently, since it appears in the same location, Camelot is potentially presented as an ancient locus too.

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/old-sarum/history/> (accessed 26/10/18). English Heritage cite the letters of Henry VIII: *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, vol 1, no. 5715, 26 December 1514.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to situate King Arthur's legendary dwelling. Yet, Kent's metonymic structure "If I had you upon Sarum plain, / I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot" at least suggests a rhetorical binary correlation between the two places and may possibly reveal an association of Old Sarum itself with Camelot. But other loci may be also designated as potential candidates for the mythic dwelling of King Arthur. As the note in R.A. Foakes' Arden edition of *King Lear* explains, "Camelot is linked with Winchester as well as other places further west" (p. 230). South Cadbury Castle, a Bronze Age and Iron Age hill-fort is one of them. In Elizabethan time, John Leland visited it and thought that it was Camelot: "At the very south ende of the church of South Cadbyri Standish Camallate, sumtyme a famose toun or castelle, apou a very torre or hille, wonderfully enstrengtheid of nature, to the which be 2 enteringes up by very stepe way: one by north eest, and another by south west" (Leland, ed. Toulmin Smith, f. 46, vol. I, Part II, p. 151, 1907). He went on to describe the hill, the four ditches, the size of the hilltop, and he noticed that much of the blue stones had been carried away by people for nearby constructions. Then, Leland added that "much gold, sylver and coper of the Romaine coynes hath be found theryn plouing", as well as other "antique things", and a horse shoe (*ibid.*). The beginning of an archaeological interest is there, even though Leland's designation of the coins as Roman is debatable.<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, Leland revealed a popular belief in the association of the site with Camelot: "The people can telle nothing ther but that they have hard say that Arture much resorted to Camalat" (f. 47, vol. I, Part II, p. 151). This belief may well have lived on in Shakespeare's time, and although South Cadbury is situated some forty miles west of Sarum plain, the site could have served as a reference for Shakespeare too. Kent's ironic threat embedding both names suggests that if he had caught Oswald in Sarum plain, he could have drawn him all the way to Camelot. Although the greater distance to South Cadbury would make the task harder to achieve, the site of Cadbury may also be presented as a hypothesis for Arthur's dwelling.

In conclusion, two places have been identified as possibly corresponding to Camelot in *King Lear*, one situated very closely to Sarum plain (Salisbury plain) – Old Sarum – and the other a little further away – South Cadbury Castle. Both are unlikely to correspond to the 'actual' Camelot since as Gautier remarks, first of all, Leland's writings date from a thousand

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<sup>119</sup> In his book entitled *Arthur*, Alban Gautier notices that after being abandoned for a few centuries, the site was reoccupied in the Dark Ages, becoming a mint for the Saxon kings of the West and for the English kings after them – hence the explanation for the coin findings in the Renaissance which Leland identifies, undoubtedly wrongly as Roman coins (Gautier, 2007, p. 163).



years after the supposed Arthurian period; it would therefore be unreasonable to trust such a posterior reconstruction (Gautier, p. 162). Secondly, the link between Arthur and a place called Camelot dates only from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and first appeared in the French texts (*ibid.*). In the previous works, Arthur's court is situated in Celliwig in Cornwall (the place has not been identified), in Caerleon in Wales, or even in London (*ibid.*).

Yet, although no certainty is acceptable in relation to the geographical location of Camelot, the sites mentioned above illustrate what a 'capital' location of Dark Ages British\* people might have looked like. According to Gautier, the site of South Cadbury was ideally situated inland, not too far from what could have been the contact zone between Anglo-Saxons and British\* kingdoms at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (p. 163), hence the link with Arthur. Furthermore, the excavations showed that the site was not an Anglo-Saxon fortress. If, Gautier concludes, the site was "certainly not" Arthur's capital, it at least gives an image of what it could have been (*ibid.*).

There are about fifty Iron Age hill-forts in England, Wales and Scotland, Maiden Castle in South England being one of the most representative. South Cadbury is one of the biggest, and could correspond to a high sovereign's court, although there is no way to be certain that this was the case. History and fiction intermingle, as often happens with Celtic matter. In a nutshell, by using one single word – "Camelot" – Shakespeare opened a window on the legendary and historical past of the British Isles. The audience of the time would have recognized the reference as familiar and could certainly associate a notion of the past with it, although without much precision. In this particular example, the transmission of knowledge from Ancient times was accomplished thanks to the historical aura associated with a fortified site. Therefore, as a realistic effect that fulfills the function of contextualization, Kent's reference to Camelot lends some sort of historical as well as legendary colour to Shakespeare's play.

## **1. 2. Arthur's court**

Although we have attempted to locate a potential field of meaning hidden behind the name "Camelot" in Shakespeare's playtext, it remains difficult to imagine what that representation evoked in people's minds on hearing the names 'Old Sarum' and 'Camelot'. It is probable that Shakespeare aimed to guide his audience towards what was meant to be understood as a court held in an ancient place, although how ancient remains difficult to ascertain. A re-used

Iron Age hill-fort during the Saxon invasions would have been too precise a reference, but having read and used the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare was aware of the chronology of the kings' reigns and decided upon an early time-frame for his play. *King Lear* is pre-Roman in setting and it is clear in Shakespeare's writing that Arthur comes after Lear: "This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time" the fool says in *King Lear* (3.2.95).

Yet, it remains unclear whether Shakespeare's audiences were able to conceive of a pre-Christian past or whether they were plunged unprepared into Medieval imagery. As far as the matter of Arthur was concerned, the main trend in the Jacobean era still was the prevalence of Medieval romance introduced from France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Dark Age and earlier features had more or less disappeared behind more recent traits. Although Holinshed mentions the Celts as the early inhabitants of Britain (1587, Vol. 2, p. 2 *The First Booke of the historie of England*), its capacity to establish a link in the minds of Jacobean audiences between Arthur's court and a reused Celtic hill-fort appears rather unconvincing. Our knowledge today makes it possible to retrospectively link John Leland's Camallat-South Cadbury to a re-used Iron Age hill-fort thanks to the development of a science which evolved from antiquarianism: archaeology. Whether Shakespeare and his audiences had a specific example of Ancient architecture in mind, or a specific Medieval castle is less certain.

The reference to Arthur's court in *2 Henry IV*, with Falstaff singing: "When Arthur first in court [...] and was a mighty king" (2.4.33-34) presents us with the same uncertainty. Again, the reference is clearly to King Arthur, but specifically to what court in particular remains a mystery. Holinshed places Arthur's first court in Caerleon in Wales, where he was crowned: "The British authors declare, that Arthur (immediatlie after he had received the crowne of Dubright bishop of Caerleon) went with his power of Britains against the Saxons of Northumberland" (1587, Volume 2, Section 5, p. 89, *The Fift Booke of the historie of England*). As noted earlier on, the court held at Camelot was introduced later with Chrétien de Troyes and the popular French fashion for Arthurian tales. Since Shakespeare uses Camelot in *King Lear*, it probably means that in his own conception and in his audience's understanding, Medieval romance images took preference over a Dark Ages 'original' Welsh court. Ever since Renaissance times, the later Medieval representation is often the one adopted when evoking King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The Arthurian Medieval trend succeeded the Celtic or Romano-Celtic one, with its rewritings, Chronicles, and ballads, and this image extends to the present time, with many novels and films. Of course, even when

Hollywood productions attempt to recreate a ‘historical’ setting, in *King Arthur* (2004)<sup>120</sup> for instance, they cannot help mixing Medieval elements in the re-enactment.

In the film of *King Arthur*, the style of the characters’ armours is a mixture of Roman, Saxon and Medieval; the king appears as the ideal son-in-law, not to mention Keira Knightley’s attire as a pseudo-Pictish female warrior Guinevere. The forearm guards worn by the men look like 14<sup>th</sup> century vambraces and their general outlines evoke a vague version of Medieval knights in armour. More serious historical attempts at representing what a warrior from the Arthurian Romano-Celtic-early-Saxon period looked like appear to offer a different image. The level of bodily protections is less bulky with the result that the soldier’s body is not enlarged by his outfit. The impression conveyed is not that of a super-hero, but of practical equipment allowing movement and a certain swiftness (see annex).

In relation to the native warrior presented in the annex to chapter 2, Konstam and Denis argue that “this is roughly how the defenders of South Cadbury, Dinas Emrys or Tintagel might have looked” (2008, p. 36). This representation makes it possible to evaluate the discrepancy that probably also existed between the Early Modern conception of Arthur’s warrior and court and those of the historical 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Medieval images and representations must have existed in the minds of Elizabethan and Jacobean spectators. In Shakespeare’s *2 Henry IV*, by the time Falstaff refers to Arthur as a once mighty king, the Ancient British warlord had probably disappeared under his later Medieval garment. The result is that we have a transtextual reference in Shakespeare’s text whose conceptualization and representation had already begun to evolve over time.

This is how this first reference to Arthur’s court and worthiness as king is introduced in the ballad sung by Falstaff in *2H4*:<sup>121</sup>

FALSTAFF [Sings.] ‘When Arthur first in court’ –  
Empty the Jordan! [Exit Drawer.]  
– ‘And was a worthy king’ – How now, Mistress  
Doll? (2.4.33-36)

The reference is brief and no further information is provided about Arthur. A. R. Humphreys’s Arden 2 edition of the play notes that “Falstaff is garbling the ballad *Sir Lancelot du Lake* (1966, p. 64), later compiled by Child in his first volume of *English and*

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<sup>120</sup> *King Arthur*, directed by Antoine Fuqua, produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, written by David Franzoni, Touchstone Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, World 2000 Entertainment, Green Hills productions, United-States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Distributed by Buena Vista Pictures, 2004.

<sup>121</sup> Line references are to Arden Third Series edition by James C. Bulman (2016).

*Scottish Ballads*, (1861, vol. 1) the first extant version of which is to be found in Thomas Deloney's *Garland of Good Will* (c. 1586). The ballad entitled *The Noble Acts of Arthur of the Round Table, and of Lancelot du Lake* offers slight variations of Falstaff's version: "When Arthur first in court began, / And was approved king, / By force of arms great victories won, / And conquests home did bring" (Child, 1861, p. 55). It is possible that the ballad was in circulation when Shakespeare wrote *2 Henry IV* (1597-1598) and it is important, therefore, to compare both texts.

If we accept the ballad as a possible source reference for Falstaff's song, then the contraction of the four lines in the original into two in the play is worthy of note. Falstaff begins the first line but does not finish it, omitting the word "began", and when he takes it up again he modifies the words, expressing only the idea conveyed by the third and fourth lines: Arthur's high deeds. The only important detail for him to remember seems to be that "Arthur was a worthy king". What we have here is either an approximate recollection on Shakespeare's part, a way to illustrate a facet of Falstaff's character and partial memory and / or a device designed to fit in the action of the scene, set at the Boar's Head tavern, in an upper room. Francis, one of the drawers, is on stage when the hostess, Mistress Quickly, and Doll Tearsheet enter, followed a moment later by Falstaff. The scene can be imagined in the following way: Falstaff is happy because he has just relieved himself and he comes back, singing or rather garbling, a popular ballad. In the middle of his song, he asks Francis to "empty the jordan", that is to say the chamber pot, which the latter seizes before exiting, as the direction indicates line 34. The contraction of the ballad suits the swift development of the action of the scene. There is no time to sing a whole song, the purpose being to express Falstaff's carnivalesque vulgarity. Yet, although the words are pronounced casually, they introduce an Arthurian intertextual reference into the play with the result that the status of Arthur is unavoidably reduced.<sup>122</sup>

We have dealt with the immense aura that King Arthur had acquired by the Middle Ages, and we have also dealt with his Welsh court, the "golden-torqued" ladies and the location of his supposed castle. By contrast, what is noticeable here is the surprising collocation between the subject of the singing and the situation described above, with the result that in Falstaff's rustic behaviour, the 'mighty king' is literally degraded to the level of human excrement. The effect is comical and befits the character of Sir John who is used to accompanying the regal Prince Hal into base lodgings, with the surrounding of the taverns,

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<sup>122</sup> And also perhaps, Falstaff's status is exposed by the presumptuousness of the comparison.

the excessive consumption of alcohol and the company of prostitutes as literal and metaphorical examples comparing with different forms of human incontinence. No baser context could have been found for a once mighty king Arthur. The use of the past form of the verb “be” in Falstaff’s line confirms the fact that Arthur’s glory belongs to a past era: he definitely “was a worthy king”.

To conclude, the presence of King Arthur in this speech indicates that the character of the great king was at least known by Shakespeare’s audiences. However, the brevity of the reference, together with his association with body waste suggests that the character was undergoing a downgrading, being no longer in vogue as a type of the insular hero or as the romance character he once was. This diminution of stature is visible in the residual account of the ballad presented here, Arthur’s former aura collapsing in oral memory as Falstaff forgets the song’s words, with the result that a powerful founding hero is reduced to mockery and satire. The reference to “Arthur’s show” by Robert Shallow in the same play may be interpreted in the same vein.

### **1. 3. Arthur’s show**

In *2H4*, act 3, scene 2, while Falstaff is recruiting country soldiers with the help of the country justice Robert Shallow, the latter tries to elevate himself in Falstaff’s eyes by recounting a memory that he thinks they share in common: “I remember at Mile-End Green, when I lay at / Clement’s Inn – I was then Sir Dagonet in Arthur’s / show – there was a little quiver fellow, and a would / manage you his piece thus, and a would about, and / about, and come you in, and come you in” (3.2.279-283). Justice Shallow is trying to impress Falstaff (although the comparison he introduces is comical) by looking contemptuously at this “little quiver fellow” he parallels with the country soldiers they have just recruited, in an attempt to make him appear stronger. His plan does not work, since, ironically, Falstaff remembers him as “the very genius of famine” (3.2.312), an insignificant fellow, both physically and mentally. “I do see the bottom of Justice Shallow” (3.2.301), Falstaff says in a pun, which indicates that he regards Shallow as a very superficial and uninteresting person. Even though it is addressed in comic attire, the Arthurian reference is worthy of comment.

Although Sir Dagonet is a knight, he appears as Arthur’s fool in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*: “And upon a day, Sir Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, came into Cornwall with two squires with him” (Malory, Caxton 1485, ed. Strachey 1897, ix. 19, p. 212). He is a hapless

weak knight who is almost beaten to death by Sir Tristram and flees, to tell his misadventure to the king. The Arthurian character chosen by Shakespeare is feeble and ridiculous, and serves to illustrate the comic personality of Justice Shallow. James Bulman's Arden 3 edition of the play notes that Sir Dagonet is "a figure whose name elicited derisive laughter in Jonson's *Every Man Out* (4.4.118), *Cynthia's Revels* (5.4.549) and Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (4.46)" (2016, p. 312-313), which swerves to confirm the ridicule of Shallow.

Furthermore, Arthur's show was a popular archery contest held in Elizabethan times at Mile End Green and which, as the note in Humphreys's Arden 2 edition indicates, was organized by "The auncient order, societie, and unitie laudable, of Prince Authure, and his knightly armory of the Round Table" (2*H4*, 1966, p. 111). A book dated from 1583,<sup>123</sup> written by Richard Robinson describes the archery fair organized by the Society of Archers whose aim was to "yearely celebrating the renewed memory of the magnificent Prince Arthure and his Knightly traine of the Round Table".<sup>124</sup> Round Table tournaments were a common feature in the Middle Ages and continued in Renaissance England, Scotland and also on the European Continent. Jousts and archery contests took the Arthurian legend as a general inspiration although other romances were also used.<sup>125</sup> What is to be noted from Robinson's book, which draws the list of all the knights involved in the competition, is that Sir Dagonet is notoriously absent. The ridicule of the character is emphasized once again, as not being worthy of competing with the other knights, so that with Falstaff we also "see the bottom of [Robert] Shallow", whose unselfconscious boasting about playing the part of a fool identifies him as being unworthy of competing with Sir John.

Although Bullough would not have expressed it this way, this Arthurian reference can qualify, to use one of his explanatory terms, as "subsidiary source-material" (1957, vol. 8, p. 361),<sup>126</sup> or, preferring Drakakis's terminology, as a subsidiary "resource". In the general conclusion to his eight volumes on *Shakespeare's Narrative and Dramatic Sources* Bullough argues that the function of "subsidiary source material" is: "to provide a parallel movement,

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<sup>123</sup> *The auncient order, societie, and unitie laudable, of Prince Authure, and his knightly armory of the Round Table With a threefold assertion frendly in fauour and furtherance of English archery at this day*. Translated and collected by R. R. Robinson, Richard, citizen of London. London: Imprinted by [R. Jones for] Iohn Wolfe dwelling in Distaffe lane neere the signe of the Castle, 1583. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A21693.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc> (accessed 27/08/18).

<sup>124</sup> <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A21693.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 30/10/18).

<sup>125</sup> As Ruth Huff Cline explains, the jousting rules in these tournaments were modified in order to be less barbaric and more chivalric, and the knights (and ladies) would play the roles of Arthurian characters too (Huff Cline, 1945, p. 206-208).

<sup>126</sup> Bullough wouldn't have classified Arthurian references as "subsidiary source-material" since Arthurian references were not integrated into his work as sources at all.

contrast, or parody” (*ibid.*). In *1 and 2 Henry IV*, the seriousness of the historical material in the play is counterbalanced by the comical elements. As has been demonstrated, the Arthurian reference is deployed in order to support the comical tone in parts of the play. The result is, as Burrow would have put it, that the reference supports an aspect of the play, which in the case of *Henry IV* might point up the difficulty of handling regal power seriously, thereby demystifying the institution and the ideology of kingship at the same time that the play appears to support it. The subsidiary intertextual reference coming from insular Antiquity serves the main body of the play in the form of a commentary on the Early Modern political situation. Thus, combining Genette’s terminology and Barker and Hulme’s notion of con-text, a metatextual relation is established in which the contemporary con-text of the play is itself a part of an historical text to be read. In a very subtle way, which perhaps may have protected him from censorship, Shakespeare was able in instances such as this to engage in a critical relationship with his own political context. Arthur’s reputation suffers in the process much as Prince Hal’s stature is eventually qualified by Falstaff’s presence, while the reference may allude to the Elizabethan political world. It is worth reminding ourselves that the female sovereign was represented in a distinctively Arthurian context in *The Faerie Queene*. This observation invites us to proceed to explore the representation of the Arthurian female presence in Shakespeare’s work.

## **2. The world of women**

It is now clear that the matter of Britain in Shakespeare, embedded as it is in paradox, is often associated with comedy and satire perhaps for the paradoxical purpose of revealing a dark tragic side; as Genette has argued: “Le comique n’est qu’un tragique vu de dos” [comedy is but the back view of tragedy] (1982, p. 27, tr. CSL). Let us now envisage a less comical aspect in considering the treatment of the feminine and its connection with Arthur and Shakespeare. We have discussed the Arthurian reference in Kent’s speech at 2.2.81-82 in relation to Camelot, yet a less obvious meaning is also embedded in these lines, which may further confirm the presence of Celtic imagery: the figure of the ‘goose’. The singularity of the collocation of Camelot and the goose motif is noteworthy and this element needs exploring in order to show that the whole speech displays a certain coherence even as far as its Celtic references are concerned. Even if it is doubtful that Shakespeare would have considered it as such, the goose bears Celtic and Arthurian undertones which have to be

excavated because they are hidden under other layers of meaning. This will be undertaken first by exploring meanings in vogue in Shakespeare's time, and then by examining the Ancient cultural dimension of the reference. It will involve a preliminary study of the concept of female sexuality as it appears in 16<sup>th</sup> century England and in the Ancient Celtic world.

It is clear that the tone used in these lines has nothing to compare it with Medieval romance or courtly love: "Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain, I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot" (2.2.81-82) is obviously an insult. Kent designates Oswald, at the very least, as a foolish person or a simpleton (the *OED* records this meaning as early as 1547) and / or, also serving as comic relief for the audience, he equates Oswald with a courtyard animal of the female gender. Womanliness and foolishness are therefore combined in this 16<sup>th</sup> century bird image. Reaching for the feminine and beyond to the Celtic symbol possibly hidden behind the plain, down-to-earth meaning of the substantive 'goose', the first step is the phrase 'Winchester goose', in use in Shakespeare's time to refer either to a venereal disease or to the figure of the prostitute.

### 2.1. The 'Winchester goose'

As Moseley notes, the semi-rural borough of Southwark, on the South bank of the river Thames in London, was home to many pleasures, among them theatre plays and bear baitings, but also brothels, also called 'stews': "Ironically, the ground landlord of many of the brothels was the Bishop of Winchester, hence the cant name for a prostitute: 'a Winchester goose'" (2007, p. 21).<sup>127</sup> Although prostitution was illegal in England, it was tolerated<sup>128</sup> as elsewhere in Europe, but the case of Winchester was particular, as Karras argues: "The bishop of Winchester was not the only powerful figure to profit from brothels; he was unique only in that his jurisdiction in Southwark made the brothels legal. Elsewhere in England, if leading citizens owned brothels, they could not make the brothels legal, but they could often ignore the law with impunity" (Karras, 1989, p. 424). By enforcing a regulation on prostitution, the bishop ensured that he was able to control his jurisdiction, and he earned money from the trade. Furthermore, if as Karras explains "the municipal brothels were established to serve the

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<sup>127</sup> In 1546, Henry VIII declared brothels illegal, thus they were not under the legal control of the bishop of Winchester any more, yet, the term 'Winchester goose' remained in use in Elizabethan and Jacobean times to refer to a prostitute or a venereal disorder (the *OED* mentions its usage until 1776 (p. 813)).

<sup>128</sup> Karras notes that "Medieval society recognized prostitution as a necessary evil" (1989, p. 399) and that Saint Augustine "held it was better for a man to have non-procreative sex with a prostitute than with his own wife because he at least would not be corrupting an innocent woman" (Augustine, *De Bono Conjugali* 11, *PL*, 40:382), (*ibid*).



necessary function of restraining male sexuality” (p. 405), they were also a means to keep female sexuality under control and channel lust, which was asserted to be “the woman’s sin par excellence” (p. 400). Women living by their bodies, that is to say officially as prostitutes, although they were seen by the Church as the epitome of lust (*ibid.*) were thus considered as less threatening to morality than an adulteress or a casually promiscuous woman. For a woman to express her sexual desire to one man, especially outside the institution of marriage, would “make her sexual license much more morally offensive” (Karras, p. 425). The overt expression of female sexual desire was considered problematic by the morality of Shakespeare’s time.

In a nutshell, the figure of the prostitute from Winchester expresses female sexuality channeled, if not legitimized, by the Church. ‘Winchester geese’ from the brothels of Southwark were “publicly accepted as prostitutes and thus as promiscuous” (*ibid*) to be distinguished from every woman whose sexual desire had nonetheless to remain under masculine control. In our first attempt to explain the hidden meaning behind the word ‘goose’ in Kent’s speech, we may say that at the very least, the allusion compares Oswald to a woman who is cackling like a goose, but that in Shakespeare’s audiences’ minds, the term also suggested ‘prostitute’: a ‘Winchester goose’. In *Pericles*, young Marina, destined to be a prostitute is called a ‘gosling’, a young goose, by the bawd who watches over her (4.2.78). The term is declined according to the age of the character but in any case, the goose is associated with femininity and with female sexuality, and the church was not exempt from this way of considering the threat of female desire and therefore of trying to limit it to prostitution. The goose in Celtic myth has a very different meaning which, although attached to femininity, bears no negative sexual connotation but rather, according to Philippe Walter, is related to the woman who creates, to the Great Goddess.

## **2.2. Birds and goddesses**

Before going into detail, we need to consider the general symbolism of birds in Celtic mythology. The French *Dictionnaire des Symboles* notes that: “Dans le monde celtique, l’oiseau est, en général, le messager ou l’auxiliaire des dieux et de l’Autre Monde, que ce soit le cygne en Irlande, la grue ou le héron en Gaule, l’oie en Grande-Bretagne, le corbeau, le roitelet ou la poule” [Birds in general in the Celtic world are messengers or auxiliaries of Gods and the Other World, be it the swan in Ireland, the crane or heron in Gaul or the goose

in Great Britain, the crow, the wren or the hen] (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1982 (1969), p. 696, tr. CSL). It is obvious that the flight of birds should predispose them to serve as symbols for the relationships between earth and sky, as is the case in numerous cultures (p. 695). However, the goose seems to have been attached to the island of Britain from ancient times, both as a wild bird or as a partly domesticated animal to be found all the year round in Southern England.<sup>129</sup>

The Fool's "Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way" (*King Lear*, 2.2.236) is fraught with double meaning. From a naturalistic point of view, the observation of the wild geese's flight has led the Fool to the conclusion that the dark season persists. In this respect the Fool gives himself licence to be critical, and to access the body of 'folk' wisdom that he might share with the audience.<sup>130</sup> Yet, beyond the Fool's words what is metaphorically implied is that the death of all life in the cycle of seasons is going to pursue its course just as the death of all life will occur in Lear's story, with Edgar being one of the very few survivors in the end. More than a mere observation of nature, the geese's flights act as an omen read by a knowledgeable man – which turns the Fool into a kind of magician – and it serves as a proleptic element foretelling the tragic outcome within the story itself. Shakespeare remains, as often, on the verge between offering plausible, quasi-scientific and naturalist explanations and indulging in magical ones. The Fool's character, enigmatic enough as we will see, appears to be able to master both. Beyond the expression of domestic folk wisdom, he is in the position of describing a vision which, according to the general symbolic interpretation seen above, identifies the goose as a messenger of the Gods, in a play which both focuses on both domestic and symbolic values. Metadramatically, the 'God' in question is Shakespeare himself, the creator who allows his most perceptive character to foresee the future course of events, thereby informing the audience and increasing dramatic tension for the purpose of entertainment.

In many cultures, geese are endowed with a sacred significance. In Rome, sacred geese were bred as watchdogs, to guard Juno's temple. They were famous for raising the

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<sup>129</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/greylag-geese/> (accessed 19/01/19).

<sup>130</sup> This may be assumed as coming from a natural knowledge on the part of the author. It is telling how essential and almost innate the observation of nature must have been in the upbringing of a man who lived in the British rural environment. The British Isles are, still today, a nesting area for migrating birds and some species of wild geese often winter in these latitudes, especially Scotland and Northern England, coming from their Icelandic breeding areas. Although the major part of England is much more Southern, we can reasonably speculate that geese wintered in England too in Shakespeare's time, during this colder period named Little Ice Age, which extended from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century. For further details, see the article by Michael E. Mann (2002), available at: [http://www.meteo.psu.edu/holocene/public\\_html/shared/articles/littleiceage.pdf](http://www.meteo.psu.edu/holocene/public_html/shared/articles/littleiceage.pdf) (accessed 06/01/19). A species of wild geese may also have stopped in England, on their way to a Southern wintering destination, but it is perilous to venture on ornithology's grounds being a non specialist.

alarm by cackling loudly when Gaul warriors attempted to take over the Capitol in 390 BC in Brittany the Gallo-Roman statuette of a war goddess with a goose-crested helmet, dating from the second half of the first century AD accords with a view expressed by Green when she states: “the goose was a potent Celtic symbol of war, aggression and guardianship” (1995, p. 34). The sculpture looks Roman in style and the warlike attribute of the goose may have come from the Romans, and, or from Celtic culture. Although it is sometimes difficult to isolate authentic Celtic traits, nevertheless the symbolism attached to the goose is very different from what we have observed related to Shakespeare’s time. The Celtic or Romano-Celtic symbolism is far from that associated with venereal disease or prostitution, or from the contemporary figurative and familiar meaning of “foolish person”. Two major features appear to be attached to the goose: either it is a warlike bird, tamed and bred for military defence, or it is the wild migrating bird, harbinger of the natural order and symbol, as Walter puts it, “of the cosmic order and the eternal return of seasons” (2002, p. 108-109).

In the Arthurian cycle, women like Ygraine, Arthur’s mother, are symbolically identified with geese and the Otherworld. In *Arthur, l’ours et le roi* [*Arthur, the King and the Bear*], Philippe Walter notices that the name Yg(u)erne, Igerne, Yverne, Ygraine, Iverme, which varies according to the manuscripts, is etymologically close to ‘Gigren’, ‘giugrann’ meaning ‘goose’ in Old Irish. He locates the hypothetical fundamental meaning of the character, and its mythological significance, as being connected with Celtic mother goddesses, who were themselves transformed into fairy beings in the Middle Ages (p. 106). Thus, the goose appears to be linked to the Otherworld, as a bird of epiphany embodying an Ancient mother-goddess or a fairy being (p. 107) i.e. a manifestation of the way in which fairies or goddesses were thought to appear to mortals. Arthur’s mother, Ygraine is thus associated with the creative energy of the Mother Goddess, and being a ‘goose’ she is linked to the Otherworld. In *Perceval, ou le roman du Graal*, by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1182), she appears as the old queen with long white plaits, dressed in a white silk gown<sup>131</sup> who commands an Otherworld castle together with two other women, Gauvain’s mother and sister (Walter, 2002, p. 106). As we have already seen, white – the colour of her hair and dress – is also a specific feature of Otherworld beings, thus confirming Ygraine’s status. Walter argues that in this Medieval tale, Ygraine, may combine the elements of a tripartite Ancient mother goddess.

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<sup>131</sup> *Perceval ou le Roman du Graal*, p. 193.

Green notes that some representations of multiple mother goddesses show a marked age differential between the figures, as if different stages of womanhood were expressed (1995, p. 107). It is the case with the triad Gauvain encounters in *Le Roman du Graal*, when Ygraine calls Gauvain's mother her daughter,<sup>132</sup> the latter therefore being younger than her while Gauvain's sister is even younger, indicates that they represent three generations in a single triad. Furthermore, the stone sculpture of three mother goddesses from the Romano Gaulish town of Alesia in Burgundy, France, offers a visible link with procreation and with birds. As Green explains, "Each goddess is accompanied by a male infant and, on the right of the stone, a fourth naked child sits in a boat, accompanied by a swan" (p. 107). Mother goddesses symbolise fertility and procreation hence the presence of children; but also, the bird attends the scene, thus fulfilling the role of assistant to the gods and perhaps as bringer of children. This adds another layer of signification to Kent's phrase in *King Lear*, involving the notion of procreation and maternity. Birds like storks that were endowed with the capacity of bringing children into this world demonstrate this connection, but other birds, such as the goose or the swan, could also reputedly circulate between the two worlds.

In mythology, especially in Celtic texts, not only are the birds messengers of the gods, but the swan and the goose are often linked to the travel to and from the Otherworld as explained in the *Dictionary of Symbols*:

Dans les textes celtiques, la plupart des êtres de l'Autre Monde qui, pour une raison ou une autre, pénètrent dans le monde terrestre, empruntent la forme du cygne et voyagent le plus souvent par deux, reliés par une chaîne d'or ou d'argent. Sur beaucoup d'œuvres d'art celtiques, deux cygnes figurent chacun sur un côté de la barque solaire, qu'ils guident et accompagnent dans son voyage sur l'océan céleste. Venant du nord ou y retournant, ils symbolisent les états supérieurs ou angéliques de l'âme en cours de délivrance et retournant vers le Principe suprême. Sur le continent, et même dans les îles, le cygne est souvent confondu avec la grue, d'une part, et l'oie, d'autre part ; ce qui explique l'interdit alimentaire dont cette dernière faisait l'objet, d'après César, chez les Bretons.

[In Celtic texts, most of the Otherworld beings who for one reason or another enter the terrestrial world, borrow the appearance of a swan and often travel in

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<sup>132</sup> In Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Ygraine has three daughters (another triad), among whom Margawse (or Morcade or Morgause), wife to king Lot of Lothian and of Orkney and mother of Gawain, Elaine who wedded king Nentres of Garlot, and Morgan le Fay, first sent to a convent, instructed to necromancy and then married to king Uriens of Gore (Malory, the text of Caxton, 1485, ed. Stratchey, 1897, p. 27).

pairs, bound by a golden or a silver chain. In numerous Celtic works of art, two swans figure on each side of the solar boat they guide and accompany in its voyage on the celestial ocean. Coming from the North or going back to it, they symbolize the superior or angelic states of the being on his way to deliverance, going back to the supreme Principal. On the Continent and even in the Isles, the swan is often mixed up with the crane on the one hand and the goose on the other hand; which explains why the latter was the subject of a food interdiction according to Caesar, in Brittany]. (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1982 (1969), p. 334, tr. CSL)

Therefore, stories which contain swans or goose may be seen as markers of a connection with the Otherworld in Celtic mythology. A few narratives of the type exist such as *Serglige Con Culainn*, “The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn” in which the birds are not called by their species’ name; they are simply “two birds on the lake linked together by a chain of red gold” (*Leabhar na h-Uidre, The Book of the Dun Cow*, 12<sup>th</sup> century, trans. Curry, 1858, p. 375). This confirms the blurred identity between swans, cranes and geese and the magic aspect of birds in Celtic texts. Swans are major protagonists of a narrative entitled *The Children of Lir* and it is tempting to postulate a connection with *King Lear*. However, the two stories remain relatively separate except for a few points which are analyzed in the annex to chapter 2.

In *King Lear*, behind Early Modern derogatory representations, the presence of the word ‘goose’, and its plural form ‘geese’ associated with women and the world of gods, shows a possible connection with a hidden field of signification. To pursue a little further the matter of the female world and the Arthurian references in Shakespeare’s play, it is important to discuss the most famous Arthurian female characters: Queen Guinevere.

### 2.3 Guinevere

Shakespeare briefly mentions the Arthurian queen in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (4.1.116) but implied in the figure is a lot more. Let us observe more closely the ancient traits which are omitted, or potentially filtered from Shakespeare’s text. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in the same vein recalling chapter 1, Boyet and Rosaline together with Maria are involved in witty sexual banter that explores the various meanings of the paronomastic “deer/dear” hunting and the issue of cuckoldry:

BOYET Who is the shooter? Who is the shooter?



*soeb* which comprises the second part of the name is related to the world of magic, suggesting notions of witchcraft, falsity and evil power.<sup>134</sup> But the Welsh root ‘gwen’ or ‘gwyn’ means a) white, pale and b) fair-haired, or fair faced, of fair complexion; by extension ‘gwen’ refers to a ‘fair maiden, pretty girl’.<sup>135</sup> Walter presents Guinevere first and foremost as a fairy endowed with enchanting powers and observes that: “It is mainly because of her exceptional physical beauty that she appears as a dangerous and evil character” (*ibid.*). And indeed, in Malory (when Merlin asks him who he would like to marry) Arthur says of her: “I love Guenever, the daughter of king Leodegrance, of the land of Cameliard, which Leodegrance holdeth in his house the Table Round, that ye told he had of my father, Uther. And this damsel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet that ever I could find” (Malory, Caxton, ed. Strachey 1897, Book III, chapter I, p. 64). Her physical appearance is one of the traits that Guenever’s Welsh origins bequeathed to Medieval culture, and some of her enchantress gifts also remain in Malory. Gorgievsky notes that in Malory, the queen is thought to have enchanted Lancelot: “It is noised that you love Guenever, and that she hath ordained by enchantment that ye shall never love none other but her, nor none other damsel nor lady shall rejoice you” (Malory, Book VI, chapter X, p. 119, in Gorgievsky, 2005, p. 93). Guinevere’s magic power is suggested here, although more generally in Malory the fairy wife motif is not developed and the queen’s supernatural origins remain hidden (*ibid.*).

In the 56<sup>th</sup> Ancient Welsh Triad (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>136</sup> Gwennhwyfar appears in triple form (like the Ancient mother-goddesses), one of whom is the daughter of (G)ogfran, the giant or ogre, an Otherworld being (Walter, 2002 p. 157-158). Also, Walter suggests that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century prose narrative *Lancelot*, the realm of Cameliard is an imaginary kingdom, very similar to an Otherworld place (*Dictionnaire des mythes féminins*, 2002, p. 873). Again, in Malory, Vivian, the Lady of the Lake and a renowned Otherworld creature, interrupts Arthur and Guinevere’s wedding banquet mounted on a white palfrey. She enters without anybody knowing who she is, following a “white hart” that comes running into the hall, and a “white bratchet” and “thirty couples of black running hounds” (Book III, chapter V). As the story unfolds it is revealed that the mysterious lady is Vivian, damsel of the Lake. The sudden entrance of an Otherworldly being at Guinevere’s wedding suggests a possible link between

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<sup>134</sup> In *Arthur, l’ours et le roi*, p. 170, Walter mentions the research done by Guyonvarc’h about the Irish *siabradh*, ‘ghost’, in *Magie, Médecine et Divination chez les Celtes*, p. 380-392. See also the *Electronic Dictionary of Irish Language* <http://www.dil.ie/search?q=1+s%C3%ADabraid> (accessed 01/03/19).

<sup>135</sup> <http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html> (accessed 01/03/19).

<sup>136</sup> Rachel Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: the Triads of the Island of Britain*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2014 (1961).

the two. By her name which bears the root 'gwyn'- white, the queen is linked to such beings usually characterized by the colour white. She is the white queen who, like Vivian and Morgan, belongs to the triad of fairy women presiding over man's destiny. These women priestesses have access to the Otherworld. If this assertion is quite clear in the texts in relation to Vivian, the Lady of the Lake and Morgan, the fierce necromant, the characterisation of Guinevere has mainly retained Christian traits. The foregoing argument has sought to demonstrate the Ancient roots that feed in the semantic chain of the character.

Furthermore, Guinevere the white queen, Guinevere the enchantress and Otherworld being, together with Ygraine, the other feminine figure of the Arthurian cycle, as we have seen, is also assimilated into the motif of the goose or white water bird. This subtle trait has been noticed by Philippe Walter and offers a further explanation of Guinevere's fairy nature:

Guenièvre elle-même semble retrouver quelques traits de cette créature féérique et déesse-oiseau relevant du folklore des eaux. En effet, dans le *Chevalier à la Charrette*, elle abandonne un peigne près d'une fontaine. Par ce seul détail, elle s'apparente aux sirènes des contes du Finistère, aux enchanteresses, fées et autres dames blanches du folklore. Il faut ajouter qu'elle se pose en même temps, mythologiquement, comme une 'dame de la fontaine', c'est-à-dire une cane, une oie ou un cygne, bien que le texte n'insiste guère sur ce détail, alors que Lancelot du Lac, son amant, est bien lié quant à lui à un lac dans lequel (ou sur lequel ?) il aurait été élevé par une fée. (2002, p. 155)

[Guinevere herself seems to retain a few traits of this fairy creature and bird-goddess that belongs to the folklore of waters. As a matter of fact, in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, she leaves a comb by a fountain. This detail only suffices to connect her to the sirens of the Finistère tales, to enchantresses, fairies and other white ladies of the folklore. At the same time, it must be added that mythologically speaking she places herself as a 'lady of the fountain', that is to say a cane, a goose or a swan, although the text does not insist much on this detail, while Lancelot of the Lake, her lover, is strongly linked to a lake within which (or on which?) he would have been raised by a fairy]. (2002, p. 155, tr. CSL)

In the Arthurian narrative, Lancelot is supposed to have been raised by the Lady of the Lake. Guinevere and Lancelot could be imagined as two fairy beings capable of turning themselves into white birds linked by a golden chain, part of a cluster of images that is so frequent in



Celtic myths, although the Arthurian tale does not say so. Far from indulging in myth recreation, this investigation amplifies a trait that would have remained invisible otherwise. This allows a better understanding of the mythic aspects of these figures whose roles varied over time and in the process lost many of their Ancient features.

This analysis cannot but lead us back to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where the word 'goose' spoken by Kent now encourages another possible, although speculative, interpretation in the light of what we have observed. Implicit intertextual relations (Genette 1982, p. 8-9) do not have to be fully voiced and obscure implications may be noteworthy and relevant for analysis. In the lines "Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain, / I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot" (2.2.81-82), it is possible to understand that Kent is returning the queen ("goose") to her husband's dwelling ("Camelot") because she was far too sexually wayward. The ill-will Kent felt toward Oswald would then be doubly or even triply significant: the goose is the animal, the prostitute, and the Arthurian queen, in the con-texts evoked.

Therefore, in a second layer of interpretation underneath the purely diegetic level of the dialogue between Kent and Oswald, the female implied would be the queen of Camelot now refigured as a prostitute (a 'Winchester goose') because of her infidelity – what Kent reproaches Oswald for is his treachery toward King Lear. Here, Burrow's theory of the function of Ancient references is efficient insofar as the figure of Queen Guinevere casts an aspersion on Goneril (and Regan) and feeds in the theme of female seduction leading to abyssal chaos in the play, and also opens on a further meaning. Beyond the common Elizabethan understanding of the Winchester goose, a further level of interpretation reveals the mythic fairy nature of the sovereign, and by extension the potentially Otherworldly nature of Lear's daughters, as it will be developed in chapter 6. The reference remains undeveloped in Shakespeare's play, but the combination of Camelot and the bird, together with the dissatisfaction expressed by Kent lead us to explore additional fields of meaning. The negative sense prompts us to examine other features of the mythic Guinevere, such as her ferocity and deceitfulness. This will lead us to the way the Queen's character is sketched in Shakespeare.

In the Arthurian tale, the kingdom sinks into chaos from the moment the king loses his queen, Guinevere, not because she dies (unlike Lear's wife) but because she is adulterous (*King Lear*, 2.2.321).<sup>137</sup> Laskaya and Salisbury observe that the "Early Welsh tradition preserved within the *Triads*, attributes to 'Gwenhwyfar' the reputation of being adulterous.

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<sup>137</sup> The loss of the wife as applied to *King Lear* will be discussed in Chapter 6.

She is listed as more treacherous than any notorious woman named in the triad of ‘Three Faithless Wives’: ‘and one was more faithless than those three: Gwenhwyfar, wife of Arthur, since she shamed a better man than any of them’” (Laskaya and Salisbury, 1995, p. 249–244). In Geoffrey, as we have already noted, while Arthur is away in Gaul and about to attack Rome, his nephew Mordred and queen Guinevere live “adulterously and out of wedlock” (p. 257). The story involving the love affair with Lancelot only developed from Chrétien de Troyes onwards but it is the one that has remained the most famous. It is worth noticing that both Goneril and Regan end up being adulterous with Edmund, Gloucester’s natural son. Both queens initiate a sexual promiscuity that recalls the Arthurian sovereign.

A Medieval lay (from the Celtic ‘laid’ meaning ‘song’) illustrates the disloyal character of Queen Guinevere; it is Marie De France’s 12<sup>th</sup> century *Lanval*, rewritten in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Chester under the title *Sir Launfal*. In this story, Queen Guinevere courts Lanval, who refuses her out of loyalty to the king. When Lanval confesses to the queen that he loves another woman (a fairy) who surpasses her in all respects, she accuses him falsely. In *Sir Launfal*, Guinevere’s adulterous nature is clearly expressed: “But Syr Launfal lykede her [Guinevere] noght, / Ne other knyghtes that werhende; / For the lady bar los of swych word / that sche hadde lemmannys under her lord, / So fele ther nas noon ende” (Laskaya and Salisbury, 2001, p. 211, ll. 44-48). She knew many lovers, and neither Launfal nor the other knights at court were attracted to her, for this reason. Guinevere seems endowed with an erotic magic power that is appropriate to the expression of female love in Celtic tradition, Gorgievsky writes (2005, p. 91). Queen Medbh of Connaught has similar idiosyncrasies, but the Christian tradition, as expressed in Malory, for example, retained the treachery and the potential danger such behaviour represented for the stability of the kingdom.

In the quotation from Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* the queen is pictured as “a little wench”, that is to say as an immature and wanton girl. The presence of this quote within the context of sexual banter is reinforced by the implied lewdness of Guinevere’s character, and it is this element that was retained by Shakespeare. In the passage the ‘hit it’ game is extended over ten lines (113-123) in which Rosaline and Boyet’s rhetorical exchange ends up in a song:

ROSALINE [singing] ‘Thou canst not hit it, hit it, hit it,  
 Thou canst not hit it, my good man.’  
 BOYET [singing] ‘An I cannot, cannot, cannot,  
 An I cannot, another can.’ (4.1.118-121)

It is a question here of scoring in this wit combat, but sexual meanings are also implied (*LLL*, 2009, p. 107). Anaphora address the impossibility to actualize the wit game in flesh ('cannot'), while epiphora repeats the words to emphasize what the onomatopoeic alliteration in /t/ suggests, as if Boyet and Rosaline were metaphorically making love through this verbal game of sex. This is confirmed by the commentaries made by Costard and Maria right after the song:

COSTARD By my troth, most pleasant! How both did fit it!

MARIA A mark marvelous well shot, for they both did hit it.

"Fit it" means that the singers succeeded in fitting the words to the tune, but it also means "to have sex" (*LLL*, 2009, p. 107) and Maria keeps score in this witty sexual game. Moreover, both comments end in epiphora (the ending of a series of speech units with the same words) combined with homeoptoton (parallelism of structure or phrasing)<sup>138</sup> so that the two secondary characters insist on the fact that Boyet and Rosaline have both performed their roles (i.e., scored at each other's expense, verbally, but also in metaphorical terms, sexually). This insistence is of course reinforced by the use of "did" before the verb form: they "both did fit it" and "they both did it".

But in this game of love and sex, what concerns us is the presence of Queen Guinevere who serves the argument of the play, which is that of love and heterosexual desire. This accords with Colin Burrow's theory concerning the function of ancient references in Shakespeare, especially in the 1590s plays. This glancing reference playfully reinforces the sexual passion and joy expressed by the singing characters. The link with Pepin Le Bref (not a king from antiquity) increases the pleasure that the occasion provides, but also, by means of an extended chain of thought, unites Guinevere to Pepin through the rhetorical forms of homeoptoton and epiphora: "was a little boy / wench, as touching the hit it" (ll. 113-114 and 116-117). The paralleled structures and repetitious vocabulary in both instances connect *de facto* the two characters.

Shakespeare seems to increase pleasure even to the point of aligning promiscuity with historical, national *and* semi-mythological figures. The audience of the time enjoyed bawdy games and Shakespeare knew how to satisfy them. But if the playwright does not rein in his expression of female desire (as is the case with Rosaline, but also characters from other plays,

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<sup>138</sup> Both definitions of terms from Maguin, 2013, p. 14-15.

such as Juliet, Perdita<sup>139</sup>, or the Merry Wives), he does, nonetheless, integrate Elizabethan cultural assumptions about the behavior of the different genders with the inherited tensions from the Medieval period in matters of illicit love and sexuality. As a female character (re)written by the romance genre, Guinevere embodies these tensions, which Helen Cooper associates with the hesitation between an increasing secular social environment and the teachings of the Church at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the time when Chrétien developed the traitorous love of Lancelot and Guinevere in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, after the famous *Tristan* story:

Even as penitent manuals were warning that all sexual desire, even within marriage, was in some degree sinful, and the papacy was concluding its fight to impose celibacy on all its priests as a non-negotiable standard of perfection [...] the *Tristan* offered a model in which sexual love offers its own challenging, and equally non-negotiable standard of a secular absolute, irresistible even when it opposes all moral and feudal norms. (2004, p. 28)

As developed by the Norman cleric and poet Thomas of Britain (or of England) between 1150 and 1170, the text of *Tristan*,<sup>140</sup> which offers a Celtic hero and setting (Cornwall, Ireland, Brittany) together with a magic love potion story, influenced Chrétien's interpretation of Lancelot and Guinevere's illicit love which, contrary to its model, did not resort to the aid of magic charms or potions (Cooper, 2004, p. 27 and p. 309). Cooper adds that "the consequences of that move have affected attitudes down to the present day" (*ibid.*, p. 28).

In the 1587 edition, Holinshed's compiler, William of Malmesbury, dealt with this ambiguity of having an unfaithful queen as part of British history by more or less evading the issue, alleging that all that was said about her and her husband might not be true. The first part of the following quotation recapitulates the ancient Welsh narrative tradition in which Guinevere's fair complexion, her association with evil and her inconstancy were the statements of jealous slanderers:

Some iudge that she tooke hir name of hir excell|lent beautie, bicause Guinne or Guenne in the Welsh toong signifieth faire, so that she was named Guennere or

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<sup>139</sup> Cooper advocates that Perdita is after Juliet "Shakespeare's most openly desiring heroine". She adds that "*The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* are deeply concerned with recuperating women's sexuality as positive and finally with celebrating it – a celebration required if the play is to register as a romance at all, with the harmony required for its closure" (2004, p. 266). However, in a tragedy like *Romeo and Juliet*, the free expression of the heroine's sexual desire ends in death.

<sup>140</sup> All references to the *Tristan* writings in Cooper, 2004, note 60, p. 438.

rather Guenlhean, euen (as you would say) the faire or beautifull Elenor or Helen. She was brought vp in the house of one Cador earle of Cornewall before Arthur married hir: and as it ap|peareth by writers, she was euill reported of, as no|ted of incontinen|cie & breach of faith to hir husband, in maner as for the more part women of excellent beautie hardlie escape the venemous blast of euill toongs, and the sharpe assaults of the followers of Uenus. (1587, Volume 2, section 5: *The Fift Booke of the Historie of England*, p. 92)<sup>141</sup>

Malmesbury reviews the episode with Mordred and her abduction by King Meleagant who took her to Glastonbury, “the isle of glass” (Walter, 2002, p. 875, and 2002, p. 156), therefore representing an Otherworld place, something that Holinshed does not mention:

The British historie affirmeth, that she did not onelie abuse hirselfe by vnlawfull companie with Mordred, but that also in Arthurs absence she consented to take him to husband. It is likewise found recorded by an old writer, that Arthur besie|ged on a time the marishes neere to Glastenburie, for displeasure that he bare to a certeine lord called Melua, who had rauished Gueneuer, and led hir in|to those marishes, and there did kéepe hir. Hir corps notwithstanding (as before is recited) was inter|red together with Arthurs, so that it is thought she liued not long after his deceasse. (Holinshed 1587, Volume 2, section 5: *The Fift Booke of the Historie of England*, p. 92)

The following passage offers contradictory evidence of the number of Guineveres that existed; apparently there could have been two or even three of them, which leads us back to the triad that we earlier identified in relation to her figure:

Arthur had two wiues (as Gyraldus Cambrensis affirmeth) of which the latter (saith he) was buried with him, and hir bones found with his in one sepul|chre, but yet so diuided, that two parts of the toome towards the head were appointed to receiue the bones of the man, and the third part towards the feet contained the womans bones, apart by them|selues. Here is to be remembred, that Hector Boeltius writeth otherwise of the death of Arthur than before in this booke is mentioned, & also that Guene|uer being taking prisoner by the Picts, was con|ueied into Scotland, where finallie she died, and was there buried in Angus, as in the Scotish chro|nicles further appeareth. And this may be true, if he had

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<sup>141</sup> Available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0205](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0205) (accessed 18/06/19).

three sundrie wiues, each of them bearing the name of Gueneuer, as sir Iohn Price dooth auouch that he had. (*ibid.*)

Apart from suggesting that here Arthur himself knows several women, this demonstrates how a motif can be implied rather than stated explicitly: a potential threefold queen<sup>142</sup> and, therefore, a mythic mother-goddess is revealed in a text that does not appear to be able to identify her, and this is made even more vague in Shakespeare's text. Out of a desire to be truthful to events, the chronicler goes on to cast some doubt on the whole story of Arthur:

Now bicause of contrarietie in writers touching the great acts atchiued by this Arthur, and also for that some difference there is amongst them, about the time in which he should reigne, manie haue doubted of the whole historie which of him is written (as before ye haue heard.) ¶But others there be of a constant beléefe, who hold it for a grounded truth, that such a prince there was; and among all other a late writer, who falling into necessarie mention of prince Arthur, frameth a speech apologeticall in his and their behalfe that were princes of the British bloud, discharging a short but yet a sharpe inuectiue against William Paruus, Polydor Virgil, and their complices, whom he accuseth of lieng toongs, en|uious detraction, malicious slander, reprochfull and venemous language, wilfull ignorance, dogged en|uie, and cankerd minds; for that they speake vnre|uerentlie and contrarie to the knowne truth concer|ning those thrisenoble princes. Which defensitiue he would not haue deposed, but that he takes the mo|numents of their memories for vndoubted verities. (*ibid.*)

Does the excuse of slander derive from an obligation to integrate a traditionally treacherous queen into British history? Malory plays the trump card of religious redemption in order to fill the paradoxical breach opened by female regal adultery, as Guinevere ends her life in a nunnery (Lancelot does the equivalent too). Religion mends the faults of undisciplined secular behaviour.

Shakespeare uses humour to emend this characterisation, which allows what appears to be Guinevere's power of sexual attraction to emerge but divested of its mythological characteristics. He did not retain her ferocity, though, as expressed in one of the Welsh Triads: "Gwenhyvar, daughter of Ogyrvan the giant, wicked (when she was) little, even worse (when she was) tall" (in Walter 2002, p. 873). There is no threat emanating from the character

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<sup>142</sup> The fifty-sixth Welsh Triad reports this tradition of a threefold queen: "The three great queens at the court of Arthur: Gwennhwyfar daughter of Gwent, Gwennhwyfar daughter of Gwythyr, son of Greidiawl, Gwennhwyfar daughter of (G)ogfran the giant", in Walter, 2002, p. 157, English translation by CSL.

in Shakespeare in *LLL*; rather, the queen is, like the other Arthurian elements we have observed, part of a complex referential network which often feeds into the main arguments of the plays and which, due to the evolution of the romance genre, is designed to trigger laughter in London theatres. However, in *King Lear*, the deeply hidden reference to Guinevere is proleptic of the upcoming chaos due to women's treachery. Finally, the looming tragedy and political intrications also illustrate references to Merlin and the prophecy in *King Lear*.

### 3. Merlin

One of the most singular references to the Arthurian matter occurs in the tragedy of *King Lear* in act 2, scene 2, when the character of the Fool refers to the Arthurian prophet Merlin. Alone on stage, at night, the Fool announces he is about to utter a prophecy: "This is a brave night to cool a courtesan. I'll speak / a prophecy ere I go" (3.2.79). In the daylight performances at the Globe, night could be evoked either by the character carrying a lit torch, as specified in the directions for the following scene ("Enter Gloucester and Edmund, *with lights*") or by chronography,<sup>143</sup> i.e. a speech device through which a character states time, as it is the case here. The Fool creates a particular nocturnal atmosphere through the device of amphibologia:<sup>144</sup> an ambiguity in grammatical structure served here by an association of ideas in which the verb 'cool' comes to qualify the collocated noun 'night', at the same time as it associates the adjective with the figure of the lustful 'courtesan'. The beginning of this second address also relates in style to the Fool's first, much shorter, direct address<sup>145</sup> insofar as it refers to sex; the Fool associates the night-time temperature with the regulation of the desire of the courtier's mistress: it is a perfect night to "cool the lust of a courtier's mistress" (Arden, note p. 268). Thus, the storytelling mode – invoking the mysterious atmosphere of the night, along with allusions to sex, create ideal conditions for the audience to pay close attention to

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<sup>143</sup> Maguin 2013, p. 12.

<sup>144</sup> "Gr. 'Amphi' 'on both sides', 'bolos', 'a throw' and 'logos', 'word' [...]. A vice of construction which introduces ambiguity. Amphibologia can be deliberate to protect the author of a message, or accidental with comical result", in Maguin 2013, p. 6. Here, it allows an oblique sexual allusion while also creating a setting for the Fool's speech. The ambiguity counts on the reconstruction of meaning on the part of the audience who associate the words 'night' and 'cool' in 'cool night' while the sexual innuendo keeps the senses alert, serving the purpose of entertainment.

<sup>145</sup> At the end of act 1, scene 5, he had already addressed the public in a two-line bawdy speech before leaving the stage: "She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure, / Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter (1.5.49-50). Note p. 215-216 in Arden Third Series offers a suggestion for the Fool's gestures as he is going off stage, "putting his *marotte*, or fool's head on a stick, the traditional bauble, between his legs to illustrate *things*". However, it may be noted that although under the tone of laughter, he was already making a prediction.

him. In terms of structure, the first direct address creates a precedent and enhances the specificity of the Fool as the only character able to step out of the play enabling him to enter the present of the audience.<sup>146</sup>

The Fool then goes on to utter what appears to be a parody of a prophecy which announces what, in the play, will be a complete reversal of the world. The significant number of anaphora in the following passage, with “when” repeated at the beginning of each of six lines, structured by the parallel phrasing of homeoptoton, emphasizes the theme of the prophecy while at the same time indicating an imprecise moment in the temporal flow of action. However, according to the Fool, even if the temporal frame of the realization of the prophecy remains unknown, the events will come. Indeed, his sentences are all affirmations of future occurrences, thereby falling within the purview of prophetic discourse. The three negations which alternate in an anaphoric mode with the ‘wh- word’ and the numerous internal negations, point to what will cease to exist in this topsy-turvy vision of the world:<sup>147</sup>

FOOL

When priests are more in word than matter,  
When brewers mar their malt with water,  
When nobles are their tailors’ tutors,  
No heretics burned but wenches’ suitors;  
When every case in law is right  
No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;  
When slanders do not live in tongues,  
Nor cut-purses come not to throngs,  
When usurers tell their gold i’ the field,  
And bawds and whores do churches build,  
Then shall the realm of Albion  
Come to great confusion:  
Then comes the time, who lives to see’t,  
That going shall be used with feet. (*King Lear*, 3.2.81-94)<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Edmund has his famous monologue in 1.2. but it is not a direct address.

<sup>147</sup> A metrical analysis helps see the emphasis laid on keywords and on the notion of ‘hearing’ the music, as in a nursery rhyme, thereby focusing on the oral quality attached to the prophecy. This can be developed in a further study on orality.

<sup>148</sup> This ‘prophecy’ is in the 1623 Folio but not in the 1608 Quarto text of *King Lear* where the Fool leads Lear off stage to end the scene (*King Lear*, p. 135, p. 268). A debate took place over Shakespeare’s paternity for this passage and its authenticity has been strongly defended (p. 268).



The phrase “Come to great confusion” is isolated in order to highlight the features of the prophesied “confusion”. This catastrophist tone may be borrowed from Geoffrey of Monmouth whose *Prophecies of Merlin*<sup>149</sup> predicted the downfall of the state. However, Shakespeare adds a substantial touch of humour along with references to his own time. Geoffrey does not cite the activity of diluting beer with water as a major catastrophe but in Early Modern cities, especially London, the fact could lead to intoxication because water was highly polluted by human sewage. The first lines indeed constitute an oblique criticism of existing situations: “priests concerned with words not substance, [...] nobles devoting themselves to the latest fashions, lovers burned by syphilis”, while lines 85-90 describe utopian features (“an ideal that will never come, the opposite of what was in fact happening daily in England”) (*King Lear*, note p. 268). This is an indirect way of denouncing a particular situation; by evoking an ideal picture, the audience will recognise the shortcomings in their own living conditions. The final four lines evoke the great anxiety before the accession of James when, as Bacon noted, many in England and abroad had feared that “after Queen Elizabeth’s decease there must follow in England nothing but confusion, interregns and perturbations of estate” (Bacon, c.1609-1610, first published 1667, ed. Spedding 1838, p. 276-277); the Dedication to the King James Bible also observed that:

For whereas it was the expectation of many [...] that upon the setting of that bright *Occidentall Starre* Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory, some thicke and palpable cloudes of darkenesse would so have overshadowed this land, and men should have bene in doubt which way they were to walk and that it should be hardly knowen, who was to direct the unsettled state. (*The Holy Bible*, 1611)

Since the fool’s prophecy was omitted from the 1608 Quarto of *King Lear* but was only included in the 1623 Folio, it may have been the result of revision. The last line of the Fool’s prophecy about people sensibly using their feet to walk seems to be a humorous response to the Dedication above: if men were in doubt which way to walk they simply had to put one foot in front of the other.

Lastly, to conclude his prophecy the Fool says: “This prophecy Merlin shall make for I live before his time” (3.2.95). This provokes a number of critical reflections that will be developed in the following arguments: they include the anachronistic reference to time, the

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<sup>149</sup> In *The History of the Kings of Britain*, p. 170-185.

character of the Fool himself in relation to Merlin, the relation of Lear to Merlin, and the notion of prophecy both in Celtic times and in Early Modern England.

### 3.1. Situation in time

Firstly, we may observe that the anachronistically enigmatic chronographic element, “for I live before his time”, is paradoxically correct because “in some sense, the Fool does ‘live before the time’ of Merlin” (*King Lear*, note p. 269). The time scheme in Geoffrey’s *Historia* (ed. Lewis Thorpe 1966, p. 286-288) and in Holinshed (*King Lear*, note p. 269) situate Lear’s story in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, while Arthur’s is the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Therefore, according to this chronology, the Fool delivers his prophecy before Merlin.

In a concern to illustrate this ancient feature, some historic productions of the play sought to stage it in a megalithic setting. For example, Macready’s production included ‘druidic circles’ that rose ‘in spectral loneliness out of the heath’, while the 1983 Granada television film starring Laurence Olivier provided a Stonehenge setting “incongruously used as a throne room” (*King Lear*, Introduction p. 30). Although *King Lear* takes place much later than the period of the megaliths, the monuments remained, suggesting that in Shakespeare’s time such references were not entirely anachronistic.

However, the deployment of such a setting is of much more significance than a time reference; it also points to timelessness and emphasizes the quasi-mythic dimension of the play: “On the stage the visual links with Stonehenge might be used to dissociate the play from the contemporary scene, and suggest instead a remote mythical world detached from ordinary human life” (p. 31). Such productions became familiar during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the trend was to depict an archetypal figure of Lear (p. 30). Shakespeare’s play suggested this quasi-mythic dimension to 19<sup>th</sup> century producers, and in his own time, the element of prophecy provided a context, and a setting in Ancient time. But this also has other implications.

For example, at the level of characterization, the Fool places himself on an equal footing with the figure of Merlin, perhaps, even, as his predecessor. With his last line “This prophecy Merlin shall make for I live before his time” he effects a reversal of time much as he predicted a reversal of the world in his prophecy, and in doing so he foregrounds himself as master of both prophecy and time, an ancestor of the fabulous Merlin.

### 3.2. Merlin and the Fool

Merlin is the legendary enchanter and bard of the Arthurian cycle. De Séchelles (1957, p. 153) accounts for the origin of the character and his prophetic role in Nennius's 9<sup>th</sup> century compilation *Historia Brittonum* with what became the famous episode of the red and the white maggots (dragons) fighting.<sup>150</sup> In the Irish version of the *Historia*, from the *Book of Ballymote* and the *Book of Lecan*,<sup>151</sup> King Gortigern (or Vortigern), previously cursed by Saint German and the British\* people for attaching himself to the Saxons and conceiving a son by his own daughter<sup>152</sup> consults his twelve druids to know what is proper to be done. They advise him to leave before being killed by the enemy to whom he has given up the country, and to build a fortress to defend himself, which he does, in Gwyneth. However, the material brought to build the fortress during the day disappears during the night, "and materials were thus gathered thrice, and were thrice carried away" (p. 93). Gortigern then consults his druids a second time and they recommend sacrificing the son of an unknown father and spilling his blood on the hill before the fortress can be built. A boy called Ambrose (Ambrosius, or Embros, Emmrys in Welsh)<sup>153</sup> is found and brought forth, ready to be sacrificed, but against all odds, he surpasses the twelve Druids by his magical insight and prophetic ability. He discovers a lake beneath the hill and two maggots sleeping. The boy invites the assembly to watch the red and white maggots fight, after which he reads the event as a prophecy concerning the future of a Britain soon to become free from the Saxons. There is an implied politics in this episode of the first appearance of Merlin, in which the red dragon represents the British\* people and the white one the Saxons. This episode is considerably expanded in Geoffrey who names the prophet "Merlin" (He first appears in *Historia* vi. 18, tr. Thorpe 1966, p. 167) or "Ambrosius Merlin" (p. 169, p. 171) and it inspired numerous Arthurian romances.

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<sup>150</sup> In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Kingsford also suggests that "Merlin Ambrosius, or Myrddin Emrys, legendary enchanter and bard, is first to be definitely traced in the *Historia Britonum* ascribed to Nennius" (Kingsford 1894, p. 285).

<sup>151</sup> The Harleian version is similar except for a few details (in Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux, 1986, p. 71-72).

<sup>152</sup> Todd notes that historically, German left Britain in 447 AD and Vortigern is said to have died in circa 484 AD. However, his unpopularity commenced after German's departure and far from being a unilateral act, the agreement with the Saxons was decided by all the "consilarii" (Gildas cap. 23). Therefore, for Todd, the statements are false and the whole question of incest is open to doubt (Todd 1848, note p. 89). Gildas has "At that time, all members of the assembly [Tum omnes consilarii], along with the proud tyrant [i.e. Vortigern], are blinded; such is the protection they find for their country (it was, in fact, its destruction) that those wild Saxons, of accursed name, hated by God and men, should be admitted into the island, like wolves into folds, in order to repel the northern nations" (Gildas cap. 23, ed. Williams 1899, p. 53-55). The main interest here is in repelling Northern Picts and Scots and is not doubled by a unilateral decision driven by carnal desire to give land in exchange for Hengist's daughter, as in Nennius and Geoffrey. These later versions, deeply marked with early

This excerpt tells of the Ancient quality of the character of Merlin, and the presence of the druids ('magicians' in Geoffrey) and the planned sacrifice anchor the story in a deeply pagan past. The practice of inaugurating the foundations of cities, temples or other solemn structures by means of human sacrifice<sup>154</sup> is not known to Algernon Herbert as a feature of remote Antiquity (*Irish version of the Historia of Nennius*, ed. Todd and Herbert 1848, additional note n° XIV, p. xxiv), but he notes some similarities with the legend of the construction of the chapel of Saint Oran of Iona, said to be the first building attempted by Saint Columba: "By the workings of evil spirits, the walls fell down as soon as they were built up. After some consultation it was pronounced that they never could be permanent till a human victim was buried alive. Oran, a companion of the saint, generously offered himself and was interred accordingly". However, Oran was found alive after three days and he revealed that "all that was said about Hell was a mere joke"; after which Saint Columba, shocked by this "dangerous impiety", ordered the earth to be flung again on his faithful follower (Herbert cites Pennant's *Second Tour of Scotland*, ap. *Pinkerton's Voyages*, tom. iii. P. 298). Here, Saint Columba turns himself into a 'druid victimary', i.e. 'priest executioner', similar to the twelve druids in Nennius or the magicians in Monmouth. This parallel suggests

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Christian doctrine through the presence of Germanus, seem to have been invented with the design to demonstrate that lust has irreversible consequences (Nennius, *Irish Historia* p. 87-89; Geoffrey vi. 12-13, tr. Thorpe 1966, p. 159-161). What we may have here is an instance of the use of stories to transmit modes of thinking and moral values. Geoffrey does not recount the incest episode but relates that Vortigern already had three sons from another woman (vi. 13, p. 160).

<sup>153</sup> There is a risk of confusion here with Aurelius Ambrosius to whom Gildas (wrote c. 540-560) and Bede (lived c. 673-735) attribute the victory at the battle of Mount Badon (Gildas, Williams 1899, p. 61; Bede, McClure Collins 2008, p. 28-29, p. 368) and who is considered as a possible historical Arthur. Indeed, in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, Merlin's name "Ambrosius" or "Ambrose" is also in Welsh "Emrys Gleitic", meaning "King of Britain" or "Emmrys Wledig", "Ambrosius Sovereign of the Land", designating a sovereign rather than a prophet. Furthermore, the form Gwledig also seems to be related to "Aurelius", thus establishing a correspondence between "Emmrys Wledig" and "Aurelius Ambrosius". This brings confusion between the prophet and the warlord although "Nennius" and Taliesin identify him with Merlin, the bard and prophet, called Myrddin Emmrys" (*The Irish Version of the Historia of Nennius*, Todd 1848, p. 97-98). In Geoffrey, Merlin prophesies the victory and crowning of Aurelius Ambrosius, arrived from Britain to defeat Vortigern (viii. 1, p. 186), which settles the differentiation between the two characters.

<sup>154</sup> Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux do not question the Celtic practice of human sacrifices but argue that it must have been performed in very solemn and exceptional occasions. They acknowledge that the specific name of the bloody sacrifice is unknown to us since the precise description of the practice must have been avoided by Christianized Irish transcriptions. The term we know is for the generic meaning of 'offering', equivalent to the one used in mass for the Eucharist: "*Idpart, idbart, edpart, or idpairt*", which to us could account for the general movement towards the integration of Ancient practices into Christianity. They also note that the sacrificial tradition is mentioned in the Classics, among which Caesar, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Cicero, or Posidonius, most often with exaggeration and calumny; and they also explain that the same ritual figures in Irish legendary literature. *Eachtra Airt Meic Cuind ocus tochmarc Delbchaime ingine Morgain* (*The Adventures of Art son of Conn and the Courtship of Delbchaem*) relates approximately the same story as in the missed sacrifice of the boy Merlin (Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux, 1986, p. 66-76). This altogether places the character of Merlin in an Ancient context associated to divination and prophecy.

a transmission of function from the pagan druids to Christian insular evangelists since Columba took it over from his pagan predecessors. It also gradually unveils the hidden implications behind the character of the Fool in *King Lear* who, by equating himself with the Arthurian prophet, disclosing his hidden Ancient qualities.

In the Welsh legendary tradition, as Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux observe, the name Merlin, or its Latinized form Merlinus, is related to the mythic Welsh character Myrddhin who is associated with an extraordinary gift of prophecy. Like Taliesin, he is considered as one of the *cynfeirdd* or 'primitive bards' of Welsh literature (Guyonvarc'h, Le Roux 1986, p. 405). His name is cited several times along with Taliesin's name at the beginning of *The Black Book of Camarthen* in which he is also called Merddin Wyllt (Merlin the Wild) (ed. G. Evans 1907, p. 46.20). Welsh tradition therefore recognizes two Merlins, Merlin Ambrosius, the bard of Aurelius Ambrosius and Merlin Silvester, or Myrddin Wyllt who seems to be derived from "a more genuine personality" and has preserved the tradition of a famous bard of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Kingsford 1894, p. 287). The *Vita Merlini*, Kingsford adds "is concerned only with the Caledonian Merlin, or Myrddin Wyllt [called Merlin Silvestris or Lailoken], his connection with the fatal battle of Arderidd in 573, his subsequent insanity, sojourn in the forest, and vaticination" (i.e. prophetic action). In the *Triads*, Kingston goes on to note that both Merlins are distinguished and Merlin Ambrosius as the bard of Aurelius Ambrosius is designated along with Taliesin and Myrddin Wyllt as "one of the three Christian bards of Britain"; while Rhÿs finds in Merlin "an adumbration of a personage who once was a king and a warrior, a great magician and a prophet" (*ibid.*). This is some significance for Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Thus, Merlin's double identity and the variations it presents suggest a possible syncretism between the Fool, the king, and the prophet, the king's bard and wild man Merlin that has to be considered in relation to *King Lear*.

### **3.3 The druid, the fool and the king**

First of all, Merlin the Wild-Lailoken's insanity and refuge in the wilderness after he experienced an unbearable sorrow resembles the progress of Lear's madness and wandering on the heath after the deception of his daughters. At the beginning of act 3 scene 2, when Lear and the Fool are in the middle of the tempest, the king internalises the natural elements and recreates a storm and fury in his mind ("This tempest in my mind" 3.4.13):

LEAR

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!  
You sulphurous and thought-executive fires,  
Vaunt-courtier of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
Strike the thick rotundity o' the world,  
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once  
That make ingrateful man! (3.2.1-9)  
[...]  
Rumble thy bellyful! Spit fire, spout rain! (3.2.14)

It is as if the king had pronounced an incantation, urging the powers of Nature to assist him in his revenge upon his daughters for their treachery. Words are chosen according to the lexical context of tempest and numerous alliterations especially in /s/, plosive consonants such as <k> or <p> and ecphosis (gr. to cry out), create the storm, representing thunder and lightning in language. In the first line, epanalepsis, or the repetition of the verb “blow” at the beginning and end of the verse, creates an effect of circularity, recalling the operation of the thunder, and the alternate spondees and iambs create a rhythm that brings emphasis onto key elements: “blow”, “winds”, and “rage”.<sup>155</sup>

Lear's rage explodes in an incantation summoning the elements, fire, air and water to unleash their forces, in gestures that recall the druids in Irish literature who are masters of the elements (Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux 1986, p. 161-174). Druids can make water appear or disappear from rivers and lakes and they can turn Nature into a benevolent or a malevolent force according to their will (1986, p. 163). In the Stowe version of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, the first druid of Ulster, Cathbad and his auxiliaries invoke the elements:

L'un des deux serviteurs lève son regard vers le ciel et observe les nuages ciel: il apporte les réponses à la troupe merveilleuse qui est autour de lui. Ils lèvent tous les yeux vers le haut et observent les nuages. Ils jettent des incantations contre les éléments si bien que les éléments se livrent combat entre eux. Ils poussent des nuages de feu vers le retranchement et le camp des hommes d'Irlande. 'Qui est-

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<sup>155</sup> Here again, a deeper analysis in metric and scansion compared with the residual elements of Celtic orality that are available today in print will be most relevant in a further study.

ce là-bas ?’, dit Aillill. ‘Je le sais’, dit Fergus, ‘c’est la base du savoir, celui qui commande aux éléments, celui qui monte au ciel, qui aveugle les yeux, qui saisit la force des étrangers par ses pouvoirs druidiques, c’est Cathba le druide aimable avec les druides d’Ulster autour de lui’.

[One of the servants raises his gaze to the sky and observes the clouds in the sky: he brings answers to the magical company around him. They all raise their eyes and observe the clouds. They cast incantations to the elements so that the elements fight among themselves. They blow clouds of fire toward the entrenchment and the camp of the men of Ireland. ‘Who is over there?’ Aillill said. ‘I know’, Fergus said, ‘it is the basis of knowledge, he who commands to the elements, he who raises to the sky, who blinds the eyes, who seizes the strangers’ strength by his druidic powers, it is Cahba the amiable druid with the druids of Ulster around him’]. (O’Rahilly, 1961, p. 142, in Guyonvarc’h, Le Roux, 1986, p. 46, p. 171, tr. CSL)

Together with the Fool, Lear absorbs various facets of Ancient druidic behaviour. They both adopt some of these druidic features, with the notable exception that during the storm, the Fool desperately tries to talk Lear into taking shelter. The image of the “court holy-water” he invokes in order to entice Lear inside, contrasts with the “rain –water” of the storm (3.2.10-11) and may be seen as the lustral healing water employed by the druids, easily Christianized in holy water.<sup>156</sup> And indeed, shortly after, Lear’s rage subsides: “No, I will be the pattern of all patience, / I will say nothing” (3.2.37-38). The Fool has the same capacity in healing as Ancient druids, in the counsel of kings and in prophecy and Lear, the king and warrior demonstrates incantatory abilities.

The syncretism between both categories of druid and warrior recalls Celtic modes of behaviour. In *Les Druides*, Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux observe that although the synthesis may be peculiar, the druid in Celtic society was not only a priest, he was also a warrior. They add that the status of the druid reflects an archaic model, anterior to the separation between spiritual authority and temporal power. They cite the example of Cathbad whose double figure appears as warrior or druid according to circumstances in the B version of the

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<sup>156</sup> Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux provide an example of this transmission of practice, from the healing quality of the druidic lustral water to the Christian holy water as related in *The Siege of Howth*, translated by Whitley Stokes in *Revue Celtique* n° 8, p. 48 (1986, p. 164).

*Conception of Conchobar*.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, druids equip themselves for battle and fight in *The Siege of Druim Damghaire*<sup>158</sup> where “un guerrier aux cheveux blonds et bouclés et d’aspect aimable, c’était le druide de Medhon Mairtine, qu’on appelait Medhran le druide” [a warrior with blond, curly hair and of amiable aspect, it was the druid of Medhon Mairtine, whom people called Medhran the druid].<sup>159</sup> Guyonvarc’h and Le roux conclude that without exception druids were also warriors, although they chose when to fight and war was not necessarily their main activity. Female druids could also bear arms, like Fedelm, Queen Medb’s propheticess in the *Táin Bó Cúailgne* (*The Cattle Raid of Cualgne*). Finn mac Cumail, the famous king of the Fianna, who was himself endowed with a sightseeing gift and who knew how to produce incantatory singing (*teinn laegda*)<sup>160</sup> was helped by his own wife druid, Smirgad (1986, “Le druide et la guerre”, p. 103-106). Although the Fool is not a warrior in *King Lear* and may be read first and foremost as the wise Erasmian fool endowed with reason and sound clairvoyance,<sup>161</sup> he also incorporates into his characterisation Ancient roots from the druidic and bardic past, especially as the Medieval Fool is also possibly a ballad singer. However, the fact that some druidic aspects may be seen in Lear is not necessarily representative of a complete form of Celtic social organization. Indeed, druid and king were very distinct functions with very different powers and capacities. Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux observe that there was no absorption of the warrior class by the sacerdotal class in Ireland (1986, p. 118). Therefore if Lear, like Merlin, is capable of invoking the elements, the comparison with a fuller pattern of Celtic analogue is limited.

The last noteworthy aspect related to the ‘Merlinesque’ reference in Shakespeare is the notion of prophecy itself. Its use is important in *King Lear* insofar as it is highly charged with

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<sup>157</sup> The story is part of the Ulster Cycle, it is a *remscéla* (i.e. preliminary story) to the *Táin Bó Cúailgne*. Its title is *Compert Conchobuir, The Conception and Birth of Conchobar*. Guyonvarc’h cites his translation of the episode: Christian-J. Guyonvarc’h, *La naissance de Conchobar*, in *Ogam* 12, 1960, p. 236-237.

<sup>158</sup> In *Revue Celtique* 43, 1926, p. 80-82. *Forbuis Droma Damghaire* in Irish is preserved in *The Book of Lismore* and is part of the cycle of Cormac mac Airt in the secondary “Cycle of kings” (*Revue Celtique* 43, p. 1-2).

<sup>159</sup> *Revue Celtique* 43, 1926, p. 39, tr. CSL.

<sup>160</sup> Without going into details, druids in the general sense of members of the sacerdotal class could have various functions: astronomer, theologian, historian, judge, harpist, poet, storyteller, sorcerer (satirist), soothsayer, prophet, magician, healer, cupbearer and warrior. Concerning the arts, filid and bards were distinct classes and there were subdivisions within each category (Guyonvarc’h, Le Roux 1986, p. 33-44).

*Teinn laegda* was an incantation mode practised by the Irish filid and which can be summed up as ‘chewing singing’ since the thumb is first introduced in the mouth before singing a short poem. It is close to *imbais forosnai*, ‘great science which illuminates’, another incantatory mode linked to a complete ritual with a sacrifice and whose final phase was a prediction (*ibid.* p. 420 and p. 399).

<sup>161</sup> The Fool himself blurs the limits between the wise man and the fool when twice in a few lines he collocates the two notions: “Here’s a night pities neither / wise men nor fools” (3.2.12-13), and “– that’s a wise / man and a fool” (3.2.40-41). He makes himself appear as wise, the Erasmian fool, or the druid Merlin, the wise counselor of kings; and indeed he makes Lear appear as the fool and behind him the regal function and all politicians, in a subtle, indirect criticism not of Christianity as in Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* (1509, first English translation 1549 by T. Chaloner), but of power in general.



contemporary political meaning and it also appears in *1 Henry IV* when Hotspur mocks Owen Glendower for referring to the practice (3.1.144-160).

### 3.4. Prophecy

In our exploration of Celtic motifs in the first chapter, we noted the status of prophecy in Celtic society. The present chapter has provided an account of young Merlin's predictive abilities as they appeared in Nennius, and later in Geoffrey he is presented as the author of multiple prophecies. This became a tradition called "the Merlinesque prophecy" that Terence Hawkes identifies as "a genre that was well-known to Shakespeare and his audience" (Hawkes 1960, p. 331). This tradition, also found in France, Italy, Spain and Germany,<sup>162</sup> was "an entity as much established in English as in other tongues, and part of a continuous tradition stretching at least from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance" (p. 332). The genre in itself had a fairly precise literary form, and the aim of the prophecies was to predict political downfall (amongst other things) when obscure conditions were fulfilled. These prophecies were almost always attributed to Merlin<sup>163</sup> and were very influential.

Hawkes mentions Rupert Taylor's book, *The Political Prophecy in England* (1911), a pioneering work in which it is stated that the tradition of such prophecies in English stemmed directly from Geoffrey.<sup>164</sup> The genre was so meaningful and persuasive that governments successively issued prohibitions against the use and dissemination of prophecy. In the Middle Ages, this prohibition was directed against the Welsh bards and the Lollards' prophetic utterances. Thomas observes that it grew under the Tudors and especially in Henry VIII's reign (Thomas 1997, p. 397), and under Elizabeth I, a special statute was passed in 1563

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<sup>162</sup> See Lucy Allen Paton "Notes on manuscripts of the *Prophécies de merlin*" in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* Vol XXVIII, 2 (1913); and Victoria Flood "Prophecy as History, A New Study of the *Prophecies of Merlin Silvester*" in *Neophilologus* (2018).

<sup>163</sup> Merlin was the best known prophet but as Keith Thomas argues up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, "the many persons upon whom prophecies were fathered or out of whose genuine writings 'prophecies' were extracted included Bede, Gildas, Archbishop Mellitus, Edward the Confessor, Henry II, Becket, Giraldus Cambrensis, Friar Bacon, Chaucer, Savonarola, Ignatius Loyola, James I, Sir Walter Raleigh and Archbishop Ussher" (Thomas 1997, p. 392). Not to mention 13<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Rymer of Erceldoune, 12<sup>th</sup> century Robert of Bridlington and 14<sup>th</sup> century John of Bridlington, whose attributed prophecies are part of *The Whole Prophecies of Scotland, England, France, Ireland and Denmark* (Edinburgh, 1603 and 1615) (Thomas 1997, p. 394).

<sup>164</sup> Either from the *Vita Merlini*, in which the titular character is Merlin of the Woods (Merlin Silvester, or Merlin the Wild, Myrddin Wytt), located in the Caledonian forest in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, whose prophecies contain the account of Arthur's departure to the Island of Avalon; or from the earlier *Prophetia Merlini* in which the 5<sup>th</sup> century Merlin Ambrosius is prophet to Vortigern, and is based on the child-prophet of Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*. Geoffrey emphasized the unity of the two. In the *Vita*, "he is understood to have been inspired by Welsh legends of the northern British prophetic wild man of the type found in the prophecies of the Black Book of Carmarthen, which can be traced back to at least as early as the eleventh century" (Flood 2018, p. 549).

(5 Eliz. c. 15, the False Prophecy Act) forbidding their public use, as well as divers proclamations and orders by the Privy Council (Hawkes, p. 331; Thomas, p. 397). Hotson cites as an example “An order to be taken for government of the Queen’s Highness’ County of Surrey” (1579-1580):

...and especially that good and substantial regard be had unto the punishment of such as shall spread abroad false and seditious rumours, according to our proclamation set forth for that purpose amongst whom those that shall by any means publish or talk of any prophecy are chiefly to be searched for and sharply punished, their books and prophecies sought out and burnt, and the people by all ways and means dissuaded from meddling with such ways and seditious fantasies. (Hotson, 1931, p. 177, from Temp Elizabeth Loseley Park Loseley MS 992)

The type of influence and effect these prophecies had, alongside their identification with ‘rumour’, to the extent that they were forbidden by law, testifies to their political uses in Early Modern England, and here again there is a further connection with *King Lear*. Arthurian references enlarge the rhizome and its ramifications overlap on various semiotic chains in the way they circulate.

### 3.4.1 Circulation

In *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (2000), Adam Fox describes the context of the circulation of ideas as a “verbal web woven by travelers” at high speed (p. 354). There were also exchanges between the capital city and the rest of the country: “In general, London acted as a magnet, attracting visitors and their news stories from around the country and then repelling them out once again” (p. 348). Fox observes that a multitude of ideas were circulating, very often false tales and sometimes very detailed one. A rumour which had started earlier but that remained a constant feature of Elizabeth’s reign onwards was the fear of “scheming Catholics” killing people in their sleep and fomenting rebellions: “the belief that hordes of Catholics were at large in the land, just waiting for the opportunity to rise up and murder Protestants in their beds” (p. 356-357).<sup>165</sup> Indeed, since Henry VIII’s breach with

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<sup>165</sup> An indication that rumour was familiar to Early Modern audience is the opening of *2H4*, the Induction which serves as a prologue to the play in which Rumour speaks of the battle of Shrewsbury: “Open your ears; for which of you will stop / the vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?” (Induction, 1-2); and ending on the courtiers

Rome and the consequent destruction of churches and monasteries, a large number of prophecies were generated by Catholic clerical opponents to the Reformation saying that “priests would bear arms” (Thomas 1997, p. 399). Thomas goes on to argue that it was not only ungodly persons who listened to ancient prophecies (p. 408); indeed, the use of prophecy in a religious Christian context effectively resurrected an Ancient Celtic druidic practice that was adopted by rebellious Catholic priests.<sup>166</sup>

Both Thomas and Fox think that the prophetic mode of transmission in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was mainly oral; indeed, the “very essence of rumour”, Fox argues, was “the breath of people talking”, and prophecy was often signaled as a form of rhyming song, in order to be remembered by non-literate auditors. However, in order to facilitate its creation and wider circulation, learned authors used the written medium (Fox 2000, p. 364). Through copying, recopying and personal letters, writing came to assume a growing importance in the origin and circulation of prophecies in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: “Here, as in other contexts, the oral and the textual fed in and out of one another in reciprocal and mutually enriching ways” (Fox, p. 363). There were also a few printed collections of prophecies in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century such as the several editions of Merlin.<sup>167</sup> The prophecy, originally an oral mode of transmission in Celtic societies, offers an example of the interaction between oral and written media of communication in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and especially indicates the way in which rumour and speculation could be generated by written sources (p. 364). It was this wide and effective form of dissemination that triggered government concern.

### 3.4.2 Effects

Thomas argues that “this government concern was provoked by the close link which had always existed between prophecy and action” (1997, p. 397). It is not clear what Thomas means by “had always existed” since he does not discuss Celtic Antiquity at all but equates the term “ancient” with the Middle Ages in his study. However, we may recall the Celtic

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who carry such noise: “From Rumour’s tongues / They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs” (39-40).

<sup>166</sup> Protestants also came to use prophecies indifferently even if they were issued by Catholics in the first place, when they needed them to serve their political views especially during the Civil War (Thomas 1997, p. 409-410).

<sup>167</sup> We have already mentioned the two editions of *The Whole Prophecies of Scotland, England France, Ireland and Denmark* (1603 and 1615), Thomas also notes James Maxwell’s *Admirable and Notable Prophecies uttered in former times by 24 Romain Catholics concerning the Chruch of Rome’s defection (1615), or the Prophetia Anglicana et Romana* (Frankfurt 1608), amongst others. There were also editions of volumes against prophecy, like John Harvey’s *Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophecies* (1588) (Thomas 1997, p. 410).

conception of prophecy which granted full power to the word (supra, chapter 1). Once words were uttered, nobody, not even a druid, could undo their performative power. Action unavoidably followed utterance, leading the protagonists in the prediction endowed with a magic aura on the path of an inescapable destiny. The power of the word issued in very precise circumstances and by specific speakers must not be underestimated in relation to Ancient societies.

Similarly, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, the spoken word exerted a strong influence on the population. In *A tract on the Succession to the Crown* Harington points to the vulnerability of those under the influence of prophecies observing that “they give a presage and leave an impression in their minds that seem most to scorn them” (1602, ed. 1880, p. 17, in Thomas, p. 396). Under Henry VIII, Chapuys, the Imperial Ambassador remarked that the English were “peculiarly credulous and easily moved to insurrection by prophecies” (in Thomas, p. 398), while “one of the leading participants in Wyatt’s rebellion confessed that it was the influence of a prophecy which finally led him to participate” (Thomas, p. 404, citing Howard, *A defensative against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies*, f. 124<sup>v</sup>, 1583). Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, issued this book after the execution of two members of his family. He was a relative of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, tried and executed in 1572 for high treason after his involvement in the Ridolfi plot to overthrow Elizabeth I and replace her with Mary Queen of Scots. Evidence was found that Norfolk had been under the influence of a prophecy about a lion (Norfolk) and a lioness (Mary Queen of Scots) who would overthrow a lion (Elizabeth I) (Thomas, p. 405). In fact, Thomas observes, “prophecies were employed in virtually every rebellion or popular rising that disturbed the Tudor state” (p. 398).

The Welsh, for instance, produced a large number of political prophecies, fathered by Merlin and relying on the tradition that the Saxons would one day be expelled from the British Isles. Being obscure and using animals’ names to refer to human protagonists, they could be easily adapted to any context. This played an important part in Owen Glendower’s revolt against Henry IV. Shakespeare’s eponymous play offers a striking analogue of this practice when the rebel Hotspur (Percy) confronts and mocks Owen Glendower for his reliance on old prophecies:

HOTSPUR

I cannot choose. Sometimes he angers me  
With telling of the moldwarp and the ant,

Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies,  
And of a dragon and a finless fish,  
A clip-winged griffin and a moulted raven,  
A couching lion and a ramping cat,  
And such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff  
As puts me from my faith. (1 Henry IV, 3.1.144-151)

This recollection of Ancient matter is introduced in a scene that begins with an emphasis on the power of names, with Glendower speaking of the resonance of Hotspur / Percy's name, as a word that inspires fear: "Sit cousin Percy. / Sit, good cousin Hotspur, for by that name, / As oft as Lancaster doth speak of you, / His cheek looks pale, and with a rising sigh / He wisheth you in heaven" (3.1.6-10). To which Hotspur replies: "And you in hell / As oft as he hears Owen Glendower spoke of" (3.1.10-11). The exchange continues with an invocation of the natural signs that appeared at Glendower's birth (the earth trembled and the sky was on fire), which Hotspur dismisses as pure invention. This will be dealt with in more details in the next chapter but it is already possible to see that although the two men are gathered here in a mutual opposition to Henry Lancaster, they clearly occupy two different, though equally rebellious worlds. The Welsh Glendower is obviously relegated to 'hell' and to times when superstition reigned, while Hotspur, on the side of 'heaven', appeals to rationality: "O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire / And not in fear of your nativity" (3.1.25). Further on in the same scene, Glendower is particularly irritated by Hotspur's incredulity and threatens to invoke spirits: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep" (3.1.52), to which his opponent replies: "Why, so can I, or so can any man, / But will they come when you do call them?" (3.1.53-54). A man of his time, Shakespeare uses the growing secular tendency to explain phenomena through reason and logic.<sup>168</sup> Thus, Ancient beliefs and ways of thinking appear definitely relegated to the past and are thus open to ridicule.

It is the case with the example cited above. The text mocks the form of the Merlinesque prophecy whereby animals represent people. In this particular instance, while "ants" may provide a humorous touch, the "moldwarp" (i.e. the mole) refers directly to a prophecy circulating at the time of Henry IV called "the mouldwarp prophecy". It was said that the sixth king after John would be the evil mole who would be overthrown by a dragon, a wolf and a lion, after which England would be divided into three parts.<sup>169</sup> First issued in the

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<sup>168</sup> The opening scene of *The Atheist Tragedy* by Cyril Tourneur (1611), between Damville and Borachio, may be consulted as an illustration to the discussion of reason and logic.

<sup>169</sup> This recalls *King Lear*, and also *The Tragedy of Lochrine*.

14<sup>th</sup> century, it was used by the Percys in their later rising against Henry IV in early 15<sup>th</sup> century (Thomas, p. 399-400).<sup>170</sup> This presents us with an interesting paradox with regard to Hotspur because as Henry Percy, he was a member of a family who historically made use of a prophecy, which in Shakespeare he openly dismisses as “skimble-skamble stuff”. Writing in 1596-1597, while Elizabeth and her government were still concerned about prophecies that could be reused for political purposes, Shakespeare chose to devolve this aspect exclusively to its Welsh origin while the English Hotspur, who once was a valuable captain in the Anglo-Scottish wars, stands on the side of reason. However, it must be emphasized that kings themselves also made use of prophecies.

### 3.4.3 Political use of prophecy to establish right to succession

Such Merlinesque prognostications parodied in *King Lear* and satirized in *Henry IV* were used by the Tudors, starting with Henry VII and the Stuarts, to legitimate their claims to the throne. The following discussion draws mainly on Roberta Florence Brinkley’s *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century* (2015, 1967, 1932).

We now realize how strongly Medieval English thought emphasised the founding of the nation by Brutus and the historicity of Arthur. Brinkley argues that in the period of the Tudors, the focus on Arthur alone was highly significant as a means of justifying their right to the throne of England. Henry VII was “the first to see the possibility of political use of prophecy and legend concerning the return of the British” (p. 2). Born in Wales, at Pembroke castle, he traced his ancestry directly back to King Arthur, and he considered that the appropriate interpretation of Merlin’s prophecy concerning Arthur’s long expected return from Avalon was not to be sought in the actual reappearance of the awaited king, but in the return of his line. Also the popular legend of Cadwallader, the last of the British\*<sup>171</sup> kings had a vision of an angel announcing the end of the British\* and the conquest of the Saxons; according to the angel, Cadwallader’s lineage would not be restored after successive periods of domination by Saxons and Normans. Cadwallader accepted the vision, resigned and went to Rome, leading a religious life, and exposing his country to Saxon invasions. The Welsh Henry Tudor, a descendant of Cadwallader and Arthur, claimed that the time had come for the fulfillment of the prophecy and that through him the British\* line could be restored: “He came

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<sup>170</sup> It was later reused against Henry VIII (Thomas p. 399).

<sup>171</sup> By opposition to the Saxons.

marching triumphantly from Wales under the red-dragon banner of Cadwallader and assumed the English throne in the name of the Ancient British” (p. 2).

“From that time” Brinkley goes on to argue “the contention as to whether Arthur, the champion of the British, was a real person or only a fabulous hero had a definite political bearing” (*ibid.*). This dual conception and this interrogation of Arthur’s real or fantasized nature may account for the paradoxical treatment of Arthurian matter in Early Modern England, and the presence of Arthur in pageants and masques at court, together with the popular derision of the character. Henry VII named his elder son Arthur and gave him the title of Prince of Wales, Bacon tells us “in honour of the British race, of which himself was [...] according to the name of that ancient worthy king of Britains, in whose acts there is truth enough to make him famous, besides that which is fabulous” (Bacon, *History of the Reign of Henry VII*, 1622, ed. 1885, p. 21, mentioned in Brinksley, p. 2). Bacon’s observation illustrates the fact that although he was still admired, doubt about Arthur’s real existence grew in the Renaissance. Shakespeare’s use of the Arthurian matter reflects the unstable discourse of the time, although it may be assumed that the playwright considered the legend as belonging to the past, even though it was used and reused by monarchs, and also by poets such as Edmund Spenser.

At the time of Elizabeth’s coronation, after the period of confusion that characterized Edward’s and Mary’s reigns, she took advantage of the prophecy of the return of providential Arthur to gain the confidence of the people and to generate a sense of security. She delved into the roots of this ancient glorious past and consistently endeavoured to promote its continuation. The Arthurian origin that Elizabeth knew was given special emphasis at the time of her coronation, but the legend was also constantly re-employed in pageants, entertainments and in literature. At Kenilworth in 1565, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester greeted the Queen “with Arthurian compliment suited to a Welsh Princess by the Lady of the Lake who, with two attendant nymphs, floated ashore upon an artificial island, ‘being so conveyed that it seemed she had gone upon the water’. Leicester [...] devised pageants to show her as Arthur’s heir, the Princess destined to revive the legendary glories of England” (Buxton 1963, p. 49). As for literature, Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* is the celebration of Elizabeth’s Arthurian lineage par excellence. By maintaining some sort of continuation of the tradition, even if part of it was anchored in fantasy, Queen Elizabeth maintained peace and she also drew on expansionist aspects of the myth in a period of imperialist development (Thomas, p. 417). The

political application of the Arthurian matter was thus of primary importance, and it is therefore not surprising that it might appear in popular plays of the period.

A dominant idea of Elizabeth's reign was not to repeat the political crisis that preceded her accession to the throne. Brinkley observes that by 1603, the diversity of claimants confused the minds of the populace. Pamphlets were published to voice the claims of different families both in Britain and on the continent. The aim was to choose a successor that would cause least dissension. James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, had a clear title to the throne because as a Stuart, he could trace his descent from Arthur through the Tudor line, and from the British\* Prince Llewelin through his Stuart lineage. He could thus make use of his British\* ancestry to strengthen and popularize his claim to the throne. He was also in a position to unite the kingdom and thereby resemble his ancestor Arthur. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1603, the Venetian Secretary of State noted that James was "said to be disposed like that famous and ancient King Arthur to embrace under one name the entire kingdom". Brinkley goes on to observe that "James was not only *like* Arthur, he was also considered to *be* Arthur" (p. 9). Aided by ancient prophecies James appeared as the one who could avert a national crisis. This emphasis on the reviving of a mythical past also included the activation of Roman history, James styling himself as 'Augustus', as we will see in our fourth chapter about *Cymbeline*. Here, myth and history enter into an eclectic pattern designed to sustain the power of the king.

Beside the emphasis on James's Arthurian ancestry, two ancient prophecies were provided by John Harington in his *Tract on the Succession to the Crown* (1602), "in old British language", "Welsche"; the first declared that: "a babe crowned in his cradle [...] shall make the ile of Brutus whole and unparted" and Harington gives the Welsh equivalent (ed. 1880, p. 120-121). The second prophecy is said to have been written under Henry VIII and according to Harington, was then applied to James VI. There was no immediate confusion following James's accession to the throne, unlike what people in Britain and abroad had feared. James Murray argues in his edition of *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (1875, p. xl) that a piece of contemporary evidence shows that belief in the fulfillment of the Jamesian prophecy was widespread and that it was a matter of common conversation in Scotland in the year of his coronation.<sup>172</sup> Since many Scots followed James to London, it may be reasonably supposed that prophecy was part of the ambient discourse in the capital too. Furthermore, in his oration at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, John Coville

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<sup>172</sup> Both Brinkley and Thomas show several instances of contemporary evidence of the belief in James's fulfillment of the long prophesied deliverer and unifier.



referred to a song of Thomas of Erceldoune (Thomas the Rhymer) which had elicited laughter when he was a boy, but was now regarded as true and authentic (Brinksley p. 8, Murray, p. xli).

Thus, prophecy circulated at the death of Elizabeth and at the coronation of James, since beside effecting the foregrounding of the prophetic tradition, it also fed into ongoing discussion about the succession to Elizabeth, and at a time when her government remained “apprehensive of contemporary prophecies capable of contemporary applications” (Thomas, p. 404). Therefore, when Shakespeare wrote about the “mouldwarp” prophecy of the “dreamer Merlin” in *1 Henry IV* around 1596-1597, and “this prophecy Merlin shall make” in *King Lear* in 1606, not only did he situate his action in a recognisable historical context, but he also reflected the social discourse of his own time. Hawkes observes that prophecy had “a depth of significance which it would undoubtedly have had to an audience fully aware of the merlinesque tradition” (p. 332).

Through Merlin, prophecy and related Celtic motifs are at the heart of Tudor England and the Elizabethan political landscape. The Ancient matter of Britain, shaped in accordance with a specific historical context influenced the transitional period between the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I, and in his plays Shakespeare encapsulates the tension and the discourse that an Early Modern audience would have been acutely aware of. In Shakespeare’s plays, prophecy is an instrument used for the purposes of entertainment, but, Hawkes writes, because Shakespeare parodies the tradition so much, he can certainly “be credited with dealing it a blow from which it never recovered”; he goes on to argue that “what he parodies in fact is a whole literary (even philosophical) mode of expression, whose complexities may in many ways reflect on those of the play[s] itself” (p. 332). Such complexity lies mainly in the paradoxical dichotomic treatment of the Arthurian matter in Early Modern time, torn between praise and laughter, between glory and disdain.

Furthermore, Merlin himself, part of the matter of Britain (and of a whole tradition throughout Europe) is depicted by Shakespeare as a “dreamer” producing, according to Hotspur in *Henry IV*, “skimble-skamble stuff”; he is also placed on the same level as the Fool in *King Lear*, which could be seen as a devaluation of the once famous magician, and correspond to Shakespeare’s possible downgrading of the figure of Arthur. In this complicated network of influences, this textual web of quotation, assimilation and revision, Merlin is also caught in the paradox between admiration and scorn. Apart from being perceived as belonging to an obsolete and legendary past, his character and ability to

prophesy are still influential in Shakespeare's time and, as we have seen, Merlin's prophecies were still edited well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, as we have also observed, behind the prophet Merlin of the Arthurian legend, lies the ancient figure of the druid that exerts a complex effect on both the characters of King Lear and the Fool, and the world to which Merlin originally belongs is also hinted at through the depiction of Owen Glendower. Through Merlin, the complex figure of the druid, close counselor of kings, but also the butt of satire, continued to be embedded in politics centuries after his alleged historical existence.

## **Conclusion to chapter 2**

This second chapter was devoted to the study of Arthurian references in Shakespeare's drama. As we have demonstrated, the Arthurian matter retained an insular feature which permits us to glimpse resurfacing rhizomatic Ancient motifs and to identify their presence in the plays. Some of these narratives came to be part of the wide repertoire of Shakespeare's possible resources. The fragments we have identified survived and re-appeared in the plays probably after circulating orally in Early Modern culture and among early historiographers such as Geoffrey, Holinshed and later compilers who wrote them down. Because Holinshed's *Chronicles* was not a stable text, but a compendium of narratives, it incorporated a wide range of narratives that combined the written and the oral. As for Geoffrey, his own cultural background and the resources he had to hand drew him to embellish in writing what was, and remained for some time, part of an oral tradition.

Renaissance culture, caught between orality and literacy, held imitation as one of its highest aesthetics and ethical virtues. This included imitation of the Classics, but also a tradition of retelling ancient native narratives according to a bardic tradition which evolved through the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period. It is only little by little, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards that the need for an authorial originality became a requirement. Thus, from a circular logic of oral transmission through repetition, culture evolved into a linear mode, and as Keith Thomas argues "the reason for the replacement of this cyclical view of history by a linear one is one of the greatest mysteries of intellectual history" (1997, p. 430). However, we may argue that the emergence and development of print technology contributed to this linearization of thought, by creating what Deleuze and Guattari term 'the root-book', with its strong unity, while the oral mode would a priori encapsulate some of the characteristics of a rhizomatic system involving multiplicity. This important aspect of oral

Celtic culture needs to be investigated further and developed but it would require more space than we have in the present format of the thesis.

In Shakespeare's time, although tales about Arthur and his knights, and Guinevere and the prophecies of Merlin, were retold thereby providing a reassuring continuity with the past, they nevertheless declined as society changed. Stories, so far fore-grounded gave way to the growing figure of the author in search of originality, and the Arthurian legend was relegated to the margins of culture; its downfall being clearly observable in the tone that accompanies its appearance in Shakespeare. For the reasons we have explored, the whole corpus underwent a spectacular contraction from the glorious state of its narratives in Medieval Chronicles to allusive and pejorative references in one of the best playwrights of Early Modern time. However, the Arthurian myth continually resurfaced over time and continues to appeal up to the present time.

In Shakespeare and in the society of his time, the myth stands, like Falstaff after his death "wheresome'er he is, in heaven or in hell!" as Bardolph wonders in *Henry V* (2.3.8). An Ancient pagan British (Welsh) narrative, which took on recognisable Christian inflections, was praised by kings for its native origin with which they sought to identify, while at the same time was despised for its anachronistically sentimental holding to an ancient past. The whole myth in Shakespeare, like Falstaff in *Henry V*, remains in "Arthur's bosom" (2.3.10), perhaps in hope of a resurrection. Its lingering presence in the plays allows us to unearth rich but hidden motifs always intertwined with other frames of references. "Arthur's bosom" is yet another representative of the phenomenon, caught as it is between the Biblical "Abraham's bosom, i.e. heaven" in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, in Luke 16:22 (*Henry V*, note p. 181) and Arthur's own heaven i.e. Avalon, from where he is expected to return one day. Shakespeare has the Hostess, a low class character, articulate the confusion. The first name that comes into her mind is Arthur, not Abraham, the representative of an originally pagan culture instead of a Biblical one. It suggests how deeply ingrained in the popular imagination the myth might have been. And it also suggests that maybe regretting Falstaff's death, Shakespeare wished him good repose in Avalon and secretly hoped for his return.

After Arthur, the next chapter will focus on Shakespeare's treatments of other figures who belong to the margins of Wales, Ireland and Scotland. As "the contour or boundary line of a body" (*OED*<sup>1</sup>), the concept of margin is simultaneously in and out, and *de facto* engages in a dialogue with the main body. Such a dialogue between the marginal areas and the leading

centre of the British Isles produces further semiotic chains and interactions in the rhizome of Shakespeare's resources.



## CHAPTER 3

### The English Renaissance vision of ‘borderers’:

#### the centre and the margins

The way of dealing with a departure from the norm actually shows the state of the norm. Geographically on the periphery of the British kingdom, Wales, Ireland and Scotland “hold, as t’were, the mirror up to [the English] nature” and serve as an unveiling process “to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (*Hamlet*, 3.2). Therefore, through numerous interactions, the margins serve to define the centre and the Welsh, Irish and Scottish “otherness” occupy a symbolically central role in emphasizing the Elizabethan and Jacobean society’s preoccupations as regards difference, a crucial political issue in an age of construction of what was to become in the modern sense of the term a British national identity.

Elizabeth was the “Virgin Queen” whose expansionist views contributed to the establishment of an empire, with colonies in the New World, like Virginia, and “plantations” in the old one, in Ireland; and King James I of England (James-Arthur) dreamt of union and of the old Arthurian kingdom, much as James-Augustus dreamt of the Roman empire. Helgerson argues that the numerous literary works by a single generation of writers all attest to England as the main focus of attention in the later part of the 16<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. From Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, to Camden’s *Britannia*, Speed’s *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, but also the writings of Sidney, Bacon, Raleigh, Marlowe, Shakespeare’s history plays, all contributed to the construction of England as a nation (Helgerson 1992, p. 1).<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, Helgerson cites Spenser in a letter he wrote to Gabriel Harvey in 1580, where he wonders “Why a God’s name, may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of

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<sup>173</sup> In the Arden 3 edition of *1 Henry IV*, Karstan notes that “no fewer than twenty contemporary playwrights wrote or collaborated on plays on English history, but none composed as many as Shakespeare’s ten” (2002, p. 9).

our own language?" (*ibid.*). This quote further emphasizes the parallel that existed in literary but also social and political discourse between the Classical world and Britain. It also directs the discussion to a subject that primarily concerns us in this section, the issue of language as cultural marker of national identity.

The following argument will deal separately with the three major "countries" of the margins – Wales, Ireland and Scotland – in order to identify their differences as much as possible thereby avoiding an imprecise gathering of them all under the singular "Celtic" nametag. Therefore, together with political contexts and theatrical characterization, the aforementioned issue of language will be of major importance in the cultural differentiation of the Shakespearean texts under consideration.

In the process of interrogating the dialogue between the centre and the margins, it is significant that the geographical or cultural context in which the 'marginal' characters evolve in Shakespeare's works is very often made 'other' by the presence of fairies, hags or magic, or by the characters' belief in them. Because they belong to the Otherworld, fairy beings exemplify the claim that they are "from an other countree" (Cooper 2004, p. 173) as a visible marker thereby signaling their estrangement. In the etymological sense it means being regarded as a stranger, an alien (*OED*<sup>2</sup>), thus standing apart from and not accustomed to the general manners of the common world (*OED*<sup>1</sup>). From there, the meaning of being alienated in feeling and affection is very close (*OED*<sup>3</sup>), which makes it easier to despise, mock, hate or be afraid of such characters, whether they be fairy beings themselves or characters believing in fairies. This ensemble of characteristics is also – it is worth pointing out – the breeding-ground of racism.

Our point, however, is not to demonstrate any form of racism in Shakespeare's plays but to consider the Early Modern vision of people living in the margins, and we argue that the presence of fairies in the characters' environment contributes to the formation of a distance from "main stream" inhabitants of Britain; indeed they function as a distinctive sign which also typically corresponds to the nature of Celtic narratives of which, as we have seen, magic is an essential component. As Helen Cooper states, fairies are others by excellence:

They are *other* in a fuller sense than almost any of the ways in which the term is now used. Most 'others' are alien because of unfamiliarity, or sexual or cultural difference, or social or geographical distance: unfamiliarity and difference and distance that ultimately offer the possibility of a closer knowledge and

understanding. Fairies come from the Otherworld, and are unassimilable.  
(Cooper *op. cit.*, p. 174)

Adding to their geographically marginal identification, characters who believe in the powers of the Otherworld, like Owen Glendower, Sir Hugh Evans and of course Macbeth, straightforwardly invoke supplementary forms of estrangement that emphasize an alienation from the norm. The point is to determine whether this fact is bound to remain as such in Shakespeare's plays or if some evolution may be envisaged, if "the possibility of a closer knowledge and understanding" even of incorporation is possible or if, like fairies, the characters remain "unassimilable".

### 1. Wales<sup>174</sup>

As we have seen with all the Tudors starting with Henry VII, Elizabeth I was of Welsh ascent, that is, of British\* ancestry, a term used to describe the first inhabitants of Great Britain as opposed to the Anglo-Saxons (see *supra*, chapter 1). The ongoing paradox concerning the matter of Britain (between inclusion and exclusion) remains as far as she is concerned insofar as the queen appears as the ultimate fairy, "Gloriana" in Spenser's national epic *The Faerie Queene*. Therefore, the head of the state and the church is represented as an 'other', an "unassimilable" being, which she certainly was, as a woman who occupied the sole agency of political power. However, in Spenser's narrative, she is not the same 'other' as 'common' fairies; indeed if she were then this would create another paradox in relation to her role as head of the Church. As Helen Cooper states: "fairies sit very uneasily with a Christian context, and tend to be made the subject of works whose ideologies are oblique to orthodox piety" to which she adds that "Spenser gets away with combining fairies and Anglicanism by making his faery land allegorical" (2004, p. 173). Thus, Tanaquill-Gloriana-Elizabeth is not potentially threatening like fairy beings and she does not belong to the old faith with which characters like Owen Glendower are particularly associated in *I Henry IV* (1598).

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<sup>174</sup> Frederick James Harries wrote a book entitled *Shakespeare and the Welsh* (1919) which appears to be a comprehensive study of Welsh characters in Shakespeare's plays. Some details are worthy of note indeed, but we remain cautious in using what appears to be a somewhat approximate account that does not sufficiently cite its sources and is, at times, unreliable in trying to ascertain of Shakespeare's opinion and thoughts. Besides, Harries argues that Shakespeare had Welsh origins through his grandmother, that he consequently knew Welsh and consequently was favourably disposed towards the Welsh culture (1919, p. 5), which does not seem to have been corroborated in serious biographies (Greenblatt 2016, Maguin and Maguin 1996).



## 1.1 Owen Glendower: character, culture and context

In the introduction to the Arden 3 edition of *1 Henry IV*, David Scott Kastan asserts that “in its very amplitude [the play] reveals its own compelling design – and one that articulates Shakespeare’s most complex and humane version of English history” (2002, p. 4). He also notes that the play is “no less about relationships than about character: about subjects and rulers, fathers and sons...” and that it is concerned “as much with the social formation of England as it is with the complex moral formation of the king who will one day rule over it as Henry V” (p. 7). Complexity is advanced as a keyword which we argue also characterizes the Early modern vision of Wales and the Welsh in Shakespeare’s drama. Kastan goes on to observe that “the play’s concern with unifying a nation torn by civil war must have resonated with many who feared what would follow Elizabeth’s death, and the King’s strategy to produce the desired unity must have seemed familiar in the England of Elizabeth, which similarly sought an imaginary unity in the nation – and indeed in the monarch” (2002, p. 41). A distant temporal setting is made to reflect the current issues of Early Modern Elizabethans; and the Welsh, together with the Percys who came from the north, are on the side of rebellion against the government in power, and therefore threaten this monarchical dream of unification.

In *1 Henry IV*, the revolt of the Percys against the king and their defeat at the battle of Shrewsbury comprises the play’s central historical plot. Unlike in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*,<sup>175</sup> Hotspur (Henry Percy) is the same age as Hal, the future Henry V who, unlike in the *Chronicles* acquits himself with honour at the battle of Shrewsbury at the end of the play (Kastan, p. 13). Owen Glendower first trained as a lawyer, served King Richard II and possibly Henry IV before he was king, according to the *Chronicles* (Vol. 6, section 13, 518). Then, after a major disagreement in Wales with Sir Reginald Grey of Ruthin, “one of the most greedy landowners” according to Philip Warner (1977, p. 110), he rebelled and incited other dispossessed Welshmen to take arms. King Henry IV who “had with wrong usurped the crown, and not onelie violentlie deposed king Richard, but also cruellie procured his death” (Holinshed 3:522 in Kastan 2002, p. 13), quelled the revolt. Thus, the groundwork was already laid for tension between the English king and Glendower.

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<sup>175</sup> According to Bullough, the resource for the historical action in *1 Henry IV* is the *Third Volume of the Chronicles* by Holinshed (1587 edition), classified as “source” (*The Narrative and dramatic Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays*, Volume 4, p. ix). The online Holinshed Project has the references given by Bullough under Volume 6 of the 1587 edition of the *Chronicles*: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_4950](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_4950) (accessed 15/07/2019).

At the beginning of Shakespeare's play, bearing the guilt of his usurpation of the English throne, Henry seeks moral justification together with the nation's unity in the suggestion of a crusade to Jerusalem. However, this has to be postponed because revolts in Wales and Scotland shake the country's stability: "It seems then that the tidings of this broil / Brake off our business for the Holy Land", Henry says (1.1.47-48). Once former allies who helped Henry secure the throne, the Percys seek to 'redeem' their 'banished honours' and 'restore' themselves 'into the good thoughts of the world again' (1.3.179-181 in Kastan p. 29) by supporting Lord Mortimer's apparently lawful claim. Owen Glendower, who has opposed the king for some time joins their rebellion as the father-in-law of Mortimer. Although his motivation is not openly stated in the play, it is presumed that his involvement is part of an ongoing struggle against the English to defend Wales's territorial integrity.<sup>176</sup>

Apart from being an efficient and feared war chieftain,<sup>177</sup> the character is determined by his mastery of magic<sup>178</sup> and belief in "the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies" in Hotspur's words (3.1.146) as we have seen in chapter 2, but also by his own description of his extraordinary birth:

GLENDOWER

I cannot blame him. At my nativity  
 The front of heavens was full of fiery shapes,  
 Of burning cressets; and at my birth  
 The frame and huge foundation of the earth  
 Shaked like a coward. (3.1.12-16)

In most mythologies heroes benefit from unusual conception and birth and in Irish literature, the *Comperta*, the birth tales, would confirm this. They relate the extraordinary deeds that took place before and at the hero or heroine's birth. These are larger than life details in order

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<sup>176</sup> Historically, the Arden 3 edition of *IH4* notes "Glendower was the leader of the Welsh rebellion for independence (1400-1410), and he was proclaimed Prince of Wales by his supporters in 1400. He entered an alliance with the Percys in their revolt against Henry IV, but was not present at Shrewsbury [1403]. He continued to fight for independence, but suffered reverses, including the capture of his wife and daughters in 1408. He was included in a general pardon issued by Henry V at his accession in 1413, which he refused. After 1415 nothing is known about him, and a later tradition has him starving to death in the mountains" (2002, p. 137-138).

<sup>177</sup> He is "the irregular and wild Glendower" (1.1.40) for the Earl of Westmorland, while Hotspur describes him as "great Glendower" (1.3.101).

<sup>178</sup> King Henry IV designates him as "that great magician, damned Glendower" (1.3.72) and he acknowledges his strength when he expresses his doubts to Hotspur about any encounter between Mortimer and Glendower: "I tell thee, he durst as well have met the devil alone / As Owen Glendower for an enemy" (1.3.115-116), while for Falstaff he is "that devil Glendower" (2.4.359-360). Here the Welsh enemy is on the devil's side, strong enough to be worth as an enemy but worrying by his affiliation with the devil. As a result, the old faith of the Welsh is equated with evil.

to outline how extraordinary the hero is. Cú Chulain, Deirdre, but also Merlin and Arthur are all characterized by such special beginnings,<sup>179</sup> and in *IH4*, Glendower means to convince Hotspur that he is of the heroic kind: “These signs have marked me extraordinary, / And all the courses of my life do show / I am not in the roll of common men” (3.1.40-42).

Holinshed’s *Chronicle* has “Strange wonders happened (as men reported) at the natiuitie of this man, for the same night he was borne, all his father’s horses in the stable were found to stand in bloud vp to the bellies” (3.521, in *Arden 3*, p. 240).<sup>180</sup> This sign is no doubt designed to shock and it makes Glendower appear as a bloody war chief while Shakespeare’s account invokes natural forces, such as thunder and earthquake, and includes the mountains of Wales and cattle (ll. 38-39). This indicates that either Shakespeare had read other descriptions of birth tales, or he willingly introduced natural elements that from the English Early Modern perspective ‘looked like Wales’, into his account of Glendower’s conception and birth.

Military historian Philip Warner argues that due to his extreme mobility and the fact that he was never where people expected him to be, Glendower was soon “considered to have supernatural powers, to be able to ride on the storm or to take a different body” and he goes on to observe that after Henry was repeatedly the victim of extremely bad weather during his military campaigns in Wales, a belief in Glendower’s capacity to command the elements grew: “in that superstitious age the hostility of the elements seemed proof positive that Glyndwr had power over wind, rain and probably earthquakes” (Warner 1977, p. 11-112). Therefore, it can be inferred that Shakespeare’s description included elements of contemporary discourse about the Welshman and transformed them into a birth myth that can also be illustrated from Celtic tradition.

Shakespeare encapsulated the features of the Welsh rebel or hero and his ascribed charisma infuses the text. However, the repetitions in Glendower’s narrative, themselves triggered by Hotspur’s countering replies, produce a parody that shatters this heroic edifice. To Glendower’s first account of the exceptional signs which presided at his nativity, Hotspur mockingly answers:

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<sup>179</sup> In *Compert Con Culain*, before the hero’s birth, ravens (fifty fairy beings) devastate the land and the troop that hunt them takes refuge in a little house where all the men and their nine chariots can enter. Cú Chulainn-Setanta first dies and is then brought to life again. His father is the supreme god Lug. There are two versions of *Compert Con Culain* (See *Revue Celtique* 9, 1888 and *Ogam tradition celtique* 25-26, 1953; English version compiled by Eleanor Hull in *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature*, 1898) and the Irish version in *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, ed. A. G. Van Hamel, 1933). For Deirdre, a loud shriek is heard from her mother’s womb before her birth, and a prophecy is uttered by the druid Cathbad (see *supra*, chapter 1). Merlin is said to have been fathered by an incubus (a demon) and Arthur’s conception is due to Merlin’s magic who helped Uther take the appearance of Gorlois, Ygraine’s husband.

<sup>180</sup> Also available at *The Holinshed Project* website: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_4964](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_4964) (accessed 17/07/19).

HOTSPUR     Why, so it would have done at the same season  
if your mother's cat had but kittened, though yourself  
had never been born.

GLENDOWER

I say the earth did shake when I was born.

HOTSPUR

And I say the earth was not of my mind,

    If you suppose as fearing you it shook.

GLENDOWER

The heavens were all on fire; the earth did tremble.

HOTSPUR

O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire

    And not in fear of your nativity.

    Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth

    In strange eruptions. Oft the teeming earth

    Is with a kind of colic pinched and vexed

    By the imprisoning of unruly wind

    Within her womb, which for enlargement striving

    Shakes the old beldam and topples down

    Steeple and moss-grown towers. At your birth

    Our grandma earth, having this distemperature,

    In passion shook. (3.1.17-34)

Hotspur diminishes Glendower's potential to command the elements, comparing Nature to an old woman's digestive system; he despicably implies that the earth was independently flatulent at the moment of Glendower's birth. This recalls the Welsh Arthur being debased as mere excrement by Falstaff in the same play. Glendower's insistence in repeating that the earth did actually tremble at his birth creates a comic effect, like an unwilling running joke. Yet, the scene does not fall entirely into comic mode because the Welshman does not intend to let Hotspur get away with disrespecting his adversary:

GLENDOWER Cousin,<sup>181</sup> of many men

I do not bear these crossings. Give me leave

To tell you once again that at my birth

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<sup>181</sup> Percy is not literally Glendower's cousin but he has become a relative via his son-in-law, Edmund Mortimer, whose sister Kate, Lady Percy, married Henry Percy Hotspur.

The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,  
 The goats ran from the mountains, and the herds  
 Were strangely clamorous to the frightened fields.  
 These signs have marked me extraordinary,  
 And all the courses of my life do show  
 I am not in the roll of common men.  
 Where is he living, clipped in with the sea  
 That chides the banks of England, Scotland, Wales,  
 Which calls me pupil or hath read to me?  
 And bring him out that is but woman's son  
 Can trace me in the tedious ways of art  
 And hold me pace in deep experiments.  
 HOTSPUR  
 I think there's no man speaks better Welsh.  
 I'll to dinner. (3.1.34-49)

Hotspur simply dismisses Glendower's speech as if he has not understood a single word of what he believes to be Welsh gibberish. The actor does not actually speak Welsh until the end of the scene. So Hotspur is merely being insulting in a general way. We learn about Glendower's stature through this speech, and also about his training in magic arts ("the tedious ways of art"). In Holinshed's *Chronicles* it is said that he trained as a lawyer but Shakespeare goes one step further, reflecting an ambient discourse about Glendower and magic. This suggests that however diluted it may have become over the ages, Ancient native culture forms a part of a powerful illustration of Shakespeare's conception of the character. Glendower was lettered,<sup>182</sup> skilled in magic arts and in military affairs; this makes him appear in the play as the figure of an Ancient druid. However, this Ancient aspect of Celtic paganism has to be read through the Christian filter whereby it is transformed into the black arts such as the following quotation shows, when Glendower warns he can invoke devilish forces:<sup>183</sup>

GLENDOWER

Why, I can teach you, cousin, to command the devil.

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<sup>182</sup> Wagner observes that "Glendwr was no simple, half-literate rustic, but a gentleman and a scholar; he had studied law in London and also served in the English army" (1977, p. 111).

<sup>183</sup> Later in the same scene, Hotspur complains about Glendower: "He held me last night at least nine hours / In reckoning up the several devils' names / That were his lackeys" (3.1.152-154). This sounds more like a subtle criticism of James VI of Scotland's *Daemonology* (1597), where he enumerates the different types of demons, than a documented evocation of Ancient faith. This speech clearly belongs to the discourse of witchcraft, much in vogue in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

#### HOTSPUR

And I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil:  
By telling truth. 'Tell truth, and shame the devil.'  
If you have power to raise him, bring him hither,  
And I'll be sworn I have power to shame him hence.  
O, while you live, 'tell truth and shame the devil'. (3.1.55-60)

Epiphora makes the word “devil” appear at the end of a series of four speech units, like a final punctuation showing Hotspur’s determination to ram the idea home and show himself unafraid in response to Glendower’s initial claim to be able to put into practice his capacity to invoke and “command the devil”. In the following three occurrences, Hotspur repeats that he himself has the power to “shame the devil” if Glendower were able to make him appear. Accumulatio, with “raise him”, “bring him” and “shame him” and diacope, words repeated at brief intervals show Hotspur’s growing impatience which ends in ecphosis (exclamation) combined with epiphora: “O, while you live, ‘tell truth and shame the devil’”. Later in the scene, it is in fact Mortimer’s invitation to the combatants to calm down (l. 61) and Glendower’s wisdom which put an end to the agitated conversation and Hotspur’s fiery temper (he is well named). Lastly, Hotspur refers to the belief written in Holinshed’s Chronicle about Welsh people telling ‘fables’, i.e. untrue stories (supra, chapter 1). Thus, when Hotspur urges Glendower to “tell the truth”, he wants him to stop behaving according to the dictates of this ‘mythical’ representation.

According to Harries, in *King Richard II* (1597), Glendower is possibly introduced as the “Captain of a band of Welshmen” cited but unnamed in the *Dramatis Personae* of the play. A mercenary in the service of King Richard II, like the Welsh reputedly were for his father the Black Prince, the Welsh Captain in this play reads nature’s signs in a manner that supports the mythology associated with the Glendower of *IH4* (1919, p. 115-116).<sup>184</sup> The scene is set in a camp in Wales, and involves Lord Salisbury who tries to retain the Welsh who want to retreat on hearing of the king’s death:

#### SALISBURY

Stay yet another day, thou trusty Welshman:  
The king reposeth all his confidence in thee.

#### CAPTAIN

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<sup>184</sup> Harries maintains this possibility and advances this argument together with the fact that Glendower is personally named later in the play by Henry Bolingbroke who urges his followers to “fight Glendower and his complices” (3.1.43) (Harries 1919, p. 115-116).

'Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay.  
 The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd  
 And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;  
 The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth  
 And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change;  
 Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap  
 The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,  
 The other to enjoy by rage and war:  
 These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.  
 Farewell: our countrymen are gone and fled,  
 As well assured Richard their king is dead. (2.4.5-17)

Nature in the form of bay-trees, the stars and the moon, but also prophecies of a fearful future, the elements of Ancient faith, are all represented here and appear to typify a marginal Welsh culture. However, unlike Hotspur's reaction, Salisbury does not mock these signs or the use of prophecy but employs natural elements to portray the king as the sun, and foresee his doomed fate:

#### SALISBURY

Ah, Richard, with the eyes of heavy mind  
 I see thy glory like a shooting star  
 Fall to the base earth from the firmament.  
 Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west,  
 Witnessing storms to come, woe and unrest:  
 Thy friends are fled to wait upon thy foes,  
 And crossly to thy good all fortune goes. (2.4.18-24)

The perfectly observed beat of iambic pentameters enriched with ornamented rhetorical devices intensifies the poetic appeal of this aside. In a sigh, "Ah Richard", Salisbury addresses his thoughts to the king using metaphors of his glory "like a shooting star" and the sun weeping at his downfall. The last quatrain, rhyming in AABB concentrates alliterations in /s/, /z/ and in /f/; especially in "Thy friends are fled to wait upon thy foes", in which the alliterative /f/ and /z/ sounds illustrate the flight of the Welsh mercenaries, while the antithetic structure opposing "thy friends" and "thy foes" underlines the king's uncomfortable situation. Thus, from this exchange it can be deduced that the English response to the Welsh appeal to the old faith is not derogatory at all, because the two men both show signs of belief in the

works of nature. The only notable difference is in the poetic superiority of Lord Salisbury by comparison with the Welsh captain.

Yet, this discrepancy does not accord with the character of Glendower in *IH4* suggesting that the Welsh Captain in *R2* is probably not Glendower. *I Henry IV* Glendower is primarily a poet trained at the English court, as he notes in response to Hotspur who, in a fit of hot temper fitting his name, tells him to speak in Welsh, his incomprehensible language. The scene takes place while they are planning a division of the kingdom among themselves:

HOTSPUR     Let me not understand you, then: speak it in Welsh.

GLENDOWER

I can speak English, lord, as well as you,  
For I was trained up in the English court,  
Where, being but young, I framed to the harp  
Many an English ditty lovely well  
And gave the tongue a helpful ornament –  
A virtue that was never seen in you. (3.1.116-123)

Hotspur's second attack on Glendower's native language is answered by a cutting rhetorical riposte, yet, Hotspur is undaunted and carries on by dismissing poetic skills which he considers unfit for a soldier. However, Glendower is a skillful soldier too, in addition to being a man of letters while Hotspur's tempestuous attitude only enhances Glendower's calm stature. Therefore, the characterisation of Glendower and more largely of Celtic material oscillates between parody and mystery, as a marginal element that requires to be commented upon in a permanent metatextual relationship whereby the 'intrigued centre' (Hotspur) produces a commentary of his 'marginal borderer' (Glendower), claiming not to 'understand' him. This relationship demonstrates the linguistic and cultural distance that exists between the two rebels. If Glendower has the ability to bridge the cultural gap, Hotspur chooses to remain at a distance when he says: "Let me not understand you, then". In this scene, Glendower's artistic education, rhetoric and self-control enable him to displace the centre to himself, while Hotspur becomes the marginal character.

Furthermore, by means of the vision of another character, his son-in-law Mortimer, Glendower appears as a fully accomplished man. This description is in accordance with the requirements to be a perfect ruler according to Ancient laws, as it was the case for Arthur:



MORTIMER

In faith, he is a worthy gentleman,  
Exceedingly well read and profited  
In strange concealments, valiant as a lion,  
And wondrous affable, and as bountiful  
As mines of India. Shall I tell you, cousin?  
He holds your temper in a high respect  
And curbs himself even of his natural scope  
When you come cross his humour; faith he does.  
I warrant you, that man is not alive  
Might so have tempted him as you have done  
Without the taste of danger and reproof.  
But do not use it oft, let me entreat you. (3.1.161-172)

This speech reveals the extent of Glendower's power. The prerequisites of the complete Celtic king, according to the Dumézilian Indo-European trifunctional ideological organizational scheme<sup>185</sup> illustrate this depiction. The Welsh leader is all at once learned and wise (sacerdotal function), skilled in martial arts and tempered (martial function) and generous, lavish (economic function). These are the qualities which make a complete leader. In the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, the great Irish queen Maeve declares that she has them all: "I was the noblest and worthiest of them. I was the most generous of them in bounty and the bestowal of gifts. I was best of them in battle and fight and combat" (tr. C. O'Rahilly 1984, p. 137).<sup>186</sup> Although the first function is missing from this declaration, in other narratives Maeve is also a poetess. Fulfilling the three functions, she is closely linked to royalty, and she requires the moral conditions that issue from this trifunctional pattern from the claimants to the throne who have to be "sans jalousie, sans crainte et sans avarice" [without jealousy, without fear and without avarice] (Dumézil 1995, p. 1005). Via the different visions of the character in the play, Shakespeare makes Owen Glendower appear as a complete leader whose qualities fit with Ancient sovereigns' mythical attributes.

To conclude it is appropriate to consider the matter of the death of Owen Glendower. Although King Henry and his son defeat Henry Percy Hotspur in *IH4*, they do not kill Glendower who was not present at Shrewsbury.<sup>187</sup> At the end of the play, the king intends to

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<sup>185</sup> Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée I. II. III.*, 1995.

<sup>186</sup> Also available at: <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T301035/index.html> (accessed 18/07/19).

<sup>187</sup> Wagner observes that the historical Glyndwr could not go to Shrewsbury and bring Welsh troops to his allies because he was trapped by floods in Carmarthen and he adds that "his presence at Shrewsbury could well have

pursue his fight against Glendower and Mortimer, the Earl of March, we recall, the lawful claimant to the throne. It is only in the third act of *2H4* that Glendower's death is mentioned by Warwick who aims at reassuring the king: "To comfort you the more, I have received / A certain instance that Glendower is dead" (3.1.102-103). The threat posed by the Welsh rebel remains ongoing for more than eight acts in total over three plays, including *R2*. In *2H4*, Glendower appears as a 'ghost character', mentioned but not present, who leaves the trace of a shadow looming over the protagonists' thoughts and actions. His presence is hidden in Rumour's words in the Induction of *2H4*, in "the vent of hearing" (induction, 2), and in "the voice and echo" described by Warwick (3.1.96-97). In the same play, the Welsh chieftain is mentioned three times by Hastings as part of the army ready to stand against Henry IV in act 1 scene 3. This implies that his presence inhabits the play's background, like a ghost. The character is not developed but he is there throughout as a native double of the official Henry Prince of Wales<sup>188</sup> and his death is presented as a relief to the king, thus acknowledging his stature and threatening capacity, which finally places him in alignment with the "signs" that presided over his birth. Shakespeare created a hero consistent with the history and Medieval legends of the time in which Glendower combines both Ancient and Early Modern traits.

Welsh heroes like Arthur and Owen Glendower suffer at the hands of 'English' characters like Falstaff, and Hotspur, and they are reduced to an inferior status, thereby illustrating at least part of the Early Modern view of what had, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, become an 'old' 'devilish' culture. However, it is impossible to claim that this is Shakespeare's view firstly, because no one can affirm what Shakespeare thought, but also, and more importantly, by using Welsh characters and culture in his plays, his growing acquaintance with detail had the effect of ameliorating the negative representation by producing a balance of characterisation; indeed, by softening the description of Glendower's signs at his birth that appeared in the bloody account in the Chronicle, he made him more humane, accessible and heroic. Hotspur and the king himself maintain a distance, considering the Welshman to be a devil, which assumes that the stereotype has been assimilated into mainstream English society.

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turned the scale. [...] Had Henry lost this battle, the course of Welsh history would undoubtedly have been changed" (1977, p. 113).

<sup>188</sup> Glyndwr declared himself Prince of North Wales (Wagner 1977, p. 111). Henry of Monmouth, the future Henry V was born in 1386 in the castle of Monmouth which was still part of Wales before the Act of Union of England and Wales was passed under Henry VIII in 1536. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Monmouth qualifies himself as a Welshman when Fluellen asks him if he would wear the leek on Saint Tavy's day: "'I wear it for a memorable honour, / For I am Welsh, you know, good countryman" (4.7.103-104) (Harries, 1919, p. 158 and 160). Henry also states that he is Welsh when Pistol asks him his name, wondering if Le Roy is a Cornish name, to which Henry replies: "No, I am a Welshman" (4.1.53).

However, not only is Glendower the father-in-law of an English nobleman, which incorporates him *de facto* in the ruling elite, but also king Henry IV himself believes in Glendower's magic abilities, which places the monarch in the same cultural sphere as his Welsh enemy, and illustrates the mode of thinking of an entire age rather than the product of the reductive fantasies of a particular people. Therefore, through a mirroring effect, it may be reasonably advanced that traces of an Ancient faith, even though they came to be considered as devilish as mediated through the Christian filter, were not only preserved in the Welsh margins but also in England. As a result, Glendower's 'otherness' is far from "unassimilable".

This point does not argue in favour of an absence of difference between the Welsh margin and the English centre, because the metatextual relationship we have described earlier produces a commentary which keeps distance between both, and marginalizing the Welsh and mythologizing Celtic culture maintains difference with the centre. But the English also preserved Welsh culture because it was necessary to secure English identity, by providing the 'true' insular tradition. Therefore, elements of the peripheral Welsh culture were recognized as part of the political English centre which thereby regained part of its own Celtic ancestry when in pre-Roman times both Wales and England were part of a Celtic culture. The latter was recognized in Shakespeare's time as the first legitimate native culture of the British Isles and was praised as such by the Tudor monarchs. This claim to the native past is illustrated in the dialogue between margin and centre in Early Modern times and in Shakespeare's plays. The fact that the future Henry V insists on his being Welsh demonstrates the need to 'integrate' the potentially rebellious 'margins' as a key to unifying the kingdom although the process is curiously reciprocal: Welsh into English and English into Welsh culture.

Beyond political claims, two other major Welsh characters in Shakespeare's work are Fluellen, the captain in *King Henry V* (1599) and Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602). Their figures are both closely linked with language. But Glendower's daughter, Lady Mortimer is not to be forgotten as a Welsh speaking character.

## **1.2 Lady Mortimer, Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans: language and cultural issues**

Kastan argues that "the play, in fact, demonstrates an unusual interest in and respect for the Welsh language" (2002, p. 123). This is in accordance with what has been seen so far and is powerfully illustrated in the third act of *1 Henry 4* when Lady Mortimer speaks in Welsh to

her husband who does not understand her and to her father who translates her words. There are five speeches and one song that are in Welsh, within about seventy lines in this sequence which closes act 3 scene 1. This indicates the density and consistence of the passage in performance to the point that the audience must have been confronted with the sound of an ‘other’ language – Welsh. To achieve this scene, Shakespeare’s company must have had at least two Welsh speaking actors who could improvise upon Shakespeare’s oral or written instructions which were not subsequently reproduced in detail as part of the text.<sup>189</sup> According to the printed text and the number of syllables in the name, the Welsh actors pronounced ‘Glendower’ in the Welsh way, in two syllables (Glin-dour) rather than three in English (Glen-dow-er), which would produce hypermetrical lines.<sup>190</sup> The name appears in its anglicized form in the text, but as Kastan observes, the historical figure was Owain ap Gruffyd (1359?-1416?), who took the cognomen Glyndwr from the name of the manor Glyndyfrdwy, ‘Glindourwie’. Either Shakespeare has not transliterated the proper name and the Welsh text in 3.1, or the compositor has failed to set it, which could be interpreted as Welsh identity becoming subordinate to English desire (Kastan p. 123). However, the presence of Welsh language in the play and the correct Welsh pronunciation of Glendower’s anglicized name grant a genuine existence to the culture. The di-syllabic pronunciation of the name resists the tri-syllabic form thereby indicating that oral pronunciation is here subversive and prompts resistance to the possibility that “the political domination the historical Glyndwr so passionately resisted [was performed] linguistically” (Kastan, p. 123). Of course there is another point: the rebels do not have a common language and fail to ‘understand’ each other. This reveals a manifest ideological meaning generated by the scene and underscores further the distance between margin and centre.

The case of Fluellen in *Henry V* is different because the pronunciation of his name in Welsh and in English is not linked to the number of syllables, but to the sound of the first phoneme that has always caused difficulty for native English speakers. The Welsh spelling of the name is ‘Llewelyn’ but hardly any English speaker would have managed to pronounce correctly the Welsh <ll>, which is certainly why it has been anglicized in Fluellen, a more

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<sup>189</sup> The 1964 production of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Company issued a text in Welsh (Kastan 2002, p. 124). A Welsh text was also apparently established by Sir Edward Anwyl and was used by Max Reinhardt for a performance of the play at the Deutsche Theatre in Berlin in 1912. Max Förster reproduces the Welsh text within the contextual scene in his article (“Die Kymrischen Einlagen bei Shakespeare” in the last volume of the *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* (p. 351-364), cited by the editors of *Revue Celtique* n° 42, 1925, p. 455).

<sup>190</sup> For example: “Against that great magician, damned Glendower” (1.3.83), “In changing hardiment with great Glendower” (1.3.101), “And what with Owen Glendower’s absence thence,” (4.4.15), “To fight with Glendower and the Earl of March” (5.5.40).

familiar form of spelling, easier to be pronounced by an English actor and easier to read for a non-Welsh reader. A Welsh actor would have retained the original pronunciation of <ll> that Sioned Davies describes as: “articulated by putting the tongue in the *l* position and producing a voiceless breathy sound” (Davies 2007, p. xxxiv). Giorgio Melchiori notes that “the role of Fluellen was apparently created for Robert Armin, when in 1599 he replaced Will Kemp as the company’s clown”. Melchiori goes on to observe that Armin specialized in the role of the comic Welshman, which also accounts for the date of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as necessarily posterior to 1599. Thus, Armin could also have played the role of Sir Hugh Evans (*MW*, Arden 3 2000, p. 11).

In the texts of *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives*, the oral particularities of Fluellen and Sir Hugh are meant to reproduce a Welsh accent and are pretexts for malapropisms; they generally substitute p for b, for example when Fluellen speaks of King Henry’s birthplace: “Ay, he was born at Monmouth, Captain Gower. What call you the town’s name where Alexander the Pig was born?” (*H5*, 4.7.11-13).<sup>191</sup> Through this substitution of “born-porn”, “big-pig”, Shakespeare exploits the comic potential of pronunciation issues thereby forcing Fluellen into an involuntary diminution of the historical figure of Alexander the Great. In the exchange that follows he proves stubborn as he persists in maintaining that the adjective “big” is the equivalent of “great”,<sup>192</sup> but his mistake is a feature of his inadequate grasp of English pronunciation and not due to a lack of culture since he obviously knows Alexander’s biography well, and can draw a parallels between Alexander’s murder of his friend Clytus and Prince Hal’s rejection of Falstaff. The linguistic game continues with Fluellen repeating the pun in his observation that “there is good men born at Monmouth” (4.7.51-52). This pandered to the audience’s prejudice against the Welsh, since it forms part of a running joke. Fluellen has been ‘anglicised’ politically here, even though his inadequate pronunciation of English undermines the process of anglicization. This integrates Celtic language in the tension between political incorporation and linguistic resistance and illustrates further the dialogue between centre and margins, between assimilation and otherness.

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<sup>191</sup> The editors of the Arden 3 edition chose not to reproduce all speech particularities: “eccentricities of pronunciation have been retained but have not been uniformly imposed, so that Fluellen, for instance, does not substitute p for b in every speech he makes” (2016 (1995), p. 110).

<sup>192</sup> In *Measure for Measure* (1604), Shakespeare used the same language trick with Pompey the bawd, to the difference that Pompey admits his error which, this time, is cultural and not due to a lack of English vocabulary as it is the case for Fluellen. Thus, Shakespeare makes two low rank characters commit malapropisms but the cultivated Welshman is far less humble than the bawd who only has an approximate historical knowledge.

Sir Hugh Evans's<sup>193</sup> Welshness is also very much emphasized in *MW*, even more than Fluellen's. He believes in fairies and Pistol addresses him as "thou mountain-foreigner!" (1.1.148) thus referring to the Welsh as strangers from a wild mountainous country. Evans's capacity for sympathy is less than Fluellen's as he is a parson and a pompous pedant. A pseudo-polyglot, he uses Latin but being less learned a pedant than Holofernes in *LLL*, he makes mistakes (*MW*, 1.1.113, note p. 132). His accent is reproduced in print in the form of mispronunciations of the type 'got' for 'god', 'fery' for 'very', 'wort' for 'word'; truncated words like 'udge me' for 'judge me', 'oman' for 'woman' or typical Welsh pronunciations like 'py'r lady' for the oath 'By our Lady' (1.1.25) or 'Cheshu', 'Jeshu' for 'Jesu', like Fluellen. Fluellen pronounces 'athversary' for 'adversary', a word that only he uses throughout Shakespeare's canon and 'digt' for 'digged' (dug) (*H5*, p. 209).

A peculiar expression of Fluellen also appears in the 1602 Quarto and not in the 1623 Folio, or in the Arden edition of the text. When Evans is about to take leave of his Host, he says "Fare you well" in the Folio; and the quarto text has "I tell you for good will, grate why mine Host" (Fol.4.5.72). This expression "grate why" is mentioned by Max Förster as having been explained due to an erroneous reading of the Welsh phrase *duw gato chwi*, "may God be with you" as *gato why* (*Revue Celtique* n° 42, 1925, p. 455).

Like Fluellen in *H5*, Parson Evans substitutes p for b and favours the plural form of polysyllabic words, a feature that is extended to verb forms: "'Oman, art thou lunatics? Hast thou no understandings for thy cases, and the numbers of the genders? Thou art as foolish Christian creatures as I would desires" (*MW*, 4.1.61-64).<sup>194</sup> Evans's English syntax is also approximate as he often prefers a noun to an adjective or a verb: "I will not be absence at the grace" (1.1.246) or "Master Slender, I will description the matter to you" (1.1.200). As it is the case with Fluellen, Evans's linguistic inadequacies are a pretext for unselfconscious comedy, for example, when he refers to 'louses' for the heraldic 'luce' (i.e. pike), the fish and the emblem of Christ (1.1.16). Being a pedant, the pompous Welshman is even more ostracized through his linguistic difference than captain Fluellen, but both men speak in

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<sup>193</sup> It is commonly thought that Shakespeare had Thomas Jenkins in mind when he created Sir Hugh Evans (Maguin 1996, p. 67; Harries 1919, p. 142). Harries argues that Jenkins may have occupied both functions of schoolmaster and parson of the nearby Guild chapel. However, Maguin argues that provided it was the case, Shakespeare had to recreate the Welsh accent because despite his Welsh origins, Jenkins was educated in England, in Oxford Greenblatt writes (2016, p. 27).

<sup>194</sup> Albeit less frequently, Fluellen also abusively uses plural forms: "By Cheshu, I think 'a will plow up all, if there is not better directions" (3.2.63-64).

prose,<sup>195</sup> while Glendower expresses himself in verse, although the metre is not always regular. The difference in social status is expressed through linguistic difference according to the requirement of the time because, as Adam Fox has observed: “It was common for critics of the English stage, from the Elizabethan period onwards, to blame the breakdown of order and morality on the way in which dramatists blurred social distinctions by making gentle folks speak like clowns and country bumpkins sound like lords” (Fox 2000, p. 102). Shakespeare generally respects consistency and verisimilitude in his characters’ modes of expression. The pedant is clearly ambitious and this shows in his comically inflated style whereas the captain’s speech is direct, although there is no doubt that both Welshmen are depicted as ‘other’.

Acknowledging linguistic otherness, Fox notes that “a number of Shakespeare’s humble characters, such as Juliet’s nurse, the cockney Mistress Quickly, the plodding constable Dogberry and Bottom the weaver, are rendered ridiculous by their malapropisms and linguistic infelicities. Such caricatures remained a source of humour on the London stage throughout the seventeenth century and beyond” (Fox 2000, p. 104). The portrayal of Fluellen and Evans exemplify such caricatures because of their linguistic difference and consequent malapropisms. They combine relative inferiority and linguistic and cultural ‘otherness’. Although Evans’s ambition does not square with ‘humility’, the comic aspect of his character reinforces English identity by invoking the ‘marginal’ Welsh as an inferior ‘other’.

The title of ‘Sir’ given to Evans was frequently attributed to a parson because it translated the Latin *Dominus* (Master) abridged in Dom or Don before the names of clergymen in romance languages; while the title of Welsh knight he receives on the title page of the 1602 Quarto is seemingly the result of a confusion on the part of the compositor who confused the two uses of ‘Sir’ (*MW*, p. 122). He is indeed “a Welsh parson” in the list of roles and not a knight at all. However, as a consequence, both titles add meaning to the character and become expressions of his aspiration, not of his condition, thus underlining his pedantry. Furthermore, Evans remains the object of contempt because of his origin. He is perceived as the “mountain-foreigner” we have mentioned and the “Welsh goat” that Falstaff sees when Evans is wearing his satyr mask at the Hern’s oak revels in 5.5. As specified in the Arden edition of *MW* “the abundance of goats (instead of sheep) in Wales and the mountainous

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<sup>195</sup> Except for Evans when he is disguised as a satyr in the Hern’s oak revels (5.5.49-54; 77-80). There, his speech particularities seem to have vanished and he speaks in verse in the printed text. The character may be assumed to make efforts to integrate and match with the uniformity of the others actors of the revels. Since everyone is disguised he probably does not want to be recognized, but Falstaff manages somehow to unmask him when he calls him “Welsh fairy” and “Welsh goat” (5.5.81; 136).

nature of the country were objects of scorn” (p. 286). Evans, like Fluellen, decidedly belongs to the mountainous margins, not to the urban centre.

The distinction between the city and the inferior country can also be felt in the king’s vision of Fluellen in *H5*. Fluellen works for his king’s good, young Henry V, with whom he maintains friendly relations. The king asks his opinion concerning the swearing of an oath (4.7.129-143), and he addresses him as “good my countryman” (4.7.109) and to a certain extent he considers him a valuable ally: “Though it appear a little out of fashion, / There is much care and valour in this Welshman” (4.1.84-85). Valorous and careful but belonging to the old ways and to the countryside, this is the portrait of the Welsh captain drawn by his English king (for despite his claiming Welsh origins, Henry belongs to the English court). Adam Fox observes a correlation between geographical situation (urban or country) and educational level: “The hierarchy of urbanization, which was mirrored by the hierarchy of educational provision and literacy levels, seems also to have been reflected in the hierarchy of ‘purity’ and ‘civility’ in speech” (2000, p. 107).

Deleuze and Guattari denounce this hierarchical mode when they describe the dichotomic unmovable law of the “root-book” as “la pensée la plus classique et la plus réfléchie, la plus vieille, la plus fatiguée” [the most classical and well reflected, oldest and weariest kind of thought] (1976, p. 12-13 *passim*; tr. Massumi 1987, p. 5). In fact, taken more broadly, this also applies to “the oldest kind of thought” that requires domination of men over their fellows and as such, does not integrate multiplicity. Yet, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the reality of nature does not work that way: “les racines elles-mêmes y sont pivotantes, à ramification plus nombreuse, latérale et circulaire, non pas dichotomique” [in nature, roots are taproots, with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one] (*ibid.*). Although the translation of the adjective “pivotantes” by the noun “taproots” does not render the movement and changeability that is implied in the French original, the opposition between an organic but fixed hierarchical order and a multiple, always changing, lateral organization appears clearly. In Shakespeare, the Welsh characters suggest a multiplicity but they are caught in a systemic hierarchical pressure that is part of the society of their time. The continued relevance of the text also resides in the fact that the phenomenon it describes remains prevalent in our own time.

From a linguistic point of view, although Fluellen and Evans are not illiterate (Fluellen has some knowledge of Classical Antiquity and Evans is a parson) and have moral values (honesty, devotion, fidelity), they involuntarily stumble over the appropriate forms of the



English language, which affects their “purity and civility” in speech. Fox cites Puttenham who argues that there was considerable difference “between the English ‘spoken in the kings court, or in the good townes and cities’ and that ‘in the marches and frontiers, or in port towns’, and that the latter was different again from what was heard ‘in any vplandish village or corner of a realme, where is no resort but of poore rusticall or vnciuill people’”; Fox adds that “the gulf between urban and rural English was a constant refrain of commentators on the language” (2002, p. 107). In *MW*, Falstaff mocks Evans’s Welshness and his accent, and sustaining the ongoing clichéd joke about food and the Welsh fondness for cheese, he rudely complains: “Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English?” (5.5.141-142). Although Falstaff’s is not the ideal model of expression (this is part of what makes it comic), he still belongs to the norm, and his relative superiority allows him to consider that the Welshman indignantly chops up the English language into pieces. Thus, Falstaff exemplifies the idea of hierarchy in the linguistic strata of society. Among the whole gradation of dialects and ways of speaking that existed, all of them were considered inferior to “the standard [...] set by the upper ranks in and around London”, as Fox observes:

Local dialects remained intact in their myriad diversity and mutual opacity as a demonstration of the limits of national incorporation and cultural standardization. Despite this, however, they were not immune from the significant changes in the spoken language at this time as people of all rank were encouraged to participate in the process of linguistic reform by a social system in which speech was an important determinant of position. The standard was set by the upper ranks in and around London, and the extraordinary growth of the metropolis during these centuries had a huge influence on the wider nation, as an agent of cultural integration no less than a motor of economic growth (Fox 2000, p. 111).

In fact, the hierarchical model – London – contained a horizontal rhizomatic structure which to a certain extent involved the integration of multiple dialects. The dialogue and tension between the periphery and the centre intensified with the development and consolidation of a more or less standardized or authorized version of English (Fox, p. 52) against which any departure from the norm could be measured and appreciated more fully. This combination of integration and tension is important for our understanding of the ways in which Celtic material found its way into the business of theatrical representation. Glendower, Fluellen, Evans and all the ‘marginal’ characters in Shakespeare’s plays participate in this paradoxical

process of integration-alienation with regards to the English model, and this process shows in the treatment of cultural elements and clichés relating to Welsh culture.

### 1.3 The other's otherness, from language to violence

Prejudices die hard as Thomas Dekker's play *The Welsh Ambassador*, written circa 1620-24 shows. In this play centered on false identity, disguise and subterfuge, Penda, the Duke of Cornwall's son disguises himself as the Welsh ambassador to address king Althelstane, a Saxon king. He adopts all the commonplace idiosyncrasies that are perceived as Welsh at the time, saying that there are no universities in Wales to make available Latin and Greek,<sup>196</sup> that the Welsh are not skilled in rhetoric and that as a result nothing eloquent can be developed (the pun on "pig high" i.e. "big high" suggests mockery as regards the kind of style the king is supposed to appreciate), but they have bards who sing the accounts of battles on their "twinkling harps":

PENDA In Wales (O magnanimous kinge Athelstanes) wee haue noe vniversities to tawge in vplandish greekes and lattins, we are not so full of rethoriques as you are heere, and therefore your greate and maiesticall eares was not to looke for fyled oratories and pig high stiles.

KING Wee doe not.

PENDA You are landlord of Wales, my master a prince of royall prittish pludd your tenants; hee and awle the sentillmen of Wales send commendations to you awle and sweare with true welse harts, and longe welse hooke, to fyde vppon your side when they can stand, till our Bardhes play in twincklinge harpes the praverys of your victories. (3.2.43-54)

We observe almost the same linguistic features as in Shakespeare's Welsh characters in this quotation. The representation of the Welsh language in print is even denser, and the cliché concerning the lack of education in the country is clearly stated. Moreover, the Ancient bardic system, which actually existed, is presented here as a typical means to relate battle deeds accompanied by the sound of "twinkling harps", which amounts to significantly reduced impression of traditional Welsh music and poetry. Shakespeare's and Dekker's accounts of Welsh, or their representation of the Welsh language and accent, are reminiscent of the genre of 'dialect literature', a specific genre of writing which appeared in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century as

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<sup>196</sup> The oldest universities in Wales were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Fox observes “from which time a variety of dramatic works, jestbooks and ephemeral writings began to contain snatches of verse or dialogue imitative of broadly ‘southern’, ‘western’ or ‘northern’ speech, and sometimes more specifically attributed”, and Fox cites the work of the physician Andrew Borde *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (1542) in which a passage of twenty-six lines is intended to represent a Cornish dialect (Fox 2000, p. 69).

Shakespeare was not immune from this trend although he involved in it in a more subtle and balanced way, sometimes inverting expected clichés, as for example, his articulation of the fact that Glendower learnt his harping in England and not in Wales; or making clichés sound ridiculous because they are uttered by comic characters, as is the case with Falstaff calling Evans “Welsh goat” or “Welsh fairy” (5.5.81) to allude to Welsh rural tradition and belief in fairies. Anne Ubersfeld argues that the contradiction between the speaker’s words and his discursive position displaces meaning and reveals the absurd (1996, p. 214). Falstaff, disguised as “a Windsor stag, and the fattest [he thinks], i’ the forest” (5.5.12-13) is in no better position than Evans disguised as a satyr, and the mocking attacks on the Welshman only serve to underscore Falstaff’s own absurd position. Other clichés are emphasized in the same way, as in the Welsh appetite for cheese highlighted by Ford and Falstaff (*MW*, p. 194 and p. 282), a Welsh drink called ‘metheglin’, made from honey and spices (*MW* p. 287, *LLL* p. 148)<sup>197</sup> or the Welsh production of wool and flannel (*MW* p. 286 and p. 287) used metaphorically by Falstaff to refer disparagingly to Evans. As far as she is concerned, Mistress Quickly calls Evans “the Welsh devil Hugh” (5.3.12), a trivial stereotype that although maybe used here in a bawdy and diminished sense, obliquely resurrects the idea that the old faith linked to Wales includes diabolical forces. Ubersfeld notes that “Tout texte théâtral est la réponse à une demande du public, et c’est sur ce point que se fait le plus aisément l’articulation du discours théâtral avec l’histoire et l’idéologie” [Every dramatic text is the answer to the public’s request, and it is on that point that theatrical discourse articulates with history and ideology more easily] (1996, p. 198). By using clichés, Shakespeare is answering an expectation from his audience, which articulates the ideological discourse of the time as it relates to Welsh ‘borderers’. However, he also makes the laughter reverberate against other comic characters, thus blurring the frontier between who is ‘other’ i.e. the object

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<sup>197</sup> This drink seems to have passed into mainstream culture since in *LLL* it is mentioned by Berowne with no specificity of origin, which suggests that the drink was culturally common in England too. It is an example of cultural integration via a consumable product. The fact that it is alcohol, which corresponded to the liking of many especially at a time when drinking water was potentially dangerous, probably facilitated the integration process.

of laughter, and who laughs at this ‘other’, which results in a comic challenge to the existing hierarchy and also acknowledges a multiplicity of voices, like a spreading rhizome.

Shakespearean subtlety in the treatment of linguistic and cultural difference is further illustrated by a hitherto little noticed instance of Welsh language in *As you like It*,<sup>198</sup> when Amiens, Jaques and other Lords dressed as foresters all sing a Robin Hood song, “Under the green wood tree”. The chorus: “duc dame, duc dame, duc dame!” (2.5.48) replaces “come hither, come hither, come hither!” (2.5.5 and 37) and is annotated as “a nonsense word to summon the Lords, as *come hither*” in the Arden 3 edition of the play (*AYL*, p. 213). The characters themselves attempt an explanation: “What’s that ‘duc dame’?” Amiens asks, to which Jaques answers “’Tis a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle” (2.5.51-52). Jaques appears to be ignorant of Classical languages, but he solves the mystery of this word using Greek, the gold standard against which his own educational level can be measured and raised, albeit artificially. Solving the mystery of this ‘invocation’ by saying it was Welsh would not have had the same effect given the ongoing prejudice against the culture at the time. Yet, the expression seems to be Welsh according to the editors of *Revue Celtique* n° 42 (1925) who cite Max Förster. The word “duc dame” has apparently already been acknowledged as an English transcription of the Welsh *dewch da mi*, “come with me”. The form *da*, common in South Wales would be a reduction of *gyda*, and Förster cites William Meredith Morris’s *A Glossary of the Demetian Dialect* (1910, p. 95). The English transcription of a Welsh term intrudes in an English song, sung by English characters, and we may wonder why. The topic of the song is nature and love, which could be related to clichés about Wales, but it is a Robin Hood song therefore the geography is not Welsh. The word may have been added by Shakespeare or one of his Welsh speaking actors, in order to provide a touch of mystery and a hidden supplement of Celtic culture, which would accord with the dialogue that follows. Only initiated people in the audience would have understood this reference. The fact that Jaques answers “’Tis a Greek invocation” confirms the hierarchical supremacy of Classical over native culture in the Renaissance and sounds like a subtle denunciation of the phenomenon, a highly disguised metatextual relation, under the form of a hidden commentary on an existing linguistic situation.

The nuanced treatment of cultural prejudice is also visible in the violent episode of the leek with Fluellen in *Henry V*. Fluellen is proud of his and Henry’s Welsh origins and continues to emphasize them: “All the water in Wye cannot wash your majesty’s Welsh plood

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<sup>198</sup> The reference is mentioned in *Revue Celtique* n° 42 (1925, p. 455) as part of Max Förster’s article (*op. cit.*).

out of your pody, I can tell you that” (4.7. 105-106). However, he is also conscious that specificities can induce disparagement (“I do believe you majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy’s day” 4.7.100-102).<sup>199</sup> The phenomenon can once again be analyzed by reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of rhizome as opposed to the hierarchical tree. As soon as the ideological hierarchy ceases to be respected, a new rhizomatic idea spreads and tries to connect with the established order with the result that there is a disruption. Fluellen is aware of the disturbance caused by the national Welsh symbol of the leek to the English order embodied by Pistol and he resists. Instead of yielding to mainstream perception, instead of closing the expression of the leek motif upon itself, reducing it to a function of impotence, Fluellen persists in decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers, as Deleuze and Guattari explain: “A method of the rhizome type [...] can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Masumi, p. 8). He connects the symbol to English perception and the result is eruptive. Strong in the awareness of Henry’s support (the king previously told him he would proudly wear the leek), Fluellen undertakes to make Pistol literally eat the leek after the latter had mocked this tradition (he brought bread and salt to Fluellen on Saint David’s day, bidding him to eat the leek he wore on his cap).<sup>200</sup> At the end of their altercation, while Pistol accepts defeat after being beaten with a cudgel, it is Gower who articulates the issue at stake:

Go, go, you are a counterfeit cowardly knave. Will you mock an ancient tradition, begun upon an honourable respect and worn as a memorable trophy of predeceased valour, and dare not avouch in your deeds any of your words? I have seen you gleeking and galling at this gentleman twice or thrice. You thought

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<sup>199</sup> Saint David is the patron Saint of Wales. A broadside ballad called “The [P]raise of Saint Davids day” (Roxburghe 1.324-325) explains why the leek has become a Welsh symbol, “Shewing the Reason why the Welshmen honour the Leecke. To the tune of When this Old Cap was new”. The EBBA website accounts for the publication of the ballad in 1630 with a question mark; since it deals with history until the death of Elizabeth I, we may reasonably assume that the ballad was written shortly after her death. The fact that a broadside was published on the subject indicates that the leek cultural feature was a matter of interest and discussion in Early Modern society.

<sup>200</sup> In the exchange between Fluellen and Pistol in 5.1, the latter calls Fluellen “base Trojan” (5.1.32), thereby referring to the first inhabitants of the Isle of Britain according to the Chronicles. He also replies that he would not eat Fluellen’s leek “for Cadwallader and all his goats” (5.1.28). The ironical and insulting statement uses the cliché of Welsh goats and associates it with Cadwallader, the last of the British kings who defended the isle against the Saxons and who is part of the prophecy of the return of the British line. Thus, it may be thought that Pistol debases the Welsh king and his culture. However, Sikes notes that there is a Welsh tradition which associates goats with the Gwyllion, i.e. “mountain fairies of gloomy and harmful habits” and a legend involving Cadwallader is associated to them (Sikes 1880, p. 49, p. 53-55). In this case, Pistol further emphasizes the link between Welshmen and fairies, and when Falstaff calls Evans “Welsh goat”, he also refers to his ‘fairy’ nature, which further ostracizes the Welshman.

because he could not speak English in the native garb he could not therefore handle an English cudgel. You find it otherwise, and henceforth let a Welsh correction teach you a good English condition. Fare ye well. (*H5*, 5.1.70-80)

Fluellen tries to make “ideological connections” between the two cultures and finally responds by enforcing a hierarchical method of physical domination upon Pistol, while Gower used no less violent words. This reveals the fact that violent clashes of cultures happen, encouraged as they are by prejudice, so that multiple forms of identifications are not possible without conflict. These correspond to the zones of interactions between the hierarchical and the horizontal models described by Deleuze and Guattari, when different kinds of semiotic chains dispute zones of leadership, or zones of fascination. The encounter between Fluellen and Pistol (who is himself a real threat to order) foregrounds social division within the hierarchy. At this point in the play, Fluellen has been incorporated despite his inadequate grasp of the niceties of English, while Pistol is a much more subversive character who stands in violation of honour and honesty, and is the remnant of that disruptive force characterized by Falstaff. The semiotic chains of violence also integrate the king who executed Bardolph for stealing a pax,<sup>201</sup> but this is out of the domain of Celtic issues.

Violence and the fear of the other are possible consequences when cultures mix and confront one another, as is visible in *IH4* with the depiction of Welsh women after the battle between the Earl of March, “the noble Mortimer” (1.1.38) and “the irregular and wild Glendower” (1.1.40) in the first act of the play.<sup>202</sup> Mortimer is taken prisoner on this occasion and the battle and its aftermath are briefly but efficiently described:

‘was by the rude hands of that Welshman taken,  
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 re-told or spoken of. (1.1.41-46)

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<sup>201</sup> (3.6.38-112). A ‘pax’ is “a tablet of gold, silver, ivory, glass, or other material, round or quadrangular, with a projecting handle behind, bearing a representation of the Crucifixion or other sacred subject, which was kissed by the celebrating priest at Mass, and passed to the other officiating clergy and then to the congregation to be kissed” (*OED*, *H5*, note 39, p. 234).

<sup>202</sup> This episode refers to the historical battle of Bryn Glas (or Pilleth in English accounts) which opposed the Welsh forces of Owen Glyndwr and the British troops in Powys in 1402. It was a major victory for the Welsh.

The deictic determiners “that” and “those” designate and distance the action with an added rejection generated by the brutality involved in the description. The Welshwomen – and it is significant that they are identified as ‘women’ – are compared to beasts, and their animality and savagery is emphasized in a depiction that Shakespeare allows to remain partial. It is worth noticing that Holinshed’s account is much more explicit (see paragraph below). The reader-spectator may only infer what a “shameless transformation” that cannot be recounted without “shame” is. Is it linked to the only body part that can generate shame and necessitate modesty, i.e. genitals? The fact that it is not expressed has paradoxically an amplifying effect. It is what can be called ‘the sound of silence’ effect. By creating an information gap in the spectator or reader, meaning reverberates and amplifies in the mind, thus provoking, in this case, an impression of shock due to the horror of the ‘non-description’. Shakespeare uses the power of imagination, thereby acknowledging its powerful efficacy and capacity of telling more than the words convey.

This passage is directly drawn from Holinshed’s Chronicle, cited as “source” by Bullough (volume 4, p. 180): “The shameful villanie used by the Welshwomen towards the dead carcasses, was such, as honest eares would be ashamed to heare, and continent tongs to speake therof” (3.520). Later, the chronicler finally decided to openly describe the cruel and humiliating treatment inflicted on the bodies of the English soldiers: “Yet did the women of Wales cut off their privities, and put one part thereof into the mouthes of euerie dead man, in such sort that the cullions hoong downe to their chins; and not so contented, they did cut off their noses and thrust them into their tailes as they laie on the ground mangled and defaced” (3.528). This episode is reminiscent of the type of torture that was practiced in Medieval and Early Modern England, with a humiliating touch added to it. Besides, from a purely practical point of view, it would be particularly demanding to perpetrate both techniques described above on the same corpse which would have to be turned on one side and on the other, the process being repeated a thousand times. Although castration was a customary part of the process of hanging, drawing and quartering, Holinshed is concerned to demonstrate the humiliation of the victims more than the feasibility of the realization of the process on a battlefield. The narrative style of this ambitious task compares with the biased accounts of the Celts by the Classics. The outcome of the battle was a severe defeat for the English, which makes it a sufficient reason to avenge the humiliation by downgrading the adversaries in the written account of the battle, and Shakespeare reused what Holinshed mentioned.

However, the presence of women on battlefields in Celtic warfare sheds light on this passage in Shakespeare, if we agree to overlook the detailed but fantasized explanation given in Holinshed about this particular battle. There are more credible accounts in other Chronicles. For example, Layamon's *Brut* describes how British women were involved in battle in the Saxon era:

The man that saw (should have seen) the game, how the women forth marched over woods and 'over' fildes 'over hills and over dales [towns and coverts], wheresoever they found any man escaped, that were with Mlega, the heathen king, the women loud laughed, and tore him all in pieces, and prayed for the soul, that never should good to be to it.' Thus the British women killed many thousands, and thus they freed this kingdom of Wanis and of Melga (Layamon's *Brut*, c. 1200, tr. Madden 1847, p. 112-113).

In this extract the description accounts for the presence of women in warfare as well as their killing of thousands, but not for the cruelty ascribed to the Welsh (i.e. British) women at the Medieval battle of Bryn Glas in Holinshed, although it must be noted that the phrase "tore him to pieces" reinforces the brutality of women, a motif that we can also trace back to Euripides's *The Bacchae*.

Holinshed's Chronicle gives another account of women at war, describing Scottish female warriors in olden times (probably the Saxon period). It was compiled in Holinshed but initially written by Boetius:

In these daies also the women of our countrie were of no less courage than the men, for all stout maidens & wiues (if they were not with child) mar|ched as well in the field as did the men, and so soone as the armie did set forward, they slue the first li|uing creature that they found, in whose bloud they not onelie bathed their swords, but also tasted ther|of with their mouthes, with no less religion and as|surance conceiued, than if they had already béene sure of some notable and fortunate victorie. (The description of Scotland, writ|ten at the first by Hector Boetius in Latine, and after|ward translated into the Scottish speech by Iohn Bellenden archdeacon os Mur|rey, and now finallie into English by W. H., 1587, Volume 4, Chapter 13, p. 19)<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0566](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0566) (accessed 25/07/19).



This account lends credence to the one in Holinshed and confirms the implication of women in warfare.

The presence of women warriors in Celtic countries is also confirmed by history and archaeology. The famous British Queen Boudicca, queen of the Iceni fought the Romans in 61 AD. Like the mythological queen Mab (Maeve), she led her army standing on her war chariot, as the famous statue on the Thames bank in London illustrates. On the continent, bones of Gaul women were found buried together with men's and the Cimbres, a German people went to war together with women, as Brunaux and Lambot attest (1987, p. 84). However, there is explicit account of such an after battle ritual as described in Holinshed. The most common of war rituals was beheading, an issue which will be developed in the next chapter in relation to Shakespeare's plays, especially *Cymbeline* and *Macbeth*. The unspeakable acts perpetrated by Welsh women after the conflict in Shakespeare's play can be illuminated either by a transformation of British female war deeds into a specific form of mutilation or a displacement of the Celtic beheading ritual, where heads were taken for religious reasons.

Harries cites Pennant who, in his *Tour of Wales* (1873) asserts that "an author who, writing near the time of the battle, says that these barbarities were committed by one Rhys ap Grych, a follower of Glyndwr, probably excited to madness by the fury of the contests wherein each side fought with greatest desperation" (1919, p. 90).<sup>204</sup> Unfortunately, Harries remains imprecise in relation to his sources and the account cited seems rather unsatisfactory insofar as it makes no reference to the presence of women at this battle. Furthermore, the only argument to support the fury of battle (the *furor*, which actually existed in Celtic and Scandinavian warfare) seems irrelevant to account for the ritual described in Holinshed. The custom of beheading seems more probable on this occasion, and women could have taken part as warriors; but the whole episode may also have been an invention in order to portray the Welsh as a barbarous people, a hypothesis that would emphasize the subversive otherness of the Welsh.

From a narrative point of view, Shakespeare did not choose to use explicit horror in his description in this play (whereas he did in *Titus Andronicus*, or a writer like John Webster would certainly have). The presence of Welshwomen on the battlefield, looming over the corpses and perpetrating horrible but untold deeds remains historically unclear, and finally

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<sup>204</sup> The historian Philip Warner mentions that "[a]ccording to local report, the Welsh camp followers of Glendower shamelessly mutilated the corpses of the dead English; perhaps it seemed an appropriate revenge for the treatment they received from invaders, for their principal activity was castration" (Warner 1975, p. 50).

belongs to an Early Modern symbolism – the emasculation of the enemy. However, the scene can also be illuminated by reference to the mythological female figures of battle goddesses, Badbh, Macha, Morrigan and Nemhain, the Battle-Furies whose identities are closely interlinked with one another. The Badbh is often designated as ‘Badbh Catha’, the Battle Crow. Mostly described in Irish myths, it does not exclude a correspondence with Welsh element since similar traits were also found throughout.<sup>205</sup> Green observes that “one method of inducing terror used by all these furies is that of shape-shifting: they frequently appeared among opposite armies as crows or ravens, sinister black carrion birds of death” (1995, p. 42). The image conveyed through the crow or raven linked to battle is the carnivorous animal eating dead bodies on the battlefield. A ninth century commentator, Cormac glossing the name of Macha, developed the image further: “Macha, that is a crow; or it is one of the three Morrigna,<sup>206</sup> Mesrad Machae, Macha’s mast, that is the heads of men after their slaughter”, which allowed Green to conclude that “the horrific image painted here is that of the crow-goddess hovering, harpy-like, on the battlefield waiting for her dues, the severed heads of the slain” (p. 43). Here, elements from the Chronicles, archaeology and mythology combine in the powerful image of the Welshwomen in *IH4*. Once more, Shakespeare engages imaginatively with Celtic legends and myths, while the rhizomatic Celtic structure remains latent.

To conclude, although Wales necessarily appears as a secondary and marginal geographical space in Shakespeare’s plays, the dialogue between this margin and the English centre is developed with relative subtlety and variety in a continuous mutually sustaining process of repulsion and integration. We observed that Ancient faith and belief in fairies is frequently descriptive of the otherness of the Welsh, together with language particularities and cultural clichés, themselves often subject of laughter. This dialogue about difference also involves submission to the norm and the superiority of the norm. Shakespeare resolves the conflict either by diluting it into more pressing foreground matters of the English political scene, by openly revealing it, resorting to violence if necessary, or by invoking the alluring mystery also implied in the foreign culture. Yet, despite all zones of friction, Wales’s particular position makes it appear as the close, familiar neighbour, already part of the inner circle since it was part of the origin of the notion of ‘Britishness’. This harmonises with the

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<sup>205</sup> Green notes that “A Romano-Celtic inscribed dedication to a goddess called Cathobodua, found in Haute-Savoie, may be the same divinity” (1995, p. 43).

<sup>206</sup> The Morrigna is the triadic form of battle goddesses in which each figure was simultaneously one goddess and three.

Early Modern construction of national identity and shows an ongoing integration process, assumed and explicitly translated in *The Welsh Ambassador* (1620):

KING Tho they are lost, heere sits a brother kinge  
To bid you welcome; call our English court  
Your owne, England your Wales; we are so strunge  
Wee will in nothinge differ but in tongue. (3.2.113-116)

In the same play, a dialogue between the clown and Eldred, the king's brother prompts a discussion about whether Wales or Ireland was the oldest "in antiquities":

CLOWN Looke how much a saint Thomas onion is a sweeter sallad  
then poore < s >  
ELDRED Right, tis well spoken and in elegancies.  
CLOWNE Or as a fatt shropshire cheese outwaies a pound of  
hairie Irish b< >, so *Wales* with her mountains is higher in  
stature and therefore older in antiquities then *Ireland*. (5.2.18-23)

If clichés, preconceptions and erroneous thinking largely dominate this comic exchange, the perception of, and the interest in, Ancient culture also shows through. After dealing with Wales, let us now see what aspects of Ancient Ireland emerge in Shakespeare's plays.

## 2. Ireland

In the sixteenth century, England had complex relationships with its close neighbours. If Wales was politically integrated in 1536, it retained a strong national identity. Despite several restrictions concerning the use of the Welsh language in court specified in the Act of Union, it never ceased to exist and develop. Scotland was still independent after several English attempts to invade it, and Ireland was seen as the first colony of England, Henry VIII having declared himself king of the country in 1541. The idea of establishing 'plantations'<sup>207</sup> in

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<sup>207</sup> The term 'plantation' belongs to the vocabulary of English colonization in Ireland. One occurrence of the term is in *The Tempest* (2.1.144). The *OED* (I. b) has the sense of "the settlement of persons in some locality; esp. colonization" as soon as 1586. Plantations in Ireland started from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. *The Tempest* was written and performed in 1610-1611 and the word "plantation" referred to the colony of Virginia established in 1607, but it also resonated with meaning concerning the plantations in Ireland (Ulster plantation, 1606 onwards).

Ireland and elsewhere, as Francis Bacon argued in his essay “Of plantations” was to implement a model that would finally be adopted by indigenous “savages”:

If you plant where savages are, do not entertain them with rifles and gingles; but use them justly and graciously, with sufficient guard nevertheless; and do not win their favour by helping them to invade their enemies, but for their defence it is not amiss; and send oft of them to the country that plants, that they may see a better condition than their own, and commend it when they return. (Bacon, ed. Spedding 1838, *Works* Vol. VI, *Literary and Professional Works* Vol. I, p. 459)

Andrew Hadfield interprets Bacon’s essay differently when he argues that: “if settlers treated natives well they should soon realize that all shared a common goal” (Hadfield 2015, p. 62). His analysis focuses on the construction of a common national united kingdom, but it does not take into account the element of control and imposed vision of a model that is imposed upon native populations, as Bacon’s proposition suggests. Indeed, as a result of this overt policy of colonization, the repeated English attempts to control Ireland were met by violent resistance. Amina Askar argues that the relationship between England and Ireland was so sensitive a subject that dramatists avoided representing Irish characters on stage, and if they did, it was English-speaking Irish; Gaelic was not represented at all (Askar 2015, p. 53-54 *passim*).

In order to discuss the vision of Ireland and the Irish in Shakespeare’s texts, as we did in relation to Wales, we will identify the historical and contemporary Early Modern contexts, deal with clichés representing the Irish, including issues of language, and question the social status of Irish characters in the plays compared to the representation of their Welsh and Scottish counterparts. Andrew Hadfield’s article “Grimalkin and other Shakespearean Celts” (SEDERI 2015), as well as his other articles on Shakespeare and Ireland, will inform the discussion throughout. For Hadfield “Shakespeare’s plays represent Ireland as a powerful cultural presence, one that threatens to undermine the stability of England” (p. 73). This statement indicates the presence of a political barrier that would make it difficult to effect any form of incorporation of the Irish margin into the English centre. Let us see if this vision actually corresponds to Shakespeare’s treatment of the question.

## **2.1 Histories and the Early Modern context**

Apart from the territorial expansion and integration within the English kingdom, another issue at stake was religion in that, as Hadfield observes, Irish Catholicism could form an alliance

with Stuart claims to the English throne: “In the 1590s the fear in England was that a Catholic pincer movement might link resistance to English rule in Ireland – the rebellion of Hugh O’Neill which developed into the Nine Years War – with the Scottish Stuart claim to the English throne” (2015, p. 60). Thus, the ‘Nine Years War’ generated anxieties, nervousness, and threat over English rule in Ireland and in England itself. Furthermore, it is important to remember that insularity increased distance yet again, making Ireland’s position different from the other marginal countries (i.e. Wales and Scotland). Going to Ireland to maintain English rule was like going into exile from court; this is at least what the Earl of Essex complained about when he was appointed commander for a mission in March 1599 to Ireland, to quell a rebellion led by the Earl of Tyrone (*AYL*, p. 75).

Thus, if the Irish were geographically placed at the furthest margin of the kingdom, the conflict with Ireland occupied the centre of the stage. All plays by Shakespeare which contain explicit or veiled references to Ireland were written in the 1590s, during Elizabeth’s reign, except one, *King Henry VIII* (1612). Thus it is clear that all allusions must be analyzed with a view to explaining contemporary history, even in the historical plays with an ostensibly Medieval context. Hadfield notes that the Nine Years War with Ireland “dramatically and suddenly ended on Christmas Eve 1601, when Lord Mountjoy’s forces comprehensively defeated the Spanish and Irish army at the battle of Kinsale” (2015, p. 68). The Irish context occupied Elizabethan politics until the queen’s death in 1603, when it gave way to the more moderate policy of James I who made peace with Ireland and Spain. This change did much to alter the perception of a Catholic Ireland that posed a threat to English supremacy.

In Shakespeare’s *King Henry VIII*, the Irish context is first evoked as part of a general commentary on the Duke of Buckingham’s trial and doomed fate by two gentlemen, acting as a chorus (2.1.39-44). They reproduce Holinshed’s analysis of the situation arguing that by sending the Earl of Surrey, Buckingham’s son-in-law to administer Ireland as Lord Lieutenant after the Earl of Kildare was summoned back to England, Cardinal Wolsey deprived Buckingham of his assistance (*H8*, p. 269). Holinshed’s Chronicle reads:

But bicause he doubted his fréends, kinnemen, and alies, and chéef]lie the earle of Surrie lord admerall, which had mar|ried the dukes daughter, he thought good first to send him some whither out of the waie, least he might cast a trumpe in his waie. There was great enimitie be|twixt the cardinall and the earle, for that on a time, when the cardinall tooke vpon him to checke the earle, he had like to haue thrust his dagger into the cardi|nall. At length there was occasion offered him to

com|passé his purpose, by occasion of the earle of Kil|dare his coming out of Ireland. (Holinshed 1587, volume 6, p. 855)<sup>208</sup>

The Earl of Surrey is also a character in the play and he openly criticizes Wolsey's policy in a direct confrontation: "Plague of your policy! / You sent me Deputy for Ireland, / Far from his succour, from the king, from all / That might have mercy on the fault thou gavest him" (3.2.259-262). This confirms that Ireland is represented as the exile destination par excellence.

Hadfield observes that "in Shakespeare's English history plays Ireland is where opposition to the English crown develops and grows" (2015, p. 64). In the second part of *Henry VI*, Jack Cade and Richard of York unite after the latter has been sent to Ireland by Henry Beaufort, Cardinal of Winchester: "Th'uncivil kerns of Ireland are in arms / And temper clay with blood of Englishmen. / To Ireland will you lead a band of men / Collected choicely, from each county some / And try your hap against the Irishmen?" (3.1.310-314). The anglicized form "kerns" comes from the Irish "ceithern", meaning a band of fighting men.<sup>209</sup> The Irishmen are described here as "uncivil", an adjective strongly associated with marginalisation, first illustrated by the privative prefix 'un-'. The Irish soldiers do *not* belong to the community of citizens [i.e. English citizens] or to their ordinary life, which is part of the *OED* definition of "civil", and they are also contrary to civil well-being (*OED* 4). They are uncivilized, barbarous, unrefined (*OED* 1), impolite and unmannerly (*OED* 2). Hadfield sees this as "yet another reference that establishes the savage and bloody nature of everyday life in Ireland" (p. 65). This is another instance of detachment, a line of marked territorialization that is the opposite of the line of deterritorialization exposed by Deleuze and Guattari which allows the rhizomatic model and its attendant multiplicities to evolve and develop (1976, p. 24-25 *passim*). Ireland is presented as an 'other' place, a 'heterotope',<sup>210</sup> a closed and different space, distant from the norm, where war and fomenting revolts are common occurrences.

Yearning for the crown, "the golden circuit on [his] head" (3.1.352) Richard of York (later Richard III) enlists "a headstrong Kentishman, / John Cade of Ashford [...] / Under the title of John Mortimer"<sup>211</sup> (3.1.356-359) who had already fought in Ireland, to assist him in

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<sup>208</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_7239](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_7239) (accessed 31/07/19).

<sup>209</sup> Full definition and variants available at: <http://www.dil.ie/8533> (accessed 31/07/19).

<sup>210</sup> The term is derived from Michel Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' which he developed in "Des espaces autres" in *Dits et Ecrits II* (2001), first published in *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* (1984).

<sup>211</sup> Cade's rebellion (1450) was an "uprising against the government of Henry VI of England. Jack Cade, an Irishman of uncertain occupation living in Kent, organized a rebellion among local small property holders

his plans. As Hadfield notes, Shakespeare's description of Cade depicts a wild beastly man. Riddled with arrows, he is "like a sharp-quilled porpentine [i.e. porcupine]" (3.1.363) and being rescued he shakes the darts from his body "like a wild Morisco, / Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells" (3.1.365-366).<sup>212</sup> If the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Holinshed are correct,<sup>213</sup> Cade was an Irishman, therefore the 'contamination' process described by Hadfield is not quite accurate when he writes that "his experience in Ireland has made him Irish, or perhaps [...] more Irish than the Irish themselves" (p. 65). However, Shakespeare presents him as Kentish and in this respect he can be said to have displaced the qualities of the Irish onto him at the point of contact, so that he becomes: "like a shag-haired crafty kern" (3.1.367).

This 'contamination' is an operative part of the threat that Ireland poses to England and is evoked by Edmund Spenser's *A View of the State of Ireland* (1596) an account of Irish affairs in the form of a dialogue between two characters: Eudoxus and Irenaeus. The level of contamination is presented as a pressure upon "the old English which are among the Irish" who, Eudoxus thinks, should long have reformed uncivil Irish traits. His interlocutor, Irenaeus replies that "some of them are now much more lawlesse and licentious than the very wilde Irish", something that surprises Eudoxus: "that seemeth very strange which you say, that men should so much degenerate from their first natures, as to grow wilde" (ed. 1809, p. 104-105). What we have is an ideological conflict between the civilized centre and the wild margin, where the latter poses a threat of contagion and degeneration. The conflict is not only ideological of course, and Hadfield goes on to draw a parallel between York's (*2H6*) and Essex's (*H5*) use of Ireland to further their rebellion against the English crown (2015, p. 65). Thus, for the English crown, the island intrinsically harboured serious political and ideological instability.

In *King Richard II* (1595) disastrous consequences await the king who, according to Hadfield, failed to understand Ireland (2015, p. 66). On his way back from Ireland, Richard

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angered by high taxes and prices. He took the name of John Mortimer, identifying himself with the family of Henry's rival, the duke of York. Cade and his followers defeated a royal army in Kent and entered London, where they executed the lord treasurer. They were soon driven out of the city; Cade's followers dispersed on being offered a pardon, and Cade was mortally wounded in Sussex. His rebellion contributed to the breakdown of royal authority that led to the War of the Roses" (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Cades-Rebellion> accessed 31/07/19).

<sup>212</sup> Cade is compared to a Morisco, therefore a Moor of Spain (*OED*<sup>1</sup>) and / or a morris-dancer (*OED*<sup>3</sup>), the ringing of his bells in the text favours the second sense. Therefore, he is seen as a pagan devilish man since as John Forrest observes in a syllogism, for Elizabethans "morris dancing is the work of the devil, paganism is the religion of the devil, therefore morris dancing is pagan" (Forrest 1999, p. 2, in Cuisinier-Delorme 2013, p. 124-125). Morris dances are related to May Day festivities.

<sup>213</sup> See note above and note 360, p. 145 in *King Henry VI* (Cambridge 1991).

realizes that Henry Bolingbroke is about to steal his crown: “So, when this thief, this traitor Bolingbroke, / Who all this while hath revelled in the night / Whilst we were wand’ring with the Antipodes, / Shall see us rising in our throne, the east” (3.2.47-50). As the Arden edition notes, the Antipodes designate “people who live on the other side of the world (not the geographical region) – metaphorically the Irish. The word means literally ‘those whose feet are opposite ours, i.e. who are upside down’ (see *OED sb. pl. 1*)” (R2, p. 320), but the distance Richard eloquently but inadequately expresses mirrors what Hadfield qualifies as “a careless regard for a land he ostensibly governs” (2015, p. 66). Metaphorically viewing some of his subjects as people who walk upside down cannot but lead to misunderstanding and rupture, and this vision finally reflects Richard’s own inability to locate landmarks. As Hadfield observes: “Richard, as if we didn’t know already, has lost sight of reality, his royal visit to Ireland only serving to undermine him, in large part because he simply does not know or understand what or why he governs” (*ibid.*). Whether a monarch decides to send an envoy to Ireland or whether he goes himself, the challenge remains unresolvable and the result is political instability.

In *King Henry V* (1599-1600), questions of unstable identity emerge as captain Macmorris is torn between his Irish identity and his membership of one single army under the English crown. First of all, from a linguistic point of view, the character is designated as an Irishman as his name shows. The prefix ‘Mac’ meaning ‘son of’ locates him in the genealogic tradition that is so important in Ireland (and in Scotland too). The name Morris is not historical, as the Arden 3 edition of the play observes, but a note by J. Le Gay Brereton in *Modern Language Review* suggests that it may have been “the common nickname of the typical wild Irishman”, thus evoking a common ethnic nickname (*MLR* 12 1917, p. 350, in Arden 3, p. 210). Furthermore, as the nickname Morisco given to Jack Cade indicated, the name Morris is also reminiscent either of Moors or of morris dancers. On the one hand it can be considered as exotic and decidedly foreign and on the other it is linked to old, pagan and devilish customs, therefore typical of the peoples that according to Early Modern views inhabited the margins. Like Fluellen and Evans, Macmorris is also recognizable through his idiom and accent, using ‘ish’ (or ‘isht’) for ‘is’ at all times.

Macmorris is profoundly Irish, not valued by all and the instability related to his character comes from the tensions that exist within the four-nation army depicted in *H5*. Gower says he is “an Irishman, a very valiant gentleman, I’faith” (3.2.67), but Fluellen disagrees: “By Cheshu, he is an ass, as any is in the world. I will verify as much in his beard.



He has no more directions in the true disciplines of the wars, look you, of the Roman disciplines, than is a puppy-dog” (3.2.70-74). Fluellen, himself a ‘marginal’ character, refuses to accept Macmorris as his equal in the arts of wars. Furthermore, he dehumanizes him, using an animal metaphor in a single speech to describe him; the proximate homophones ‘ass’ and ‘arse’ are an indication of a possible connection between the Irish and the anal in Early Modern English culture, as will be argued in relation to the description of Nell’s body in *The Comedy of Errors* (see infra).

Macmorris’s unstable identity within the four nation army is best illustrated when, Fluellen tells him that there are not many Irishmen in the army: “Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation –” (3.2.121-123). To which Macmorris replies: “Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal? What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?” (3.2.124-126). The word nation is repeated four times at the end of five interrogative sentences (epiphora) thereby emphasizing the question of nationality. The deployment of interrogatio, i.e. rhetorical questions, for which no answer is expected, shows a form of vehement assertion on the part of Macmorris whose aggressive defiant manner reveals plainly the Early Modern view of Irishmen. Diacope and polysyndeton in the third sentence, where the connection ‘and’ is repeated at brief intervals, quickens the pace, and amplifies Macmorris’s excitement and / or anxiety thereby contributing to the fragmentation of the sentence and revealing the character’s shattered identity. Hadfield observes that the passage is “a much commented upon verbal crux that suggests that identities were not stable at this point” (Hadfield 2015, p. 68). The four voices in Henry V’s army – Welsh, Irish, Scottish and English – illustrate the division in Early Modern English society and also the political desire to build a national identity.

For Hadfield, “the play defines an unstable moment when people were unsure who they were or who they were going to be in the years to come, whether events in Ireland were going to change the nature of archipelagic cluster of the British Isles” (*ibid*). However, it is not only a question of English concern as regards Ireland; Macmorris’s loud cry reveals tensions yet unresolved in relation to the contrast between Irish identity and the English norm. Shakespeare makes this apparent in the same way that he has Shylock address Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* (3.1.46-54), except that unlike the Jewish usurer, the Irish captain does not occupy a central position in the play. He does not have the extensive rhetorical ability as Shylock nor does he go as far as taking revenge. Shakespeare does, however, give a voice to the Irish captain although he is never fully integrated within a unified realm, as the insults that

he is forced to withstand reveal a degree of contempt for a marginal identity. The instability of Macmorris's identity reflects the situation of Ireland within the British Isles and it may perhaps be speculated that Shakespeare intended that it should provide a point of resistance to the extant hierarchical social and political order.

Finally, in *Henry V*, a textual issue contributes to the instability that lies at the heart of the playtext. In the 1623 Folio edition of the play, after the defeat of the French, Queen Isabel addresses her future son-in-law as "brother Ireland", instead of "brother England", whereas this speech is absent from the 1600 Quarto. This may be an error in the Folio or, perhaps, its absence in the quarto is the result of censorship due to the then current controversy with regard to Irish affairs. Hadfield cites Gary Taylor, the editor of the 1982 O.U.P. edition of the play who argues that "the reason for the slip is probably not scribal or textual but 'an indication of [a] preoccupation with Irish affairs'" (Hadfield 2015, p. 67-68, Taylor 1982, p. 266). If so, how did the accidental appellation reappear in the 1623 Folio? It was probably safer to restore the appellation in the text in 1623 than in 1600. The Arden 3 edition of the play does not retain it, thus implying that it may have been a printing mistake. However, if this was not an error, then either Shakespeare's or another sympathetic hand may have been responsible for the rare appellation "Brother Ireland". Thus, the instability related to Ireland also inhabits the overall architecture of the play: its printed text. Yet, in Elizabethan time, some motifs were less fluctuant in relation to the Irish culture: clichés. They reveal Early Modern representations and are also indicative of links with Celtic traditions.

## **2.2 Animal metaphors, whisky drinkers and Nell's body**

In *As You Like It*,<sup>214</sup> Rosalind's two allusions to Ireland appear as topical references to the 1599 crisis: "Pray you no more of this, 'tis like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon" (5.2.105-106), and the reference to "an Irish rat" (3.2.173). Juliet Dusinberre observes that the play "has always been considered exempt of political influence because of its pastoral mode. But this is not how the Elizabethans viewed pastoral. In an age of censorship, the pastoral mode provided a way of saying one's dangerous piece with relative safety"; she goes on to argue that Essex's exile in Ireland and the contemporary political scene are active elements of a play about exile and banishment more generally (AYL, p. 102-103).

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<sup>214</sup> First performed between 1598 and 1600.

To the two above references associating animals with Ireland and the Irish, a third can be added, Hotspur's "I'd rather hear Lady, my brach, howl in Irish" in *IH4* (3.1.232). For Hotspur, hearing his female dog howl "in Irish" is preferable to listening to a song in Welsh, which says a lot about his attitude to both languages. The sound of Irish is equated to an animal's cry and the symbolism of the dog adds to the derogatory meaning of the sentence.<sup>215</sup> Applied to a person, the word means "a worthless, surly or cowardly fellow" (*OED*<sup>3a</sup>). Furthermore, a bitch is also a vulgar term for a lewd woman. This proximity of meanings produces a pejorative vision of Irish culture, establishing it as being close to animality, baseness and lewdness.

The allusion to rats is more complex. The *OED* mentions the "the notional killing or expulsion of rats in Ireland", adding that E. C. Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1894, p. 1040/1) "states that it was popularly believed that rats could be eliminated by cursing them in rhyming verse, although does not explain the connection with Ireland" (*OED*<sup>1.3</sup>). Brewer's dictionary entry reads:

*Irish rats rhymed to death.* It was once a prevalent opinion that rats in pasturages could be extirpated by anathematising them in rhyming verse or by metrical charms. This notion is frequently alluded to by ancient authors. Thus, Ben Jonson says: Rhyme them to death, as they do Irish rats" (*Poetaster*); Sir Philip Sidney says: "Though I will not wish unto you... to be rimed to death as is said to be done in Ireland" (*Defense of Poesie*); and Shakespeare makes Rosalind say: "I was never so berhymed since...I was an Irish rat", alluding to the Pythagorean doctrine of the transmigration of souls (*As You Like It*, 3.2). (Cobham Brewer 1900, p. 1040/1)<sup>216</sup>

The *OED* cites a literary study by C. Bertha and D. E. Morse, *More Real than Reality, the Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts* (1991) which glosses the magical ritual described above: "The ancient Irish satirists, who,.. when necessary, could rhyme rats to death to end a plague" (iv. 191). However "ancient" in this quote the belief was, it can be illustrated by the ritual satiric practice of the Celtic druids, as Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux note:

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<sup>215</sup> In the Celtic domain, the dog is associated with the world of warriors; contradistinctly to the Greek and Roman conceptions of the symbol, it is the object of flattering metaphors. The great hero Cúchulainn is the dog of Culann, the blacksmith. First named Sétanta, it is after killing the fierce guard-dog in self-defense that he was given this nickname. In insular and continental Celtic warfare, dogs were raised and trained for battle and hunting and all pejorative meaning is absent from this animal symbol (Chevalier, Gheerbrandt 1982, p. 242).

<sup>216</sup> In this quote it is worthy of note that the adjective 'ancient' is used to designate Early Modern references, thus meaning "belonging to a time long ago in history" without necessarily being thousands of years ago. It is therefore different from the adjective 'Ancient' with a capital A, that we use to refer to Antiquity.

La satire, même exprimée en mètres poétiques, n'est pas de la simple poésie: elle est poésie, certes, mais incantatoire, magique, sentence prononcée par un druide contre un individu qui transgresse une règle de son état. À la différence de la louange, elle peut être écrite et c'est pour cette raison que, dans la déviation irlandaise, elle appartient à celui qui a licence de faire usage de l'écriture, le voyant et magicien qu'est le *file*.

[Satire, even expressed in poetic metres, is not mere poetry: it is poetry, of course, but incantatory, magical, a sentence pronounced by a druid against an individual who transgresses a rule of his state. Unlike praise, it can be written and it is the reason why, in the Irish deviation, it belongs to the one who has a license to make use of writing, the seer and magician that the *file* is]. (Guyonvarc'h, Le Roux 1986, p. 205, tr. CSL)

The period that is referred to in this critical commentary covers pre-literate and literate Ireland, that is to say a tradition transmitted across the ages, adapting to new cultures and modes of communication. The *file* is a poet, which is why Irish rats are associated with rhyme or bardic poetry. The *OED* also cites Ben Jonson's *Staple of Newes*: "The fine Madrigall-man, in rime, to haue runne him o' the Countrey, like an Irish rat" (1631, 4<sup>th</sup> Intermean 55 in *Works* II). The "madrigal-man" is a bard writing and singing madrigals. The emphasis here is more on the rhyme than on the magical aspect of composition, whereas Shakespeare insists on the enchanting power of words, while Rosalind who says to be "berhymed" is in fact "bewitched" by Orlando's rhymes, written on paper and hung on trees. Shakespeare acknowledges the magical aspect of this Irish tradition together with its mode of expression, poetry or "rhyme". This is all the more emphasized by the spiritual reference to Pythagorical metempsychosis, i.e. the transmigration of souls, which indirectly links the Irish tradition with Classical Antiquity (Pythagoras lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC). Although Shakespeare does not develop the reference, in two lines he manages to show a more acute perception of Ancient Irish tradition than many of his contemporaries<sup>217</sup> and he does not hesitate to use a syncretism of Classical and native cultures to support the allusion.

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<sup>217</sup> Note page 249 in the Arden 3 edition of *AYL* also cites "Jonson's *Apologetical Dialogue*, appended to the 1602 quarto of *Poetaster*, 'the Author' protests that he could easily destroy his detractors: 'Rhyme 'em to death, as they doe Irish rats / In drumming tunes' (150-1, p. 269). Cf. Sidney, *Apology*: 'Nor to be rhymed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland' (142)".

Apart from the allusion to Ancient Irish faith and tradition<sup>218</sup> the expression “Irish rat” also carries a derogatory meaning linked to people. In contemporary Early Modern parlance, a rat is “a dishonest, contemptible, or worthless person; spec. a man who is deceitful or disloyal in a romantic relationship” (1571, *OED*<sup>2.4a</sup>)<sup>219</sup> which can also be used humorously, in a weakened sense or affectionate form. And in another Early Modern sense, now obsolete, a rat is “originally a person who is arrested for disorderly conduct, usually as a result of being intoxicated. cf as drunk” (*OED*<sup>2.4b</sup>).<sup>220</sup> Dishonest, deceitful, disloyal in affection and associated with excessive drinking, the description corresponds to the Early Modern conception of the rebellious Irish. Therefore, this expression “Irish rats” is the focus of a cluster of meanings, a syncretism of traditional Ancient faith and contemporary derogatory metaphor in which the Irishman not only makes the rat flee but becomes the animal himself.

However, this second thoroughly derogatory sense is not what Rosalind intends when she says “I was an Irish rat”. If the offensive meaning appeals to the general public as regards the Irish, Shakespeare’s use of it confronts them with its inappropriateness in relation to Rosalind. She cannot be represented negatively, since she was an “Irish rat” only in the sense that she was banished, expelled from her usurping uncle’s court at the beginning of the play. Rosalind bears the name of a flower, an expression of beauty, and Orlando, who is in love with her, reverses the estrangement process by ‘berhyming’ her with his verses hung on trees in order to attract her. He wants to show Rosalind’s virtue and he wants the audience witness his affection for her:

O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books,  
 And in their barks my thoughts I’ll character,  
 That every eye which in this forest looks  
 Shall see thy virtue witnessed everywhere. (3.2.5-8)

The audience i.e. the trees of the forest<sup>221</sup> and also “every eye which in this forest looks”, bear witness to the assimilation of a person who was once “an Irish rat”, and Orlando carves the virtuous nature of this person into the trees, in their very flesh, as if to provide a counter to the

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<sup>218</sup> This tradition of eliminating rats recalls the Medieval German legend of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* who lured all the rats out of the town of Hamelin with his magic pipe.

<sup>219</sup> “To smell a rat” is “to suspect deception, foul play” (1540, *OED*)

<sup>220</sup> The *OED* has “as drunk as a rat” (1548).

<sup>221</sup> Touchstone clarifies the fact that the audience is metaphorically designated as the forest after Rosalind has dismissed him with his bad joke and before Celia reads Orlando’s words: TOUCHSTONE: “You have said. – But whether wisely or no, let the forest judge” (3.2.118-119) i.e. let the audience decide which poetry is best.

derogatory meaning. Thus, the “Irish rat” is humanized and personified in a virtuous being, which modifies the whole process of distancing Irish people and dismissing them as ‘rats’.

Within the Nemeton, i. e. the Celtic temple, the forest, Orlando becomes the reversed satirizer-druid who instead of being a means of expulsion, praises and attracts Rosalind. She first seems endowed with supernatural qualities insofar as she is depicted as virtuous, and virtue is a trait attached to “the power or operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being, Now *arch.* or *obs.*” (*OED*<sup>1.1a</sup>, in *AYL*, p. 236). This supernatural quality is confirmed in the fifth act when, disguised as the boy Ganymede, she informs Orlando that she has supernatural powers: “Believe, then, if you please, that I can do strange things. I have since I was three year old conversed with a magician, most profound in his art and yet not damnable” (5.2.57-60) and “I say I am a magician” (5.2.69).<sup>222</sup> Once again, the one who is estranged is the one with supernatural powers, believing in an old faith, but Shakespeare subtly rehabilitates the “Irish rat” thereby narrowing the distance between margin and centre.

The other animal metaphor related to the Irish in *As You Like It* is the Irish wolf (5.2) and here again, it is Rosalind disguised as Ganymede, the ‘other’ character, who mentions it. Her speech follows an exchange between Silvius, Phoebe, Orlando and herself, where they each in turn describe the object of their affection. Their cues follow each other in the form of an echo to which Rosalind concludes saying: “Pray you no more of this, ‘tis like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon” (5.2.105-106). The Arden 3 edition of the play notes that “in Lodge,<sup>223</sup> Ganymede tells Montanus (Silvius) that ‘in courting Phoebe, thou barkest with the wolues of Syria against the Moone’ (sig. N4<sup>v</sup>). Shakespeare’s substitution of Irish for ‘Syrian’ may point to a topical allusion to the Irish expedition of 1599 (Cam<sup>1</sup>, p. 158)” (2006, p. 326). The substitution clearly shows a focus on Irish culture, its magical traditions and natural surroundings, and its location as a place of ‘exiled’. Part of the context and setting of this predominantly pastoral play is English, i.e. the Forest of Arden located in Shakespeare’s Warwickshire. However, the reference to Ireland fulfills the function of a displacement so that once again what is revealed is a ‘heterotope’,<sup>224</sup> a place that is ‘other’ characterized by its discontinuity with its environment and its distance from the norm, which corresponds to the popular perception of the Ireland at the time.

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<sup>222</sup> Although the realization of her magic is practical insofar as she means that she can transform herself from boy Ganymede into Rosalind, whom she is, the environment of the forest creates a magical aura hovering on the characters, transforming them to a certain extent into magical beings. As usual, Shakespeare stands in between reason and magic, thereby allowing a glimpse on a thrilling other world to his audience.

<sup>223</sup> Bullough mentions Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde* (1590) as ‘source’ for *AYL* (vol. 2, p. 158).

<sup>224</sup> See *supra*.

Furthermore, in *A View of the State of Ireland* (1596), Edmund Spenser observes that once a year the Irish turn into wolves (ed. 1809, p. 99, also mentioned in *AYL*, note p. 326). He goes on to argue that this may come from “a disease called Lycanthropia [...] which bringeth a man to this point [...] that in Februarie he will goe out of the house in the night like a wolf, hunting about the graves of the dead with great howling” (1809, p. 99). For Hadfield, “Shakespeare’s reference to Irish wolves howling at the moon in *As You Like It* is another example of short-hand reference to the wilderness and savagery of Ireland for an English audience” (2015, p. 62). This view is perfectly acceptable insofar as it is the most obvious interpretation which fits the general perspective on Ireland in Early Modern England. However, in *AYL*, the reference is humorous since its immediate frame of reference is the voices of the characters who sound like wolves howling. If generally the whole imagery of wolves is linked to blood thirsty killers, the image given of the Irish in Spenser’s *A View of the State of Ireland*,<sup>225</sup> or in Derricke’s poem and the twelve woodcuts that illustrate it, Shakespeare mentions the familiar representation but diverts attention away from it. His four characters howling at the moon are not contaminated, nor do they turn into blood-thirsty savages and yet they howl “like Irish wolves”. There is no way of knowing whether Shakespeare read Spenser, or Derricke or saw the woodcuts, and Bullough does not cite them as possible resources of the play. But the brief mention of Irish wolves must have sounded a familiar note to an English audience, which Shakespeare exploits to produce a more nuanced view.

In the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, after deploying cultural clichés involving cheese and the Welsh, Ford emphasizes the penchant of Irishmen for whisky when he speaks of “an Irishman with his aqua-vitae bottle” (2.2.287-288). From a linguistic point of view, the Latin ‘aqua-vitae’ literally means ‘water of life’, which is also the meaning of the Gaelic ‘usquebauch’, ‘uisge-beatha’ (pronounced ‘ouchkeu **bèha**’) in Scottish Gaelic, anglicized as ‘whisky’. ‘Uisge’ (pronounced ‘ouchkeu’) means ‘water’ and ‘beatha’, ‘life’. An element of the Gaelic language is here hidden behind a Latin expression. The *OED* dates the shortened anglicized term ‘whisky’, or ‘whiskey’ in Irish, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but not before, which shows that the designation of the drink in the Early Modern time was effected using the

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<sup>225</sup> Spenser makes Irenaeus argue that the Gauls used to drink their enemies’ blood and the Irish their friends’, and he adds what he presents as his own testimony: “at the execution of a notable traytor at Limericke, called Murrough O-Brien, I was an old woman, which was his foster mother, take up his head, whilst he was quartered, and sucked up all the blood that runne thereout, saying that the earth was not worthy to drinke it, and therewith also steeped her face and breast, and tore her haire, crying out and shrieking most terribly” (ed. 1809, p. 104). Hadfield argues that this episode can be read and understood in the anti-Catholic context of the 1590s (1999, p. 195).

Gaelic word. Indeed, the *OED* records several occurrences of the Irish ‘usquebaugh’ or close equivalents in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>226</sup> The use of a Latin correspondent in Shakespeare’s play is in keeping with Amina Askar’s suggestion that Gaelic was generally avoided on the English stage. The playwright declined to use a single Gaelic word whereas a whole scene is performed in Welsh in *IH4*. Ford is not a pedant who is inclined to use Latin words, therefore his latinate usage indicates a particular of the Irish language and culture at the time.

In relation to Ireland, the distance between the centre and the margin is not only established by the Early Modern difference of faith or the use of clichés, it also implies a denial of linguistic identity that accompanied a dehumanization factor, illustrated by the numerous animal metaphors that are associated with Irish culture. Indeed, even if an element of the human body survives, it is a baser one, as the reference in *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) indicates with the description of Nell’s body. Talking to his master Antipholus of Syracuse, the slave Dromio of Syracuse describes Nell, the kitchen maid, saying: “she is spherical, like a globe. I could find out countries in her”. Antipholus then asks: “In what part of her body stands Ireland?” to which Dromio replies: “Marry, sir, in her buttocks; I found it in the bogs” (3.2.116-121). Ireland is first in the list of the countries cited in this description that also includes Scotland, France, England, Spain, America (the Indies) and Belgia (the Netherlands), in Antipholus’s questions. According to Baldwin, it is a “disquisition on politics”, that Hadfield argues, mirrors “the intellectual and political background in London in the late ‘eighties [...] and ‘would have been immensely appreciated’ by the audience at Gray’s Inn, on 28 December 1594, the first recorded performance of the play” (1997, p. 53; 2015, p. 62). Ireland and Scotland, two countries on the margins, come first in this list, which accounts for the concern of the time as regards their topical relevance. Wales is not cited since it was already politically integrated. There is also some evidence of anachronism here with the contemporary geographical references embedded in a play set in Classical Greece.

Dromio uses the word ‘bog’, which comes from the Irish Gaelic ‘bocach’, ‘bogach’ meaning ‘bog’, ‘moor’, ‘marsh’ and is a reference to Ireland’s expanses of wet spongy ground, but is also a clear allusion to the anus and to human detritus which “reflects an Elizabethan linking of Irish ‘savagery’ and ‘analilty”” (*CE*, p. 222; Hadfield 1997, p. 54). Hadfield mentions John Derricke’s long poem *The Image of Irelande* (1581), arguing that:

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<sup>226</sup> In 1581, J. Derricke’s *Image of Ireland* ii. sig. Fij: “She fillles them then with *Vskebeaghe*”; in 1600, R. Cecil *Lett.* 24 Sept. (1864) 33: “Remember .. the Lord Treasurer with a couple of Pugges or some *vscough baugh*”; in 1616, F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher’s *Scornful Lady* ii. sig. E1: “A bottle of *Vsquebaugh*”, available at: <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy-s1.stir.ac.uk/view/Entry/220682#eid16027492> (accessed 27/07/19).



It would seem highly unlikely that there is not some connection between Derricke's poem and Shakespeare's play, whether the influence of the former on the latter was direct or indirect. It may well be that Dromio is making a new pun by exploiting the geographical proximity between the 'Arse' and the 'bogs' in *Image of Irelande*, repeating Derricke's joke, or that both are employing a general joke that has become obscure for us. (Hadfield 2015, p. 64; 1997, p. 54)

Hadfield also mentions the open air Irish feast, illustrated in plate three in the sequence of twelve woodcuts which illustrated *The Image of Irelande*. It shows two figures displaying their buttocks to an assembled audience, or "defecating by the fire, next to the bard and within range of those eating at the table" (1997, p. 54). The 1883 edition of *The Image* observes that Derricke referred to this plate writing that it showed the habits of a people descended from "Macke Swine, a barbarous ofspring come from that nation, which mai bee perceiued by their hoggishe fashion" (1883, Plate III). The name of the clan cannot be fortuitous and adds to the propagandist depiction of the people of "that nation". Hadfield observes that this plate was "probably the most frequently reproduced image of Tudor England" (1997, p. 54); thus, not only words (Derricke, Spenser), but also images served to spread 'information' about Ireland.

In the 1590s, the Irish were, as Spenser noted "the enemie" and he advocated the use of violence to "redresse" them (*A View* 1596, p. 157 and 152). Hadfield observes that "*A View* was clearly written with an English audience in mind" (1999, p. 196) and in such conditions, Irish culture and religion were bound to remain distant, relatively foreign and subject to prejudice. Integrated in the succession and origin myths, Wales was *de facto* partially integrated to the centre. It lay at the heart of Tudor and Jacobean England and occupied this paradoxical situation of 'marginal centre', without forgetting that in the Second Tetralogy,<sup>227</sup> Wales was regarded as the place of rebellion, perhaps even more dangerous a location as it was close to England. The situation was different for Ireland insofar as it remained a margin that was forcefully under the process of being subjugated by a superior political centre elsewhere which was determined to maintain control against a Catholic threat. Although both Wales and Ireland rebelled, the geographical distance kept Ireland even more apart, foreign, 'other' and it was easier to qualify its inhabitants as 'savages', whereas the Welsh were 'only' 'mountain foreigners' as Pistol calls Evans in *MW* (1.1.148).

However, Hadfield also observes that there were more moderate views of Ireland and that Spenser's *A View of the Sate of Ireland* was probably a conscious reaction to these

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<sup>227</sup> *Richard II*, 1 and 2 *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*.

accounts. Edmund Campion's *History of Ireland* (c. 1569), one of the first Tudor books on Ireland, was later revised by his pupil, Richard Stanihurst (1547-1604) who compiled it for Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, 1587).<sup>228</sup> Campion was in favour of a comprehensive sympathetic policy of education of the Irish as a means of reconciling them to English rule, and he also praised Irish religious devotion. The same opinion was echoed in Stanihurst's account of the Irish in *The Chronicles* (Hadfield 1999, p. 196). Thus, Shakespeare, for whom the 1587 Chronicle was a major resource, had access to a moderate perspective, which emerges at various points in his plays. He could not ignore mainstream propaganda, but our opinion is that he tried to soften it in favour of a more nuanced account.

In the conclusion of his article "Grimalkin and other Shakespearean Celts", Hadfield wrote: "Shakespeare's plays represent Ireland as a powerful cultural presence, one that threatens to undermine the stability of England. Nearly four centuries later, Irish dramatists, while still sympathetic to the bard, recognized the part that his drama had played in the destruction of their native culture" (2015, p. 73). The image of Ireland in Shakespeare cannot but continue to resonate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century context of the Celtic revival. As William Butler Yeats indicated at the end of his poem 'Parnell's Funeral': "All that was said in Ireland is a lie / Bred out for the contagion of the throng, / Saving the rhyme rats hear before they die" (in *From a Full Moon in March*, 1935). Shakespeare's subtle treatment of Ireland and Irish culture similarly reflected a vision of the time, combining humour and rationality with a touch of magic, and resisting the temptation to follow a dominant narrative. Now let us see what vision of Scotland emerges from Shakespeare's plays.

### 3. Scotland<sup>229</sup>

The discussion of this third geographical margin will follow the pattern set for Wales and Ireland although here it will be necessary to consider the temporal shift from Elizabethan to Jacobean, and the effect upon theatrical representation. The first part will consider two different types of characters, a soldier and a king, found respectively in *King Henry V* (1598-1599) and in *Macbeth* (1606).<sup>230</sup> The social status of both characters is to be seen in relation

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<sup>228</sup> Hadfield observes that "both Campion and Stanihurst became Jesuits, Campion being martyred in 1581" (1999, p. 196).

<sup>229</sup> Part of the following discussion is expected to be published under the title "The Scottish Other in Shakespeare's drama", in *L'Écosse: la différence / Scotland, the Difference*, Caledonia Series, Presses Universitaires de Franche Comté, forthcoming.

<sup>230</sup> The study of *Macbeth* will be developed in a specific chapter.

to Elizabethan and Jacobean monarchic history. Secondly, the question of language will be approached to see how Shakespeare expresses the Scottish difference through the way his characters speak. Then, we will tackle the notion of ambient discourse, of ‘con-text’ (Barker and Hulme) as resource, in order to read between the lines of Shakespeare’s plays and better define the vision of the Scots that prevailed in late 16th, early 17th century England. Having already dealt with Early Modern Welsh and Irish contexts and characters, elements of comparison will now be possible.

### 3.1 Characters and their Social Status

In the two plays referred to in the following discussion, the Scottish character appears either as soldier (Captain Jamy in *King Henry V*), lord and king (Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and king Macbeth in *Macbeth*) or nation (Scotland, seen as the threatening “weasel Scot” in *H5*, 1.2.170).<sup>231</sup> It is also worth noticing that the depiction of the Scottish ‘other’ is different according to the shift in political context. Each representation can be seen as an indication of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean internal and international preoccupations. Under Elizabeth I, when *Henry V* was written and first performed (1598-1599), the discourse of invasion was still current. The Spanish Armada had been defeated only ten years earlier, in 1588, and the tensions with Spain continued until 1603. Marie Stuart, Elizabeth’s Scottish cousin had been executed in 1587, after having been found guilty of lèse-majesté and of plotting with the Spanish king to invade England and to take over the English throne. Furthermore, Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone’s rebellion in Ireland, itself supported by Spain, was quashed in 1601,<sup>232</sup> as we have noted in the previous discussion of Ireland. Therefore, a threat from abroad but also from the margins of the kingdom was part of the reality of the time and soldiers were major figures in this context.

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<sup>231</sup> In *King Lear*, the character of Albany also represents Scotland, Alba or Albania being the first name of Scotland in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1587) named as such after Albanact, one of Brutus’s three sons, among whom he divided his kingdom: “This later parcell at the first, tooke the name of Albanactus, who called it Albania. But now a small portion onlie of the region (being vnder the regiment of a duke) reteineth the said denomination, the rest being called Scotland, of cer|teine Scots that came ouer from Ireland to inha|bit in those quarters” (1587, vol. I. 20, Cap. 21, p. 115). In the play, the country is not specifically linked to a potential armed threat but represents division and as such, Lear’s and the kingdom’s downfall. Lear reigned over the whole of the British Isles but chose to divide his kingdom between his daughters. Albany, married to Goneril, inherited of the northern part.

<sup>232</sup> For more details on the historical context, see Ronald A. Rebholz, “Shakespeare’s Philosophy of History Revealed in a Detailed Analysis of *Henry V* and Examined in Other History Plays”, *Studies in Renaissance Literature*, Volume 25, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2003, p. 145-150.

### 3.1.1 Captain Jamy

In *Henry V*, William Shakespeare found in history elements that were familiar to the audience of his time. Not only was there an international conflict with France, that recalled an episode of the Hundred Years' war, but also, Scotland presented an internal threat, as the Earl of Westmorland observes:

WESTMORLAND

But there's a saying very old and true;  
If that you will France win,  
Then with Scotland first begin:  
For once the eagle England be in prey,  
To her unguarded nest the weasel Scot  
Comes sneaking and so sucks her princely eggs,  
Playing the mouse in absence of the cat,  
To tame and havoc more than she can eat. (*H5*, 1.2.166-173)

The governing metaphor captures a certain vision of the two hostile nations as preying animals, one noble and the other treacherous. On the one hand, an imperial "eagle" reminiscent of Rome, and on the other hand, a fierce mammal wreaking havoc for the sake of it. England's prestige and nobility confront Scotland's cruelty, dishonesty and deceitfulness and the former's posterity, its lineage ("princely eggs") is shown to be threatened by the latter's greed. It seems that the Scots cannot be trusted and that this has been the case since olden times ("a saying very old and true"). The whole nation of the Scots is perceived as a menace to England, as evidenced by the opening of *Henry V*.

In the play, the second figure who represents the Scottish nation is Captain Jamy, not a lower ranking soldier but a captain, whose skill is lauded by Fluellen, the Welshman, himself a character originating from another margin of the kingdom:

Captain Jamy is a marvelous falorous gentleman,  
that is certain; and of great expedition and  
knowledge in th' aunchiant wars, upon my  
particular knowledge in his directions: by Cheshu  
he will maintain his argument as well as any  
military in the world, in the disciplines of  
the pristine wars of the Romans. (*H5*, 3.2.80-85)

It is worthy of note that unlike Macmorris, Captain Jamy is considered as a valiant soldier by Fluellen, skilled in the arts of ancient wars where knowledge of Roman military strategy is as a yardstick of competence.

The name “Jamy” is a demotic form of James, a current name for the Scottish monarchs. From 1406 to 1625 the Stuarts provided Scotland with six kings all named James and the last of them, James VI – later James I of England – ruled Scotland at the time when *Henry V* was written. The reference to the monarch’s name is clear in the play as Shakespeare has Fluellen call Jamy by his full name “good Captain *James*” (3.2.85, my italics). However, in Roger Ascham’s *Toxophilus* (1545), a king is addressed by his pet name: “The excellent prince Thomas Hawarden nowe Duke of Northfolk [...] slew kyng Iamie with many a noble Scot cuen brant agenst Flodon Hil [...]” (ed. Arber, 1869, p. 87-88). It is probably no coincidence that Shakespeare chose this particular name for his captain. Later, the name seems to have taken different connotations. It was used in popular broadside ballads either as a clearly Scottish name or to designate a character coming from a rural setting. The evidence we have is to be found in Restoration ballads likely to be older although no evidence remains of an earlier period. One of them entitled “Scotch Souldiers Kindness” (Rox. II 418) deals with “Scotch Jemmy, and Jockey, and Sawny with many brisk Lads of that Land” (*ibid.*) who, staying temporarily in Southwark, court fifty damsels, take their maidenheads and then leave them, unmarried. The trait emphasized is here the licentiousness of the soldiers who are Scottish, not English, and therefore capable of gross immorality. Displacement is a means of dealing with delicate subjects and the male Scot is used here as a means of speaking of unbridled sexuality. Another ballad, called “Young Jemmy, or the Princely Shepherd” (Rox. II, 556) is set in the pastoral world of Arcadia, but the character is also an irresistible young man. Finally, to use a very contemporary reference, the male character of the TV series *Outlander* is called Jamie. He too is endowed with powerful sexual attraction and he is also depicted as the rural fellow and a valiant soldier. The name appears to have been commonly used to denote a stereotypical Scottish character and came to embody certain characteristics of rurality and sexuality. Shakespeare’s play does not emphasize these elements since the role of Captain Jamy is primarily anecdotal. Yet, the name of a king– although not yet an English king – is given to a mere army captain and the overall impression that emerges from him, aided by the larger discursive con-text, is that of the otherness of the character through his rurality, potential sexual vigour and military skills. However, along with other representatives of the margins in *Henry V* the potential threat that they pose is neutralized by their being

incorporated into Henry's army. This serves to emphasize Hal's capacity to unify the realm, something that had eluded his father, Henry IV. However, not only did Shakespeare depict Scottish soldiers in a Medieval context, but he also portrayed a Scottish king.

### 3.1.2. King Macbeth

*Macbeth* presents a very different picture. The play was first performed in 1605-1606 after James I (VI of Scotland) became king of England. The Scot Shakespeare depicts is neither directly a threat to England nor a mere officer playing a minor role in the English army. He is now a nobleman who becomes king, albeit by killing Duncan the ruling sovereign. Macbeth's instability seems to originate mainly from his belief in wizardry, because he trusted the Weird Sisters' prophecy, and the play eventually gets rid of this 'other' king attached to the old, pagan past. At the end of the play, after Macbeth's death, a new Scottish king called Malcolm, who has spent several months at the English court as an exile, returns and restores order: "My thanes and kinsmen, / Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland / In such an honour named. What's more to do, / Which would be planted newly with the time, / As calling home our exiled friends abroad" (5.9.28-32). New titles are bestowed which signify a new political establishment (*Macbeth*, note p. 299) heralding a new age that parallels the promise expected of James VI-I as the new king who unites Scotland and England. There was some concern that James would favour his origins but he actually took pains to reassure his subjects in his speeches: "For my intention was always to effect union by uniting Scotland to England, and not England to Scotland" ("A speach in the Starre Chamber", 1616, p. 553). He insisted that English law should remain unchanged, and that he would not favour Scottish officials:

There is a conceipt intertaind, and a double ielousie possesseth many, wherein I am misjudged.

First, that this union will be the Crisis to the overthrow of England, and setting up of Scotland [...].

The second is, my profuse liberalitie to the Scottish men more then the English, and that with this union all things shalbe given to them, and you turned out of all. [...]

Some think that I will draw the Scottish Nation hither [...]. Can any man thinke that Scotland is so strong to pull you out of your houses? (1616, p. 514)

James had to assure his English subjects that his desire for the unification of both nations would not be the source of misrule and discord. Macbeth expresses such fears after having usurped the throne of Scotland, but the end of the play looks toward a reassuring future, with a monarch capable of installing rule and concord. From an English perspective, the ending creates a sense of belonging advocated by Malcolm, thus stabilizing the kingdom after a period of unrestrained savagery.

### 3.2 Language

The sense of belonging is reflected in the use of language: “As much as any other factor, language both defined the sense and prescribed the limits of belonging” (Adam Fox, 2000, p. 76). Accent, pronunciation, vocabulary all attach the individual to a geographical area, but they are also markers of positionality. Speech idiosyncrasies act as “an immediate and powerful agent of identification” (Fox, p. 76) both regarding the area of origin and social status. Fox argues in favour of a “self-conscious identification of speech patterns with social status” (p. 100). He also says that commentators, in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century advocated that “people should speak in ways befitting their status and position” (*ibid.*) as observed in previous chapters. Shakespeare tried to recreate with his characters, a language that would correspond both to their origins and social status.

In *Henry V*, Captain Jamy says: “I sall be vary gud, gud faith, gud captains bath: and I sall quit you with gud leve, as I may pick occasion; that sall I, marry” (3.2.103-105). The attempt to recapture the Scottish accent is visible in “sall” instead of “shall” and in the pointy /u/ which replaces <oo> in “good”. Furthermore, the numerous repetitions of such a plain word as “good”, devoid of any precision in meaning, shows a certain lack of vocabulary, a basic mode of expression. Epanaphora, repetition of “I sall” at the beginning (twice) and end of the clauses above, combined with antimetabole, the reverse grammatical order of the words (“sall I”) indicates a repetitive mode of speech, and point towards caricature. This contributes to the creation of an intellectually limited character, either because he is a soldier, or because of his origin which is emphasized in the rendering of his accent. The Irish captain Macmorris’s speech peculiarities show in the way he says “ish”, for “is”, or “Chrish” for “Christ” or interjections such as “la!”. The /sh/ sound could actually be a characteristic of the Scottish accent, but to each “foreign” character in the play is attached only one or two phonological traits which define them. This is an idiosyncratic way of making them easily

identifiable to the audience. Fluellen's idiom is more elaborate although it contains a few errors that we have developed in the preceding section on Wales. These representations are gentle caricatures, and the speech patterns of the characters are used to place them in a political hierarchy.

Shakespeare sought to recreate a certain degree of verisimilitude, sometimes forcing particular traits in order to produce laughter. Jokes at the expense of foreigners were probably common at the time as they are still common nowadays. However, in the army in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, mocking one's origins was taken so seriously that laws were issued on the matter.<sup>233</sup> In the play, when Fluellen hints at Macmorris's origin, his "nation" (3.2.124-126), the latter responds energetically and the scene ends in an argument, thus rendering a situation which was common enough in real life for a law to have been enforced against it, but that was also potentially divisive in an army. Preoccupations with nation, nationality and the nation state were growing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, together with the development of a national identity (Fox, p. 64). As far as language was concerned, a standard form of English gradually emerged (the phenomenon had started as early as the late fourteenth century): "king's English", which was constantly developing and changing but provided "a shifting standard against which to judge all other 'dialects' as illegitimate and inferior" (*ibid.*).

The "dialect literature" mentioned in the first part of this chapter also applies in relation to Scotland. It appeared as a genre of writing in the mid sixteenth century (Fox, p. 69), therefore the practice of imitating specific regional speeches was already known to the public when Shakespeare wrote his plays (in fact Chaucer did it too in the fourteenth century). In *Henry V*, what we have is an appropriate mode of expression, corresponding both to the origins and status of the officers, although these features tend toward caricature. Shakespeare generally sticks to the norm or very subtly diverts from it, exaggerating traits in order to mock an inferior status, as, for instance, in the case of the pedantic schoolmaster Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The use of malapropisms and linguistic turns effected by low characters such as the ill-named Pompey the Great in *Measure for Measure*, shows the character's failure to attain the status suggested by his name, despite his ambition to do so, and it is this that triggers laughter.

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<sup>233</sup> "Strict martial laws were enforced to prevent quarrelling of this kind. Cf. Garrard, *Art of Warre* [1591], p. 40, Law 30, 'there shall be no souldiers or other men, procure or stir up any quarrel with any stranger, that is of any other nation and such as serve under one head and Lord with them'", *Henry V*, ed. J. H. Walter, 1965 (1954), note 125, p. 65.



On the other hand, there is no discrepancy between the characters' ambition and their real status in *Henry V* or *Macbeth*. The Scottish soldier and the king speak according to their ranks. Macbeth speaks in iambic pentameters and often uses a rich vocabulary, with no mark of Scottish accent. Prudence was probably the major concern, as a Scottish king was on the throne and Shakespeare's friend Ben Jonson had gone to prison for mocking the Scots in his play *Eastward Hoe*, as we will see. Generally speaking, *Macbeth* shows the interest of the time for intense linguistic change and richness. As Fox reckons: "more loan words enriched English vocabulary than at any time before or since" (p. 100). Shakespeare coined numerous words and expressions and he often has Macbeth speak polysyllabic words, often of Latin origin, together with a fairly simple phrasing: "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly. If th'assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease, success: that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all, here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We'd jump the life to come" (1.7.1-7). Complex lexemes alternate with simple ones in this "compressed and euphemistic" language with a "complex semantics" (*Macbeth*, Introduction, p. 40). The polysyllabic "assassination" (itself a coinage) and "consequence" draw attention to the major elements of the plot, and the constricted style conveys the character's will to put an end to the situation as quickly as possible. Yet, epanaphora, the coordination of a repeated word with itself ("here / But here") combined with the rupture of the changing line, illustrates the entrapment of the character's mind, and the impossibility of escape from his thoughts. Paradox is at the heart of Macbeth's mode of expression and it will be a trait of his character throughout the play. Finally, the use of the pair of near homophones "surcease" and "success" is worth noticing insofar as they pull meaning in opposite directions: the positive "success" involves the negative "surcease" thereby indicating a level of psychological sophistication that surpasses the treatment of marginal figures in *H5*.

Furthermore, the absence of any apparent Scottish Gaelic in *Macbeth* is noticeable. Whereas in *1 Henry IV*, Glendower converses with his daughter in Welsh and she also sings in Welsh, as we have seen, no reference of the sort is present in *Macbeth*. There is no occurrence of the word "Gaelic" in Shakespeare's works at all. Although both Welsh and Gaelic are Celtic languages, the status of the latter was subject to different historical pressure. Among other laws passed in this regard, the *Statutes of Iona* (1609-1610) had stated that the clan system together with the use of Gaelic should be banned in favour of English (that is the southern dialect) education and language:

Attempts were made by legislation in the later Medieval and Early Modern period to establish English at first amongst the aristocracy and increasingly amongst all ranks by education acts and parish schools. The Scots Parliament passed some ten such acts between 1494 and 1698. The Statutes of Iona in 1609-10 and 1616 outlawed the Gaelic learned orders, and sought to eradicate Gaelic, the so-called 'Irish' language so that the 'vulgar English tongue' might be universally planted. The suppression of the Lordship of the Isles (1411), the Reformation (1560), the final failure of the Jacobite cause (1746) and the end of the clan system were all in turn damaging to Gaelic. (BBC Voices, available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/multilingual/scots\\_gaelic\\_history.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/multilingual/scots_gaelic_history.shtml) (accessed 03/08/19).

King James IV was the last of the Stuart kings to master Gaelic, Scots and English, but the Scottish Stuart monarchs themselves ratified the successive laws, thus relegating Gaelic to the status of an inferior dialect. This directs us to the concept of inclusive and exclusive boundaries (Fox, p. 73).

Although much unnoticed, Gaelic is discernible in *Macbeth* as Jean Berton observes in his article "l'étymologiquement correct dans *Macbeth*, ou la fache cachée d'un roi mise en abîme" (2002), in which the onomastics of the characters reveals the Gaelic background of the play. This will be developed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to *Macbeth*, but in the meantime an anecdote is worth noting. The name of Macbeth encapsulates in itself a political reference to James I, thus establishing the parallel between Macbeth and the new Scottish monarch that nobody would have failed to observe at the time of the performance of *Macbeth* in 1606. Composed of 'Mac' meaning 'son of' and 'Beth', the pet name for Elizabeth, the name advances James as Elizabeth's foster son.<sup>234</sup> Inheritance passes from one family to the other, as was traditionally the case in Scotland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and Berton observes, James therefore is linked to the queen who had his own mother executed. The pun involving the king was another linguistic element common to Early Modern London.

In a play, the recreation of a discursive network reflects the nature of an ambient discourse shared by a speech community which will have internalized the presence of the Scottish 'others' by their multiple designations, the characteristics of their expression and their behaviour. Of course the Scots were not the only 'others', but in *Macbeth*, it is the figure

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<sup>234</sup> Jean Berton notes that in 1606, everybody in London knew that 'mac' meant 'son' (2003, p. 46). The pun created here with Macbeth works on the same basis with Macmorris, the Irish soldier in *H5*. It was also the same explicit proposition with "Macke Swine", the "barbarous offspring come from that nation" (i.e. Ireland) mentioned by Derricke in his *Image of Ireland* (see supra).

of the king that is ‘othered’, which mirrors the otherness of James VI and I. The Early Modern king becomes the *de facto* authority in a society of multiple speech communities: “England at this time comprised a network of variegated and interlocking speech communities which provided very significant boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for those who experienced them” (Fox, p. 72-73). Such communities could be delimited either naturally, following the configuration of the natural environment (river, hill, forest, road...), administratively (a parish, a county...) or again corporatively (each corporation had their own linguistic characteristics) and the simple fact of being exterior to one of them was enough to incur scorn (*ibid.*). The king evolved as a solitary figure not immune to exclusion, as Jenny Wormald observes: “yet, behind the flattery lay distrust and sometimes scorn. Much attention has been given to the ‘growth of distrust’ among the king’s English subjects. The jarring of styles between James and these subjects raises acutely the neglected theme of the alienation of the king” (in Jean Berton 2003, p. 45). Thus James as authority can be shown in dialogue with the margins, thereby creating a proper area of communication that can be observed in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Such a variety of discourses, existing alongside the performance of a play has to be considered as an intrinsic element of enunciation, as Dominique Maingueneau observes:

On est ainsi conduit à donner tout leur poids aux circonstances de l’énonciation, entendues non comme un entourage contingent de l’énoncé mais comme une des composantes de son rituel. [...] Il faut sur ce point modifier nos schémas de pensée habituels, rapporter les œuvres non seulement à des idées ou à des mentalités mais à l’apparition d’aires de communication spécifiques.

[Thus we are driven to acknowledge the very importance of the circumstances of enunciation, understood not as a contingent surrounding of the utterance but as a component of its ritual. [...] In this respect we have to modify our traditional ways of thinking and attach works not only to ideas or to mentalities but to the apparition of specific areas of communication]. (Maingueneau, 1993, p. 67, tr. CSL)

Such areas of communication can be seen as discursive spheres, sometimes interacting with each other, responding to each other, shifting between playwright, playtext and audience, people and elite, or royal court, and other works of art, plays, authors, that exist before, during, and after the performance. Maingueneau’s notion of areas of communication can be

related to the notion of ‘con-text’ developed by Barker and Hulme in which the ambient discourse surrounding a work is considered as text.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, when Shakespeare includes ‘other’ characters in his plays, the whole discursive ‘con-text’ is brought into the play. The latter is understood as oral as well as written or printed material, with the word ‘text’ taken in the widest sense of the term. In the transitional period from Elizabethan to Jacobean London, Scottishness (Scottish identity) and subjectivity were evoked by the people and the elite in an interaction of oral, written and printed works, of which broadside ballads furnish a particular instance.<sup>236</sup>

### 3.3. Ambient discourse

In the theatre, the audience was part of a speech community, as Walter Ong observes: “The spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups. When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker” (Walter Ong, 1982, p. 74). The “wooden O” served to reveal, express and discuss subjects and tensions, it was a specific area of communication in which several discursive spheres interacted and mingled in an implicit and organic mode of communication.

In 1604, the collaborative comedy by Ben Jonson, John Marston and George Chapman entitled *Eastward Hoe*<sup>237</sup> irritated Caledonian sensitivities so much that “He [Jonson] was jailed, now for satirizing the Scots, for James I was king” (Cook, intro, p. 2, in Jonson, *The Alchemist*). Several allusions in the play led to Jonson’s arrest and imprisonment, the last being probably the least bearable, as Felix E. Schelling argued (1903, p. xiv). First, the figure of Sir Petronel Flash ridicules James’s so-called ‘carpet knights’. Then, there is the Gentleman’s cue “I ken the man weel, he is one of my thirty pound knights” (4.1.213-214) which mocked the king’s Scottish accent: “mimicking the royal northern burr” (1903, p. xiv). The complaint which sent Jonson and Chapman to prison came from Sir James Murray who,

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<sup>235</sup> “Con-texts with a hyphen, to signify a break from the inequality of the usual text / context relationship. Con-texts are themselves *texts* and must be *read with*: they do not simply make up a background” (Barker and Hulme, 1985, note p. 236). See the introduction to the present thesis.

<sup>236</sup> For example “An excellent new ballad, shewing the petigree of our new king James, the first of that name in England” printed in 1603, reassured the population by exposing the King’s ancestry and worth, as well as it subtly expressed concerns of the time as regards Spain, the Pope and Ireland (*The Shirburn Ballads*, ed. Clark 1907, p. 315-320).

<sup>237</sup> All references to the 1605 play by Jonson, Marston and Chapman from Felix E. Schelling (ed.), Boston and London, D. C. Heath and Company, 1903.

according to Schelling “the allusions must neatly have fitted from his birth and his recently created knighthood” (p. xiv).

In *Eastward Hoe* clichés are also valued and there is “an allusion to the popularity of Scotch (sic) fashions, in a farthingale which is warranted ‘the right Scot’” (*ibid.*). The Scottish farthingale was smaller and closer fitting than was the norm. Gertrude and Poldavy’s comments illustrate this very well: “Tailer, Poldavis, prethee, fit it, fit it: is this a right Scot? Does it clip close and beare up round? Fine and stiffly, ifaith; twill keepe your thighs so cool, and make your waste so small” (1.2.60-65). This fashion item becomes a metaphor for a Scotsman, creating a further sexual double meaning in this lively comedy. Furthermore, in act 2, scene 3, Quicksilver, apprentice to the goldsmith Touchstone, refers to the inconstancy of Scottish knights: “She could have bin made a lady by a Scotch knight, and never ha’ married him” (II, 3, 105-107). Both allusions point to the way the sexual behaviour of Caledonian men was perceived, which confirms the image exposed in the Restoration ballad alluded to earlier.

Finally, in the same play there is the passage on the “industrious Scots”, also called “ubiquitous Scots”, when Seagull, describing life in the colony of Virginia, says:

And then you shall  
live freely there, without sargeants, or courtiers  
or lawyers, or intelligencers, onely a few **indus-  
trious Scots** perhaps, who indeed are disperst  
over the face of the whole earth. But as for  
them, there are no greater friends to English  
men and England, when they are out an’t, in  
the world, then they are. And for my part, I  
would a hundred thousand of ‘hem were there,  
for wee are all one countrymen now, yee know,  
and we shoulde finde ten times more comfort  
of them there then we doe here. (3.3.46-57, emphasis mine)

The ubiquity of the Scots accounts for a contemporary feeling of invasion and the fear and hatred that went with it, even though the tone of the play is that of comedy. The allusions and remarks in *Eastward Hoe* serve as filters for the ambient discourse of the time. Despite the turmoil, the play was revived in 1614 and acted before the king. Although clichés about Scotland contributed to maintaining the alienation of the Scottish ‘other’, elements of incorporation of this margin also showed through.

As Danièle Berton-Charrière observes, at the beginning of James' reign, Anthony Munday praised him as the "second Brut" in his pageant, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605):

For joy of which sacred union and combination, Loctrine, Camber, and Albanact, figured there also in their antique estates, deliver up their crowns and sceptres, applauding the day of this long-wished conjunction, and *Troya nova* (now London) incites fair Thames is and the rivers that bounded the severed kingdoms (personated in fair and beautiful nymphs) to sing paeans and songs of triumph in honor of our second Brute, Royal King James (*The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* 238-247, in Berton-Charrière 2009, p. 45)

Munday was officially commissioned to produce this pageant to celebrate the entry of Sir Leonard Holliday into the City of London as the new Lord Mayor.<sup>238</sup> The pageant was performed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1605, immediately before the discoverie of the Gunpowder Plot. It was a perfect occasion to (re)assert the glory of the recently enthroned king, James I of England and VI of Scotland. Danièle Berton observes how myth can be used to serve political designs:

Il glorifie son souverain d'un titre de légende « second Brut », le parant ainsi des qualités et attributs mythiques du modèle premier, bien que le roi Jacques ait adopté une démarche inverse en prônant la réunion des deux des trois nations que son prédécesseur avaient créées par la division de son propre royaume de Bretagne (« Britain »). L'image se vide de son évènementiel initial et se remplit selon les besoins du moment. Rendue atemporelle et universelle, elle irradie fierté, sécurité et prospérité.

[He glorifies his sovereign of a legendary title "second Brut", adorning him with the qualities and mythical attributes of the first model, albeit king James adopted a contrary approach by praising the reunion of the three nations his predecessor had created by dividing the kingdom of Bretagne ("Britain"). The image, emptied of its initial event, fills according to the current necessities. Rendered atemporal and universal, it radiates pride, security and prosperity]. (Berton 2009, p. 45, tr. CSL)

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<sup>238</sup> See Danièle Berton-Charrière, "Triumphs of Re-United Britannia" (2009, *passim*).

Yet, praise of the monarch was only the official perspective, and did not reveal ambient fears. As Jean Berton observes, despite the failure of the Gun Powder Plot, problems were far from being resolved, especially as far as Scotland was concerned: “la Conspiration des Poudres venait d’échouer, mais tous les problèmes étaient loin d’être réglés car les Écossais, disait-on, allaient faire main-basse sur les terres et les privilèges anglais” [the Gunpowder Plot had just failed, but all the problems were far from being solved because the Scots, people said, were going to appropriate English lands and privileges] (2003, p. 45, tr. CSL). Indeed, many members of the Scottish court accompanied James to England, which served to project part of the Scottish social, cultural and political context onto the English scene; but it was far from being an invasion.

However, in his speech at Whitehall in 1607, James was forced to justify his attention towards his fellow Scots in the following way:

And if I did respect the English when I came first, of whom I was received with ioy, and came as in a hunting iourney, what might the Scottish have iustly said, if I had not in some measure dealt bountiffully with them that so long had served me, so farre adventured themselves with me, and been so faithfull to mee. I have given you now foure yeeres prooffe since my coming, and what I might have done more to have raised the Scottish nation you all know, and the longer I live, the lesse cause have I to be acquainted with them, and so the lesse hope of extraordinary favour towards them: for since my coming from them I doe not already know the one halfe of them by face, most of the youth being now risen up to bee men, who were but children when I was there, and more are borne since my coming thence. (James I, 1616, “A Speech at White-hall”, 1607, p. 515)

Politics has always been a perilous exercise requiring argument to defend a cause. Although no invasion took place nor was there a general turmoil, James had to justify the way he accommodated his train and faced growing opposition from Parliament. The question remains of how far was he able to integrate himself into the role of English monarch as a Scot. Much like the Welsh tradition of origins, James VI-I embodied the paradox of being both the centre and the margin, an uncomfortable situation.

In *Henry V*, Captain Jamy is part of a liminal cluster of characters coming from the margins of the kingdom, yet incorporated into the army therefore paradoxically both here and there, inside and outside. Shakespeare emphasizes their difference and awkward position in order to form a group of ‘others’ susceptible to mild ridicule, as they attempt to integrate the

dominant model. The treatment of Macbeth is much more subtle by comparison. The inspiration comes from Holinshed's *Chronicles* but the approach is Shakespeare's. He chose to portray a Scottish ruler, showing his worth as a soldier, his ambition, his rise and downfall, together with the pathological instability of his character.<sup>239</sup> Shakespeare emphasizes Macbeth's evil side<sup>240</sup> since in Holinshed he appears as an efficient monarch (he actually reigned over Scotland for seventeen years, from 1040 to 1057) and with Duncan as weak king who has to be eliminated for the sake of the kingdom. Lady Macbeth is also demonized in Shakespeare compared to Holinshed where Macbeth's men suggest the murder of Duncan and Lady Macbeth only acts in a subordinate role. The aspects chosen by Shakespeare in his treatment of the Scottish difference reveal the preoccupations of his time as regards the stereotypes of a nation and nationality, and also English fears that emerged in the years immediately following James's accession.

The 'other' place of representation of the Scot in the late sixteenth early seventeenth century produces a 'paratopic structure of representation', much like Ireland does but with less violence implied, which attracts literary creation, as Maingueneau observes: "Il suffit que dans la société se crée une structure paratopique pour que la création littéraire puisse être attirée dans son orbite" [It is enough to see the creation of a paratopic structure in society for literary creation to be attracted in its orbit] (Maingueneau 1993, p. 36, tr. CSL). Shakespeare would have found 'other', 'marginal' places inspiring insofar as they produce difference, something a dramatist is obviously attracted to. Furthermore, from a metadramatic point of view, necessarily situated at the margin, the place of the 'other' (person, language or nation) parallels the situation of the playwright who lives and writes (and in Shakespeare's case perform) on the margins of society, from where a vantage point is available in order to observe. Again, Maingueneau describes this phenomenon: "La situation paratopique de l'écrivain l'amène à s'identifier à tous ceux qui échappent aux lignes de partage de la société : bohémiens, mais aussi juifs, femmes, clowns, aventuriers, Indiens d'Amérique..., selon les circonstances" [The paratopic situation of the writer leads him to identify with all those who avoid the separation lines in society: gypsies, but also Jews, women, clowns, adventurers, American Indians ..., according to circumstances] (1993, p. 36, tr. CSL). In the Early Modern

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<sup>239</sup> This aspect will be developed in chapter 5.

<sup>240</sup> It must also be noted, as Jean Berton observes, that the large part of magic included in *Macbeth* could not but please the monarch who had written a treaty called *Daemonologie* in 1597 (2003, p. 44). In this respect, Macbeth being *de facto* estranged because of his belief in dark Scottish faith mirrors James and his interest in the dark arts.



English context, the circumstances lead the writer toward the paratopic structures of Scots, Welsh and Irish.

### **Conclusion to chapter 3**

The main focus in this third chapter was to measure the distance of marginal Wales, Ireland and Scotland from the English centre, and thereby evaluate the state of the norm and Shakespeare's treatment of this rich social, cultural and political matter. An interactive process of inclusion – exclusion is visible in the plays that extends to the representation of issues such as religion and language as major factors of difference and estrangement.

In *Lire le théâtre*, Anne Ubersfeld deals with the characters' languages which can be designated as "idiolects", that is to say language particularities as they appear and are enhanced by theatrical practice: "Dans tous ces cas particuliers, le langage sert à donner au personnage un statut 'd'étranger'" [In each of these specific cases, language is used to give the character the status of 'foreigner'] (1996, p. 203, tr. CSL). This status can be linked as much with social hierarchy as with origin; Ubersfeld offers the example of servants who do not master the language of their masters. She goes on to observe that in the theatre, laughter produced by the estrangement of the 'other' appeals to the superior feeling of the spectator:

Dans tous les cas, l'idiolecte du personnage sert à éveiller chez le spectateur un rire de supériorité sur celui qui ne sait pas bien se servir de l'outil linguistique de la communauté. La différence linguistique n'est jamais considérée au théâtre comme une différence spécifique, mais comme la désignation de celui qui est hors du groupe, en position d'infériorité.

[In all cases, the character's idiolect is used to trigger a superior laughter in the spectator about the one who does not handle the linguistic tool of the community properly. Linguistic difference is never considered in the theatre as a specific difference, but as the designation of the one who is apart from the group, in an inferior position] (Ubersfeld 1996, p. 204, tr. CSL)

Insofar as he used the specificities of language in his plays, deploying the resources of the literary genre of 'dialect literature' and meeting his audience's expectations, Shakespeare can be said to occupy a position of superiority because he masters all forms of languages. However, as we have seen, his often subtle treatment of the subject makes him more

concerned than may appear with questions of inclusion – exclusion and justice – injustice. He always introduces nuance and does not seem to advocate any hierarchical superiority of one ‘semiotic chain’ over the other, even though he shows the state of the norm. There is no doubt that in the plays there is a dominant discourse, but it is one of incorporation of the margins. However, as is often the case, he gets his characters to speak from the margins, which suggests that their incorporation is not complete. The issue is particularly crucial with Celtic material because it forms part of the discourse of origins while at the same time it is remote and potentially alien. Language involves the representation of semiotic chains that are implicated in the operations of power, and Deleuze and Guattari describe what they take to be its resistance to hierarchy:

Il n’y a pas de langue en soi ni d’universalité du langage, mais un concours de dialectes, de patois, d’argots, de langues spéciales. Il n’y a pas de locuteur-auditeur idéal, pas plus que de communauté linguistique homogène. La langue est, selon une formule de Weinreich, “une réalité essentiellement hétérogène”. Il n’y a pas de langue-mère, mais prise de pouvoir par une langue dominante dans une multiplicité politique.

[There is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is, in Weinreich’s words, “an essentially heterogeneous reality”. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political community]. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1976, p. 20, tr. Massumi, 1987, p. 7)

The “homogeneous linguistic community” dismissed by Deleuze and Guattari corresponds to what could be expected in Shakespeare’s time with the growing need for order and unification under one nation and one language. Yet, Shakespeare’s audiences represented a large multilingual community of people gathered in the metropolis, as an “essentially heterogeneous reality”. In many cases throughout history, the hegemony of one language triumphed over the rhizomatic variety of other tongues. The new ‘mother tongue’ thrived by obliterating and / or downgrading the other existing tongues. This is visible in Shakespeare in the dialogue which takes place in the plays between the dominant discourse and an incorporated Celtic corpus, between the centre and the margins.



## CHAPTER 4

### *Cymbeline*: tensions in a Celto-Roman Context

As one of the two instances among Shakespeare's plays set in a Celtic historical context, and taking place partly in a Welsh setting, *Cymbeline* deserves a special treatment. The play is set after Caesar's invasions of the isle of Britain\*,<sup>241</sup> after a few decades of Roman occupation and before Boudicca's revolt against the Romans (61 AD). Written in 1609-1610, some years after James I succeeded to the throne of England (he also retained the Scottish crown), the play reflects contemporary English concerns about the first steps in the construction of the modern political entity of Great Britain. This concern already existed at the turn of the century but evolved with the Stuart monarch as the head of the state.

The first examination of *Cymbeline* and its Celtic context relates to Ancient British\* roots. Does the play reflect any pride in the Ancient tradition that so strongly appealed to the Tudor and Stuart monarchs? In other words, is Cymbeline himself or any other in the play proud to be a native of the isle of Britain\*? In his article "From Britannia to England: Cymbeline and the Beginning of Nations" (published in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2008), Andrew Escobedo argues in favour of another proposition. For him, although the play does not eradicate the idea of nation, it focuses on an alternative model of nationhood, distancing former conceptions that relied on Ancient British\* roots; he suggests that the play's: "skepticism about ancient origins does not imply a *tout-court* debunking of nationhood, as commentators often assume. Rather, in this play Shakespeare registers a transition from conceiving the nation as a community of deep-rooted *nati* to conceiving it as a community of rather recent origin" (p. 62). Escobedo suggests that the transition from Britannia\* to modern England operating in the play can only be effected "by losing an ancient and dignified ancestry", replacing it with more recent Saxon origins (p. 63).

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<sup>241</sup> As a reminder, The terms 'Britain\*', 'British\*', 'Breton\*' or 'Britannia\*' marked with an asterisk refer to the Ancient peoples of the British Isles, especially Wales and the territory that corresponds to today's England. Without the asterisk, 'Britain' and 'British' point to the modern notion of the political union of Great Britain and its inhabitants while 'Breton' refers to the inhabitants of Brittany. When the terms used above are in citations, they will be left as they were in the original, without any asterisk.

This chapter seeks to address the issue, arguing that not only does the play diverge from the Ancient insular origins of Britain, but it also gets closer to the Classical world, thereby almost replacing one kind of Antiquity with another. After examining the overall plot of the play, we will define *Cymbeline*'s situation in time at the crossroads of its multiple historical and contemporary contexts and in relation to the Chronicles. Then, the focus will be on the play's paradoxical depiction of an effort to remain linked with Rome, in spite of a context of invasion. Lastly, although set in a Celto-Roman context, the atmosphere of the play retains some aspects of the Medieval romance and often makes reference to Roman gods rather than Ancient Celtic deities, as in *King Lear*. Yet, a few details on the surface of the text are concerned with Celtic cultural references; for example, the motif of the severed head and the female figures of the fairy, the queen and the goddess, that also exist in other plays and lastly, the relation between music and the Otherworld.

A generically eclectic play, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is centered on a romance plot involving Innogen, king Cymbeline's daughter and Posthumus Leonatus whom she married against her father's will.<sup>242</sup> The royal family is a reconstructed family, to use a modern term, because the queen has a son, Cloten, whom she seeks to place on the throne by any means including treachery and murder. She tries to poison Innogen but her plan fails, the doctor in charge of concocting the poison having exchanged it for a sleeping potion. Cymbeline has two other children, two sons who were abducted when they were infants by Belarius, also known as Morgan, a lord banished by Cymbeline. The two boys' names are Guiderius and Arviragus, but they are raised as Belarius's sons under the pseudonyms of Polydore and Cadwal. The context is Roman Britain\* (today's Essex and Kent), a society that has been for some time in close dialogue with the Roman world. However, the *Pax Romana* is not straightforward; we attend battle scenes and Cymbeline first refuses to surrender to the Roman invader Caius Lucius. Then, there is a reversal of the situation and Cymbeline finally pays the required tribute to the Romans. The play ends in concord and harmony, like the Roman Soothsayer's name "Philharmonus" suggests; he, together with Cymbeline, owns the last speeches of the play.

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<sup>242</sup> Valerie Wayne calls it "the calumny plot" and argues that it is derived from what Helen Cooper calls "the calumny romance, the story of a woman accused of being unchaste until some agent, earthly or providential, proves her innocence and reveals the charges against her to be false, usually slanderous" (*Cym*, 2017, p. 7).

## 1. Situation in time, historical context and Chronicles

### 1.1 Onomastics and spatio-temporal indications

In *Cymbeline*, the juxtaposition of ‘nationalities’ like “Briton, Frenchman and Gallian” (act 1) disturb the play’s historical coherence. In act 1, scene 4, Philario, an Italian friend of Posthumus’s says: “here comes the Briton”<sup>243</sup> (1.4.28), referring to the context of Ancient insular Britain\*. Then, act 1, scene 6, Iachimo, another Italian, says: “There is a Frenchman his companion, one an eminent monsieur that, it seems, much loves a Gallian girl at home” (1.6.63-65). French and Gaul are collocated in this sentence. Of course, while Shakespeare knew France as an existing kingdom and the French as its inhabitants, in Cunobelinus’s time, nobody would have used the term. Confusion and anachronism make it difficult for us to construct a completely coherent account of the historical context; however for a Shakespearean audience this was certainly not an issue, and even possibly represented a means of situating the geographical and historical setting. The adjective “Gallian” and the noun “Gallia” (1.6.200)<sup>244</sup> fit the historical context of the play, representing the Celtic culture of the continent while France was part of the Jacobean’s contemporary knowledge.<sup>245</sup>

This kind of approximation often occurs in Shakespeare’s plays, as for example in the geography of *The Winter’s Tale* which provides a coastline with Bohemia. Shakespeare obviously recreated an environment for the plays in which the audience could let their imaginations wander and situate the action of the plot, but absolute rigour was unnecessary. As Deleuze and Guattari would put it “anexactitude [...] is the exact passage of that which is under way” (1987, p. 20). Part of the process under way was the lack of time to write the plays and the need to meet the audience’s requirements, which did not favour a thoroughly precise antiquarian research, but relied upon readily available information. However, this notion of vagueness is also indicative of a blurring of chronological frontiers, as Escobedo observes: “As readers or audience members, we think we are in ancient Britain, but the

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<sup>243</sup> The corresponding linguistic branch being Brittonic, enclosing Welsh, Cornish and continental Breton, different from the Goidelic branch (Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Manx).

<sup>244</sup> In *King Lear*, Gallia is the King of France.

<sup>245</sup> Wayne notes that in Early Modern England “‘British’ (unlike ‘Briton’) was not widely used and had specialized applications, but it could refer to Brittonic peoples driven into Wales by the Saxons, and to Henry VII (Harri Tudur or Tewdwr) as well as his descendants (Kerrigan, *Archipelagic*, 23)” (*Cym*. 2017, p. 67). Thus it must be remembered that we use ‘British’ or ‘Breton’ in this chapter to refer to the pre-Roman Celtic and Romano-Celtic speaking tribes. The word ‘Brittonic’ used in the preceding quotation to refer to people seems as erroneous to us as the word ‘Celtic’ applied to designate people. They are acceptable terms to deal with language and culture.

emergence of Milford Haven as Wales begins to make us suspect that King Cymbeline rules in modern England, despite the absence of the words ‘English’ or ‘England’ anywhere in the play” (2008, p. 79). Indeed, Milford Haven is an anglicized toponym well known to English contemporaries as a controversial location,<sup>246</sup> and Innogen associates it with “Wales” (3.2.61) and not “Cambria” (a name used twice in the play). In his letter to Innogen (3.2.43) Posthumus associates Cambria with Milford Haven, and Belarius says “In Cambria are we born, and gentlemen” (5.5.17). The use of “Cambria” suggests a desire to recreate an ‘olden times’ atmosphere and get closer to Ancient Britain\*. The Arden edition notes that the noun is a Latinized form of the Medieval Welsh *Cymry* (or *Cymru*), a term that designates both the Welsh people and the land they inhabit and “the Brittonic word from which *Cymry* developed was *Combrogî*, literally ‘people belonging to the same bro’ or region, hence the –b- found in the Latin, *Cambria*” (*Cym.*, note p. 240). Approximation and “anexactitude” reign as far as nationality is concerned and the bridge between Ancient Britain and Jacobean times is made clear, thus creating a referential crossroads. Shakespeare’s use of the Latinized form of the Welsh *Cymry*, “Cambria” together with the English nomination, “Wales” triggers the speculation that a didactic purpose is at work, because if Holinshed’s Chronicle clearly states that “Lhoegres and Cambria [are now] England and Wales” (1587, I, 3.22), this knowledge may not have been available to all audience members. As with the combination “France”-“Gaul”, the purpose behind the crossed referential “Wales”-“Cambria” was possibly didactic clarification.

Furthermore, the interrelation between Ancient South East Britain\* and Early Modern England politics is suggested by the way Wales is presented, as Escobedo argues: “the primitiveness used throughout the play to describe Milford Haven recalls English stereotypical accounts of Welsh backwardness” (2008, p. 79). Thus, juggling between an Ancient and a contemporary setting, the play appears as part of what Escobedo identifies “as a Union debate play [...] keeping in mind the association between Scotland and Wales in contemporary treatises about Great Britain” (*ibid.*). Thus, the contemporary context of the play is inevitably present in its very core but this is particularly the case with *Cymbeline*.

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<sup>246</sup> The Arden edition of the play notes that situated in the South of Wales, this sea port was known as “the landing place of Henry Tudor, who went on to defeat Richard III in 1485, ending the War of the Roses and establishing the Tudor dynasty. As a port from which others could invade Britain, it was ‘a locus of national vulnerability’ (Sullivan, 137). In the 1590s, its importance for national security became a topic of discussion (T. Hawkes, 59-60), and in 1599 it was the purported landing place for the ‘invisible armada’ (Shapiro, 207). Guy Fawkes proposed it to King Philip as a place for landing a Spanish force as early as 1603 and supporter of the Main Plot were rumoured to have captured it (Sullivan, 137)” (*Cym.*, note 44, p. 240).

Among other pseudo historical references concerning onomastics in the play, in act 3 scene 1, the queen talks of “Lud’s town” (3.1.32), the city of Lud. The term refers to Caer Lud,<sup>247</sup> the Ancient London, previously called Troynovant, the New Troy. According to the Chroniclers, the British\* [Breton\*] capital’s name was changed from Troynovant to Caer Lud by Cymbeline’s grandfather, king Lud, and over time the name turned into London.<sup>248</sup> Thus we find another element of Welsh language in the etymology of a toponym present in Shakespeare’s play. Looking closer at the Chronicles, especially Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, we find a reference to the transition from Troynovant, built by Brutus to Caer Lud:

Once he had divided up his kingdom, Brutus decided to build a capital. In pursuit of his plan, he visited every part of the land in search of a suitable spot. He came at length to the River Thames, walked up and down its banks and so chose a site suited to his purpose. There then he built his city and called it Troia Nova [New Troy, Troynovant]. It was known by his name for long ages after, but finally by a corruption of the word it came to be called Trinovantum. After Lud, the brother of Cassivelaunus, who fought with Julius Caesar, had seized command of the government of the kingdom, he surrounded the capital with lofty walls and with towers built with extraordinary skill, and he ordered it to be called Kaerlud, or Lud’s City, from his own name. (*HRB*, p. 73-74)

Holinshed cites Geoffrey as far as Brutus’s building of the city is concerned (1587, II, 4, p. 10) but he does not mention Kaer Lud in the same section. After the city’s transformation, Lud renamed it according to his own name: “By reason that king Lud so much esteemed that ci|tie before all other of his realme, inlarging it so greatlie ad he did, and continuallie in manner re|maind there, the name was changed, so that it was called Caerlud, that is to saie, Luds towne: and after by corruption of speech it was named London” (vol II, bk 3. section 9., p. 22).<sup>249</sup> Shakespeare uses what is in Monmouth and Holinshed. However, at the risk of devaluing all mythic pretensions for the city of London, archaeology shows that it was actually built by the Romans. No trace of a construction anterior to the Roman era was ever found on the site. Paul Sealey, curator at the museum of Colchester, explains that *Londinium*

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<sup>247</sup> “Caer” means “fort, fortress, enclosed stronghold, castle, citadel, fortified town or city in Welsh” (*GPC*).

<sup>248</sup> An earlier edition of *Cymbeline* notes: “‘Lud’s town’. London. According to the chroniclers, the British capital, Troynovant, was so extensively improved by Cymbeline’s grandfather, King Lud, that it was renamed Caer Lud, or Lud’s town, which latter form they alleged (quite erroneously) became corrupted to London” (*Cym.* ed. J. M. Nosworthy 1974 (1955), p. 76).

<sup>249</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0146](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0146) (accessed 06/08/19).



was founded around 50 AD by immigrant craftsmen, merchants and financiers “on a key position at the lowest bridging point of the Thames” (Sealey 2010, p. 30). Therefore, the name of Lud, whose paronymous<sup>250</sup> consonance with the Celtic supreme god Lug is striking, may well have been ‘reinjecte’d into the Chronicle History by an author, Geoffrey who was well versed in Ancient insular mythology.<sup>251</sup> The same process is observable for king Leir in Geoffrey and Lir or Llyr a high god from Irish and Welsh mythologies, transformed into a king in the genealogy of Brutus in the *Historia*. The Celtic cultural context inserts itself into the narrative through onomastics.

The other names of the play do not give any further indication of a native Celtic context. Apart from Cadwal, Arviragus’s pseudonym which refers to Cadwallader, the last of the British\* kings according to the Chronicles, or Cloten which could be a Welsh name, and Cymbeline of course, many of them belong to Classical Antiquity which is a major element in *Cymbeline*.

## 1.2 Roman invasions

In the play, the tension between Romans and Bretons\* is visible in act 2 scene 4 in the dialogue between Philario and Posthumus (banished and sent to Italy by Cymbeline), when they discuss the situation of the relationship between Rome and Britain\*. The action takes place in Philario’s house, in Rome:

PHILARIO

Your very goodness and your company  
 O’erpays all I can do. By this, your King  
 Hath heard of great Augustus. Caius Lucius  
 Will do’s commission thoroughly. And I think  
 He’ll grant the tribute, send th’arreages,  
 Or look upon our Romans, whose remembrance  
 Is yet fresh in their grief.

POSTHUMUS            I do believe –  
 Statist though I am none, nor like to be –

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<sup>250</sup> Paronymous: “having the same sound but different orthography and meaning” (*OED*).

<sup>251</sup> Kruta provides the different forms of the god’s name: Lug (Gaul), Lugh (Ireland) and Lleu (Wales) and observes that the major god was identified with Mercury by Caesar. He is called Lugh *Lámh-Fhada* (long arm) in Irish and was also qualified of *Samildanach*, ‘polytechnician’, as inventor and practitioner of all arts. He is the sovereign Celtic solar god, protector of the arts and war. His name is linked to the Celtic feast of the great assemblies, Lughnasad, in August (Kruta 2000, p. 712).

That this will prove a war; and you shall hear  
The legions now in Gallia sooner landed  
In our no-fearing Britain than have tidings  
Of any tribute paid. Our countrymen  
Are men more ordered than when Julius Caesar  
Smiled at their lack of skill but found their courage  
Worthy his frowning at. Their discipline,  
Now wing-led with their courages, will make known  
To their approvers they are people such  
That mend upon the world. (2.4. 9-26)

In his speech, the Roman Philario states the two possible choices available to king Cymbeline: either to pay the tribute to the Romans, or to wage a war. According to Posthumus, the king will never agree to pay the tribute, and he praises the warlike quality of the Bretons\* and their capacity to resist the invader. He refers to Caesar's former invasion of Britain\* when he had the occasion to mock the Bretons\* for their lack of skill although their courage impressed him. Posthumus argues that his fellow "countrymen" are now "ordered" in addition to being courageous.

The words "order" and "discipline" are strongly charged culturally as references to Roman warfare. Andrew Escobedo argues that "Roman influence cannot claim credit since Posthumus strongly suggests that his peoples' progress followed independently of Caesar's invasion, as a native rather than a Roman achievement" (p. 82). However, we would argue that if the process happened independently, that is to say uninfluenced by Rome, what we have here is an example of cultural impregnation involving military techniques to resist invasion that operated through observation and by necessity. In fact, for Posthumus, the insular warriors 'elevated' themselves to the rank of the invader by absorbing the notorious Roman military 'discipline'. Through the motif of military technique, this example illustrates the construction of a Roman cultural filter that strongly shaped insular societies (as it also did on the continent). The phenomenon amounts to a Genettian relationship of hypertextuality, uniting the British\* cultural hypertext to the Roman cultural hypotext. British\* military art attached itself to the Roman example and derived practices from it, so as to be rewritten according to new Roman cultural values and practices.

However, albeit cited as a threat by Philario, and praised as an example by Posthumus, Caesar's incursions were not decisive victories, historically speaking. Caesar was the first to attempt military invasion of the Isle of Britain\* in 55 BC after conquering Gaul between 58

and 50 BC.<sup>252</sup> Once in Gaul, he followed the well known commercial routes that led to the insular Bretons\*. His assaults were repelled, as the queen affirms in *Cymbeline*: “A kind of conquest / Caesar made here, but made not here his brag / Of ‘Came, and saw, and overcame’. With shame – / The first that ever touched him – he was carried / From off our coast, twice beaten [...]” (3.1.22-26). French historian Camille Jullian confirms this version:

À l’exception (mais elle est de taille) du Massif Central, toute la Gaule semblait réduite à la fin de 56, et César put mener en 55 deux expéditions de prestige: une démonstration de dix-huit jours au delà du Rhin, et une campagne de trois semaines en Bretagne, assez mal engagée cependant, et qu’il fallut reprendre avec plus de moyens l’été 54 pour obtenir une vague promesse de tribut.

[To the (significant) exception of the Massif Central, the whole of Gaul seemed reduced by the end of 56 BC, and in 55 Caesar could lead two prestigious operations: an eighteen day demonstration beyond the Rhine river, and a three week campaign in Britain, rather ill-engaged however, which had to be resumed in the summer of 54 to obtain a vague promise of tribute] (Jullian 1993, p. 426, tr. CSL).

Geoffrey’s *Historia* tells of Caesar’s defeats by the British (*iv.3*, p. 107-113). However, in the play, Caius Lucius, the Roman ambassador to Britain and general of the Roman forces states the contrary:

LUCIUS

When Julius Caesar – whose remembrance yet  
Lives in men’s eyes, and will to ears and tongues  
Be theme and hearing ever – was in Britain  
And conquered it, Cassibelan, thine uncle,<sup>253</sup>  
Famous in Caesar’s praise no whit less  
Than in his feats deserving it, for him  
And his succession granted Rome a tribute,  
Yearly three thousand pounds, which by thee lately  
Is left untendered. (3.1.2-10)

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<sup>252</sup> Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Roman-Britain> (accessed 07/08/19).

As the Arden edition of the play notes, Shakespeare is staging opposed historiographies in this scene, one coming from Caesar's *Gallic Wars* and the other from Holinshed (*Cym*, p. 233). Caesar is presented as having established the basis of a contract with Rome which pledged the line of British\* kings to pay a yearly tribute, starting with Cassibelan.

The play stages a dichotomy between Roman and British\* roots. On the one hand, the play advances British\* figures like Mulmutius who was the first to create a corpus of common laws (3.1.54-55), or Cassibelan, who was, as we will see, the unifier. No mention is made of the multiple divided peoples who inhabited the island and the image given of Cymbeline is one of the successor of unifying kings like Lud or Cassibelan reigning over the whole of the West, that is to say the whole island. Provided we accept him as the historical inspiration of Shakespeare's Cymbeline, the historical Cunobelinus managed to unite the South East of England at the most, even though he was a powerful chief. The image is often given of Celtic tribes as barbarous peoples, especially in Caesar's accounts; and in the play, Cymbeline refers to the warlike nature of his people who became so out of the need to resist Caesar's attacks (3.1.53). It would be a mistake to consider Celtic tribes as living peacefully among themselves before the Roman invasion; this would amount to forgetting the numerous quarrels and struggles for power that existed between the various tribes. However, some chiefs managed to reach some kind of union and even managed to found an empire as Luern (or Luernos) did in Arvernia, in central Gaul (Jullian 1993, p. 426). Another famous example of unification against the Roman invasion is that of Boudicca who led a rebellion against Suetonius in 60 AD, managing to federate several British\* tribes and win victories although she was finally defeated. However, on the other hand, the play foregrounds Rome's power and despite Caesar's mitigated attempts, the Roman conquest progressed and had serious consequences in Britain\*, especially in the non-marginal countries.

It is worth studying the impact of Roman invasion on British\* peoples in order to understand the evolution of mentalities and culture in the British Isles ever since, in Shakespeare's time and later. Mike Ibeji, a specialist in Roman military history provides an insight into the process:

The Roman invasion of Britain was arguably the most significant event ever to happen in the British Isles. It affected our language, our culture, our geography, our architecture and even the way we think. Our island has a Roman name, its capital is a Roman city and for centuries (even after the Norman Conquest) the language of our religion and administration was a Roman one. For 400 years,

Rome brought a unity and order to Britain that it had never had before. Prior to the Romans, Britain was a disparate set of peoples with no sense of national identity beyond that of their local tribe. In the wake of the Roman occupation, every 'Breton' was aware of their 'Britishness'. This defined them as something different from those people who came after them, colouring their national mythology, so that the Welsh could see themselves as the true heirs of Britain, whilst the Scots and Irish were proud of the fact that they had never been conquered by Rome. (Ibeji 2011, online)<sup>254</sup>

The point here is made as regards the cultural influence of the Romans on the people who were not situated on what came to be called the 'Celtic fringe', the margins of the British Isles, in other words Wales, Scotland and Ireland, but on the peoples who came to be called 'English'. Ibeji argues the Roman conquest was also a factor in the development of the notion of 'Britishness' (which is also what is developed to a certain extent in *Cymbeline*), but this process unfolded differently according to the situation of each people in the British Isles, and if the Welsh, Scottish and Irish could claim not to have been conquered by Rome, it was a different proposition for the English.

In the South East of modern England, for example, which is relevant to *Cymbeline*, tribes like the Catuvellauni, the Trinovantes or the Iceni experienced the effects of the Roman conquest fully, but adopted very different attitudes to it. The kings of the Atrebates welcomed Roman help in resistance to Catuvellaunian expansion while Boudicca, queen of the Iceni, led a revolt in 60 AD. In any case, the region had maintained strong commercial relationships with the continent long before and after Rome's conquest of Gaul. Thus, acceptance of or resistance to Roman authority depended upon particular local circumstances, and British\* identity evolved in different ways in the face of contact with the invader. Between resistance and submission to a 'worthy invader', Shakespeare's play tackles the issue in relation to the Elizabethan and early Jacobean preoccupations. In *Cymbeline*, Cloten, who is ultimately beheaded, and his mother the queen, a treacherous character, both stand unhesitatingly on the side of resistance.

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<sup>254</sup> Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions_01.shtml) (accessed 07/08/19).

## 1.3 Resistance: Cassibelan and Mulmutius

### 1.3.1. Cassibelan

The name of Cassibelan is only mentioned in the play, but it has a deep resonance in Celtic insular tradition as we will seek to demonstrate. Historically, Kruta notes, it is very probable that Cassivellaunos, who led the resistance against Caesar in 54 BC was king of the powerful politico-economic ensemble of the Trinovantes-Catuvellauni that had existed since the beginning of the 1st century BC. The powerful Trinovantes occupied today's Essex and part of Suffolk, separated from Cantium (Kent) by the Thames's estuary, while the Catuvellauni inhabited today's Hertfordshire, and much of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Cambridgeshire. The power of this coalition enabled them to exert a tutelary presence over the Cantium realms and a strong influence over all the area cited above (Kruta 2000, p. 845 *passim*). This reveals Cassibelan as a dominant Celtic ruler who maintained a state of 'union' over a significant part of Southern Britain.<sup>255</sup>

In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, the queen, in her resistance to the Romans, states that Cassibelan once opposed Caesar's assaults:

QUEEN

The famed Cassibelan, who was once at point –  
O giglot Fortune! – to master Caesar's sword,  
Made Lud's town with rejoicing fires bright,  
And Britons strut with courage. (3.1.30-33)

In Geoffrey's *Historia*, Cassibelan is the brother of Lud, the king who gave his name to London, possibly derived from Lug as we have seen.<sup>256</sup> Cassibelan reigned after his brother's death because Lud's sons were too young to take over the crown. In Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, a Breton chief named Cassivellaunos appears as having opposed Caesar (Book V, chap. 11-22, p. 249-263). After a fierce struggle against the Roman army, he finally surrendered and sued for peace, with the help of Commius, the Atrebatian. This episode is also in Geoffrey's *Chronicle* (iv.9-10, p. 115-118), but the British\* intermediary who helped Caesar is called

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<sup>255</sup> The 'union' topic is recurrent and evokes a contemporary reference to James VI-I.

<sup>256</sup> This is one example in which Geoffrey probably mixes history and myth, using the historical Cassivellaunos and the mythic Lud-Lug.

Androgeus, Cassibelan's nephew, who decided to betray his uncle after a quarrel.<sup>257</sup> Treachery appears as a reason for British\* defeat, but this is the version of the narrative that appears in Shakespeare's play where traitors are on the British\* side but are also opposed to the Romans.

The name of Cassibelan also, in all probability, corresponds to the character of Caswallon son of Beli that appears in Welsh literature, in *The Second Branch of Mabinogi, The Mabinogi of Branwen, daughter of Llyr* (ed. Davies 2007, p. 22-34). Caswallon (or Kaswallaun, Caswallaun, Cassibelaun) attacks the Island of the Mighty (i.e. today's England) in the absence of king Bendigeit Vran, son of Llyr, who has gone to Ireland to avenge his sister Branwen for the outrage inflicted on her by Matholwch, her husband:

Caswallon attacked them and six men were killed, and Caradog's heart broke from bewilderment at seeing the sword kill his men and not knowing who killed them. Caswallon had put on a magic cloak so that no one could see him killing the men – they could only see the sword. Caswallon did not want to kill Caradog – he was his nephew, his cousin's son". (tr. Davies 2007, p. 33)

The use of magic is typical of Celtic narratives and the motif of Caswallon's sword that kills 'on its own', due to his owner's invisibility has been transformed in *HRB* where it is Caesar's sword, captured by Cassivellaunus's brother Nennius, which is endowed with specific magical powers: "The sword was called Yellow Death, for no man who was struck by it escaped alive" (iv.4, p. 110).<sup>258</sup> Shakespeare retained "Caesar's sword" (3.1.31), almost mastered by Cassibelan. The motif of the powerful hero's sword is telling because it seems to have shifted from a native to a Roman owner. Contrary to the *Chronicles*, Shakespeare (re)attributed the mastering of the sword to Cassibelan, but it is Caesar's, not his sword that is cited and all elements of magic have now disappeared. The feud involving family members is present in the Welsh tale cited above and in *HRB* and *Holinshed* where Androgeus, Cassivellaunus's nephew betrays him, (but in *Bede* there is no family link and Androgeus is the chief of the Trinovantes and chooses to side with Caesar).<sup>259</sup>

Caswallon is also Llund's and Nyniaw's brother in the story of *Lludd and Llefelys* (*ibid.*, p. 111-115), and in the *Third Branch*, as Davies observes "he receives the homage of

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<sup>257</sup> The character of Androgeus appears in the Welsh triad n° 51, "The three men of shame" under the name of Afarwy son of Llund son of Beli (ed. Bromwich 2014, p. 138).

<sup>258</sup> *Holinshed* also accounts for the same episode of Nennius capturing Caesar's sword in I, *Hist.* 27 (in *Cym.* 2017, p. 233).

<sup>259</sup> *Holinshed* 1587, Volume 2, section 3 of 8: *The Third Booke of the Historie of England*, p. 23; *Bede, EHEP*, ed. 2008, p. 13.

Pryderi, reflecting Welsh traditions linking him and his family with the domination of Britain” (2007, p. 236). The character is also to be found in the Welsh *Triads*. For Rachel Bromwich, there is an extensive tradition surrounding Caswallawn (p. 93) and she agrees that “the connection between *Caswallaun mab Beli* and the historical *Cassivellaunos* is generally accepted” (p. 305), while *the HRB* has Cassivelaunus son of Heli whose two brothers are Lud and Nennius (iii. 20, p. 106), thus identifying him with the Welsh figure. Bromwich goes on to observe that Caswallaun is present in a few triads whose contents bring new elements, altogether different from either Caesar’s accounts or the Bruts, or Geoffrey’s *Historia* (triads 35, 36, 38, 67, 71); only triad 51 draws from *HRB*. These elements, she writes “provide sufficient evidence that *Caswallaun* had an independent existence in Welsh tradition, before his name was utilized in this way to render *HRB*’s *Cassibellaunos*” (p. 306). Thus, elements of a long Ancient Welsh and more generally of British\* tradition illuminate a ghost character, only cited as part of the context but nevertheless present in Shakespeare as one of Cymbeline’s ancestors. Cymbeline himself utilizes the valour of another of his forefathers, Mulmutius, in the manner of a battle flag against the invader’s hegemony.

### 1.3.2 Mulmutius

When Lucius, general of the Roman armies comes and demands the payment of his tribute, Cymbeline replies that having promulgated their laws, the ancestor of his people, Mulmutius, is the only authority to be obeyed in spite of Rome’s anger:

CYM                    We do say then to Caesar,  
Our ancestor was that Mulmutius which  
Ordainedd our laws, whose use the sword of Caesar  
Hath too much mangled, whose repair, and franchise  
Shall, by the power we hold, be our good deed,  
Though Rome be therefore angry. Mulmutius made our laws,  
Who was the first of Britain which did put  
His brows within a golden crown, and called  
Himself a king. (3.1.53-61)



Thus, according to Shakespeare, Mulmutius was the first king of Britain\* to wear a golden crown. Geoffrey introduces him as the son of Cloten, king of Cornwall,<sup>260</sup> a man of courage (ii.17, p. 88), a law maker and as a unifier of the kingdom: “when he had completely subjugated the entire island, he fashioned himself a crown of gold and restored the realm to its earlier status” (ii.17, p. 89). The earlier status refers to the union that existed under Brutus, a state of concord confirmed by the name of Mulmutius’s burial place “beside the Temple of Concord” (ii.17, p. 90). There is a tension between concord and discord evoked by the name of Mulmutius and this is emphasised in Holinshed, together with reference to the symbol of the golden crown:

Cloten, by all writers, as well Scottish as other, was the next inheritour to the whole empire: but lacking power (the onelie meane in those daies to obtaine right) he was contented to diuide the same among foure of his kinsmen; so that Scater had Albania. But after the death of this Cloten, his sonne Dunwallo Mulmutius made warre vpon these foure kings, and at last overcame them, and so recouered the whole dominion. In token of which victorie, he caused himself to be crowned with a crowne of gold, the verie first of that mettall (if anie at all were before in vse) that was worne among the kings of this nation. (1587, Volume 1, “After what maner the souereigntie of this Ile dooth remaine to the princes of Lhoegres or kings of England”, Chap. 22, p. 117)<sup>261</sup>

Thus, in the play, an ancient king is summoned by Cymbeline to evoke concord, the circular symbol of the crown representing alliance, and wealth (a gold crown), a state that existed before the Romans invasion. In relation to the Early Modern context, it is worth noticing that Mulmutius also reigned over Albania (i.e. Scotland), like James VI-I, a monarch often compared as we have seen, to Brutus or Arthur.

Holinshed also presents Mulmutius Dunwallon as a feared king and a law maker capable of restoring order in the kingdom:

Somewhat yet we haue of Mulmutius, who not onelie subdued such princes as reigned in this land, but also brought the realme to good order, that long before had béene torne with ciuill discord. But where his laws are to be found, and which they be from other mens, no man liuing in these daies is able to determine. [...] in like sort there hath not reigned anie monarch in this Ile, whose waies were

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<sup>260</sup> In *Cymbeline*, Cloten is king Cymbeline’s step-son.

<sup>261</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0076](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0076) (accessed 08/08/19).

more feared at the first, than those of Dunwalllon (king Henrie the fift excepted) and yet in the end he prooued such a prince, as after his death there was in maner no subiect, that did not lament his funerals. And this onelie for his policie in gouernance, seure administration of iustice, and prouident framing of his laws and constitutions, for the gouernment of his subiects. His people also, coueting to continue his name vnto posteritie, intituled those his ordinances according to their maker, calling them by the name of the laws of Mulmutius, which indured in execution among the Bretons, so long as our homelings had the dominion of this Ile. (1587, Volume 1, book 2, “Of the laws of England since hir first inhabitation”, Chap. 9, p. 176)<sup>262</sup>

Holinshed goes on to observe that Mulmutius’s laws were retained by the Saxons and beyond. The Arden edition of the play notes that Mulmutius Dunwallow “consolidated the kingdom following civil war and ruled for 40 years, establishing Mulmutius’ laws, which were later translated and codified by Alfred the Great” (*Cym.* 2017, p. 235). Thus the sub-text that existed with the evocation of Mulmutius, available to Shakespeare and possibly his actors<sup>263</sup> via Holinshed, was that of a perennial state of concord and order. Reference is made here to the continuity of the British\* line and to the unification theme so dear to Jacobean England, where James I was regarded as the guarantor of the union and concord of the whole kingdoms.

However, it should be noted that Mulmutius’s union of “the whole dominion” (Holinshed 1587, Vol. 1, Chap. 22) was effected by waging war against other tribes, reflecting the desire for unity in Tudor England and recalling the various contributory military campaigns. Thus the state of concord is paradoxical because it is here built upon discord though it is represented as something that is idealised. Mulmutius’s union reveals a significant difference with pre-Roman Celtic Britain\* and even with Roman Britain that were composed of separate tribes in pursuit of their own interests. These tribes could unite at times against the Romans, or wage wars for domination and power over the territories of other tribes, as it was the case with the Cassibelan and later with the Catuvellauni and their chief Cunobelinus.

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<sup>262</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0088](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0088) (accessed 08/08/19).

<sup>263</sup> During rehearsals, such historical background is possibly evoked as part of a discussion on the ‘subtext’ of the play, an element feeding the written text, to add depth to the actor’s apprehension of the role.

## 1.4 Cunobelinus

Historically, Cunobelin or Cunobelinus was a powerful Breton\* king who reigned between 10 and 40 AD over the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes, powerful tribes in the South East of what is now modern England. He restored the politico-economic order that existed before, from the 1st century BC onwards. Historian Paul Sealey states that around 10 AD, Cunobelinus annexed the Trinovantes and moved their capital from Verulamium (St Albans) to Camulodunum (Colchester). It seems that the city was the residence of the sovereign, a centre of regal power rather than a capital in the modern sense of the term. Cunobelinus managed to unite the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes, thus increasing his influence, but after the second Roman invasion in 43 AD under the emperor Claudius, they were reverted to two separate entities which demonstrates the precarious nature of any attempt toward unification at the time.

Nevertheless, under Cunobelinus's relatively long reign, the South East of Britain\* was (re)'united'. We could speculate that the king wanted to enlarge and unite his kingdom in order to undermine Roman supremacy. The king possessed foundries and minted his own coins in gold, silver and bronze, which is a sign of power. However, the coinage shows signs of Romanized British\* coins that were minted in the wake of Julius Caesar's campaigns in Britain\*. Some coins have inscriptions in Roman letters, several of Cunobelinus's stateres giving the name of the king: "CVNO" or even "CVNOBELINVS", as well as occasionally the name of the mint "CAMU", for Camulodunum. The motifs on the coins are a mixture of Celtic and Roman designs in which, as De Jersey argues "there are very complex links and interactions in operation" (De Jersey 2001, p. 18). Numismatics provides precious information relating to the influence that Roman culture exerted on that of the indigenous Britons\*.<sup>264</sup>

The name Camulodunum means "Camulos's fortress"<sup>265</sup> and was a vast fortified oppidum around Colchester (Essex). The site is dedicated to Camulos (lit. "the powerful"), one of the names of the Gallo-Roman god Mars, probably inherited from an influential Celtic deity with which it became identified. Irish tradition refers to a Cumal, father of Finn, who could be an insular equivalent (Kruta, 2000, p. 513). Furthermore, it is possible that the name

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<sup>264</sup> Some of Cunobelinus's coins were reproduced in Camden's *Britannia* (1610), as the illustration in Wayne's edition of the play shows (*Cym.*, p. 53).

<sup>265</sup> 'Dunum' comes from the Gaelic *dun*, meaning 'fortress'. It is used in Ireland, in Britain and on the continent in the toponym of numerous urban areas anterior or posterior to Roman occupation (Kruta 2000, p. 588).

Camulodunum, frequently mentioned by the Latin sources, inspired the Medieval Camelot, Arthur's fortress (*ibid.*, p. 511). This is another indication of the Ancient origin of Arthurian narratives, and figures like Cunobelinus could even be a model for Arthur himself.

It is notable that Cunobelinus appears as a powerful insular sovereign who placed himself under the protection of a war god, thus demonstrating power and independence. However, the presence of Roman culture cannot be missed; it had been the case in relation to insular people especially in the South, since the first Roman campaign of invasions in 55-54 BC, and even before through the various relationships with the neighbouring continent. However, few elements enable us to establish thus far that Cunobelinus viewed the Roman presence in an auspicious way. He annexed the Trinovantes who had established a friendship treaty with Caesar,<sup>266</sup> which shows that Cunobelinus did not fear the Roman in Britain\* at the time. Holinshed's Chronicle develops this point further: after Cassibelan's reign and before his, Cymbeline's father Theomantius enjoyed good relationships with the Romans and paid a money tribute to them:

Theomantius ruled the land in good quiet, and paid the tribute to the Romans which Cas[sibellane had granted. [...] Kymbeline or Cimbeline the sonne of Theo[mantius was of the Britains made king after the decease of his father [...] This man (as some write) was brought vp at Rome, and there made knight by Augustus Caesar, vnder whome he serued in the warres, and was in such fauour with him, that he was at libertie to pay his tribute or not.

Cymbeline was the second generation after Cassibelan and he appears to be a free king who could choose whether to pay money tribute to the Romans. Also Geoffrey mentions the fact that Cymbeline was raised in Rome: "Cymbeline was raised to royal eminence, a powerful warrior whom Augustus Caesar had reared in his household and equipped with weapons. This King was so friendly with the Romans that he might well have kept back their tribute-money, but he paid it of his own free will" (iv.11, p. 119). Historically, Cunobelin's Roman breeding seems to indicate a Roman strategy that consisted in taking the children of local chiefs as hostages, as an assurance of peace, and a guarantee that due payment of tribute would be undertaken. Furthermore, they counted on the inter-marriage of the children raised in Roman culture in order that they would reproduce the model in their native country and thus

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<sup>266</sup> Barry Cunliffe, in *Les Celtes* 1997, p. 587-588.

peacefully provide a new colony for Rome.<sup>267</sup> Cymbeline's friendship with the Romans, evoked by Geoffrey and Holinshed, provides a logical explanation for the ending of Shakespeare's play, when the king finally agrees to support Rome.

The tribute theme occasions multiple interactions between the characters in *Cymbeline*. Holinshed provided Shakespeare with sufficient resource material in this respect especially with regard to the attitudes of the queen and Cloten who argue against the paying of tribute:

But here is to be noted, that although our histo|ries doo affirme, that as well this Kimbeline, as al|so his father Theomantius liued in quiet with the Romans, and continuallie to them paied the tri|butes which the Britains had couenanted with Iu|lius Cesar to pay, yet we find in the Romane wri|ters, that after Iulius Cesars death, when Augu|stus had taken vpon him the rule of the empire, the Britains refused to paie that tribute [...] (1587, Volume 2, *The Third Booke of the Historie of England*, Chap. 18, p. 32)<sup>268</sup>

Thus, Shakespeare follows Holinshed in describing particular details. Shakespeare represents this view in three of his characters. Together with Cloten and the queen who directly influence Cymbeline, Posthumus shares the opinion that the king will not pay and would prefer war (*op. cit.*, 2.4.15-20). Cloten declares, provocatively: "There be many Caesars ere another Julius: Britain's a world by itself, and we will nothing pay for wearing our noses" (3.1.11-14), thereby remaining in favour of independence from the imperial power of Rome. The queen, for her part, appeals to "the famed Cassibelan" (3.1.30) who once achieved the very political unity that Rome promised.

After conspiring together to seize the crown Cloten and the queen die, and with them the resistance line. As far as Posthumus is concerned, he acknowledged he was little qualified to offer an opinion as regard the issue of the tense situation between Britain\* and Rome: "statist though I am none, nor like to be" (2.4.16). Bu his return, along with the revelation of the existence of Guiderius and Arviragus fulfills the soothsayer's prophecy. The play ends in peace, union and concord, and the British\* seem to align with Rome's policy.

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<sup>267</sup> This was what happened with Arminius, a German prince who rebelled once he returned from Rome to Germany and attacked Varus's Roman legions in the forest of Teutoburg in 9 AD.

<sup>268</sup> Also available at : [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0155](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0155) (accessed 08/08/19).

## 2. Striving to be Romans: an unexpected idea<sup>269</sup>

As a reminder of the plot, under the influence of Cloten and the queen, Cymbeline first refuses to pay his 'due' to Caius Lucius, general of the Roman armies (3.1), thus starting a war. But although his army is victorious, he finally changes his mind and agrees to pay to maintain peace.

If this attitude seems surprising – why submit when you are in a position of supremacy? –according to Valerie Wayne, Constance Jordan explained it as “coming ‘not from the abject position of a conquered people’ but from the ‘conscientious observance of a contract. Tribute paradoxically signals their freedom not their servitude’”, Philip Edwards notes that “[h]aving won the battle, [Britain] is free to abandon the nationalist intransigence which caused it, surrender the separatist claim and as an adult partner enter into free union with Rome” (in *Cym.*, p. 56). From a diegetic point of view, this accords with Shakespeare’s resource, Holinshed’s mention of Cassibelan’s pledge to the Romans, and Cymbeline may be seen as honouring it. Yet, in the con-text of the play, there is also a desire to remain on the side of the Romans. This can be justified diegetically by Cymbeline’s education in the Roman world as mentioned in Holinshed, but also ideologically by the admiration for the Roman Empire that existed in Shakespeare’s time. Holinshed observes this attachment to Rome:

[I]t is reported, that Kimbeline being brought vp in Rome, & knighted in the court of Augustus, euer shewed himself a friend to the Romans, & chieflie was loth to breake with them, because the youth of the Britaine nation should not be depriued of the benefit to be trained and brought vp among the Romans whereby they might learne both to behaue themselues like ciuill men, and to attein to the knowledge of feats of warre. But wether for this respect, or for that it pleased the almightie God so to dispose the minds of men at that present, not onlie the Britains, but in manner all other nations were contented to be obedient to the Romane Empire. (1587, Volume 2, *The Third Booke of the Historie of England*, Chap. 18, p. 32)<sup>270</sup>

The Roman world is presented here as bringing civilization to nations. Once again, the dialogue between centre and margin is activated, with the adjective “ciuill” as an indicator of

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<sup>269</sup> This title is borrowed from Mike Ibeji. Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions_01.shtml) (accessed 08/08/19).

<sup>270</sup> Also available at : [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_0155](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0155) (accessed 08/08/19).

the difference between centre and margin. Furthermore, the right “knowledge of feats of warre” as part of Roman culture recalls the soldiers’ vision, especially Fluellen’s in *Henry V*. Roman culture is presented as superior in many aspects, as Mike Ibeji observes:

Yet perhaps Rome’s most important legacy was not its roads, nor its agriculture, nor its cities, nor even its language, but the bald and simple fact that every generation of British inhabitant that followed them – be they Saxon, Norman, Renaissance, English or Victorian – were striving to be Roman. Each was trying to regain the glory of that long-lost age when Britannia was part of a grand civilization, which shaped the whole of Europe and was one unified island. (Ibeji 2011, online)<sup>271</sup>

As an illustration of Ibeji’s statement, the conclusion of *Cymbeline* shows the articulation of Celtic and Roman power. This is indicative of the relationships that frequently happened in Celto-Roman times. From a historical point of view, this is how Roman military and political strategy operated, as Ibeji goes on to observe:

The Roman Empire was based on two things: lip service to the emperor, and payment to the army. As long as you acknowledged the imperial cult and paid your taxes, Rome did not really care how you lived your life. [...]

Rome controlled its provinces by bribing the local elite. They were given power, wealth, office and status on condition that they kept the peace and adopted Roman ways. If you took a Roman name, spoke Latin and lived in a villa, you were assured of receiving priesthoods and positions of local power. The *quid pro quo* was that you were expected to spend your money and influence in providing Roman amenities for your people, newly civilized in the literal sense that Roman towns and cities were founded for them to live in. (Ibeji 2011, online)

Without possessing the same historiographical hindsight, Shakespeare integrates this notion of a bribed elite who ‘romanizes’ its people and maintains peace. *Cymbeline* evokes “great Jupiter” (5.5.481), and Innogen and Posthumus marry in Jupiter’s temple. Multiple references to the supreme god together with his presence in the play offer ample indication of strong Romanization. This accords with the historical account of the process that took place in the area of South East Britain\* during the Ancient period in which the play is set, but also with the perception of the Roman past that was prevalent in Early Modern England, the humanist

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<sup>271</sup> Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/questions_01.shtml) (accessed 08/08/19).





Whom heavens in justice both on her and hers  
Have laid most heavy hand.

SOOTHSAYER

The fingers of the powers above do tune  
The harmony of this peace. The vision  
Which I made known to Lucius ere the stroke  
Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant  
Is full accomplished. For the Roman eagle  
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,  
Lessened herself, and in the beams o'th' sun  
So vanished; which foreshadowed our princely eagle,  
Th'imperial Caesar, should again unite  
His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,  
Which shines here in the west.

CYMBELINE                      Laud we the gods,  
And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils  
From our blest altars. Publish we this peace  
To all our subjects. Set we forward. Let  
A Roman and a British ensign wave  
Friendly together. So through Lud's town march,  
And in the temple of great Jupiter  
Our peace will ratify, seal it with feasts.  
Set on there. Never was a war did cease  
Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace. (5.5.457-484)

Harmony and concord prevail, having been effected by Cymbeline: "my peace" (5.5.458). He had waged war against the Romans, which allowed him the honours of a war chief, because submitting without fighting would probably have been interpreted as a sign of cowardice. Shakespeare's play shows a victorious king who willingly accepts Rome's demands. He justifies his previous hostility laying the blame on his manipulative "wicked" queen. The Roman Soothsayer acts as a divine echo of the British\* king's words, thus sealing spiritually the pact that was promised orally. Nothing should now prevent the "imperial eagle", Caesar, from uniting with the "radiant" Cymbeline. The solar image seems here to be the equivalent of the imperial eagle. The figure of the Soothsayer draws together a 'mixed' history *and* the formal aesthetic of the play. In *Julius Caesar*, his equivalent is dismissed as a 'dreamer', like 'the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies', thereby acquiring the features of an insular druid.

His presence suggests an Early Modern interest, if not a belief in the relation between superstition and truth.

According to the Soothsayer-druid figure, the British\* king appears linked to the symbol of the sun, like Lug, the Celtic supreme god whose cult is celebrated in summer. It is also possible to see in this radiant sun of the west (“the radiant Cymbeline, / Which shines here in the west”) the setting sun, symbol of Cymbeline’s decline because he submitted to the Romans. In this case we would have the image of a Celtic king going to Lud’s town to lay down arms before Caesar, as did Vercingetorix and others. Yet, the king clearly expresses his wish to see the British\* and Roman flags waving “friendly together”, suggesting the desire for a cordial relationship between Britain\* and Rome.<sup>272</sup> Shakespeare voices both views, as Wayne observes: “As so often in Shakespeare, it works with elements from both sides while evading direct alignment with either one. Quentin Skinner remarks that in general Shakespeare seems to ‘stand back from endorsing any one side in the arguments *in utramque partem* [in both directions] that he likes to stage” (*Cym.*, p. 56). This aligns with the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter concerning the Early Modern vision of the margins and the nuanced Shakespearian approach.

Thus, the end of *Cymbeline* shows the demonstration of power on the part of a sovereign who is the embodiment of harmony and concord and links himself to Rome of his own free will. The connection with such a prestigious empire is meant to radiate over Britain\* and its British\* sovereign thus acquires an aura, much in the same way that James I saw himself as Emperor Augustus, as Wayne observes: “Mentions of a ‘British empire’ then became more frequent as union between England and Scotland became more possible. In nearly all of these uses, the Roman Empire served as a primary reference point: King James saw himself as a Roman imperial ruler and liked to be identified as a second Augustus” (*Cym.*, p. 57). However, some critics have observed that the parallel between Cymbeline and King James I was not altogether flattering for the Stuart monarch, Wayne argues that: “The king’s deficiencies have led some critics to reject the notion that his character or the play is largely complimentary to James I, and there is considerable diversity of opinion about whether it supports his project for union” and she goes on to note Hadfield’s observation that “he is probably the least distinguished and colourful of Shakespeare’s titular heroes” to finally conclude that “[a]ny similarity between him and James I apart from his advocacy of peace would seem to me to have been far from flattering” (*Cym.*, p. 69-70). This confirms the

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<sup>272</sup> The Arden edition notes that this symbol “recalls James I’s creation of a union flag in 1606 that combined the Scottish cross of St Andrew with the English cross of St George” (*Cym.*, p. 377, see also p. 52-53).

nuanced view expressed in the play, and the presence of multiple dialogues of union and disunion, concord and discord, peace and submission versus war and freedom, but also between British\* roots and Roman superiority. These discussions are imbedded in the numerous intricacies that exist in the multiple references to Celtic Antiquity in the play, often intertwined as they are with Roman cultural motifs.

As Colin Burrow noted, references to Antiquity serve the main argument of the play. In *Cymbeline*, both Classical and Celtic Antiquities mingle and interact, raising the question of the supremacy of influence of the one upon the other, and translating the Early Modern struggle to decide upon the ancestry of the British\* people. This conflict between conquering and conquered culture had begun a lot earlier than the Jacobean era, when little by little, Roman and British\* issues became intertwined with one another. This is visible in the ways that the polytheist cults present in each culture became intertwined, as Ibeji observes:

Both Rome and Britain had polytheistic religions, in which a multiplicity of gods could be propitiated at many levels. At one end of the spectrum were the official cults of the emperor and the Capitoline Triad: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, linked to the other Olympian gods like Mars. At the other end, every spring, every river, every cross-roads, lake or wood had its own local spirit with its own local shrine. The Romans had no problem in combining these with their own gods, simply associating them with the god(s) or goddess(es) who most resembled them. (Ibeji 2011, online)

An example of the deep religious inter-impregnation of both cultures appears in the thermal city of Bath where there was the sanctuary of Sulis-Minerva:

At Bath, the famous temple bath complex was founded on the site of a local shrine to the water goddess Sul of the hot springs. She was linked to Minerva, for her healing qualities, but images of other gods and goddesses were also set up in the temple, most especially Diana the huntress, to whom an altar was dedicated. (*ibid.*)

Sulis-Minerva, Camulus-Mars, Lug-Jupiter or the triadic form of Diana-Hecate-Selene with triadic Celtic associations of Goddesses such as the Morrigná (Bodb, Morrigan, Macha), all bore the marks of an interrelated or parallel Western tradition, and it is this interconnection that is an important element of Shakespeare's play.

In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare emphasizes both the Celtic and Roman elements of British history, while at the same time privileging the Jacobean context where concord between England and Scotland was the main preoccupation. But he also staged elements of Britain's Roman heritage as an important part of national identity. The Celto-Roman period in which *Cymbeline* is set (and it is the same for the pre-Roman period of *King Lear*) would have favoured the presence of gods from the Celtic pantheon. However, the references to gods belonging to Classical antiquity are frequent in his plays. The assimilation of Roman values from the time of the conquest onwards, and the persistence of a form of pride in Roman ancestry, followed by the development of a pride in belonging to an Empire, together with the rediscovery of Ancient Classical texts which served as models for Early Modern pupils and writers certainly accounted for the numerous references to the gods of the Roman pantheon. From then on, the native culture of the British Isles would appear in the background, underneath the more prestigious Classical models. The need for a modernity that inhabited the Early Moderns advocated by Escobedo in his article (2008, p. 87) does not, therefore correspond to the claim made for Saxon ancestry but primarily to the desire to imitate the values of Rome.

Yet, as *Cymbeline* emphasizes, native features and motifs are not suppressed either, as Wayne suggests in relation to Posthumus who embodies both cultures: "the play's discovery of his hybrid roots stages the benefits of ancestral recovery for his early modern audience" (*Cym.*, p. 74). He is counted as a 'Briton', his father fought the Romans with Cassibelan, and his honorific title 'Leonatus' has been seen by Marcus as suggesting the Stuart Lion used by King James. Hence, he has partly British and Scottish affiliations (*ibid.*). Furthermore, his condition of being an orphan creates a void in his character that can easily be filled with Roman and British\* features: he lives in Rome (although in exile) and bears a Latin name<sup>273</sup> but is considered as "the Briton" by his Roman friends (1.4.28). Therefore, through his name pointing to the future (Posthumus meaning literally 'after death'), he embodies an Early Modern vision of history and of the times to come: a two-fold ancestry with a Roman name.

### 3. Celtic motifs

Nearly half of the scenes in *Cymbeline* are set in Wales, presented as the authentic, untouched British place (*Cym.*, p. 66-67 *passim*). We have developed the discussion between margins

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<sup>273</sup> Postumius was a Roman consul and general who perished with all his army in 215 BC in a battle against the Boiens (Livy, *Roman History*, Book xxiii, 1-6).

and centre in the previous chapter; the treatment of Wales in *Cymbeline* extends this but with the exception that the characters who inhabit Wales are alternatively described as wild *and* civilized, as Wayne observes:

Cymbeline presents its ancient Britons as both savages and civil. The scenes with Guiderius and Arviragus shift between portraying them first as civil (3.3), then savages (4.2.112-53), then civil (4.2.194-289), then fiercely valorous (5.2.11-14 and SD; 5.3.14-51). [...] far from being insolent pagans, the characters enter with a degree of order and reverence that hints at forms of ancient civility. (*Cym.* 2017, p. 55)

Although their surrogate father complains that they live in “a cell of ignorance” (3.3.33) and says that they are “bestly” (3.3.40), the boys show a certain majesty and ‘civilization’ that can be attributed to their royal South-Eastern origins. Shakespeare still presents Wales as the territory of the Ancient British\*, to which is attached a degree of backwardness, insofar as regal characters are concerned; and Lud’s town is the equivalent of Early Modern London, presented as Cymbeline’s capital city (while it was Colchester at the time of Cunobelinus). Thus, South-East Britain\* is the civilized territory, maybe due to its interaction with the continent and the Roman world and Wales is the wild ‘mountainous’ but civilly uncivilized country.

However, apart from the Welsh setting, the play contains other Celtic motifs, some of which are also present in other plays. These relate to warrior and warfare techniques such as blinding, severing of heads and war dogs, but also to the figures of the woman (fairy, queen, and goddess) and the play’s deployment of music associated with the Other World. As ever, the Celtic reading is present but in the background, while other material prevails. It must also be remembered that we are working in the Indo-European domain and that very often common elements are to be found in Classical, Christian, Celtic, German and Scandinavian mythologies. What interests us is the extent to how even a weak glimmer of Celtic culture among other more prevalent motifs are present in the Shakespearean text, giving it a fuller sense of its British\* roots. The first extant motif that surfaces in Shakespeare’s text is the practice of the severed head.

### 3.1 The warrior and warfare techniques: the severed head

Let us begin with the evocation of a motif related to the physical and mental condition of the warrior – the blinding – whose consequences are revealed in Dumézil’s trifunctional model. When Iachimo carries out the treacherous plan he conceived for Posthumus, announcing to him Innogen’s infidelity, he replies: “it is a basilisk unto mine eye, / Kills me to look on’t” (2.4.107-108). The basilisk is a giant snake with cockrel’s wings,<sup>274</sup> a fabulous creature whose looks kill. Thus, Posthumus finds himself symbolically blinded by what he believes to be his wife’s treachery. From the Dumézilian trifunctional point of view, so severely wounded, the warrior cannot accomplish his duty and is *de facto* prevented from carrying out his function. Posthumus has just received a blow that kills him, he says. Furthermore, this blow also destroys his capacity for judgment insofar as he cannot symbolically see, and therefore cannot distinguish between the true and the false, the good and the bad; he is mentally blinded, incapable of taking the right decision. Posthumus Leonatus is thus deprived of his functions in the Dumézilian sense of the term as early as the second act of the play and this will influence the progress of the plot. The blinding theme is also present in *King Lear*, with the enucleation of Gloucester, but it is treated in a different way because if Gloucester literally loses his eyes, he also, and paradoxically gains in clear-sightedness whereas Lear is metaphorically blind: although he can physically see, his capacity of judgment is seriously impaired. In any case, Gloucester is to be considered as a mirror of Lear, as we shall see in the final chapter. In both the examples of Posthumus and Lear-Gloucester, what we have is a loss of the first two functions. They all lose their capacity for judgment (first function, sacerdotal), and their fighting capacity (second function, warlike) because they can’t ‘see’. They lose their minds, their heads, in a metaphorical sense, and the head in Celtic warfare is of particular importance. The following motif of the severed head will be dealt with first as an Early Modern practice but it also harks back to the Celtic tradition as described by the Classics and by archaeology. This feature was also frequently represented in Medieval romances and is illustrated in Irish and Welsh narratives, as archeologists have recently found out in a pluri-disciplinary approach to the issue. Thus, we will see how a prominent warfare technique in Ancient times provides a rich background for a motif that comes to the fore in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* and *Macbeth*.

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<sup>274</sup> Also called a *cockatrice*, alleged to be hatched by a serpent from a cockrel’s egg (*OED*). It would be a symbol of the regal power which strikes those who lack respect (*Dictionnaire des symboles*, p. 109).

### 3.1.1. In Early Modern time

Apart from the physical and mental fitness of the warrior without which he was nothing, one of the major themes in Celtic warfare was the severed head. The motif did exist among other peoples in Indo-European culture and in oriental countries, but it was prevalent in Celtic culture both in the British Isles and on the Continent of Europe. In Shakespeare's time, representations of Celtic warriors with severed heads were not uncommon, as in the famous drawing of a Pict with tattoos and severed heads entitled 'The Trvve picture of one Pict', from Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590) (in *Cym.*, p. 62-63)<sup>275</sup>. The same kind of engraving is offered in John Speed's *History of Great Britain* with the title: "the portraitures and paintings of the ancient Britaines" (1614 [1611], Book V, chap. 7, p. 180). Plate V in John Derricke's *Image of Irelande* (1581) shows Englishmen carrying Irishmen's heads: an English soldier is holding a head in his hand and others on their swords, while another in the background is beheading a 'kerne' (i.e. Irish soldier) with the caption reading: "to see a souldiour toze a Karne, O Lord it is a wonder! And eke what care he tak'th to part the head from neck asunder" (Derricke, ed. 1883, plate V). In the next engraving of *Image of Irelande*, Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy for Ireland, leaves the city of Dublin under the heads of Irishmen displayed on pikes above the castle gate, with the caption "these trunckles heddes do plainly showe each rebelles fatall end, And what a haynous crime it is, the Queene for to offend" (*ibid.*, plate VI). This demonstrates that the custom of beheading the vanquished and exhibiting their heads was a feature in Early Modern society, as it was frequently demonstrated by the presence of heads on the gates of the tower of London and on London Bridge. The purpose of this 'tradition' was mainly to punish, to make an example and to discourage law-breaking and rebellion. It was a symbolic punishment similar to hanging, drawing and quartering. Let us see how it emerges in Shakespeare's play.

### 3.1.2 In *Cymbeline*

At act 4, scene 2.111, the stage direction reads: "*Enter GUIDERIUS [with Cloten's head]*". Prince Guiderius is Cymbeline's son, brought up in Wales by Belarius, and Cloten is the queen's son, Cymbeline's step-son, a weak and disloyal character. After fighting with each other, the two men leave the stage and are replaced by Belarius and Arviragus waiting for

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<sup>275</sup> Wayne also refers to Montaigne's essay "Of the Cannibales" in which he writes that the Brazilian Indians took home the heads of their enemies as trophies of victory (*Cym.* 2017, p. 63).





planned on beheading his rivals, which expands the frame of reference to his own origin, the South East of the Isle of Britain, an area not regarded as Celtic since the invasions of Romans, Saxons, Vikings and Normans. Probably because it was a familiar element to his audiences, Shakespeare enclosed an Ancient motif in his representation of Romano-Celtic Britain\*.

In addition to the engravings printed in antiquarian books, he could have encountered this practice in the numerous Medieval romances that still circulated at the time. As examples in a non-exhaustive list, Guy of Warwick decapitates the giant Colbrand (ed. Zupitza 1891, part 3, p. 605), Sir Percyvell of Galles (a Welshman) cuts off Saracens' heads (in Cooper 2004, p. 61) and Arthur hacks off the heads of two kings in Geoffrey's *Historia*: "Their armour offered them no protection capable of preventing Caliburn, when wielded in the right hand of this mighty King, from forcing them to vomit forth their soul with their life-blood. Ill luck brought two Kings, Sertorius of Libya and Politetes of Bithynia, in Arthur's way. He hacked off their heads and bundled them off to hell" (x.ii, p. 255). In another of his romance plays, *Pericles*, the heads of former unsuccessful suitors of the princess hang on the wall in Antiochus's court (stage directions at 1.1.31 and 34). In each case, the heads taken are those of enemies or potential rivals. There is a certain idea of the value of the head according to the rank of the enemy in Arthur's taking of the two kings' heads, and also the description is tinged with Christianity as in the phrase: "bundled them off to hell". However, the severed head motif, relatively widely used in Medieval romances and in Shakespeare hypothetically came from Antiquity and from the remnant of an Ancient Celtic practice attested by the Classics.

### 3.1.3 In the Classics

In his article "La tête coupée, symbole de mise à mort suprême en Gaule méridionale ? Des textes anciens aux données de l'archéologie" [The severed head, symbol of supreme death in Meridional Gaul? From the ancient texts to archaeological data] (2011, tr. CSL), Bernard Dedet gives the details of occurrences referring to the practice of beheading in the Classics. For example, Diodorus Siculus and Strabo recount Poseidonius of Apamea's testimony after his journey in the South of Gaul towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. This is what Diodorus wrote:

When at any time they cut off their enemies' heads, they hang them about their horses' necks. They deliver their spoils to the servants, all besmeared with blood,

to be carried before them in triumph, they themselves in the meantime singing a triumphant paean. And as the chief of their spoils, they fasten those they have killed, over the doors of their houses, as if they were so many wild beasts taken in hunting. The heads of their enemies that were the chiefest persons of quality, they carefully deposit in chests, embalming them with the oil of cedars, and shewing them to strangers, glory and boast how that some of their ancestors, theirs fathers, or themselves, (though great sums of money have been offered for them), yet they refused to accept them. Some glory so much on this account, that they refuse to take for one of these heads its weight in gold. (Diodorus, *Historical Library*, Book V, tr. Booth 1814, p. 315)

In *Roman History*, Livy describes general Postumius's fatal end when he was killed with his two legions in a battle against the Boians in 215 BC:

Spoils taken from his body and the severed head of the general were carried in triumph by the Boians to the temple which is most revered in their land. Then after cleaning the head they adorned the skull with gold according to their custom. And it served them as a sacred vessel from which to pour libations at festivals and at the same time as a drinking cup for the priests and keepers of the temple. (Livy, *Roman History*, Book XXIII, 24, tr. Gardner Moore 1940, p. 83)

According to these two descriptions, the head was that of an enemy, taken as a token of victory to be held in triumph, as the English did in Derricke's engravings, carrying the heads of the Irish on their swords. Livy is the only one to connect the further display of the heads to a sacred value. Postumius's head is carried "to the temple which is most revered", which is absent from the Early Modern conception of the severed head and from other Classical accounts. As Dedet observes, information coming from the Classics state that the heads were all taken from the corpses of male enemies (no mention being made of females) and the beheading was not the cause of death, since the heads were taken after.<sup>277</sup> Then, the rank of the victim was important; there was a question of prestige attached to the heads which could be displayed either in private homes or in public places, and in some accounts the skulls could be used as drinking cups. The practice is said to have also existed in other peoples' traditions (Scythes and Taures in Crimea) from about the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Dedet 2011, p. 282).

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<sup>277</sup> This illuminates the scene involving the Welsh women in *Henry IV part I* and again raises the hypothesis that it could have been women taking the heads of dead soldiers. There is no mention of women's heads taken in the Classics but there were women soldiers as we have seen in the previous chapter.

### 3.1.4 In Archaeology

As a matter of fact, archaeological research corroborates most of the information noted in the Classics (Dedet, p. 283-287; Kruta 2000, p. 839). The sites of the Cailar, Ribemont, Entremont, Roquepertuse, or *Glanum* have provided precise information on the tradition of the severed head in Gaul, and in Western Britain, heads displayed on wooden poles have been discovered on the site of the hill fort of Bredon Hill (Allen 2001, p. 51). According to Dedet, the Oppidum of Entremont is probably the most complete site: pillars and lintels are carved and engraved with severed heads and some architectural elements have holes in which skulls could be displayed. A horseman has one of these severed heads attached to his horse's neck, several statues of cross-legged seated men bear severed heads between their thighs and even the brooch of one of the characters is a severed head, as if to insist yet again on the motif (Dedet, p. 283).<sup>278</sup> Dedet's investigation brings new information to corroborate the fact that archaeological research has managed to draw further conclusions thanks to an interdisciplinary approach involving the history of ideas in the Ancients like Aristotle but also through the exploration of Irish mythological epics.

Dedet also cites Claude Sterckx's book, *Les mutilations des ennemis chez les Celtes préchrétiens : la tête, les seins, le graal* (2005), as a study dedicated to Irish and Welsh epics of the Dark Ages, allowing further explanation of the deeper meaning of this practice for the late insular Celtic world. Dedet's major conclusions from Sterckx and from archaeological studies are that the heads, belonging exclusively to young or middle aged male warriors, were seized after their deaths, thus acting as an 'extra-death' or 'superlative death', described in the insular narratives. The *modus operandi* is systematic and very precise: "D'abord un grand coup tranchant porté au niveau des vertèbres cervicales pour détacher la tête du tronc, puis un arrachement des vertèbres encore attenantes au crâne, et enfin un enlèvement des muscles situés sous la mandibule" [first a big cutting blow struck at the basis of the cervical vertebrae to detach the head from the trunk, then, wrenching the remaining vertebrae from the skull and finally removing the muscles from under the mandible] (Dedet 2011, p. 287, tr. CSL).

There is also a special care in retrieving the brain. This particular detail illustrates Guiderius's claim that not even Hercules "could have knocked out [Cloten's] brains, for he had none" (4.2.114). The expression takes on a specific turn in the severed head context, giving the impression that Cloten was such "a fool, an empty purse" (112) that he had no

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<sup>278</sup> The phenomenon is described in the scientific short film entitled "Quand les Gaulois perdaient la tête" (Goefroy 2013, 13'51), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GczRbefa16k> (accessed 10/08/19).

brain at all to retrieve from his skull. This vision downgrades the value of the head and in this respect it replicates the Early Modern conception of the punishment of traitors. It can be seen as an evolution of the original Celtic practice which attached explicit value to the severed head. This value was dependent on the social prestige of the victim but it also resided in the fact that the head was probably perceived as the repository of procreative, vital energy. The conception finds an illustration in the belief in Classical Antiquity (Aristotle, Herodotus) that “la colonne vertébrale est considérée comme le conduit d’écoulement d’un ‘sperme cerebrospinal’ et la verge est vue comme l’organe de diffusion de ce fluide qui provient du réservoir vital qu’est le cerveau” [the spine is perceived as a canal for the flux of a cerebrospinal sperm, with the penis as the organ of diffusion of this fluid coming from the brain, the vital repository] (Dedet 2011, p. 285, tr. CSL). Thus, keeping the head was a means of appropriating this vital energy, beyond the mere appropriation of the soul, as Dedet concludes from Sterckx’s study in insular mythology and archaeological data related to Celtic Gaul:

Détacher la tête de ces défunts va sans doute au-delà du souci de ménager ou de conserver une ‘valeur spirituelle’, ou une ‘âme’, censée résider dans cette boîte qu’est le crâne.<sup>279</sup> C’est d’abord s’approprier leur énergie vitale et leur force procréatrice interrompues, et c’est ainsi donner à ces individus une seconde mort, une mort suprême. En même temps, c’est peut-être aussi priver ces personnes d’un ‘outre-tombe’, cet ‘*antumnos*’ [...] un au-delà où ils sont censés continuer de vivre.

[Tearing off the heads of the deceased probably goes beyond the concern to spare or preserve a ‘spiritual value’ or a ‘soul’, supposedly residing in the cranium. It first amounts to appropriating their interrupted vital energy and procreative force, and it is thus giving these individuals a secondary death, a supreme death. Along with that it may also mean depriving these people from a ‘beyond’, the ‘*antumnos*’ [...], an afterworld where they are meant to continue their lives]. (Dedet 2011, p. 288, tr. CSL)

The distance from Shakespeare’s text is now fully apparent since he does not go into such detail, but at the same time this description invests the play with new meaning. On the one

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<sup>279</sup> In 2001, Allen recognized the head as the dwelling of the soul: “the Celts believed that the dwelling place of the immortal soul was the head. To possess an enemy’s head was to possess his soul. As with so many aspects of the warrior’s life, the taking of an opponent’s head in battle, and preferably as the result of single combat, had a mystical significance” (2001, p. 51).

hand, Shakespeare confronts the Early Modern conception of the severed head as punishment and exhibition of traitor's heads insofar as Cloten receives the *ad hoc* chastisement devolved to traitors; but on the other hand, by evoking the brain, the value of the head and even its monetary value, Shakespeare recalls Celtic behaviour evoked by the Classics and corroborated by archaeology. We should remember that Diodorus wrote: "Some glory so much on this account, that they refuse to take for one of these heads its weight in gold" (see *supra*). Although Guiderius states the contrary because he totally denies any value for Cloten's head, by introducing this discussion, Shakespeare goes beyond the usual Early Modern conception as regards severed heads. This takes yet another turn when we consider insular narratives.

### 3.1.5 In insular mythologies and *Macbeth*

The motif of the severed head is widely used in Celtic insular narratives. In *Oidheadh Con Culainn* (*Cú Chulainn's Death*), the story of Conall Cearnach's revenge for Cú Chulainn's death is a long succession of decapitations of all of Cú Chulainn's enemies. Eimhear, his wife receives Cú Chulainn's head and drinks his blood.<sup>280</sup> The episode ends with the poem *Laoidh na gCeann* ('*The Lay of the Heads*') which takes the form of dialogue between Eimhear and Conall concerning the identity of each of the heads he has collected in revenge for his foster-brother.<sup>281</sup> Dedet's analysis demonstrates the significance of the head, and particularly the brain, in insular narratives:

Dans ces épopées, en effets, les héros celtes, au premier rang desquels Conall, Cúchulainn et Fionn, sont de grands chasseurs de têtes ennemies. Certes, ils multiplient les parades chargés de leurs prises et exposent celles-ci sur des pieux, mais aussi ils boivent dans des crânes aménagés en coupes. Or, dans cet acte, il apparaît que l'important n'est pas tant le crâne osseux en lui-même, mais plutôt le cerveau qu'il a contenu et qui l'a imprégné 'd'énergie vitale'. Ainsi, dans le Cycle de la Branche Rouge, le héros d'Ulster, Conall Cernach tue Mesgegra, roi de Leinster, et lui coupe la tête. Son cocher est dans l'incapacité d'emporter toute

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<sup>280</sup> In *The Witch*, by Thomas Middleton (c. 1613-1616), Rosamund, Duchess of Ravenna, plans to kill her husband after he forces her to drink from a cup made from her father's skull.

<sup>281</sup> Version B du récit de la *Mort de Cuchulainn*, ed. Van Hamel, p. 80-81 ; French translation Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, *La mort de Cuchulainn*, in *Ogam* 13, p. 512-513. Julia Sophie Khüens offers a detailed philological study of the poem in Chapter 7 of her thesis (Glasgow 2009, p. 338).

la tête et Conall Cernach lui donne alors l'ordre d'en sortir la cervelle, de la mêler à de la craie et d'emporter la balle de matière obtenue pour l'ajouter à la collection de têtes du trésor royal. C'est cette balle contenant la cervelle qui aura ensuite une grande efficacité magique.

[Indeed in these epics, Celtic heroes, especially Conall, Cúchulainn and Fionn, are great hunters of enemies' heads. Of course they multiply parades with their takings and exhibit them on stakes, but they also drink in skulls converted as bowls. However, in this act it appears that the importance is not so much the skull bone itself, but rather the brain it contained and that impregnated it with 'vital energy'. Thus, in the Cycle of the Red Branch, the Ulster hero Conall kills Mesgegra, king of Leinster and cuts his head. His chariot driver cannot take the whole head and Conall Cernach orders him to take the brains out, to mix it with chalk and take the ball made of the matter thus obtained to the heads collection of the royal treasure. It is this ball containing the brains which will then have a great magical efficiency]. (Dedet 2011, p. 284, Sterckx 2005, p. 47, tr. CSL)<sup>282</sup>

Again, this illuminates the episode in *Cymbeline* when Guiderius speaks of 'knocking Cloten's brains out'. If, as Dedet notes, the extraction of the brain remains exceptional in Irish mythology, this precise case of making a ball with it reveals the essential value granted to the brain (*ibid*). This emphasizes further the infamous nature of Cloten as a brainless man.

In *The Pursuit of the Cattle-Raid of Flidais* preserved in the Scottish Glenmasan manuscript, after Fergus has killed and beheaded Oilil the Fair, he brings the head to Flidais as a 'love token' and she sings a lament for the head, asking that it should be suitably dressed (*Celtic Review* 4, p. 22-27). Along with Oilill, his twenty-four sons, seven hundred members of his household, his clan and other clans are also killed and beheaded: "and so it was that many were the bodies without heads, and trunks without necks, and carcasses severely hacked throughout the whole plain. Such indeed was the closeness and nearness of the corpses that the raven could hop from one blood-red carcass to another of the mangled bodies and bloody headless trunks as they lay on the wide field" (p. 23). The head as a love token is not mentioned in the Classics nor by archaeologists and it is not in Shakespeare either. But the savagery of the description following Oilill's death recalls some elements of the massacre of

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<sup>282</sup> The version of the tale in the *Book of Leinster* adds that it is with this ball made of brain extracted and mixed with lime that king Conor will eventually be slain (*The Siege of Howth*, in *Revue Celtique* Vol. 8, 1887, p. 47).

Macduff's wife, children and household in *Macbeth* (4.2)<sup>283</sup> although no decapitation is mentioned.

At the end of the play, however, Macduff avenges himself in a single combat with Macbeth. The stage directions are worthy of note: "Enter fighting, and Macbeth slain. [Exit Macduff with Macbeth's body]" (end of 5.8). Twenty seven lines later, Macduff enters carrying the head of the murderous traitor, as the stage direction indicates: "Enter MACDUFF with Macbeth's head" (5.9. after line 19).<sup>284</sup> Although some of these stage directions were very often the work of editors, they are, for the most part, in the 1623 Folio.<sup>285</sup> From a theatrical point of view it was necessary to have the two characters fight on stage, and the audience needed to see Macbeth slain by Macduff in revenge for his lost family and household. These stage directions, inspired, it may be assumed, by the logic of performance, adequately corroborate the ancient practice of beheading which was performed on dead bodies. Unexpectedly, archaeological data and Shakespeare meet here. Holinshed provides a comparable version of Macbeth's death: "therewithal he stept vnto him, and slue him in the place. Then cutting his head from his shoul|ders, he set it vpon a pole, and brought it vnto Mal|colme" (1587, volume 5, *The Historie of Scotland*, p. 171).<sup>286</sup> Thus, set in early Medieval times (Holinshed states that Macbeth was slain in 1057), *Macbeth* appears to transport a motif coming from the Ancient world and stages a continuation of the practice in the Middle Ages. Then, in his following speech, Macduff addresses the new king, Malcolm son of Duncan, in keeping with the Ancient practice of regarding the head as a trophy:

MACDUFF

Hail, king, for so thou art. Behold where stands

Th'usurper's cursed head: the time is free.

I see thee compassed with thy kingdom's pearl,

That speak my salutation in their minds;

Whose voices I desire aloud with mine.

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<sup>283</sup> Macbeth says: "The castle of Macduff I will surprise, "seize upon Fife, give to th'edge o'th'sword / His wife, his babes and all the unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line" (4.1.149-152). Announcing the news to Macduff, Ross indicates that his "wife and babes [were] savagely slaughtered" (4.3.205-206), "wife, children, servant, all that could be found" (213). The ballads recounting the presumably historical events of the attack of the castle of Crecynbroghe by Captain Care has a similar tone: the lord of the castle is away from home and the 'gay lady' and her sons are savagely murdered, the house burnt (n° 52, in *Tudor Songs and Ballads*, from MS Cotton Vespasian A-25, ed. Seng 1978, p. 128-135).

<sup>284</sup> Macbeth, who beheaded "the merciless Macdonald" in 1.2.9-23, is beheaded in his turn. The same process happens to many characters in the Celtic mythology; they behead and get decapitated in their own turns, like Cú Chulainn, for example.

<sup>285</sup> *Mac.*, *Appendix I*, part 1: editing the text, p. 319-321.

<sup>286</sup> Also available at: [http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587\\_1263](http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_1263) (accessed 12/08/19).

Hail, King of Scotland. (5.9. 20-25)

Macbeth's head is deemed to be "cursed", contrary to Cloten's which is of no value, Macbeth's is potentially harmful by comparison. In fact, it has inherited the evil aura attached to the Weird Sisters. Because he believed in their prophecies, he became part of their world, as we have seen in the case of the Welshmen believing in fairies. This correspondence between fairies and hags will be dealt with in the next chapter about *Macbeth*. In relation to Irish narratives, Macbeth's "cursed" head recalls Balar's hostile severed head in one of the founding myths of the Irish corpus.

In *The Second Battle of Mag Tured*, a number of soldiers were beheaded, including Nuadha the Tuatha de Dannan's king, who was decapitated by the giant Balar who in turn was himself beheaded. Before Balar's fight with Lugh, he made the request that his head should be placed above Lugh's because he said: "Sa taille ajoutée à celle de ta tête sera pour qu'aïlle avec toi ma richesse, ma prospérité, mon horreur et ma valeur guerrière. Car je ne trouverai pas après moi quelqu'un qui me sera plus cher que toi" [Its size added to your own head will bring you my wealth, my prosperity, my horror and my warlike valour] (in Guyonvarc'h 1980, p. 76, tr. CSL). The value of the head is here acknowledged and the reference seems to support archaeological accounts, except that it is stated nowhere that the severed head had to be placed on top of a living being. However, after Lugh decapitated Balar, he put the head on a stone pillar nearby and the head burnt and broke off the stone to four fragments. Then, Lugh addressed Balar: "Il est vrai", dit Lugh, "que le conseil que vous m'avez donné n'était pas amical, car ma tête serait pire que ce pilier si j'avais osé poser cette tête sur la mienne" [It is true, Lugh said, that the advice you gave me was unfriendly, because my head would have been worse than this pillar had I dared to put this head on mine] (in Guyonvarc'h 1980, p. 77, tr. CSL). As a result, Lugh left the head on a hazel bough (a magic tree) and took a leg as a proof of Balar's death. The trophy as proof of killing is also found in Medieval Japan where the soldiers had to bring back enemies' heads to justify their deeds. But the severed head was not always that of an enemy, as the *Mabinogi of Branwen* shows.

Our final example comprises a part of *The Second Branch of the Mabinogi, the Branch of Branwen, daughter of Llyr*. Having been wounded after rescuing his sister, king Bendigeit Vran ordered that own head be cut off. He wanted his soldiers, the seven survivors of his clan, to take it and bury it in London, facing in the direction of France. The head would thus serve as a means of deterring invasions. But this, he said "will take you a long time". First, his soldiers were ordered to go to Harlech with the head. For seven years they would feast and for



eighty years following in Gwales in Penfro, without sorrow or anxiety, with the head being of the same company as when the king was alive. Bengigeit told them that they could remain there and the head would not decay, so long as they did not open the forbidden door towards Aber Henfelen (i.e. a door to the Otherworld) (ed. Davies 2007, p. 32). What we have here is a double narrative involving a distortion of time due to the significance of the magic character of the head in Celtic culture. The major difference with what we have seen so far is that the head belongs to a companion, which is not mentioned in Classical writing and is not clear from archaeological evidence.<sup>287</sup> In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, however, the use of the skulls in 5.1 is a lot different since it involves discourse of the natural decay of the body after death, a Medieval tradition that is not particularly Celtic. By the time Hamlet reaches 5.1.182 (F) where he encounters the skull of Yorrick, the afterworld has been converted into a memory of the king's jester, and this leads him to musing on the egalitarian fate of the body after death.

To conclude, the Ancient Celtic practice of the severed head, asserted by the Classics, by archaeology and in the insular Irish, Welsh and Scottish narratives serves to illustrate a feature that was common during the Middle Ages and in Renaissance England. The knowledge of Ancient practices present in Shakespeare helps us to chart their evolution from Ancient times. In particular, the spiritual and even magical value of the head is diminished in Early Modern times while the Ancient notion of trophy added to that of punishment is retained. But Shakespeare introduces a further supplementary discourse. He resurrects traits that are found in the Classics and he discusses the curse of the head. Furthermore, what happens to Cloten's head raises a question in the light of our previous demonstration. In act 4 scene 2, Guiderius says: "I have sent Cloten's clotpoll down the stream / In embassy to his mother. His body's hostage / For his return." (4.2.183-185). A clotpoll is a "thick or 'wooden' head (*OED n. 1*); literally a head (poll) made of a clod of earth, [and] figuratively a blockhead (*OED n. 2*" (*Cym.*, note p. 295). We may add to this a third meaning, since the word also refers to the fake head that was used in performance, and therefore an object, a stage prop (*ibid*). In theatrical practice, not only does the severed head serve the plot, and also create a dramatic effect, but it is also a metatheatrical element, allowing the theatre to comment on its own practice. What is intriguing in Guiderius's disposal of the head is that he first sent it down the stream in Wales, in the hope that it would reach Lud's town and his mother the

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<sup>287</sup> Dedet, citing Sterckx, also mentions the case of Conall Cearnach's death: when he dies, his enemies take his head and bring it back in Connaught as a trophy; but a prophecy announces that, one day, they will recover Conall's head and will find new vigour by drinking milk from it (Dedet 2011, p. 284, Sterckx 2005, p. 121). The hero's head is beneficial to the community.

queen, and secondly that his body is kept as a “hostage for his return”. Bevington argues that “Having sent the head downstream as if it were an ambassador to a parley, Cloten’s body will be held as a security to ensure the head’s safe return, which will never happen” (in *Cym.*, note p. 295). Indeed, the queen is not present from 3.5 onwards, and we learn about her death in 5.5. She is not involved in any discussion with the princes after her son’s death. Guiderius’s statement is thus ironical but even so, the head is considered as a metonymy for the entire person. Furthermore, the idea of the return of the head also conveys a desire to keep it, as a trophy, perhaps for display? But while Macbeth’s head was exposed,<sup>288</sup> Cloten’s was not, it was sent back to his mother, either the queen, or nature, represented by the stream where the head was thrown. Symbolically, Cloten’s “mother” might also be “mother-earth” cited in *AYL*, i.e. death, and the goddess Nature. Here, the beginning of a relationship is discernable between queen and Nature, an idea that will be developed more fully in the last chapter.

However, other Celtic elements are observable in *Cymbeline*, and the relation to death is also expressed through music.

### 3.2 Music and the Otherworld

At least twice in *Cymbeline*, ‘Solemn music’ is heard. The first occurrence is when Cadwal-  
Arviragus plays Belarius’s “ingenious instrument” (4.2.185) announcing Fidele-Innogen’s (supposed) death. The Arden edition of the play notes that the adjective “ingenious” means “skillfully constructed” (*OED* a., 3b) and critics have suggested several instruments that fit this appellation, from a ‘musical automata, the ancestor of the pianola’ to a ‘mechanical marvel operating by itself’. However, Kerrigan and Butler have respectively favoured ‘an old British harp’ and a ‘wind harp’, “both important in Celtic and Welsh iconography” (*Cym.*, note p. 295). The playwright took special care to have the young prince play this instrument before carrying Innogen’s body in his arms. This musical interlude allowed Polydore-Guiderius and Morgan-Belarius to wonder what was happening, indeed Guiderius asks: “What does he mean? Since death of my dear’st mother / It did not speak before. All solemn things / Should answer solemn accidents. The matter?” (4.2.189-191). The music is clearly linked to death: it played before the princes’ mother died, and again now that Innogen is thought to be dead. This connection constitutes a significant Celtic motif, as will be demonstrated.

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<sup>288</sup> And so was Macdonald’s, as the Captain says: “And fixed his head upon our battlements” (1.2.23).

The second occurrence in *Cymbeline* is act 5 scene 4, where the long stage direction describes a remarkable procession:

Solem music. Enter (as in apparition) SICILIUS LEONATUS,  
father to POSTHUMUS, an old man, attired like a warrior,  
leading in his hand an ancient matron, his wife, and  
MOTHER TO POSTHUMUS with music before them. Then,  
after other music, follow the two young Leonati, BROTHERS  
TO POSTHUMUS, with wounds as they died in the wars.  
They circle POSTHUMUS round as he lies sleeping. (5.4.29.1-7)

This apparition presents Posthumus's family coming back from the world of the dead to help him face the ordeal of his imprisonment and gain the king's mercy. Unlike in *Hamlet* where silence reigns, here the ghosts enter the stage to the accompaniment of music, and musicians are part of the procession. A possible staging would have music play just as Posthumus is going to sleep in his cell saying: "O Innogen, / I'll speak to thee in silence. [*He sleeps*]" (5.4.28-29). This would create the appropriate atmosphere and provide a transition with the following scene. The link between music and sleep is a recurrent motif in Celtic mythic narratives as Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h argue:<sup>289</sup>

On appréciait aussi le sommeil, et comme toute musique de bonne qualité était capable d'endormir magiquement ses auditeurs, les harpistes avaient le rang de *bô aire*, c'est-à-dire d'hommes libres possesseurs de bétail [...]. Ils faisaient donc partie, au départ, de la classe sacerdotale, parce que la musique est une technique et, dans son état de perfection, une technique de l'Autre Monde : les harpistes sont souvent mentionnés à côté des *filid* du plus haut rang, et ce sont eux-mêmes des *filid*.

[Sleep was also appreciated, and since any good quality music could magically put the audience to sleep, harp-players had the rank of *bô aire*, that is to say of free cattle owners [...]. So to start with they were part of the sacerdotal class,

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<sup>289</sup> For example, in *Aislinge Oengusso (The Dream of Oengus)*, a young woman from the *Sid* (or *Sidhe*, the Otherworld) sends Oengus, young brother of the king of Ireland to sleep with her music instrument (Guyonvarc'h 1980, p. 233-234). In the *Second Battle of Mag Tured* (anglicized form *Moytura*) the druid-god Dadga wants to take back his harp, stolen by the Fomoir. Inside the harp, the Dagda had tied all the melodies: the three major ones being the air of sleep, the air of laughter and the air of sorrow. When he entered the enemies' banqueting house and summoned the harp, it left the wall, killed nine people and came to the Dagda. Then he played the air of sleep, all the army fell asleep and they could escape from the enemy's camp (*ibid.*, p. 58-59).

because music is a technique and, in its state of perfection, a technique from the Other World: harpists are often mentioned next to the highest rank *filid*, and they are *filid* themselves]. (1986, p. 143)

Among the sacerdotal class, the *filid* are seer bards in charge of the upkeep and the transmission of knowledge in Ireland (in Wales they are called ‘bards’). Miranda Green notes that they survived long after Ireland’s Christianization: “Long after Ireland adopted Christianity, the *filidh* remained as seers, teachers and advisers, taking over many of the druids’ functions. Indeed the *filidh* maintained a function until the seventeenth century” (Green 1993, p. 66). Thus, the linking of music to magic and knowledge persisted into Early Modern culture. Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux confirm that “La musique est une des manifestations terrestres de l’autre Monde” [Music is one of the terrestrial manifestations of the Other World] (1986, p. 292). Music also heals, entertains, modifies time, and like the birds of Rhiannon, it can “wake the dead and lull the living to sleep” (*ibid.*, p. 294-295 *passim*; *How Culhwch Won Olwen*, ed. Davies 2007, p. 197).

The ghosts of Posthumus’s family soothe him by praising his merits and while at the same time teaching him how to proceed. They are followed by a theophany, the divine apparition of Jupiter himself, descending from the ‘heavens’ (the roof above the stage in Elizabethan theatres like the Globe). Thus, the Otherworld and the Divine in Celtic culture and mythology heralded by music, ‘enables’ the presence of ghosts and a Roman god in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*. However, there is only one time in the Celtic year when doors to the Otherworld open, letting the spirits of the dead pass between the two regions and that is during the three nights of Samain, at the end of October and beginning of November. Apparitions at other times can only be ‘fairy’ creatures from the Otherworld, or gods, but not humans. Furthermore, the name “ghost” took the meaning that we know today in the 12<sup>th</sup> century only. Therefore, here is another syncretism of Medieval, Roman and Celtic representations in a single motif.

The same mix is observed in *King Henry VIII*, where Queen Katherine’s vision before she dies clearly reveals a Christian ethos, but Celtic traits also illustrate the scene in that music is here again linked to sleep, and death. In act 4 scene 2, Katherine, resting, asks for the melancholy tune she has prepared for her death: “Good Griffith, / Cause the musicians play me that sad note / I named my knell, whilst I sit meditating / On that celestial harmony I go to” (4.2.77-80). She then falls asleep and has a vision details of which are contained in the long stage direction:

The vision

Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six  
Personages, clad with white robes, wearing on their heads  
garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces,  
branches of bays or palm in their hands. They first  
conge unto her, then dance; and at certain changes, the  
first two hold a spare garland over her head, at which  
the other four make reverend curtsies. Then the two  
that held the garland deliver the same to the other next  
two, who observe the same order in their changes and  
holding the garland over her head. Which done, they  
deliver the same garland to the last two, who likewise  
observe the same order. At which (as it were by  
inspiration) she makes in her sleep signs of rejoicing and  
holdeth up her hands to heaven. And so, in their  
dancing, vanish, carrying the garland with them.

The music continues. (4.2.82.1-17)

These six “spirits of peace” as Katherine calls them (4.2.83) dressed in white and leaning over her are like angels blessing the Catholic queen who is about to enter paradise. Yet, the ritual itself has very little that is Christian about it and the verb “tripping” (on a light and quick pace) is often associated with fairies. The garlands and branches of bays, together with the dances evoke a pagan scene. Although bays and palms are Mediterranean plants, closer to the Roman world, their green colour recalls fairies and the green world, pagan traditions linked to Nature, almost as if Katherine is returning to the natural world. Furthermore, the queen describes her vision in words that further intermingle the Christian and the pagan: “No? Saw you not even now a blessed troop / Invite me to a banquet, whose bright faces / Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun? / They promised me eternal happiness and brought me garlands” (4.2.87-91). This troop sounds like Christian angels, and eternal happiness accords with the concept of Christian paradise, a spiritual place. But the banquet is profoundly pagan, material, and corresponds to the Celtic vision of life in the Otherworld, a place of never ending festivity. Music summons creatures from an Otherworld and allows Katherine to prepare for death, sending her to sleep on a sorrowful note (not the Dadga’s sleeping air on the harp). Christian, Roman and Celtic elements intermingle in the vision of a highly pious

Catholic queen, in a play that is not set in a Celtic environment, thus demonstrating that such motifs emerge almost unconsciously in the playwright's work, as an integral part of his style.

After the motif of music and the Otherworld and fairy-like creatures irrupting in Queen Katherine's vision, let us conclude by investigating Celtic motifs in *Cymbeline*.

### 3.3 Women figures: fairy, queen and goddess

In *Cymbeline*, the young princes are metaphorically giant figures who inhabit the cave in Wales, as we have seen in our first chapter (supra); but the giant is not the only creature coming from Ancient lore to inhabit this cave.

#### 3.3.1 The fairy

In act 3, scene 7, on entering his dwelling, Belarius sees a creature eating, whom he first calls "fairy" and then "angel" (it is actually Innogen, disguised as the boy Fidele):<sup>290</sup> "But that it eats our victuals, I should think / Here were a fairy. [...] By Jupiter, an angel – or if not, / An earthly paragon. Behold divineness / No elder than a boy!" (3.6.40-44). Popular lore believes that little people inhabit nature. For example, it is common to leave food on windowsills for the inhabitants of the forest, trolls and gnomes in Scandinavian countries, and in Ireland, fairy creatures like elves, pucks and hobgoblins can be benevolent as well as malevolent, which is why it is advised to placate them by giving them food. The fact that Innogen is eating when Belarius sees her connects her to this tradition of the meal prepared for the fairies, and Claude Lecouteux observes that the ritual was particularly developed in the Middle Ages: "À la charnière des XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, le repas des fées semble être une tradition vivante bien connue" [At the tipping point between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the fairy meal seems to be a well-known living tradition] (Lecouteux 1995, p. 170, tr. CSL). Obviously, Belarius does not recognize this tradition because for him the fact that the creature eats earthly victuals testifies to the fact that she is not a fairy being. But the popular Medieval tradition further illustrates Innogen's representation as an 'other' being eating the meal purposefully left for her kind.

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<sup>290</sup> Paradoxically, Innogen is here taken as a fairy while in 2.2. in her bed at Cymbeline's court, she prayed the gods to protect her from them: "To your protection I commend me, gods. / From fairies and the tempters of the night, / Guard me, beseech ye." (2.2.8-10). Transposed in the Welsh setting, in the cave, she almost became a fairy herself, thus making her prayer in 2.2. a proleptic statement.

Innogen is mistaken for a fairy although she is dressed as a boy because fairy creatures are not necessarily feminine.<sup>291</sup> There are fairy knights for example,<sup>292</sup> and the creatures cited above are considered as fairy beings and can also be animals (bird, deer, wild boar, cat...). In fact, they are creatures from the Otherworld, very often endowed with a shape-shifting quality, and labelled 'fairy'. Although the connection is not entirely clear, the link with the Otherworld is, hypothetically speaking, what aligns popular knowledge to Ancient faith in Celtic culture. Lecouteux reckons that the fairy is a literary creation of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, with a double origin in folklore in which Celtic traditions are prominent, but not forgetting German roots (1995, p. 162). The evolution of the figure of the fairy over time is complex and will be developed more fully in the next chapter.

Finally, Innogen's figure as an 'other' is further enhanced by her presence in the cave, a setting seen as an entrance to the Otherworld in fairy lore, as Wentz observes:

The Heaven world of the ancient Celts, unlike that of the Christians, was not situated in some distant, unknown region of planetary space, but here and now on our earth. Necessarily a subjective world, poets could only describe it in terms more or less vague; and its exact geographical location, accordingly, differed widely in the minds of the scribes from century to century. Sometimes, as usual to-day in fairy-lore, it was a subterranean world entered through caverns, or hills, or mountains, and inhabited by many races and orders of invisible beings such as demons, shades, fairies, or even gods. (Wentz 1909, p. 164)

Wentz adds a detail concerning Irish manuscripts where the Otherworld, usually situated in the middle of the Western ocean, is called *Tir Béo* or *Tir na m-béo*, 'The land of the Living', *Tir N-aill*, 'The Other Land (or World)', *Mag Már*, 'The Great Plain', *Mag Meld* or *Mag Mell*, 'The Plain Agreeable (or Happy)', or *Tir na n-og* 'the Land of the Youth' (Wentz, p. 165-166, Lecouteux p. 148). In *Cymbeline*, Wales and its mountainous topography serve both as a refuge and as a mysterious place linked to Otherworld beings. Lecouteux stresses the mythic potential of the mountain and of wild spaces in nature (sea, forests, deserts) in Medieval romances, as remote places, inaccessible and unknown: "Ces lieux sont le théâtre de manifestations extraordinaires; ils sont le domaine du merveilleux. Là tout est possible, c'est

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<sup>291</sup> Guiderius mentions "female fairies" in 4.2.216, in relation to Fidele-Innogen's sleep.

<sup>292</sup> For example, there are fairy knights in the Scottish Border ballad of *Tam Lin* (ed. Child 1884, p. 335) and in the lay of *Yonec* by Marie de France (ed. Harf-Lancner 2002, p. 182-209). Lancelot is partially a fairy knight, being Lancelot of the Lake, (abducted) son of the Lady of the Lake, while the Green Knight never claims to be an otherworldly being, but Gawain, together with the reader, have strong suspicion that he might be (Cooper 2004, p. 203).

le paysage de l'aventure chevaleresque et initiatique, là vivent des hommes monstrueux et des bêtes fabuleuses, des êtres surnaturels enfin" [These places are the theatre of extraordinary manifestations; they are the realm of the marvelous. There, everything is possible, it is the landscape of initiatory chivalry adventure; there, live monstrous men and fabulous beasts, supernatural beings, finally] (p. 135, tr. CSL). In *As You Like It*, there are two examples of Duke Senior's mention of Ferdinand's cave: "Go to my cave", he says (2.1.201) and at the end of the play, Jaques indicates his intention to go to the Duke's place: "I'll stay to know at your abandoned cave" (5.4.194). The cave is chosen as a refuge by the Duke living in exile, like Belarius and the two princes in *Cymbeline*. This setting connects the characters with nature and displaces the action into an 'other' world. Unlike Plato's cave in which individuals are constrained and forced to look at images, Shakespeare's evocation of the cave opens onto the natural world and appeals to the spectators' imaginations to develop the motif, according to their own cultural background and the discourse of their time. It is probable that the common belief in fairies would have triggered particular representations of the caves in *Cym.* and *AYL* as entrances to the mysterious 'Otherworld', thus contributing to further enrich the atmosphere of the plays.

### 3.3.2 The queen, women treacherous by nature?

The second woman figure to consider in *Cymbeline* is the unnamed queen. She is called the 'queen', Cymbeline's wife. This highlights a certain disregard for the character and at the same time it points to the regal function of queen herself. The queen, who 'makes' the king in Celtic societies and guarantees the balance of the kingdom (see Chapter 6 on *King Lear*) is here presented as an unstable, ambitious and unfaithful character, and even a traitor and a murderess. In this sense she recalls Macbeth's queen, Lady Macbeth, ready to kill for ambition and power. In *Cymbeline*, the queen incites her husband to fight against the Romans, and when she dies he capitulates to the Empire. We have seen that some critics have interpreted this as a sign of power and self-determination, but from a Celtic point of view, the reading is that of a king who, without his queen, is unable to reign and who, much like Lear, admits his incapacity as a sovereign. Cymbeline was betrayed by his queen, and along with King Lear he lost the brilliance of his regal aura. Would women be devious by nature?

The following extracts indicate the male conception of women's potential dark side which is also expressed in Celtic narratives. In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus admits to being



depressed by women's lack of virtue after Iachimo dishonestly accused Innogen of having betrayed him:

POSTHUMUS            Let there be no honour  
Where there is beauty, truth where semblance, love  
Where there's another man. The vows of women  
Of no more bondage be to where they are made  
Than they are to their virtues, which is nothing. (2.4.108-112)

Later he adds: "We are all bastards" (2.5.2), referring to the infidelity of women. In the same monologue he develops his vision of the nature of women:

POSTHUMUS  
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,  
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving; hers;  
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges hers;  
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,  
Nice longings, slanders, mutability;  
All faults that name, nay, that hell knows, why, hers  
In part, or all: but rather all, for even to vice  
They are no constant but are changing still,  
One vice but of a minute old for one  
Not half so old as that. (2.5.22-31)

The use of rhetoric is significant in this passage and speaks volubly against the female sex. The nominal group "the woman", anaphorically placed twice at the beginning of lines 22 and 23 and followed by "lust" at the beginning of the next line leads the reader / spectator to an almost unconscious and immediate connection between women and lust. This analogical process then evolves as an indication of inductive reasoning. Starting from her defects woman is blamed for: "ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain, nice longings, slanders, mutability", and we are driven towards the conclusion, established as law that woman is "all faults" (27). This logic is reinforced in a spectacular way within an homeoptotic structure, coming back, always in the same manner, as if to reaffirm the regularity between women and the worst defects of mankind. The possessive "hers" is repeated three times at the end of a line, but also three times within it. Epiphora ("hers" at the end of the line) thus comes to punctuate the speech: all evils are attributed to the woman generally, but pre-eminently

Innogen. Through the syncopated rhythm it produces, diacope shows Posthumus's confusion. It is doubled with epizeuxis ("hers, hers", 24), which yet again insists on the subject and demonstrates how Posthumus's mind is obsessed by the feminine gender that causes him to suffer. The cumulative effect, rendered by asyndeton (juxtaposed elements with no coordination, 25-26) culminates in correctio: "All faults that name, nay, that hell knows" (27) and "In part, or all: but rather all" (28). Posthumus corrects himself for the sole purpose of amplifying the meaning of his words. The man is upset and angry; but he is also far too quick to calumniate the female sex on what is in large part hearsay evidence.

This diegetic line is to be found in *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, or again in *The Winter's Tale* and descriptions of women's inconsistency and inconstancy abound in Shakespeare's texts. The discourse on female deficiencies was common, serving to play down masculine's faults as it was the case in another time with the theatre de boulevard of Feydeau and Courteline, but this is also a further expression of the Christian doctrine of original sin. In Shakespeare's time, women could be the victims of harsh treatment: they could be beaten as a cure against an excess of choler or fits of humour. Innogen is innocent, as the first two syllables of her name and her pseudonym (Fidele) suggest, but she is made to carry an entire imagery dedicated to women and the expression of their dark side. In fact, symbolically, like Snow-White her innocence is poisoned by the queen's negativity.

In Celtic narrative, this calamitous aspect is presented in a different way but the dark side of women is also powerfully depicted. This can serve to explain the character of the queen in *Cymbeline*. Firstly, it must be remembered that a woman is capable of anything, according to the mythical structure implying that the Goddess is, as Philippe Walter suggests: "capable du meilleur comme du pire, sous prétexte qu'elle a été bafouée" [capable of the best and the worst, on pretext that she was flouted] (2002, p. 161, tr. CSL). It is not a purely Celtic trait but in Irish myths we find the negative image that says, according to Walter: "la femme provoque souvent la trahison ou la faute qui auront des conséquences fatales et provoqueront des calamités" [the woman provokes the betrayal and the fault that will have fatal consequences and will provoke calamities] (*ibid.*). Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth is recognizable here insofar as she convinces her husband into enacting the prophecy of the Weïrd Sisters. In the Arthurian legend, Guinevere and Iseult provoke a modification of the course of destiny by their adulterous liaisons. They used what Walter calls "la fatale liberté" [fatal liberty] (*ibid.*) that changes the fate of kings. In the precise case of Posthumus, Innogen's supposed betrayal modified his trajectory as a member of the caste in power: she

could 'make' him or 'destroy' him. This freedom is an integral part of the Celtic social order, as Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h observe: "loin d'être confinée dans le gynécée ou tenue en servitude comme dans certaines sociétés polygames, la femme irlandaise, bretonne ou gauloise, possède un statut bien défini, lequel est strictement le même que celui de l'homme : elle peut tester, hériter, jouir de ses biens, exercer une profession, avoir sa propre domesticité" [far from being secluded in the gynaeceum or kept in servitude like in some polygamous societies, the Irish, Breton or Gaul woman possesses a well defined status which is rigorously the same as the man's : she can test, inherit, enjoy her own properties, carry out a professional activity, have her own domesticity] (in Walter 2002, p. 168, tr. CSL). Medb (or Maeve) was the free queen par excellence, who tested the pretenders to the throne and evaluated their qualities, who led armies from her war chariot and commanded murders if necessary.

To some extent, certain aspects of the famous queen Medb (or Maeve) inform the behaviour of Cymbeline's unnamed queen. Inciting kings to courage and not to cowardice is certainly one of Medb's attributes and Cymbeline's surrender would have been unbearable for his queen. She had to die, in a way, so that her character would not be confronted with such an outcome. Such a murderess could not remain alive nor could a queen coming from another time. Too strong a woman, capable of inciting combat, especially against the 'unifying' Romans did not correspond to Early Modern images of the Ancient past. Cymbeline's queen is an ambivalent character who personifies treachery, who has unlimited potential for dark deeds, and who also embodies a hidden motif deriving from Ancient times. In part, she illustrates the idea that in Celtic culture, as Walter notes "la femme représente fondamentalement la souveraineté parce qu'elle est l'émanation de la grande déesse, unique divinité féminine du panthéon celtique. Mais cette souveraineté est toujours partagée, donc incertaine" [the woman fundamentally represents sovereignty because she is the emanation of the great goddess, unique female divinity of the Celtic pantheon. But this sovereignty is always shared, so uncertain] (p. 168). Thus, the queen shares power with the king. In Shakespeare's play, this female image accords with obscure, pagan forces and can only be the prerogative of 'villains'.<sup>293</sup> However, and despite the Early Modern filter, the queen's regal function stands out, linked to the very function of Sovereignty and to the Ancient Celtic goddess.

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<sup>293</sup> The matter is debated differently in *Othello* in act 4 scene 5 where Aemilia blames men for all women's 'faults'.

### 3.3.3 The Goddess

*Cymbeline* refers to Nature as goddess. In its Welsh abode, Belarius-Morgan, the exile living in a cave calls to her: “O thou goddess, / Thou divine Nature” (4.2.168-169), and in *As You like It* Charles refers to “mother earth” (1.2.192), using it as a metaphor for death before his fight with Orlando: “desirous to lie with his mother earth” meaning ‘longing to be buried in the ground’, therefore ‘to die’. Nevertheless, according to the Celtic rhizomatic network that lies beneath the surface of the text, this last reference points to Ancient worship. Much like in *King Lear*, we delve into a pre-Christian Ancient world, in which Nature is venerated as a goddess. The motif is that of the feeding mother earth, the mother goddess.

Indeed, Belarius reveres the goddess for what the two boys have become thanks to her influence and care. She made them according to her own heraldry (blazon) and she burns brightly in them (blaze): “thyself thou blazon’st / in these two princely boys!” (4.2.169-170). The double meaning acknowledges both the goddess’s high lineage and her strength. Belarius continues, offering a precise explanation of the manner in which the goddess incarnated herself in a way in the boys and modeled them into their princely shape:

BELARIUS                    They are as gentle  
As zephyrs blowing below the violet,  
Not wagging his sweet head, and yet as rough,  
Their royal blood enchaf’d, as the rud’st wind  
That by the top doth take the mountain pine  
And make him stoop to th’ vale. ‘Tis wonder  
That an invisible instinct should frame them  
To royalty unlearn’d, honour untaught,  
Civility not seen from other, valour  
That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop  
As if it had been sowed. (4.2.170-180)

Belarius notes the ‘natural’ qualities of his protégés. This identity favours measure and temperance, therefore judgment. They also prove strong like a violent wind capable of making the tree tops bend as though in subjection to them, and are naturally valorous, being regal princes. In the final words of this quotation, there is the suggestion of a nourishing function insofar as the verbs “grow”, “sow” and the substantive “crop” belong to the semantic field of agriculture. The princes themselves appear as a promising crop, destined to provide

their kingdom with divine protection, inspired by the goddess, Nature. Belarius is amazed at the completeness of their character and sees here the work of an “invisible instinct”. According to him, their successful breeding is attributed to a two-fold reason: their royal stock which brought them “civility”<sup>294</sup> and the goddess, illustrating herself in its trifunctional form as judge, protector and nourishing entity.

In Celtic culture, the unique goddess takes different forms and different names but always points to unity, as Le Roux and Guyonvarc’h observe:

Il n’y a en effet qu’une seule et unique divinité féminine celtique, aux noms et fonctions variables suivant le partenaire auquel elle est liée. Les trois Macha sont une seule et même Macha trifonctionnelle. Mais Macha est un autre nom de la Bodb et, comme il y a trois Macha, il y a trois Bodb, et aussi trois Mórrigan. Autrement dit, la divinité féminine est unique, et c’est parce qu’elle est unique qu’elle porte de multiples noms qui rendent compte de ses relations avec des divinités masculines diverses (ou au moins avec des personnages mythiques) au niveau de chacune des trois fonctions.

[There is indeed only one unique Celtic female divinity, with variable names and functions according to the partner to whom she is connected. The three Machas are a single trifunctional Macha. But Macha is another name for the Bodb and, as there are three Machas, there are three Bodbs, and also three Mórrigans. In other words, the female divinity is unique, and it is because she is unique that she bears multiple names that account for her relationships with various male divinities (or at least with mythic characters) at the level of each of the three functions]. (Le Roux, Guyonvarc’h 1991, p. 161-162, tr. CSL)

Thus, the unity of the mother goddess illustrates itself in three representations. As seen in the second chapter, the Matres, three female divinities, mother-goddesses joined in one single statue were highly developed in the Celto-Roman world. One in particular was found at the Roman fort of Housesteads on Hadrian Wall. In the Arthurian legend, they appear as the trio Ygraine, Morgan and Viviane: Viviane representing the first sacerdotal function as high priestess, Morgan is closely related to the goddess of battles, the Morrigan via her name, and Ygraine is the nourishing mother, who bore the infant Arthur. In the Irish pantheon, the name of the goddess is also Brigit, mother of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Miranda Green notes that “the

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<sup>294</sup> The Arden edition notes that “Civility not seen in other” refers to Ancient Britons\* (p. 294) (i.e. Welshmen) insofar as the princes could not gain their civilized nature from them, but from Cymbeline’s royal line.

name comes from the Celtic word *brig* which is suggestive of power and authority and means ‘High One’ or ‘Exalted One’” (1995, p. 196). She adds that this corresponds more to a title than to a true name and that the name of Brigantia, tribal goddess of the Brigantes derived from the same root. Brigit also appears under different names, and she was later assimilated to a Christian saint, as Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux observe:

Brigit est, à l’inverse de Minerve<sup>295</sup> dans le panthéon classique, l’unique divinité féminine celtique. Elle n’est guère attestée sous ce nom à cause de l’assimilation ultérieure à la sainte chrétienne. Cependant, des regroupements tendent à prouver que divers noms de personnages mythiques féminins, en particulier Boand, Eithne, Etain, ne désignent que la même divinité sous des noms et des aspects différents.

[Brigit is, contrary to Minerva in the Classic pantheon, the unique Celtic female divinity. It is not much attested under this name because of the ulterior assimilation to the Christian saint. However, groupings tend to show that diverse female mythic characters’ names, in particular Boand, Eithne, Etain, only designate the same divinity under different names and aspects]. (1986, p. 370, tr. CSL)

Felix Guirand also notes another name which he possibly relates to Brigit: Dôn (in Britain\*), Dana, Danu, Donu (in Ireland), mother of the Dana tribe, the Tuatha de Danann (Ireland) or children of Dôn (in the Welsh documents). He also mentions Kerridwen (Wales) who owns the “cauldron of Inspiration and Science” (ed. 1994, p. 209-212 *passim*). Miranda Green goes on to mention Brigit’s single and triple form, with two eponymous sisters, as well as her numerous roles as patron of poetry, crafts, seers and doctors.

Beyond the Irish Brigit or Dana, the depiction of “Nature” as goddess in *Cymbeline* refers to the age old concept of Mother Earth, as Green observes:

The concept of a divine Mother was common to many ancient societies. Such cults reflect the preoccupations of communities for whom the fertility of their crops and livestock, and indeed, their own procreation were fundamental concerns. [...] For the pagan Celts of Europe during the Roman period, the mother-goddess was perhaps the most important of the supernatural powers.

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<sup>295</sup> Green notes that the Celtic Brigit and the Roman Minerva are commonly associated since both goddesses are related to crafts and healing. The stone relief of the tribal goddess Brigantia from the Roman military site of Birrens in Dumfriesshire shows the syncretism between the two goddesses (1995, p. 196).

(Green 1995, p. 105-106)

The basic symbolism associated with Mother-goddesses is that of fertility and abundance, linked to the land and procreation. However, it would be a mistake to consider the role of the female Celtic divinity as a whole as limited to this single aspect. As we have begun to sense, the potential exists for much more, including negative aspects that we will develop in our next chapter.

#### **Conclusion to Chapter 4**

In *Cymbeline*, the dual motifs of the rising new British nation and the Ancient British\* world compete. Situated at the confluence of two periods of time – Celto-Roman and Jacobean – the play illustrates the breach between two cultures: Celtic and Roman. It also represents the difference between the native peoples of the East, accustomed to the Roman values and those of the West, the mountaineers raised by Mother “Nature”. At the crossroads of times and cultures, *Cymbeline* stages the concept of choice and the historical time when the Ancient past of the British Isles was subsumed into the Roman Imperial model. As Danièle Berton Charrière argues: “l’Angleterre s’aligne *de facto* sur d’autres modèles tels que la Grèce ou Rome [...]. Concorde et harmonie s’affichent, auréolées de gloire” [England *de facto* aligns with other models such as Greece or Rome [...]. Concord and harmony parade, with a halo of glory] (2009, p. 45, tr. CSL). The process of choosing a better ancestry than its own for England had begun in the Middle Ages with the writing of the Brut chronicles, but it may be reasonably advanced that it was confirmed here, with the necessity of establishing what was thought of as a solid support of unity, namely, the Roman Empire. However, at the same time, invoking the Ancient indigenous past also amounted to making it present for Shakespeare’s audience, and this extended to the recognition of its existence. Embedded Celtic motifs allow a deep insight into a complex and already layered culture, a palimpsest that was in the process of being transformed again by what became official discourse. It is what gradually happened since after Shakespeare, no rebirth of Ancient culture occurred before the Celtic Revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since by definition, no one can revive something that is still alive, we can safely assume that the native culture of the British Isles “died” to some extent in the South East, but that nevertheless, it continued to be present in Shakespeare’s plays. Its resurgence produces an underlying complex rhizome with multiple offsprings stemming from the main horizontal structure.

The motif of the severed head has been traced as another confluence that links Celtic, Medieval and Early Modern times together with its gradual evolution from a warlike and spiritual practice to a more secular environment. Women figures have enabled us to identify the character of the fairy and its possible relationship to Ancient faith, while the queen also appears as an important figure in Celtic societies as guardian of the balance of the world and partner of the king. Cymbeline's queen is a dark character but she also embodies this Ancient past, much like Lady Macbeth, as we will see. Thus, although present, Celtic culture evinces some of the more sombre traits associated with remote places such as Wales where Nature, the goddess, reigns. Very probably without being aware of it, Shakespeare gave this figure three functions – judge, warrior and nourishing – thus tying the bond with the Ancient world. However, as Green states in the conclusion of her study, Celtic goddesses are not only the idyllic embodiments of Nature and fertility:

The Celtic goddesses were by no means tied to the 'female' concerns of procreation and domesticity: they were powerful divine entities, invoked equally by women and men, and their functions embraced the entire religious spectrum: from warfare to healing; from sovereignty to death; from abundance to destiny; from nourishment to the Otherworld. Their potency arose partly from their dualism and ambiguity: they could protect and destroy; cure and curse; they provided nourishment but also predicted and controlled life's end. They could be capricious and vengeful but also gentle and benevolent. Their treatment of humans depended on the respect shown to them. (Green 1995, p. 204)

This two-fold and ambivalent major feature of Celtic female figures will accompany us to the end of the thesis, first beginning with *Macbeth* and finish with *King Lear*. It is clear that dealing with Celtic female deities transports the setting to more spiritual, mythic and magic grounds, with characters getting closer to the euhemerized<sup>296</sup> deities of Celtic mythology: although they act like humans, their roles cannot be reduced to this category.

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<sup>296</sup> The *OED* defines the term as derived from "Euhemerus, a Sicilian (c. 316 BC), who maintained that the gods of Greek mythology were deified men and women". Euhemerism is "the method of interpretation which regards myths as traditional accounts of real incidents in human history" (*OED*).





## CHAPTER 5

### Foul and fair *Macbeth*,

### confrontations with the fairy-hag

*Macbeth* is the “Scottish play” and as such it has a number of marginal issues, some of which were already dealt with in our third chapter. On the political scene, James VI-I, the Scottish king on the throne of England is to be considered as the first, real or imagined, spectator of this play that was created around 1605-1606 while Shakespeare was a member of the King’s Men. Therefore, resonances with the Early Modern contemporary scene and regal power cannot be dismissed from the interpretation of the play. Historically speaking, we could qualify the treatment of *Macbeth* as a ‘creative misuse’ of Holinshed, in itself an unreliable historical account, as Jean Berton has argued (2003, p. 43). In Holinshed’s 1587 edition, Lady Macbeth is only a ‘surplus motivation’ for her husband in the act of killing Duncan and it is his close counsellors, including Banquo, who help him commit the crime. King Duncan is an inefficient ruler in Holinshed, worthy of his demise, while Shakespeare transforms him into a balanced and charismatic ruler; and in Holinshed Macbeth is an efficient monarch who reigned successfully for a number of years, but in the play he is a dark king.<sup>297</sup>

Furthermore, there is a textual issue concerning the play since between the year of its creation and its first printed appearance in the 1623 Folio, it was revised probably by Thomas Middleton, who had subsequently written *The Witch* (c.1613-1616). Two songs, ‘Come away, come away’ and ‘Black spirits’ are both in *The Witch* (3.3 and 5.2) and in *Macbeth* (3.5.35 and 4.1.43), but the texts of the songs are not printed in Shakespeare while they are in Middleton’s play. There remains a scholarly debate concerning the extent of Middleton’s revision of Shakespeare’s text. However, our focus will not be on issues of authorship but on

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<sup>297</sup> In the first part of his article “L’étymologiquement correct dans *Macbeth*, ou la face cachée d’un roi mise en abyme”, Jean Berton describes the discrepancies and relationships between the play, the Chronicle and history (2003, p. 42-46).

Celtic material, where influences and transmission are a more direct matter of concern to this thesis.

This chapter will deal firstly with characters: the names of *Macbeth* whose Gaelic etymology contribute to shaping the general anatomy of the play; the female figures of the Weïrd Sisters in relation to the Celtic triads, in a cultural cluster also connected to the Roman Hecate, and Lady Macbeth as the representation of the hag undergoing a redemptive process. Secondly, the argument will be devoted to a closer study of magic and the supernatural, focusing on the evolution of Ancient magic into dark arts under the influence of Christianity. Finally, we will explore a specific motif that can be traced back into Celtic culture: the walking forest, in the last act of the play, when Birnam wood appears to walk to the fortress of Dunsinane in accordance with the prophecy issued by the Weïrd Sisters. The overall demonstration will attempt to show in what ways Celtic motifs illustrate the forces at work in the play and in particular the contrasts between obscurity and brightness, between the old ways and the new, between what should and what should not be done in politics, between chaos and order. First of all, the Gaelic characters' names, a subtle but obvious reference to Celtic culture, illustrate this prevalent motif in the play.

## **1. Characters: Macbeth's names, the Three Sisters and Lady Macbeth**

### **1.1 Macbeth's oxymoronic names: the dun and the bàn<sup>298</sup>**

In his article "L'étymologiquement correct dans *Macbeth*" (2003), Jean Berton, a specialist in Gaelic languages, reveals an oxymoronic current at work beneath the surface of the text, in the rhizomatic Celtic semiotic chain of the play.<sup>299</sup> Berton notes that:

Les historiens ont établi que le nom véritable du roi MacBeth était Macbeth MacFindlaich (l'orthographe est variable) et que MacBeth était la forme réduite de MacBheathaig, soit 'mac + Beathag ou Beathadh'. Dans la mesure où le nom de Bethog, forme anglicisée de Beathag, est un nom de saint, il est manifeste que Macbeth est un nom de baptême, forcément chrétien ; ce qui n'offre pas d'intérêt notable hormis celui de faire de Macbeth un héros noir, une sorte d'anti-modèle pour un auditoire chrétien.

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<sup>298</sup> In English: the 'dark' and the 'fair', Gaelic terms borrowed from Jean Berton 2003, p. 49-50.

<sup>299</sup> The term 'semiotic chain' is from Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary of 'rhizome'.

[Historians have established that the true name of king MacBeth was MacFindlaich (the spelling varies) and that MacBeth was the reduced form of MacBheathaig, so ‘mac + Beathag or Beathadh’. Insofar as the name of Bethog, the anglicized form of Beathag is a Saint’s name, it is obvious that Macbeth is a christening name, and inevitably Christian; which is not a matter of note except that it makes Macbeth a dark hero, a sort of anti-model for a Christian audience]. (Berton 2003, p. 47, tr. CSL)

It can be added that in his very name Macbeth bears the dichotomic influences of Gaelic and Christian cultures and represents the related tension between ‘dark’ and ‘bright’ forces at work, as it will be developed in this chapter.

We have already studied the reference to Beth as a diminutive for Elizabeth in our third chapter. We also know from chapter 3 that in the drink *uisge beatha*<sup>300</sup> (whisky), *beatha* means ‘life’ (see supra). Therefore, Macbeth is literally ‘the son of life’, a positive meaning, the expression of a Christian symbolism, possibly reflecting the efficient and respected sovereign of the Chronicle, as Berton argues; or, we might speculate, a Celtic hero of a solar Lug type, admired by all, successful in combat, as he is depicted at the beginning of the play.

In a second meaning, as Berton observes, *beatha* means ‘welcome’ or may be a nickname to designate a welcoming person of good temper, much like Macbeth welcomes king Duncan to his castle in the first act. However, this benevolent nature is already undermined, under the influence of his wife and as a result of the effect of the witches’ prophecy, as Berton observes. Lady Macbeth tells her husband what attitude he should adopt: “Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye, / Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under’t” (1.5.64-66). In fact, she is the welcoming host, Macbeth himself being absent upon the king’s arrival in 1.6. Indeed, in the very next scene Macbeth is discovered reflecting on the prospect of regicide. The positive aspects of his character are maybe the most visible at first sight, the demeanour of the brave soldier, of “noble Macbeth” (1.2.68) worthy of being named Thane of Cawdor by the king; but this soon disappears as he becomes the victim of graver tensions. Thus, as Berton states, the meaning of ‘son of life’ is ironical in Macbeth’s case since “le héros shakespearien sans descendance ne donne que la mort” [the Shakespearean hero with no descendants offers nothing but death] (p. 47, tr. CSL). We could add that his welcoming is also ironical since it is only a mask and since the welcome for Duncan is but a prelude to his death.

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<sup>300</sup> As a reminder, ‘uisge-beatha’ is pronounced ‘ouchkeu **bèha**’.

A third meaning of *beatha* as Berton notes, informs the character of Macbeth, as illustrated from Edward Dwelly's *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* (1977); here the derived form *beithir*, produces a double sense: 'thunder' or 'wild animal'. Finally, in a fourth possibility, the adjective *beathach* suggests 'violent', 'taciturn' or 'depressed'. Berton underlines the significance of the weather in which the Weïrd Sisters utter their invocation: "*Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches*" are the very first words of the play, followed by: "When shall we three meet again? / In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" (1.1.1-2). Continuing from Berton's remark about the meaning of Macbeth as 'son of thunder', the witches can be seen invoking the spirit of Macbeth himself, as if they were beginning to control him from the very beginning of the play. Furthermore, since the title of the play is eponymous, the witches' invocation also metadramatically amounts to summoning the whole play itself onstage, like a very specific prologue, brief but compelling like rumble of thunder.

The image of the wilderness of thunder is also suggested in Macbeth as the 'son of the wild animal'. As Berton argues: "Il est mac-beth littéralement, c'est-à-dire le fils de la bête sauvage, donc plus ou moins bête sauvage lui-même : la sauvagerie est son destin auquel il ne peut échapper" [He is literally mac-beth, that is to say the son of the wild beast, therefore more or less a wild beast himself : savagery is his fate, which he cannot escape] (p. 47, tr. CSL). An extended metaphor assimilates Macbeth to a bear, and is a further illustration of Berton's reading. In the last act, trapped like a beast in his fortress of Dunsinane and assailed from all sides, Macbeth says: "They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, / But bear-like I must fight the course" (5.7.1-2). Macbeth uses the common metaphor of the bear tied to a stake and attacked by dogs in bear-baiting, a popular entertainment in London in Shakespeare's time.<sup>301</sup> Again in the following scene, before his fight with Macduff that leads to his death, Macbeth refers to the fact of being baited and humiliated like an animal in front of a foul-mouthed crowd: "I will not yield / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, And to be baited with the rabble's curse" (5.8.27-29). His wild instinct prevails and he refuses to surrender, determined to fight till death. Macbeth's savagery and violence are present throughout the play, both when he defends Duncan and when he kills him, when he orders the murder of Banquo and his son and when he decides to order the attack on Macduff's castle and the massacre of his family. But he is also the violent man with fits of depression, both after Duncan's murder and in the final act, after he hears of his wife's death in 5.5.

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<sup>301</sup> We will develop the relationship between king and bear in Celtic culture in the final chapter on *King Lear*.

In the very roots of his name, Macbeth embodies a contrast also reflected in other characters. Berton continues with the name of Macduff, slayer of Macbeth, arguing that the name comes from the historical MacDubhaich, from the clan Dubh<sup>302</sup> founded by king Dubh, king of Scotland from 962 to 966. He argues that the word *dubh* refers directly to the dark colour of his hair and possibly of his skin, and he also reminds us that Macduff was torn from his mother's womb. Thus, he concludes: "Macduff, le noir ou le brun, est associé à la mort; ce qui peut se voir comme un paradox puisque Macduff est du côté des bons. Mais c'est lui qui exécute Macbeth, le fils de la vie ou de l'animal sauvage, etc.." [Macduff, the dark or the brown, is associated with death ; which can be seen as a paradox since Macduff is on the side of good. But he is the one who executes Macbeth, the son of life or of the wild animal, etc..] (Berton 2003, p. 48, tr. CSL).<sup>303</sup> He could also be interpreted as the vengeful force of the play. Literally called 'the son of the dark', born unnaturally, he faced the death of his family and household. Macduff is surrounded with death and exploits its continuation to the full. Within the context of the play he resembles certain elements of the revenger.

The Gaelic name of Macdonald or Macdonwald, slain by Macbeth at the beginning of the play also highlights the traits of his character, Berton observes: *mac* (son) + *don* (evil, bad) + *wald* (govern). In the play, he is "The merciless Macdonald / (Worthy to be a rebel, for to that / The multiplying villainies of nature / Do swarm upon him)" (1.2.9-12), as Berton observes. He is also the Irishman "from the Western Isles of kerns and gallowglasses" (12-13), therefore a violent, uncivilized man and, according to Early Modern views, a rebel to the crown.<sup>304</sup>

Similarly, Donalbain's name possibly suggests that he is a 'bad Scot'. Donald Bàn can be understood as Donald 'the fair' (blond haired) or it can be Don Alban, the 'bad Scot', *don* meaning 'evil, bad' and *Albanach*, 'the Scotsman'. Since he flies to Ireland, king Duncan's second son can be seen as a 'bad Scot', Berton argues, in relation to Duncan,<sup>305</sup> whose name also contains a dark side: *dun*, meaning 'brown' closely related phonetically to *don*, 'evil' and *donn* 'black'. Berton adds that these words could be homophones and even homographs in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when spelling was not fixed, and he concludes that the etymology here contradicts

<sup>302</sup> Berton notes that the diagraph 'bh' corresponds to the grapheme 'v' (p. 47).

<sup>303</sup> Macbeth is in fact simultaneously both the son of life and of the wild animal.

<sup>304</sup> This recalls what we observed in chapter 3 in relation to the Anglo-Irish context of the plantations. It corroborates the English vision of the Irish borderers. However, here Macdonald opposes the Scottish crown, which in the light of the Jacobean context tends to represent it as siding with England. It must be reminded that Scots too were sent to the plantations in Ireland.

<sup>305</sup> A *duncan* is also a 'fortlet', i.e. a small fort (Dwelly 1918, vol II, p. 373), which stresses his inferior position either as the unworthy historical king or as the one who is evinced in *Macbeth*.



The harvest is your own. (1.4.27-33)

Banquo articulates what should have been Macbeth's answer and thus appropriates the imagery of the fruitful crop, one of the attributes associated with the complete sovereign. The metaphor depicts Banquo as a growing plant promising good harvest and this also echoes the witches' prophecy that his descendants will be kings. As the Arden edition notes, there is also a Biblical echo here (*Mac*, note p. 151).<sup>309</sup> However, the Celtic reading reveals a further element that is explicitly associated with kingship. Macbeth should have become the growing plant, plentiful, provider of abundance for his people, but his crimes prevented him from adopting this role. Thus, Banquo becomes 'the white' (he also appears as a ghost) and Macbeth is 'the black', each in turn representing one side of the coin, one aspect of the oxymoronic structure of the play.

To conclude, Jean Berton questions Shakespeare's awareness of the Gaelic meanings of his characters' names arguing that being close to King James's court, he could have been informed by Gaelic speakers (p. 48). This is all the more possible as many Scottish nobles accompanied James to London. Furthermore, onomastics being of recurrent importance in Shakespeare's characters' names, the Gaelic names cannot be considered exceptional. Finally, what can be called the persistent but latent oxymoron concerning the characters' onomastics in *Macbeth* may refer to an overarching struggle in the play between good and evil, the fair and the foul, the Early Modern and the Ancient. It expresses a tension, and raises questions about who is on which side thereby blurring the borders between them. Although, the etymological exercise is pushed to the extreme as Jean Berton points out (p. 50), the Celtic Gaelic language casts new light on the plays' characters and reveals some of their hidden, 'fair' and 'foul', 'bàn' and 'dun', sides.<sup>310</sup> Pulling the strings and blurring the limits, are the triadic Weïrd Sisters who are truly on the dark side.

## 1.2 Three times three sisters

In *As You Like It*, while hanging his verses on the trees in the forest of Arden, Orlando invokes the "thrice crowned queen of night" (3.2.2), and in *King Lear*, the king appeals to

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<sup>309</sup> The remark is Naseeb Shaheen's, in *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1987): "In the Scripture the righteous are frequently compared to flourishing trees that the Lord has planted" and she provides the reference to Jeremiah, 12.2: "thou hast planted them... they grow and bring forth fruit" (in *Mac*, note 28 p. 151).

<sup>310</sup> In *Macbeth*, it is also worth noticing that the name of the fortress of Dunsinane also bears the morpheme 'dun'.



male and female principles: “by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night” (1.1.110-111) before disinheriting his younger daughter Cordelia at the end of the ‘love test’. In *Macbeth*, the Greek goddess Hecate is part of the *dramatis personae*,<sup>311</sup> along with three other witches, thus making a total of three female triads in the play, respectively composed of the Weïrd Sisters, the three other witches, and the threefold moon goddess of Classical Antiquity: Hecate, Artemis, and Selene.<sup>312</sup> Thus, the number three is of particular significance in the Scottish play. It is relevant to the Classical world but it is also a prevalent figure in Celtic culture, and in this respect, Shakespeare’s play (with or without Middleton’s additions) is the place where both Antiquities meet and interact. The motif appears in the Classical image of the three Graeae, sisters to the Gorgons, who share one eye that is stolen by Perseus on his way to Medea’s cave. The Graeae are similar to the Greek Moirai, the Northern European Norns, the Harpies, and the Roman Parcae.

Let us first consider the function of the number three before studying in what ways the specificity of Celtic triads inform the Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth*. Indeed, why three female figures and not two, four or five? The prevalence of the symbolic function of the motif comes from an intrinsic organization in nature as well as in culture, as Chevalier and Gheerbrandt assess:

Trois est universellement un nombre fondamental. Il exprime un ordre intellectuel et spirituel, en Dieu, dans le cosmos ou dans l’homme. Il synthétise la tri-unité de l’être vivant [...]. Les naturalistes ont observé de nombreux ternaires dans le corps humain. Il semblerait que toute fonction importante d’un organisme possède cette structure de base. [...] La raison fondamentale de ce phénomène est sans doute à chercher dans une métaphysique de l’être composite et contingent, dans une vue globale de l’unité-complexité de tout être dans la nature, qui se résume dans les trois phases de l’existence : apparition, évolution, destruction (ou transformation) ; ou naissance, croissance, mort [...].

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<sup>311</sup> Hecate appears in two scenes (3.5 and 4.1) entering with the three other witches. She has one long speech and a shorter one. These scenes are part of the debate concerning authorship of Shakespeare and Middleton. Considering their position in the play, they could well have been added in a later revision but this is not certain (see *Mac*, note p. 228). Some versions have Hecate exit with the witches after 4.1.131, which is inconsistent since she already left stage after 4.1.43.

<sup>312</sup> The powerful goddess Hecate was revered at crossroads, where her three headed statues were placed. She was called ‘triple Hecate’, and at night, by the new moon, people would place offerings to these statues to gain favours from the redoubtable goddess (*Mythologie Générale* 1994, p. 163). The statue of the tricephalous goddess found in Cébazat (Auvergne) and kept at the museum of archaeology Clermont-Ferrand illustrates her character as triple entity and goddess of the moon.

[Three is universally a fundamental number. It expresses an intellectual and spiritual order, in god, in the cosmos or in man. It synthesizes the tri-unity of living beings [...]. Naturalists have observed numerous ternaries in the human body. It would seem that all important functions in an organism possess this basic structure. [...] The fundamental reason of this ternary phenomenon is without doubt to be sought in a metaphysics of the composite or contingent being, in a global view of the unity-complexity of all beings in nature, which is summed up in the three phases of existence: apparition, evolution, destruction (or transformation); or birth, growth, death]. (Chevalier Gheerbrandt 1982, p. 972-976, tr. CSL)

The universal presence of number three within the smallest elements in nature may account for the importance of the symbol at a cultural level. What stands out is the “unity-complexity” or the “tri-unity” of the symbol. This is expressed by the Trinity in the Christian religion, for instance, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, which in Celtic mythology, could be considered as a ‘triad’. In Celtic artwork, the ‘triskele’ integrates the organic principle of three, also present in the tripling of other art forms like ‘palmettes’. Dated sometime between 200 BC and 100 AD, the crescentic bronze plaque discovered in a lake at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey, displays an elaborate ‘triskele’. It is a three-legged design radiating from a centre which may represent the relationships between the living, the dead and the gods, or the ongoing cycle of birth, life and death.<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, Pliny reckons that druidic time was regulated according to the moon and in centuries of thirty years, that is to say three ten year periods (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* xvi, 249, in Guyonvarc’h Le Roux 1986, p. 260). The symbolism of three is highlighted in Celtic culture, in art and current life as much as in literature.

In “L’unité en trois personnes chez les Celtes”, Joseph Vandryes argues that the dominant feature of the symbol is the unity of the personae, illustrated either by the undivided condition of the three personalities or by the fact that one among them stands out with a definite personality followed by the other two who are of lesser importance (Vandryes 1935, p. 331). In *Macbeth*, this is achieved by having each of three Sisters who speak in turn, but in one voice, like the separate voices of a same being. Vandryes adds that: “Le nombre trois peut servir à exprimer la grandeur ou la puissance [...]. En triplant un personnage, on ne faisait donc que lui reconnaître ou lui conférer une force supérieure aux autres hommes” [Number three may serve to illustrate grandeur or power [...]. Tripling a character merely amounted to

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<sup>313</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/564U-3D5RVW5\\_Dyh017AHQ](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/564U-3D5RVW5_Dyh017AHQ) (accessed 22/08/19).

acknowledge that he either possessed or was granted a superior strength compared with other men] (*ibid.*, p. 340-341). This is also true for women, since female triads are also prominent in Celtic mythology. Evidence indeed that the Weïrd Sisters are powerful beings, they are all instrumental to the plot of the play.

Let us now consider the number three in relation to Celtic mythology proper, especially Irish,<sup>314</sup> which will help illustrate its usage in relation to Shakespearean text. In Irish mythology, the gods and the members of the sacerdotal branch very often appear in triplicate as in the case of Lug, the supreme god, and his two brothers, the druid Dagda and the champion god Ogme (Guyonvarc'h Le Roux, 1986, p. 421). As we have already seen, there is also the female triadic Morrigna, that is to say Badbh, Nemhain and Morrigan, and as Miranda Jane Green observes in her discussion: “[t]hey were simultaneously one goddess and three [...].The goddesses combined destruction, sexuality and prophecy” (Green, 1995, p. 42). The Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth* also share at least some of these qualities together with the dark colour of paganism and hell indicating the passage of the Celtic myth into the discourse of Christianity as we shall see. They can also be illustrated by the figure of the three daughters of Cailitín, who bore the general name of *badba* and were, according to Vandryes, female demons (1935, p. 328).<sup>315</sup> Together with their three brothers, Queen Medb turned them into magicians (warlocks and witches), destroying one arm, one leg and one eye of each, and using them as the instruments of Cú Chulainn’s downfall (Green 1995, p. 151). The fact that each of them acquired a spear and were destined to slay a king further illustrates the action of the three witches in *Macbeth* whose enterprise eventually leads to Macbeth’s death.

Furthermore, as Green goes on to note, “[t]he early Welsh myth of Peredur contains allusions to witches who were predominantly evil but who were both teachers of war-craft

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<sup>314</sup> In Wales, there is no such development of the triads in mythology, which, as previously noted, has come down to us in manuscripts that were more heavily Christianised than in Ireland. However, as Rachel Bromwich observes in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (“The Triads of the Island of Britain”), “a tendency towards triple groupings can be pointed out in the works of Gildas, and in the *Historia Brittonum*, and a few triads are found amongst the oldest Welsh verse in the *Gododdin* (CA ll. 179-93)”. Bromwich goes on to observe that the triad form was also a sophisticated technical skill in poetry expressed in the three-line *englynion*, while in *TYP*, the triad groupings were used “as a convenient compendium of reference on which the bards might draw for the canonical patterns of comparison demanded by their craft” (*TYP* 2014 (1961), p. liii-liv). Thus, the triad motif also occupies the heart of Welsh poetry and serves as a means of transmission of the oral memory of Celtic tradition. However, number three was also popular in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as the title of this broadside ballad suggests: “Choice of inventions, Or Severall sorts of the figure of three, That are newly composd as here you may see, Then lend your attention you shall heare anon. It goes to the tune of Rock the Cradle sweet John” (British Library – Roxburghe 1.32-33, EBBA 30028). The study of number three in the oral culture of the British Isles would require more space than we have here, but these indications emphasize its relevance.

<sup>315</sup> The name of *badba* is that of the *Badbh* or *Bodb* (the crow) the Irish war-goddess belonging to the Battle-Furies cited above, who were often interchangeable (Green 1995, p. 41). In link with *Macbeth*, we will see an example of their charm related to battle and fighting trees in the last part of this chapter.

and prophets, like Scáthach and other Celtic seers” (*ibid.*). The association of witches with war-craft recalls their role in *Macbeth* where they are closely linked to war and who predict the military trick of the enchanted forest. In young Peredur’s story, he encounters the Nine Witches of Caer Loyw (Gloucester) during one of his travels. They knew him and hailed him by his name, in a manner similar to Macbeth (and Banquo his double), and they taught him war-craft. The Weïrd Sisters follow this pattern, to a certain extent: in a Celtic reading, bearing in mind that all prophecy has a performative power, the witches induce all the murders in *Macbeth*.<sup>316</sup> They did not literally teach Macbeth battle skills as it was the case with Peredur, but they developed murdering skills in him, also indirectly assisted by Lady Macbeth, as we shall see. The nine witches encountered by Peredur also recall by their number the nine sorceresses in the play (Weïrd Sisters, other witches and triple-crowned Hecate).

Green also remarks the link between such prophetesses and heroes “whom they instructed but to whom they were subservient” (p. 152). Macbeth is always preemptory when he addresses the witches, although he awaits their instructions, as in the following speech: “Stay, your imperfect speakers, tell me more. [...] Speak, I charge you” (1.3.70 and 78). At this point, the witches vanish, refusing to engage further, but in 4.1, they accede to his request after he has asked: “I conjure you, by that which you profess, / Howe’er you come to know it, answer me” (4.1.49-50). Perhaps he has used the right words this time, and becoming a conjurer he obtained the answer he sought; when they reply each in turn, they do so in the manner of one single voice: “Speak”, “Demand”, “We’ll answer” (4.1.60). Then, the first witch asks Macbeth whether he would rather have the answer from their own mouths or by the spirits’; he replies, ordering almost in an animal barking, appropriate to Macbeth ‘the son of the wild animal’: “Call’em, let me see’em” (4.1.62), with the epiphora, ‘em’ repeated twice at the end of the imperative statements, emphasizing the order yet again. Macbeth enters their world, they are now at his service.

To conclude in relation to the motif of three, the Weïrd Sisters also find a parallel of sorts in Lear’s daughters in *King Lear*. Contrary to the Arthurian triad, they are distinct characters and do not bear the same name, unlike, the three Guineveres (triad 56, *TYP*, p. 161). However, they are united insofar as they are sisters, they all die in the end, and they all contribute to the destruction of the kingdom in their own way. They act like three fairy-

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<sup>316</sup> According to an Early Modern reading, the Witches ‘equivocate’ in the play (see the final part of the present chapter), but the responsibility for action is Macbeth’s. The performative nature of the prophecy in the Celtic perspective considers that action follows the prophetic words uttered by the ‘druid’ or ‘druidess’.

women presiding over men's fates (fata). Like the witches in *Macbeth*, they influence the course of action, benevolent or malevolent in turn, and unstable. As such, they illustrate the ternary model in constant balance, 2 + 1 or 1 + 2, never square, but always odd, ready to lean toward the good or the evil side according to circumstances. But this instability always leads to a new era, as it is the case in *Lear* or *Macbeth*: from chaos comes renewal, with Edgar as a promising new king in one case and Malcolm the stable sovereign in the other.<sup>317</sup> The number three applies to a wide range of domains in Celtic culture where the intrinsically organic value of the symbol is fully integrated. In the organization of time, in artwork, in mythology, literature, in the divine, in poetry, the prevalence of the motif is undeniable, and in *Macbeth*, it gives added strength to the triple figure of the Weïrd Sisters. Behind other layers of interpretations, the Celtic triad slowly reveals its presence through the three old hags.<sup>318</sup>

### 1.3 Lady Macbeth, the hag redeemed

The following discussion will develop the vision of Lady Macbeth as a prolongation of the triadic figure of the hags. Contrary to the Sisters, the queen is alone, but she bears in herself the complex motivation of the three witches insofar as she is the one who implements their prophecy.<sup>319</sup>

In Shakespeare's Scottish play, Lady Macbeth may be associated with the ancient pagan past (the Weïrd Sisters, the walking forest motif...).<sup>320</sup> She has a powerful influence over her husband, and this is all the more striking in Shakespeare as she acts independently to entice her husband into murdering Duncan. In both Holinshed and Boece,<sup>321</sup> in contrast, Macbeth's men organize the murder with him and she acts as an additional motivation. In Shakespeare's play, however, she is the one who leads her husband toward his fate, and her

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<sup>317</sup> Metadramatically, number three is also the figure of creation. While four represents stability, unbalance invariably leads to movement and to creation, through an unstable, sometimes painful process.

<sup>318</sup> In 4.1, Macbeth enters and says: "How now, you secret, black and midnight hags?" (4.1.47). It is as if he was calling at the same time each of them and the three of them by their names: three individual adjectives for one substantive 'hags', representing individuality and unity.

<sup>319</sup> From 3.2, Macbeth decides to pursue his 'task' alone by resorting to murdering Banquo and his son Fleance. The queen stays behind, apparently innocent to the manoeuvre while it is he who plans "a deed of dreadful note", in a semi-invocation of "black Hecate" (3.2.40-45). Yet, although Macbeth seems to act alone, the presence of the Weïrd Sisters and of Lady Macbeth still hovers in the air.

<sup>320</sup> Mary Gleeson attempted a study entitled "Celtic undertones in Macbeth", in *Proceedings of the II Conference of the Society for English Renaissance Studies*, ed. S.G. Fernández-Corugedo, Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo, 1992, p. 123. See also Céline Savatier Lahondès, "The walking forest motif in Shakespeare's Macbeth: origins", in *Notes and Queries: Volume 64 (2)*: Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 287-292.

<sup>321</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of Scotland*, George Bishop, London, 1577, p. 244. Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae English, Heir beginnis the history and croniklis of Scotland*, trans. by John Belleden, Thomas Davidson, Edinburgh, 1540, p. ℓrrriiii, original editions preserved in the library of Innerpefferay, Scotland.

intention is utterly dark. She supplements the prophecies of the Weïrd Sisters in the sense that she helps to make them come true. She does so because she senses Macbeth's nature, as the 'son of life', which she takes for a human weakness:

LADY

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be  
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature,  
It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,  
Art not without ambition, but without  
The illness should attend it. (1.5.15-20)

"[Thou] shalt be what thou art promised" gives no doubt as to the queen's intention to fulfil the Sisters' prophecy, and places her on the side of the 'evilness' that she thinks is lacking in her husband. His 'nature' is too tender, too compassionate, "full o'th'milk of human kindness" and it is clear that without her, he will not be able to fulfil his ambitions. Eventually, her madness and suicide may appear as part of a redemptive pattern, in conformity with the Christian view of humanity, but her dark undertones are associated with the representation of what appears to be a dark pre-Christian past. In this, she possesses characteristics of the figure of the hag, and the dualistic nature of the sovereignty goddess, exemplified in queen Mebd, capable of indulging in very sombre traits.

As Green shows, "[l]ike other sovereignty-goddesses, Medb had her dark side, as a wielder of death. She could shape-shift from girl to old hag-form and thus present her dualism as a symbol of young life or dying old age" (1995, p. 80). Thus Lady Macbeth can be seen as the extended and transformed image of the old hag of Ancient times. Green describes the features of the crone woman of Irish mythology, who also, in part, resemble the triadic enchantresses':

The dualistic nature of the sovereignty goddess, her concern with life, fertility and death, was symbolised by her ability to shape-shift, particularly between the image of the young, beautiful girl and the ancient, hideous hag, the *puella senilis* (the Old Girl). The crone symbolism was particularly associated with the death-aspect of the goddess. The shape-change itself was normally brought about by the sacred marriage: when the hag-goddess mated with the rightful king of Ireland, she saw transformed from a wild, wandering hag into a sane and lovely girl. So the partnership between goddess and king was of mutual benefit.

Sometimes, there was initial conflict and hostility between hag and hero: if the man was suitable for the kingship, the hag was transformed; if he was not, then she remained a hag and brought about his downfall. (Green 1995, p. 84)

Issues of marriage, mutual benefit, suitability for kingship, fertility and death are echoed in *Macbeth*. The couple is infertile, although in the Chronicle, Macbeth's wife, Gruoch, had a son, Lulach, from her previous husband, Gillacomgain, who is also Macbeth's cousin and who Macbeth he probably murdered. In Holinshed Lulach was made Macbeth's heir and reigned for a few months before being probably killed by Malcolm (*Mac*, note p. 127). In Shakespeare's play the couple have no heir, and the queen senses Macbeth's soft nature as if he were deemed unsuitable for kingship. Lady Macbeth incarnates both aspects of the "fair and noble hostess" (1.6.24) welcoming the king to her castle where birds sing and the air is delicate (1.6.1-10 *passim*) and the old hag, who can disavow her husband, the goddess of sovereignty who can create future kings or cause their downfall.

In 1.5, she confirms her transformation from young queen to old hag when she welcomes her husband almost repeating the Sisters' words *verbatim*: "Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, / Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter, Thy letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant" (1.5.54-58). As the note in the Arden edition indicates, the queen's words recall the witches' prophecy in 1.3.50: "All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter" although they were not included in the letter he sent to her (1.5.1-14). Some magic is at work by which Lady Macbeth has been transformed into the cruel hag, the 'wielder of death'.<sup>322</sup> But although we see the result at Macbeth's entrance, the transformation actually occurs before his arrival, since, alone in her room, after reading the letter and on hearing of her husband's arrival, the queen invokes dark spirits:

LADY

The **raven** himself is hoarse  
That **croaks** the **fatal** entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come you **spirits**  
That tend on mortal thoughts, **unsex** me here,  
And **fill me** from the crown to the toe, top-full

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<sup>322</sup> Shakespeare does not miss and repeats the paronomastic pun between 'which' and 'witch' throughout the passage when Lady Macbeth says: "Thou'dst have, great Glamis, / That which cries, 'Thus thou must do', if you have it" (1.5.23-24), which makes the voice of the witch heard as if it was her who spoke "Thus thou must do", whereas it is Lady Macbeth. In the same passage, the words "which" and "fate" are collocated: "Which fate and metaphysical aid..." (1.5.29), thus summoning the witch, fate and metaphysics, i.e. supernatural, in a same cluster of meaning.

Of **direst cruelty**. Make thick my blood,  
 Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
 That no compunction visiting of nature  
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep **peace** between  
 Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
 And take my milk for gall, your **murdering** ministers,  
 Wherever, in your sightless substances,  
 You wait on nature's mischief. Come **thick night**,  
 And pall thee in the **dunniest** smoke of **hell**,  
 That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
 Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark  
 To cry, 'Hold, hold'. (1.5.38-54, emphases are mine)

In a Celtic reading, the famous monologue resonates with the presence of the *Bodb*, goddess of battles, harbinger of death: the raven that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan. In the same way that the witches have three voices, Lady Macbeth's invocation repeats the word "come" three times, thus emphasizing the weight of her utterance and confirming her association with the hags. She wishes to be 'unsexed', that is to say to be liberated from the weakness attributed to women, but this leads to a resemblance both with an insensitive hag, too old to be sexual, and a divine goddess of battle, whose blood is "thick", full of "direst cruelty" and opposed to "peace" (l. 43 and 46). The dominant lexical field is that of darkness and sombre deeds: "fatal", "murdering ministers", "thick night" and the word "dunniest", a poetic adjective derived from the Gaelic *dunn* meaning 'brown', referring here to the darkest, the murkiest hellish setting. But one will also notice in this speech the oxymoronic tension at work in the altercation between lightness and darkness, materialised here in the opposition between heaven and hell (l. 52-54). In a proleptic statement foreseeing her end, Lady Macbeth hopes that heavenly forces will not interfere in her dark world. Indeed the two dimensions are fairly close to one another, and are only separated by a "blanket of dark" (l. 58).

In Ireland and Scotland, the figure of Cailleach Beira (Bearra, Bheara) also named 'the Queen of Winter' in folklore embodies most of the features cited above, including the pagan-Christian ambivalence.<sup>323</sup> Green states that the Cailleach, "the hag of sovereignty" appears in

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<sup>323</sup> Danièle Berton Charrière emphasizes the role and features of the Cailleach in her article "Morna Pearson et la comédie tragique domestique 'Doric': cherchez la femme...", in *Les Femmes et L'Écosse*, ed. Marie-Odile Hédon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, forthcoming.



the 9<sup>th</sup> century ‘Lament of the Old Woman of Beare’<sup>324</sup> and was primarily associated in its early form with the South-West of Ireland. She was “a kind of mother-goddess, linked with female guardianship of the wild, with war, death and sovereignty” (Green 1995, p. 85); the latter two features of the goddess recall the traits Lady Macbeth embodies in Shakespeare’s play.

Furthermore, Green notes that the term *Cailleach* applies both to an ‘old woman’ or a ‘nun’,<sup>325</sup> thus completing the figure with a pagan-Christian syncretism. For Green, “it may be that the origin of the myth lies in a time when the pagan and Christian orders were coming face to face with one another” (*ibid.*). Eleanor Hull notes that in the original manuscript (Trinity College, Dublin, H.3.18, p. 42), the poem is preceded by a statement which links the *Cailleach* (named *Derri*) to three other “poetesses”: *Brigit*, *Liadan* and *Uallach*. Hull goes on to observe that among these four women three later came to be known as nuns or saints (*Uallach*, being known only as a poetess) (Hull 1927, p. 228). Taken together this connects the single figure of the *Cailleach* to a potential triad of poetesses, and also links them to the figure of the Ancient druidess in that the poetic function was also undertaken by druids.<sup>326</sup> The significance of the Weïrd Sisters is further illustrated through this image, but the syncretism between pagan and Christian tradition qualifies their prolonged influence, and help to explain Lady Macbeth more adequately.

The ambivalent feature of the goddess, from old hag to young beautiful woman became separated into two distinct branches as time went by, in the same way that the multiple yet unique figure of the Irish goddess underwent a transformation into the Christian dichotomy of good and evil. Considering the example of Queen *Medb*, in *Mythe et épopée*, George Dumézil writes that because of the instability of kingship, *Medb* has little by little inherited “l’orientation cynique d’une carrière de grande débauchée” [the cynically orientated career of a highly debauched woman] (Dumézil 1004). This sense of debauchery can only be sustained in the light of the Christian view, and Dumézil’s “little by little” refers to the evangelization process in the Irish and British isles. Even if the mythic *Medb* does not

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<sup>324</sup> The whole poem is translated into English in Kuno Meyer’s *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry* (1911, p. 88-91), and a verse rendering was published by Eleanor Hull in her *Poem-book of the Gael* (1913, p. 147-150).

<sup>325</sup> Eleanor Hull states that *Cailleach* means “one who wears a hood or veil (*caille*), and may equally well apply to an old woman with a hood, an ‘Auld Wife’ or ‘Hag’, and to a nun who has taken the veil” (Hull 1927, p. 226, Dwelly 1918 Vol I, p. 148).

<sup>326</sup> There are instances of *druidecht*, the druidic art, used by women in the Irish corpus. The daughters of Calatin invoking the walking forest is one of them, as it will be developed in the last section of this chapter; and queen *Medb* frequently makes use of poetry, a druidic art, herself.

conform to this model, as Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux confirm,<sup>327</sup> her status as goddess of sovereignty could not be fully accepted by the new Christian conception, since her change of husbands (she knew nine) was bound to be considered as debauchery. This promiscuity was gradually integrated into the Christian discourse against 'witchcraft'. Lady Macbeth does not go to such extremes (she was wedded twice in the Chronicles) but, playing on a double-entendre, her famous 'unsex me' and 'fill me' speech, invoking dark spirits, displays the common attributes of Medieval witches, believed to be the sexual partners of the Devil. This aspect invites us to make a connection with Goneril and Regan, Lear's daughters who *are* promiscuous, and consider the emergence and the Christianisation of a Celtic motif both in the character of Lady Macbeth, and in *King Lear* the focus of the final chapter.

One cannot but notice the evolution over time in the depiction of Irish and Scottish mythic heroines. The Christian faith dealt with an avenging god sending people to heaven or hell. Such imagery was unknown in the Ancient faith. The two contrasting religious systems, gradually fused with the introduction of Christianity, developed in the Middle Ages, but elements continued to persist during the Renaissance period. As Green advocates: "It is significant that where Irish mythic women possessed real power, this is frequently presented as being a bad thing: thus deities such as the Morrigan, queen-goddesses such as Medb and heroic mortals such as Deirdre, are all represented as destroyers, bringers of sorrow and disharmony" (Green 1995, p. 70). Which part is Christian and which is pagan is not always easy to determine.

### **Conclusion to the first part of chapter 5:**

*Macbeth's* oxymoronic names weave a dichotomic 'foul' and 'fair' play throughout a text that brings into alignment Early Modern 'bright' views and Ancient 'dark' practices. The druidess-like characters of the Three Sisters illustrated by Celtic traits also relate to the Classic triadic figure of Hecate, thereby making the 'witches' a means of illustrating both Ancient mythologies. Lady Macbeth acts as an extension of the prophetesses, and her dark purposes and deeds bring her close to the figure of goddess of sovereignty, to the point that she could be seen as the one who assists in the tragic demise of a husband unworthy to be

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<sup>327</sup> "Nous savons maintenant depuis longtemps, en dépit des interrogations de quelques celtisants (et non des moindres) que la reine Medb n'est ni une hetaïre, ni une femme s'adonnant à la boisson" in Françoise Le Roux, Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, *La Société celtique*, éditions Ouest-France Université, Rennes, 1991, p. 152. [Despite the interrogation of a few Celtic scholars (some of them prominent), we have known for a long time now that queen Medb is neither a hetaera nor a woman devoted to drinking] (Tr. CSL).

king and who cannot produce heirs. But like Macbeth, she embodies both ‘the dun’ and the ‘bàn’, the ‘foul’ and the ‘fair’ insofar as she is torn between her sombre feelings and a desire for redemption. This dichotomy is particularly prevalent in the depiction of magic and the supernatural in Shakespeare’s plays.

## **2. Magic and the supernatural: narratology of a dichotomic evolution**

In Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, that provide a source for the narrative of Shakespeare’s play, the weird Sisters are said to be “women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of an elder world” (Holinshed, 1587, *The First and Second Volumes of the Chronicles, The Historie of Scotland*, p. 170, col. 2, l. 60-63), and Macbeth is said to have confidence in wizards: “for that he had learned of certain wizzards, in whose words he put great confidence, (for that the prophesie had happened so right, which the three faries or weird sisters had declared onto him)” (*ibid.*, p. 174, col. 2, l. 6-10). The three creatures are “strange” and “wild”, belong to an “elder world” which could be Ancient times, and are seen as fairies who are connected to magic. They are prophetesses, but the term ‘witch’ is also used to describe them in Holinshed: “a certeine witch whom hee had in great trust” (l. 14) referring to the devil and thus to a Christian conception of female identity retrospectively applied to this Ancient world. The vernacular textual sources are transformed according to the ideological assumptions of the time in which they were written, and one single motif can be found translated in accordance with various discourses. The extracts from Holinshed show evidence that the terminology related to the three female characters of the heath is wide and varied at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The various appellations seen above will provide us with paths to follow in order to define the world of magic and the supernatural in *Macbeth* but also more widely in Shakespeare, and especially the evolution of the motif from Ancient pagan religion.

In the light of what has been studied so far, the hypothesis advanced here is that the duality already present in sovereignty goddesses and in the transformative figure of the old hag underwent a dichotomic arborescent division (Deleuze and Guattari) under the influence of Christian thought. Two distinct branches emerged to create a whole that integrated ambivalence, and added judgment that emerged in the form of witchcraft trials. Albeit in a subtle way, *Macbeth* articulates this duality along with the ideological evolution of a single holistic pagan principle into a dual Christian conception. In the process of analyzing this evolution, we may reasonably advance the hypothesis that Ancient faith and practices

(druidism, magic, beliefs in the Otherworld, and the divine principle of multiple unity) were divided into dark side of magic (witchcraft) and enchanted fairy lore (some aspects of which were integrated into Christian religion).

However, the boundary between the two is often blurred, as Green argues in her attempt to distinguish the figures of the witch and the fairy: “Sometimes the identity of the sorceress or enchantress is ambiguous, and we are not quite sure to which world she belongs” (1995, p. 150). She adds that the one is concerned with the dark side of religion and ritual practice, magic, the occult, and superstition, while the other is “the spirit-woman who lures humans, mainly men, across the boundary of the earthly world to her Otherworld place” (*ibid.*). Both usually bring misfortune to humans, and their representations are probably highly modified by Christianity. In Holinshed, as we have seen they are all related: fairies, wizards, prophetesses, witches, weird sisters, as creatures from an ‘elder world’. Let us try and determine ‘which is which’, in relation to Shakespeare and his time, with the aim of discerning more precisely the presence of an Ancient motif.

## 2.1 The dark fairy

First of all, it is worthwhile to pause a little on the adjective that describes the Weïrd Sisters. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the form ‘Weïrd’ comes from Middle English *wyrde*, *werd(e)*, or *veird* and that the 1623 Folio of Macbeth retained the forms *weyard*, *wayward*<sup>328</sup> while Holinshed and Boece, have *Weird*. The emendation in *weïrd* in the academic text was proposed by Theobald as the Arden edition notes, and the name must be pronounced in two syllables (*Mac.*, note p. 139), hence Theobald's use of the diæresis in his emendation, as the *OED* observes. The meaning of the appellation is “[h]aving the power to control the fate or destiny of human beings, etc.; later, claiming the supernatural power of dealing with fate or destiny. Originally in the Weïrd Sisters = †(a) the Fates; (b) the witches in Macbeth” (*OED*<sup>1</sup>). Therefore, the fairy quality of the Weïrd Sisters stands out, together with their condition of witches. They are ‘dark fairies’, or fairy hags, thus continuing the ambivalence that we have observed in the Ancient sovereignty goddess.

Helen Cooper notes that the function of the fairy (hag) is linked to power more than sex, and she agrees with the fact of seeing the Irish fairy hag as a relic of the goddess Ériu

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<sup>328</sup> “The wayward Sisters, hand in hand” (F 1623, 1.3.30), “Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all, As the weyard Women promis’d” (F 1623, 3.1.2), “I will to morrow..to the weyard Sisters” (F 1623 3.4.132) (*OED*).

(p. 178).<sup>329</sup> So, basing our presumption on the Irish model, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a similar process took place in mainland Britain: the transformation of Ancient goddesses into fairy hags. Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux note the traits of an Ancient druidic figure behind 'witches' like the daughters of Calatin (1986, p. 150). Cooper observes the continuance of the motif in the 'même' of the loathly lady of romance literature (2004, p. 178). She also highlights other functions of fairies that help to further define the Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth*: they usually benefit from the power of privileged knowledge (this trait correlates with druidism, *druidecht* and with the capacity of the seer), they play the role of moral arbiter, judge and teacher (this corresponds to Titania in *MND* and also to the three Sisters and Lady Macbeth, if we accept the possibility that they want Macbeth's downfall because of his incapacity), but above all, they can confer material possessions and the power that goes with them. Cooper gives the example of the Lady of the Lake and the sword Excalibur given to Arthur, The Sisters give Macbeth the titles of Thane of Cawdor and of King, and the power that goes with them.

Furthermore, categorizing the Weïrd Sisters as fairies, as in Holinshed, obviously keeps them at distance from the figure of the Medieval, Christian witch. Indeed, fairies cannot be witches because as Cooper observes, fairies are more easily defined in terms of what they are not. They are not diabolic, but no precise metaphysical or theological status is attached to them. There were attempts to explain their 'nature', though: "[i]ntellectual explanations for their existence in the Middle Ages sometimes cast them as angels who had remained neutral in the War in Heaven" (Cooper 2004, p. 179). This attempt to categorize the fairy highlights her opposition with the witch, one standing on the side of angels and the other siding with the devil. This tends to confirm our hypothesis of a dichotomic evolution from one single divine being (or from representatives of the divine, the sacerdotal function) into two opposite branches. The differential theme between light and dark in *Macbeth* encapsulates this transition that takes place in the substrate of the play.

A further indication that the Sisters are not witches is that the word 'witch' is used only twice in *Macbeth* (1.3.6 and 4.1.23), and the Sisters do not call themselves 'witches' (*Mac*, note p. 137). The appellation appears in the list of roles of the 1623 Folio and throughout the play before the Sisters' speeches, but only twice in the dialogue. In the first occurrence in 1.3, the word is employed as an insult by a sailor's wife against the first Sister, as she explains:

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<sup>329</sup> Ériu is one of the names of the female tutelary goddess of Ireland, the single unity enclosing a multiplicity of representations.

## 1 WITCH

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap  
And munched, and munched and munched.

'Give me', quoth I.

'Aroynt thee, witch,' the rump-fed ronyon cries. (1.3.3-6)

The character of the 'witch' described here conjures up the Medieval vision of the destitute single woman, the outcast rejected by society on account of her 'Weirdness' (in the modern sense). The second occurrence of the word 'witch' in the play designates an ingredient that the third Sister adds to the cauldron, expressed ironically as a "[w]itch's mummy" (4.1.23), i.e. an extract of mummified witch.<sup>330</sup> However, despite the fact that they do not refer to themselves as witches, the three Sisters in *Macbeth* are often characterized as such and the 1623 Folio did adopt the appellation. It is probable that the term was too full of Christian connotations to evoke 'elder times' and that the term 'weird' was preferred for that reason by Shakespeare. The printer of the 1623 Folio may have been guided by whoever revised the play.

Originally the term 'witch', coming from the Old English *wicca* (masc.) or *wicce* (fem.) designated both male and female magician, sorcerer or sorceress (*OED* sb1, sb2). In later use however, it came to refer especially to women, "supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation, to perform supernatural acts" (*OED*<sup>1</sup>). It is now clear that Macbeth's Weird Sisters occupy a position between two conceptions, between and old past belonging to pagan traditions of magic and prophecy and a Christian tradition with its specific definition of witchcraft that developed during the Middle Ages. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, the Medieval heritage was still active, and increased along with the anxiety brought about by the witch hunts. Helen Cooper notices an evolution between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in this respect, which accounts for the perception of Shakespeare's Weird Sisters as witches, and for the evolution in the attitude towards magic itself:

One major difference between the late sixteenth-century understanding of magic and the Medieval lies in the closeness of its association with the diabolic. It had

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<sup>330</sup> The Arden edition of the play notes that 'mummy' is "a medicinal substance made from mummified (embalmed) flesh, usually that of human beings (*OED*<sup>1</sup>)" (*Mac*, note p. 235). In a podcast broadcast by the Folger Library, Ian Smith and Ayanna Thompson discuss the texture of 'mummy' in relation to *Othello*: "In Act 3 scene, 4 [...], Othello tells Desdemona that the handkerchief he gave her was 'dyed in mummy'", available at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/othello-and-blackface-rebroadcast/id1082457631?i=1000447353939> (accessed 18/09/19).

always had such a potential, but the same anxieties that fuelled the Renaissance witch-hunts pushed such an interpretation to the fore to a degree that is not characteristic of earlier centuries. (Cooper 2004, p. 166)

She adds that in the Renaissance “practitioners of magic were regarded with immediate and intense suspicion” (*ibid.*). Witch hunts, trials and executions were common in the 16<sup>th</sup> and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. James VI-I was particularly concerned with the issue since he wrote a book on the subject entitled *Daemonologie* in 1597, also republished in England in 1603. He also wrote the witchcraft pamphlet *News from Scotland* (1591)<sup>331</sup> and he also produced an anti-witchcraft legislation. In *The Sources of Shakespeare*, Kenneth Muir notes that Shakespeare was familiar with James’s works (1977, p. 209). *Macbeth* is thought to have been performed before King James in 1605-1606, and there is still debate among scholars to determine whether the witchcraft scenes were designed to please the king, as intended flattery, or if they were a subtle criticism of his preoccupation with witchcraft. We will not develop this further but will simply suggest that it could be a mixture of the two. The subject was dear to the King and Shakespeare was certainly aware of it, but at the same time, the specific ingredient added to the cauldron, the ‘witch’s mummy’, denotes a meta-commentary of the condition of such women, that amounts to saying that in this domain, the witch herself often died.

The Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth* embody ambivalence. They are dark fairies but they also dance and sing, as Hecate says: “And now about the cauldron sing, / Like elves and fairies in a ring, / Enchanting all that you put in” (4.1.41-43). Furthermore, Simon Forman’s account of a performance in 1610 (or 1611), states that the three women met by Macbeth and Banquo “thorowe a wod” were “3 women feiries or Nimphes” (*Mac*, Appendix 2, p. 337), although in the text Banquo says: “You should be women, / And yet your beard forbid me to interpret / That you are so” (1.3.45-47). The detail of the beard was added to Holinshed’s description either by Shakespeare or the play’s revisor (*Mac*, note p. 141). The ambivalence of the text reflects the ambivalent motif of the fairy, itself also illustrated in the character of Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet*.

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<sup>331</sup> Full title: *Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life of Doctor Fian, a notable sorcerer, who was burned at Edenbrough in Januarie last, 1591*. “It contains accounts of three women accused of witchcraft and tried before King James VI of Scotland, one of whom was said to be using witchcraft against the King himself. James caused the pamphlet to be printed as part of his attack on witchcraft. The woodcut illustrations depict scenes from the alleged acts, including the casting of spells over a cauldron” (British Library, Collection Items, online, available at: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/~link.aspx?id=470FFE8DAB15417A9C9069FCA9D66253&z=z>, accessed 24/08/19).

We dealt with the example of Queen Mab in the introduction to illustrate Colin Burrow's theory regarding the function of references to Antiquity in Shakespeare's plays, and the Irish Queen Medb appeared as another illustration of the fairy hag, as we have seen with Lady Macbeth. In *Romeo and Juliet*, she is also positioned between the dark fairy as in *Macbeth* and the fair one who appears in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, albeit Medb is more worrying and potentially dangerous. Considering that she belongs to the same type of characters as the Sisters in *Macbeth*, let us now investigate how Medb is narrated, what kind of magic her figure embodies during Shakespeare's time and how the mythic quality attached to the Ancient queen Medb evolved into Mab in the text of a play such as *Romeo and Juliet* (1.4.53-70).

The Celtic<sup>332</sup> origin of Queen Mab is very much debated by scholars, especially as far as Shakespeare's mention of the character in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) is concerned. However, it will be argued that bridges can be established between the mythic sovereign Medb and the fairy queen Mab, which will allow us to trace her evolution through time. The variation in spelling could be discussed in more detail but at present, we will simply argue that for a non-Gaelic speaker, an anglicized pronunciation and transformation of the Irish Medb, or Meadb, Medbh, Meadhbh into Mab sounds reasonable.<sup>333</sup> It could be the result of an erroneous selection of the vowel <a> and the consonant <b> from the Irish form Meadb or Meadhbh which, instead of the correct (approximate) pronunciation in /meiv/ resulted in /mæb/. The fluctuation of spelling in Shakespeare's time must also be kept in mind in relation to orthographic variation.

Her narrative tradition indicates her evolution and also the evolution of the perception of magic. On the one hand, the popular English tradition came to see her as the queen of the fairies: "Mab, also called Queen Mab, in English folklore, the queen of the fairies. Mab is a mischievous but basically benevolent figure".<sup>334</sup> Here the dual quality of the ancient goddess reappears. According to Walter Wenz, in Irish Ancient narratives, Medb and Ailill, belonging to the realm of gods are clearly part of the fairy people: "In this text [the *Echtra Nerai*, the *Expedition of Nera*] Ailill and Medb are represented as mortals like ourselves; though in some other manuscripts, more correctly, it seems, and usually in popular traditions, they appear as Tuatha de Danann themselves, or as the fairy-king and -queen of Roscommon, one of the five

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<sup>332</sup> As a reminder, the word is used in literature criticism, especially in Medieval Studies to refer to the Welsh, Irish, Scottish, Ancient British and Breton corpora of literature, written in Celtic languages.

<sup>333</sup> For more detail, see W. P. Reeves, "Shakespeare's Queen Mab", in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 17, N°1, The John Hopkins University, Jan. 1902, p. 10-14.

<sup>334</sup> Available at: <https://global.britannica.com/topic/Medb> (accessed 28/12/16).



ancient provinces of Ireland” (Wentz 1909, note 3, p. 126). There seems to be some confusion between myth and popular tradition, and the Ancient mythic divinities may have evolved into fairy beings, which lead to the birth of the fairy queen Mab.

As a reminder, in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Queen Mab, the fairy, appears in Mercutio’s speech:

MERCUTIO

O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the fore-finger of an alderman,  
Drawn with a team of little atomies [...]  
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut  
And in this state she gallops night by night (1.4.53-70).

The image of the queen in her chariot evokes the image of the historical Queen Boudicca, queen of the Iceni tribe who led the revolt against the Romans in 60-61 A.D. In the ancient texts, Queen Medb herself used a chariot:

Meave summoned marvellous courage when she perceived the confused state of matters under the chiefs. She kept in the rear of the stout warriors. The Gamhanraidh were vigorously pressing the pursuit with the view to reach and to crush Meave. She did not blench or shrink from the situation, but kept her place valiantly in front of the hosts who needed her help so much [...]. She then quickly entered her chariot, took her place gallantly among the warriors, and firmly kept step in the line. (*The Pursuit of the Cattle Raid of Flidais*, Glenmasan Manuscript § 220, p. 209, online)<sup>335</sup>

Besides, Shakespeare gives Mab a warlike function “Sometimes she driveth o’er a soldier’s neck, and then dreams he of cutting foreign throats” (1.4.82-83). She also appears as a magician inspiring love dreams: “she gallops night by night, through lover’s brains, and then they dream of love” (1.4.70-71). The figure of Mab linked to sovereignty and law, to love and fertility, as well as to war and magic sketches in what looks like a complete trifunctional portrait, or what remains of it. Yet, it shows that somehow, the aura of the mythic sovereign radiated through time and space and was still present in Shakespeare’s Renaissance England.

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<sup>335</sup> Glenmasan Manuscript, *The Pursuit of the Cattle Raid of Flidais*, § 220, p. 209, available at: <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T800012/index.html>, (accessed 27/12/15).

This tiny representation of a great queen “in shape no bigger than an agate-stone, / On the fore-finger of an alderman” draws on mythic sources. The vision given to Shakespeare’s audience corresponds to a desire and a fashion of the time since people believed in fairies. In the description of Shakespeare’s Mab, it is as if the gigantic proportions of myth had shrunk to the size of the ‘little people’. One can only measure the gap between the two representations. The fairy queen was already represented as such in Jonson’s masque *Oberon* (1611), for which Inigo Jones designed costumes with wings for the ladies; and she was also the eponymous character of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. This keeps the fairy-hag in *Macbeth* at distance.

After Shakespeare, a fashion developed and writers frequently used the name of ‘Mab’ until the twentieth century (Reeves 1902, p. 10) and Pre-Raphaelite painter Henry Menell Rheam offers a means to measure the discrepancy between the mythic sovereign and the minute fairy queen. Ben Jonson’s first masque *The Entertainment at Althorp, or The Satyr* (performed on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1603 at Althorp, Northamptonshire) was written to welcome Anne of Denmark, the new Queen, and Prince Henry, her son, “as they come first into the Kingdom” (Chambers 1951 (1923), p. 391. “On arrival (25 June), the Queen and Prince were met in the park by a Satyr, Queen Mab and a bevy of Fairies, who after a dialogue and song, introduced Spencer’s son John, as a huntsman, to Henry; and a hunt followed” (*ibid.*). The fairy queen welcomed the Scottish sovereign herself. The Satyr came in as a troublemaker who introduced Mab as, among other things, the abductor of children.<sup>336</sup>

This last element points to the popular belief in the *changeling*,<sup>337</sup> recently illustrated in the TV series *Outlander*<sup>338</sup> the action of which is located in Scotland. The term of “fairies’ midwife” quoted above from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, as Steevens and Warton noted, means “the midwife *among* the fairies, because it was her peculiar employment to steal the newborn babe in the night and to leave another in its place” (*The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. Johnson and Steevens 1793, note 9 p. 372). Solid evidence of this belief was gathered fifteen times by W. Wentz when he toured Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wentz 1909, see index p. 302). Mab’s dubious nature is expressed by the

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<sup>336</sup> In *MND*, Titania has stolen the Indian boy from his father after the death of his mother, and she wants to keep him with her while Oberon wants him at his service. The child is called: “a little changeling boy” by Oberon (2.1.120), following the popular belief in the ‘changeling’.

<sup>337</sup> Belief in the changeling is evoked in *IH4* when the king says: “O that it could be proved / That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged / In cradle clothes our children where they lay / and called mine ‘Percy’, his ‘Plantagenet’;” (1.1.85-88).

<sup>338</sup> *Outlander*, season 1, episode 10 “By the pricking of my thumb”, written by Ira Steven Behr, directed by Richard Clark, Sony Pictures, 2015.

kidnapping of children. Furthermore, in Jonson's *Entertainment at Althorp, or The Satyr*, she has her fairies draw indelible marks on the ground, to remember the very moment of the meeting with Queen Anne: "Now they print it on the Ground / With their feete in figures round, / Markes that will be euer found, / To remember this glad stound" (Jonson 1616, p. 872). The scene looks like a magic ritual, which reminds us that the boundary between fairy-lore and witchcraft is sometimes soft.

The first sense of the substantive 'Mab' in the *OED* 'a slattern, a promiscuous woman' tends to support Dumézil's view, relating the character to debauchery. The *New Comedie of Jacob and Esau* (1568), act 5, scene 6, reads: "And come out, thou mother Mab, out olde rotten witche, / As white as midnightes arsehole or virgin pitche" (ed. Farmer 1908). In this quote we have all the ingredients of the 'dark side' of the character: old age, witchcraft and sexuality. In Scotland, the Medieval appellation of Queen of Elphame (Pitcairn 1833, p. 161-165 *passim*) used in the witch trials to designate the devil's wife, or the figure of the Nicnevin,<sup>339</sup> may be seen as a another later Christian evolution of the pagan mythic character. This is the substance of the accusation laid against Alesoun Peirsoun, in Byrehill, on May 28 1588, for sorcery, witchcraft and incantation:

"[...] dealing with charms, and abusing of the common people therewith, by the said art of Witchcraft [...] for haunting and repairing with the good neighbours and Queen of Elfame, there divers years bypassed, as she had confessed by her deposition, declaring that she could not say readily how long she was with them; and that she had friends in that court which was of her own blood, who had good acquaintance of the Queene of Elphane, which might have helped her"(Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland, *op. cit.*, p. 161-162. Transcription by CSL)

The bottom page note n° 2 on page 161 indicates that "the good neighbours and the Queen of Elphame" means "the brownies or fairies, and the Queen of Faery, (q.d. elf-hame?)". There, a bridge appears between fairy-lore and witchcraft.<sup>340</sup> The period of the witch trials corresponds to a time, which had begun with Christianization, when "all that evoked the pre-Christian religion was relegated to hell or to the Fomoir" F. Le Roux and C. Guyonvarc'h explained, as it was already noted (1986, p. 391, tr. CSL). It is not surprising that the dual nature of the

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<sup>339</sup> Available at: <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/nicnevin> (accessed 05/02/17).

<sup>340</sup> The TV series *Outlander* provides a contemporary illustration of this topic, showing that Scotland still bears a credible potential for interest in occultism and folk-lore today. Season 1, episode 11, "A devil's mark", written by Toni Graphia, directed by Mike Barker, Sony Pictures, 2015. This episode stages the character of Guillis Duncan, whose historical trial James VI of Scotland attended, and about whom he wrote his pamphlet '*News from Scotland*'.

goddess and the druidic tradition of the Ancient religion should be regarded as popular superstition that was condemned as devilish by the Church. Shakespeare's Weïrd Sisters, and to a certain extent Lady Macbeth, are linked to this dark side of magic, and Mab stands in between. But although *Macbeth* is a tragedy, the dichotomy inherent in the play also leads us to consider the 'white', harmless aspect of magic.<sup>341</sup>

## 2.2. The enchanted fairy world

Cooper notes that magic and the supernatural as distinguishing features of romance were as high in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as in the Middle Ages mainly because "Magic is above all a narrative issue: a way of telling a story; or a problem that gets in the way of telling a story well" (2004, p. 137). In *Macbeth* magic is at the heart of the restless tragic plot, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the love potion goes to the wrong person and in *Romeo and Juliet*, the sleeping potion contributes to the tragic ending.<sup>342</sup> Magic is what prevents a smooth unfolding of events; it is thus what triggers the interest in a work.

The metaphorical weaving of plots and deceits applied to women weaving enchantments and spells in 14<sup>th</sup> century Middle English was part of a broad cultural distrust for women, as Cooper suggests, but there was no immediate association with dark magic. Witchcraft, she goes on to observe, was "an act, not a state" and it could be performed by men and women, as we have seen with the etymology of the word 'witch' in Old English ('wicca' and 'wicce'). Merlin is accused of being a witch in the *Morte D'Arthur*, she says, but not Morgan, who starts her career in Geoffrey as a fairy. Besides, skill in enchantments was not necessarily bad and 'nigromancy' was not inherently evil, it was just forbidden to Christians. The association of enchantments with dark arts occurred after the later "witch hunting frenzy" (Cooper, p. 160). Shakespeare, as we have already seen, was part of "the last generation to be brought up on an extended range of Medieval romances in more or less their original forms, and which therefore had access to their generic codings and intertextualities" (p. 23). *Macbeth* illustrates Shakespeare's subtle reluctance to associate the Weïrd Sisters with witches together

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<sup>341</sup> Two passages in *Temp* illustrate this dichotomy: Stephano: "Monster, you fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy, has done little better than played the jack with us" (4.1.196-198). Shakespeare plays here on the ambivalence of the harmless monster and on the sonority of the names "monster, fairy, witch". The second instance is like an echo to the first: Trinculo: "That's more to me than my wetting, yet this is your harmless fairy, monster" (4.1.211-212).

<sup>342</sup> In *Romeo and Juliet*, the potion is in fact a poison, a "distilling liquor" that causes all the aspects of death (4.1.94-160). It is concocted by Friar Laurence whose character would be worth developing in relation to Nature and Ancient druidic practices.

with the integration of codes belonging to the discourse of witchcraft so dear to the king. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, even in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* which enacts a parody of fairies, he used the narrative codes of romance to create his fantastic fairy worlds. The environment integrates the ambivalence so characteristic of fairies, but it is not dark.

In *MW* 5.4 & 5.5 in the Herne's oak revels scenes, Falstaff wears horns on his head, Evans comes as a Satyr, Anne and the children are disguised as fairies, Pistol as Hobgoblin and Mistress Quickly is the Fairy Queen who says: "Fairies black, grey, green and white, / You moonshine revelers and shades of night, / You orphan heirs of fixed destiny, / Attend your office and your quality" (5.5.37-40). In a single line, she comically deploys nearly all the colours usually attributed to fairies, thereby acknowledging their ambivalent quality (black-white), their link to nature (green) and their role as masters of fate. Shakespeare plays with the codes and his characters illustrate the popular belief in fairies: "they are fairies, he that speaks to them shall die" (5.5.47); Evans as Satyr says "I smell of man of middle earth" (5.5.80) i.e. a mortal man, not a fairy; Falstaff calls Evans "that Welsh fairy" (5.5.81) and Evans himself believes in fairies, as was developed in chapter 3.

Cooper argues that the fairy tradition evolved from a widespread belief in the Middle Ages and a gradual retreat into a world of fantasy. In the pre or Early Modern period, it was not necessarily a belief, but there was less suspension of disbelief. It was considered then that the world could be reduced to the rational, and fairies stood on the boundary between the rational and the irrational: they were not controlled by humans, and they had nothing to do with religion (Cooper, p. 174). The common trait in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was some 'slippage' between Classical and native tradition, as knowledge in Classical mythology spread slowly among vernacular speakers. Before the word 'nymph' was borrowed into English, the standard Old English term used was 'elf', while from the 14<sup>th</sup> century the French derived 'fairy' (Cooper p. 177). Laskaya and Salisbury add that scholarly consensus attributes the origin of the word 'fairy' to French and Latin and Lewis Spence, in *Fairy Tradition in Britain* "links 'fairy' with Fata which is itself linked both to the *Fates* of Classical mythology and the nymphic *Fatae*" (Laskaya Salisbury 2001, p. 249). Therefore, the figure of the fairy is a late Medieval syncretic form in which Classic and Celtic traditions blend, without forgetting German ones as Lecouteux observes (1995, p. 162). The Latin terminology (*Fata, Fates*) assimilated the native one 'elf' and integrated one of the distinguished characteristic of fairies as masters of destiny that existed in the three cultures. This syncretism is visible in

Shakespeare where the word ‘fairy’ is largely used (*MND*, *MW*, *Cym*, *Mac*, *RJ*...), but the form ‘elf’ also appears, as in *MW*, when Pistol-Hobgoblin says: “Elves, list your names; silence, you airy toys” (5.5.42). *Macbeth* has ‘elves’ and ‘fairies’ in the same line, when Hecate addresses her ‘witches’: “And now about the cauldron sing, / Like elves and fairies in a ring” (4.1.41-42), and Oberon also uses both forms in *MND*: “Every elf and fairy sprite” (5.1.383), while the fairies themselves, Puck and Titania indifferently use ‘elves’ for ‘fairies’ of both sexes (2.1.17, 2.1.30, 2.2.5, 3.1.168). Continuing with the exploration of the ambivalence of magic, a further character is worth studying: Puck, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, who like the fairy hags in *Macbeth*, embodies a contrasted nature.

### 2.2.1 Puck-Hobgoblin-Robin Goodfellow

The name of Hobgoblin itself attracts attention. The Arden edition gives a definition for the fairy creature: “Hobgoblin, known also as Puck or Robin Goodfellow (as in *MND*),<sup>343</sup> was a spirit playing pranks, who acted as messenger or herald in the fairy world” (“Crier Hobgoblin, make the fairy oyez” in *MW* 5.5.41). It is also noted that in the Quarto edition of the play, “Hobgoblin is taken to be the same as ‘Satyr’, Evan’s disguise” since Evans is addresses as “puck” at the equivalent of line 5.4.0.1n (*MW*, note p. 279). The syncretism between native and Classical traditions appears once more. A full investigation of the figure of Puck-Hobgoblin-Robin Goodfellow, who occupies such a central place in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* would be beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>344</sup> The space we have here only allows us to note his popularity in Early Modern times and the origin of his name.

The broadside ballad “The Mad Merry Pranks of Robin Goodfellow” (Roxburghe 1, 230-231, British Library; ed. Chappell 1872, p. 80-85) demonstrates the popularity of the character. The ballad is dated between 1601 and 1640 (?),<sup>345</sup> and is attributed to Ben Jonson, although it is not in his published works; it may have been intended for a masque. A passage from Milton’s *L’Allegro* recalls the ballad. Chappell notes that “in 1628 and also perhaps before that date, there were little books in prose published about the Robin Goodfellow, with

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<sup>343</sup> In 2.1., a fairy introduces him by his various names and describes his mischievous character: “Either I mistake your shape and making quite, / Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite / Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he / That frightens the maidens of the villagery, / Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern, / And bootless make the breathless housewife churn, / And sometime make the drink to bear no barm, / Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm? Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck, / You do their work, and they shall have good luck” (2.1.32-41).

<sup>344</sup> For more details see Katherine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 1959; William Bell, *Shakespeare’s Puck and his Folkslore*, 1852; Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies*, 1930.

<sup>345</sup> Available at: <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30163/citation> (accessed 25/08/19).

songs intermixed with them” (1872, p. 80). The traces left by the ballad and the songs inserted in the prose books attest to the popularity of the character and are a remnant of the native oral culture of the British Isles.<sup>346</sup> Schleiner confirms this view (1985, p. 66). As Chappell also observes, citing Percy: “our simple ancestors had reduced all these whimsies to a kind of system, as regular, and perhaps more consistent, than many parts of classical mythology: a proof of the extensive influence and vast antiquity of these superstitions” (1872, p. 80). In addition to the superiority of this discourse attributing a notion of ‘simplicity’ to Ancient people, Percy underlines a consistent and widespread Ancient insular popular tradition. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot offers an indication of Robin’s extensive popularity, and reveals the keen interest for witches at the time:

And know you this by the waie, that heretofore Robin goodfellow, and Hob goblin were as terrible, and also as credible to the people, as hags and witches be now: and in time to come, a witch will be as much derided and contemned, and as plainlie perceived, as the illusion and knaverie of Robin goodfellow. And in truth, they that mainteine walking spirits, with their transformation, &c: have no reason to denie Robin goodfellow, upon whom there hath gone as manie and as credible tales, as upon witches; saving that it hath not pleased the translators of the Bible, to call spirits by the name of Robin goodfellow, as they have termed divinors, soothsayers, poisoners, and couseners by the name of witches. (Scot 1584, ed. Nicholson 1886, p. 105)

Scot observes the proximity, and popularity, of the connection between Robin Goodfellow or Hobgoblin and witches (in the process, he also acknowledges the manner of the transformation of soothsayers and other masters of ancient arts – therefore potentially druids – into witches). The failure to demonise this popular character was, according to Scot, the result of the reluctance of the Church to do so, therefore, Robin Goodfellow remains on the ‘fair side of magic’, albeit with an element of mischief that borders on the devilish.

In the list of roles in *MND*, Robin Goodfellow is designated as “a puck” (*MND*, p. 118), thus referring to his category as a ‘sprite’, an elf or fairy being. In her article “Imaginative Sources for Shakespeare’s Puck” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 1985), Winifred Schleiner traces the origin of the tradition in English, Welsh and Irish popular lore. Citing other research, he notes that “in the 12<sup>th</sup> century romance *Richard Coeur de Lion*, pouke

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<sup>346</sup> The popularity is also acknowledged in Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584, ed. 1886, p. xxii).

designates a knight with uncanny supernatural powers.<sup>347</sup> The Welsh version is *Pwca* (pooka)” and citing Briggs’s *A Dictionary of Fairies*, he adds that Shakespeare’s Puck being so close to the *Pwca*’s characteristics and actions, “some Welsh people have claimed that Shakespeare borrowed him from stories told by his friend Richard Prince of Brecon, who lived near Cwm Pwca, one of the *Pwca*’s favourite haunts” (Schleiner 1985, p. 66). In Ireland, the equivalent is the Púca anglicized in Pooka, “also denoting an evil spirit”, Schleiner adds, which shows a consistent tradition in the British Isles, although, as Deasún Breatnach stresses, it is probable that the word arrived in Ireland with the English language (1993, p. 105).

However, like the figure of the hag, the Puck is not entirely devilish. Indeed, Breatnach observes the dual nature of the Púca: “It may seem surprising that the boisterous shape-changing Púca should [...] be functionally equivalent to an angel, but this duality is well established in tradition” (*ibid.*).<sup>348</sup> Shakespeare’s Puck is also “an honest Puck” unwilling to be called a liar, as he himself says at the end of the play (5.1.421 and 425), the fairy calls him “sweet Puck” as we have seen, and Oberon says “my gentle Puck” (2.1.148), which reflects the Ancient tradition of an integrated duality.

Schleiner argues that Shakespeare’s Puck is “deeply imbued with dark conceptions of devilish sprites” and that the playwright innovated in distancing his character from “the dark communal recesses of magic and witchcraft”, introducing nuance into his conception. We argue that Shakespeare explored Elizabethan interests in Devilish forces and integrated more Ancient traditions that were also possibly part of the ambient – possibly oral, discourse. The more positive attitude to Puck may have been a reason why he does not appear in the faery world in *Macbeth*. The narration of Puck is once again dichotomic, differential, and subtle, but it remains part of the enchanted world of magic together with the royal fairy couple of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

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<sup>347</sup> Spenser’s “Epithalamion” also refers to the *Pouke* : “Ne let the Pouke, nor other evill sprights, / Ne let mischievous witches with theyr charmes, / Ne let hob Goblins, names whose sence we see not, / Fray us with things that be not” (1595, l. 341-44, cited by Schleiner 1985, p. 66).

<sup>348</sup> Shakespeare’s Puck is also shape-changing: “And sometime lurk I in a gossip’s bowl / In very likeness of a crab” (2.1.47-48) and “The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale / Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me” (2.1.51-52). Breatnach cites Ó Conaill to confirm this tradition: “It was said the Pooka could take any shape he wanted. He could make a dog or a horse or a cow of himself” (1993, p. 105). In *The Tempest*, Ariel, the airy spirit, is also endowed with shape-shifting qualities, for example when Prospero orders him to “make thyself like a nymph o’ th’ sea” (1.2.302), and in 1.2.317.1, he appears as such.



### 2.2.2 Queen and King of Faerie: Titania and Oberon

The Faerie Queen was a familiar figure to 16<sup>th</sup> century readers, as was already mentioned. Spenser's eponymous work is an illustration of it and an example of literary culture, directed to Queen Elizabeth, but although this was a court narrative, the Queen of fairies was also popular among common folk.

Helen Cooper notes that the fairy queen is a 'meme', a motif that replicated across cultures, and she identifies Shakespeare's Titania and Oberon as "the only literary fairies who can still rely on wide reader recognition beyond academia", thus acknowledging their popularity over time. The tradition from which they are derived includes Chaucer's quarrelling fairy queen (and king) of *The Merchant's Tale*, "And behind them all is a supporting group of fairy aristocrats and monarchs – most often queens, occasionally kings – who dispense threats or favours, wealth or death; who act as challengers or benefactors, as moral teachers or prophets, or, in the case of female fairies, as mistresses or as founding mothers" (2004, p. 174). This is in keeping with the ambivalent characteristics of fairy beings and with the way Titania and Oberon are depicted in *MND*.

We have already seen quite a few characteristics of fairy queens who are, like goddesses, not under the control of fathers or husbands nor (unlike mortal queens) are they answerable to councillors and subjects (Cooper p. 207).<sup>349</sup> This illustrates the characterization of Titania who appears as the most potent figure in *MND*, and acts in complete freedom, choosing to keep the Indian boy in spite of her husband's demand. Apart from Gloriana in Spenser's poem, Cooper cites four other examples of fairy monarchs who were as famous to Elizabethans as Titania: the fairy queen of Lanval (Landeval, Launfal), named Dame Tryamour in the Middle English Breton Lay, the elf-queen in Thomas of Erceldoune, Melusine, although less known at a popular level, and Oberon, the fairy king (p. 176).

Already popular before *MND*, Oberon's first appearance was in *Huon de Bordeaux*, originally a 13<sup>th</sup> century French poem, rewritten in prose in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. An arbitrary judge and ruler, he was originally the son of a fairy and a mortal man, and became fully fairy in his later incarnations (Green, Jonson, Shakespeare).<sup>350</sup> Cooper goes on to note that Oberon was the most frequently used name for a fairy king, while fairy queens were not usually

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<sup>349</sup> For more detail on this motif in Celtic culture see "Deirdre, Grainne and Medb, three mythological female characters shaping Scotland", in Pittin-Hedon, Marie-Odile (ed.), *Women and Scotland: Literature, Culture, Politics*, Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche Comté (forthcoming).

<sup>350</sup> Oberon, king of the fairies, also appears in *The tragedy of Guy, Earl of Warwick* (Ben Jonson?, c. 1593?)

named until Mab appeared in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was possible that a range of choices were available like Titania from Ovid, Proserpina from *The Merchant's Tale*, or the much darker Hecate. Yet, despite her name of Latin origin, as Cooper notes “both Titania and Oberon remain firmly in the native fairy tradition, with its pucks, its mischief-making, and its household elves who creep out when all the mortals have gone to bed” (p. 176). The narration of Titania and Oberon thus stands at the confluence of epochs and cultures, incorporating Classical antiquity, Celtic insular Antiquity, Medieval times and the Early Modern era – but embodying, Cooper writes, only “a surface gloss of the classical supernatural” (p. 177).<sup>351</sup> Such references are part of a rhizomatic structure that comprises a number of semantic chains that make the motif highly complex.

Cooper adds that Shakespeare followed Golding in his translation of the gods of the natural world as ‘elves of hilles, of brookes, of woods alone, / Of standing lakes’ and used this terminology in *The Tempest*, when Prospero addresses the elfin spirits with a view to renouncing magic: “Ye elves of hills , brooks, standing lakes and groves” (5.1.33), but, she adds “[e]ven in such an Ovidian context, Shakespeare is affirming native traditions of fairy, just as he does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*” (p. 177). This cultural cluster requires further analysis, but behind the apparent ‘gloss’ of Classical mythology, the Celtic native material can be located at the heart of the play. What is indicative of its presence is magic.

In *MND*, the function of magic is crucial because, as Cooper notes “the play fails to restore the emphasis on the human” (p. 143). Fairy magic is needed to restore order in the human world and harmonize the relationship between the lovers. Titania and Oberon, queen and king of fairy, can be perceived, according to a Celtic reading as an evolution of Ancient deities. They are Otherworld beings living in an unspecified time that could resemble eternity,<sup>352</sup> or the Celtic Otherworld, not the world of the Dead depicted in the Lay of Orfeo, but rather, something like the Isle of eternal youth, the Irish Tir Na Nog. The young human lovers access the fairy world through a ‘wood’, a sacred place in Celtic tradition, to them as the place where they first met “to do observance to a morn of May” (1.1.167), a time related

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<sup>351</sup> Cooper adds that Shakespeare followed Golding in his translation of the gods of the natural world as ‘elves of hilles, of brookes, of woods alone, / Of standing lakes’ and used this terminology in *The tempest*, when Prospero renounces magic: “Ye elves of hills , brooks, standing lakes and groves” (5.1.33), but, she adds, considering the ensemble of the play “[e]ven in such an Ovidian context, Shakespeare is affirming native traditions of fairy, just as he does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*” (p. 177).

<sup>352</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is part of the few of Shakespeare's plays with unspecified time of action: *AYL*, *CE*, *LLL*, *MND*, *MA*, *Per*, *TGV*, *Temp*. This trait conveys a blurred perception of chronological landmarks, favouring the impression of an ‘other’ setting.

to the Ancient Beltane feast.<sup>353</sup> The quartet Helena- Demetrius, Lysander-Hermia is unbalanced and discordant from the start and it is only in the fairy world, and thanks to a fairy magic, that they ultimately recover balance and concord. Thus, references to Antiquity, here again a mixture between Classical and Celtic, relate, as Burrow suggested, to the theme of the play, that it to say to the restoration of lost order and harmony. Celtic magic underscores the play, and it is also the main attribute of Prospero, the potent duke of Milan in *The Tempest*.

### 2.2.3 Prospero's magic

The character of Prospero in *The Tempest*, appears in the light of native tradition as the inheritor of Ancient druidic faith. Although the play blurs the notion of time,<sup>354</sup> we know that it is not specifically pre-literate oral magic because the magic is derived from a book, and Prospero possesses a library:

PROSPERO

But this rough magic

I here abjure; and when I have required

Some heavenly music (which even now I do)

To work mine end upon their senses that

This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,

Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,

And deeper than did ever plummet sound

I'll drown my book. (5.1.50-57)

The breaking and burial of his staff, his magical instrument, recalls ritual practices of sword burials in swamps or peat bogs throughout Celtic Europe, especially in Ireland. Drowning his book would amount to drowning himself, since all his magic is incarnated in it, as the extension of a primary oral druidic knowledge. Such a sacrifice recalls what Eamonn Kelly calls 'the ritual killing of kings' (2014, p. 11), although the link is here of course highly speculative and the motif would need further investigation.

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<sup>353</sup> May festivities are central to Shakespeare's work, and are deeply associated with love, as Cooper suggests (p. 17). Like Midsummer, they refer to Ancient pagan Celtic feasts dedicated to fertility like Beltaine on 1<sup>st</sup> May, or Lughnasadh on 1st August, in mid-summer. The feast of Midsummer traditionally refers to the summer solstice, around 21<sup>st</sup> June. Plays like *MND* celebrate bright season feasts, while tragedies like *Lear* or *Macbeth* are rather expressive of Samhain, the beginning of the dark season, at the end of October or Imbolc (Dimelc), on 1<sup>st</sup> February. See F. Laroque, *Shakespeare et la Fête* (1988), for more information (p. 84-88, p. 120).

<sup>354</sup> It presents contemporary issues of colonization that may reflect Early Modern England, but no time reference is specified.

It is noteworthy that Prospero learnt his magic from the witch Sycorax's book. Each embodied respectively dark and white magic, they formed a differential couple that seemed not to be able to exist without each other. Prospero 'discases' (undresses) himself, quits his magician's robes and presents himself the way he appeared when he was duke of Milan, with a hat and rapier (5.1.84-86). In this case, as Cooper notes, "the structural patterning finally rejects both magic and colonialist appropriation, and refuses to claim any fantasy perfection" (p. 67). The island is left to the spirits, its original inhabitants and Prospero does not take his powers as enchanter back with him. Indeed the epilogue renounces the illusory magical world of the play (*ibid.*). As in the case of the wood in *MND*, the magical island recalls the Celtic Irish Otherworld beyond the sea, and Prospero appears to resemble an Ossian who underwent a perilous trip to this world. The epilogue, spoken by Prospero, guarantees him nothing in terms of a future because he counts on the leniency of audience to help him and make his safe return possible:

PROSPERO

Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell;  
But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands.  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardoned be

Let your indulgence set me free.

Exit.

A sojourn in the Otherworld never guarantees a safe return, as Prospero suggests, thereby aligning with Celtic narratives. Spells and prayers come together in his appeal to get back to the 'real' world and he invites the audience to join him in his effort. Is all magic left behind?

It seems that Ancient faith, “spirits to enforce, art to enchant”, are all deemed as valuable as prayer “which pierces so that it assault mercy itself”. Prospero seems to suggest that all means are appropriate in order to secure freedom. But however, Prospero, the powerful enchanter, the skilled magician who masterminded a shipwreck, freed Ariel from his prison-tree, and immobilised his enemies has now forsaken all his powers, and the actor beneath the theatrical façade leaves his audience to determine his fate.

### **Conclusion to part 2 of chapter 5**

Helen Cooper argues that magic and its treatment may show “a comparative lack of sensitivity to [the] historical moment”, but that “this is offset by the social particularity of its use” (p. 152). Cooper goes on to distinguish between the different contexts in which magic is received:

Such magic has a high potential for becoming a focus for discussion or debate: it appears most often in works designed for reading in social contexts that would enable such debate, the parlour or chamber rather than the hall or inn, or by those with sufficient literary and leisure for personal reading, for whom private thought can take the place of discussion. (Cooper, p. 153)

This is probably what strikes Cooper as Shakespeare’s exception, writing for the “exceptional social inclusiveness of the audiences for Elizabethan drama, from the queen to the apprentice” (p. 152-153).

The history of fairies in Britain is twofold. Its multiple rhizomes direct attention towards the dual division of a former Ancient complex including benevolent and malevolent features that may be correlated with the two distinctive branches of the Christian faith. The figures of the dark and white fairy beings emerged as a more or less hermetic classification of this division. In both cases, we have noted that Medieval and early Modern fairy beings could be traced to Ancient gods and goddesses or to druids and druidesses, practitioners of magic. Secondly, the line of transmission of this evolution is twofold and its two branches also differentiate folklore from romance. As Cooper observes, the transmission of “[f]airy beliefs at a popular level seem[s] to have been continuous from Celtic times onwards, [while] the literary kind of fairy was conveyed into French literature by way of parallel Celtic traditions in Brittany and from there, back across the Channel to England”. She adds that “direct transmission from Irish or Welsh to English is hard to trace and seems to have been

unimportant by comparison with French and Breton routes” (p. 177). Thus, oral tradition managed to find a direct route of transmission over time where printed analogue struggled. However, sometimes hidden in Shakespeare’s plays, in Celtic texts or in archaeological sources, motifs await to be unearthed that will facilitate the tracing of the culture of the British Isles back to Ancient times. The motif of the cauldron is one of them, whose symbolism offers one of the rare links between archaeology and literature to testify the survival of Celtic myths (Green 1993, p. 14).

This motif also includes Shakespeare and brings us back to *Macbeth* with the Weïrd Sisters’s incantation in 4.1 over the boiling cauldron: “Double, double, toil and trouble; / Fire burn, and cauldron bubble” (4.1.10-11), repeated three times before the apparitions come for parade before Macbeth. In Celtic narratives, in *The Mabinogi of Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, Bendigeidfran offers a magic cauldron to Matholwch in reparation for an offense committed against the latter while he was staying at his court: “the property of the cauldron is that if you throw into it one of your men who is killed today, then by tomorrow he will be as good as ever except that he will not be able to speak” (ed. Davies 2007, p. 25). Celtic tradition has three types of cauldron, the first is related to resurrection, the second type corresponds to the cornucopia, the horn of abundance, and the last one is of a sacrificial nature (Chevalier Gheerbrandt (1982, p. 216-217). A panel of the silver cauldron of Gundestrup (200 BC - 300 AD) shows a man being thrown into a cauldron, possibly depicting a scene of rebirth. In *Macbeth*, the cauldron is rather of the resurrection type, although after the incantation, it is apparitions that emerge rather than living men.

Let us now explore another motif in *Macbeth* that can be traced to Celtic times.

### 3. The walking forest motif<sup>355</sup>

The motif of the walking forest present in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, as well as in Holinshed’s and Boece’s *Chronicles*, has a pedigree that can be traced back to ancient times. Not only is it literally a case of a walking forest, which in itself is indicative of myth, but it is also accompanied by a suggestion of military activity. An investigation of the traces of an ancient Celtic culture reveals some interesting details that relate to the origins of the walking forest motif. For example, in *Les Druides*, Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux describe what they call the ‘vegetal war’ (1986, p. 150, tr. CSL). They cite three occurrences of the vegetal motif within

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<sup>355</sup> The following discussion was published under the title “The Walking Forest Motif in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* – Origins” in *Notes and Queries*, volume 64, Issue 2, June 2017, p. 287-292.

the corpora of Irish and Welsh texts, and offer a continental example that appears in Livy's *History of Rome*. Another instance of this motif, though not mentioned in Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux, appears in the Welsh *Mabinogion*. According to Pierre Le Roux,<sup>356</sup> the fact that the motif can be found on the continent in Gaul and in Germany, as well as in Wales and Ireland, confirms that it belongs to a homogeneous Celtic culture. This possible Celtic origin of an element in *Macbeth* has not so far been noticed in any work done on Shakespeare's sources.

In the B version of the story of Cuchulainn's Death (a version that is much less studied than the A Version, and that has apparently not yet been translated into English),<sup>357</sup> three 'witches' communicate a vision much in the same way as the Weïrd Sisters do in *Macbeth* (4.1):

Then, the three daughters of Calatin arose, crippled, one-eyed and mute, the three Bodb, begging and erring, the three black, loathsome, ominously coloured, evil witches... On the flashes of a swift wind, with a powerful shriek, they came to Emain and these three horrible, hideous ghosts sat down on the green lawn near the city. They conjured up the fantasy of a great battle between two armies, between wonderful moving trees, beautiful leafy oaks, so that Cuchulainn heard the sound of a fighting ... and of the pillar of destruction and the ruin of the fortress. (*Aided Con Culainn, The Story of Cu Chulainn's Death*, in Guyonvarc'h Le Roux 1986, p. 150, tr. CSL)<sup>358</sup>

Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux argue that the vision contains elements of a "German *Walpurgisnacht*" (1986, p. 150, tr. CSL) a pagan feast which took place during the night from 30<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May, when sorcerers and witches gathered on a hill for a Sabbath. The date also evokes the pagan Celtic feast of Beltane which celebrated fertility.<sup>359</sup> In the extract given above, Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux also detect an intermingling of Celtic and Christian cultural motifs in the narrative. For them, the Christian figure of the evil witch finds its origin in that of the druid woman, who is, herself, linked to the vegetal world. The vellum manuscript on which Van Hamel based his transcription is in Early Modern Irish and can be dated some time

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<sup>356</sup> In his article "Les arbres combattants et la forêt guerrière", published in OGAM XI, (Rennes, 1959), Pierre Le Roux explores the motif in more depth than Guyonvarc'h. He deals with the symbolism of the Celtic sacred forest. Citing Pliny and Tacitus, he traces analogies between the German forest and that of the Gauls. He also deals with the examples cited by Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux in more details.

<sup>357</sup> R. Lehmann, 'Death and Vengeance in the Ulster Cycle', ZCP 43 (1989), p. 7, in Kühns 2009, p. 42.

<sup>358</sup> The Early Modern Irish version of this extract of *Aided Con Culainn* (the story of Cú Chulainn's death) (16<sup>th</sup> century) can be found in ed. A.G. Van Hamel, Mediaeval Modern Irish Series Volume 3, *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, 1933, p. 80-81. The text in French is in Guyonvarc'h 1980, p. 150.

<sup>359</sup> There are numerous references to 1<sup>st</sup> May, 'May Day' festivities in Shakespeare, which can be traced back to the Celtic feast of Beltaine.

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Nat. Lib. of Scotland, Gaelic MS. Nr XLV).<sup>360</sup> The Middle Ages and the Renaissance were periods when “tout ce qui évoquait la religion préchrétienne était rejeté dans l’enfer ou au niveau des Fomoire” [everything that evoked the pre-Christian religion was relegated to hell or to the Fomoire]<sup>361</sup> according to Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux (1986, p. 150). It is therefore not surprising that a stratum of Christianisation overlaying the antique Celtic matter should be found here. This is how the figures of the three Fates or Parcae, in which Guyonvarc’h sees the ancient figure of the druid woman, evolved:

‘Parques’ n’est que l’un des noms des fées, personnages synchrétiques, tour à tour femmes sylvestres ou champêtres, matrones, sages-femmes, dispensatrices de la fertilité, de la richesse et du bonheur. Démonisées par l’Église qui les taxe d’illusion diabolique – en effet elles apparaissent et disparaissent on ne sait comment – elles devinrent des stryges, des lamies, des masques, des sorcières.

[‘Parcae’ is but one of the names of the fairies, syncretic characters, in turn forest or country women, matrons, midwives, dispensers of fertility, wealth and happiness. Demonised by the Church which accused them of diabolical illusion – indeed they can appear and disappear at will – they became stryges, lamias, masks, in short, witches]. (Lecouteux 1995, p. 169, tr. CSL)

The sudden appearance of the three daughters of Calatin in a gust of wind includes some of the characteristics described above. Claude Lecouteux acknowledges the literary creation of the fairies in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and also their folkloric origin in which, he argues, “the Celtic traditions take the lion’s share” (p. 162, tr. CSL). However present the Celtic element may be, it very often remains occluded beneath both the Christian narrative and the references to Classical Antiquity. This is also the case in Shakespeare’s plays.

However, the evolution of the moving forest motif diverges a little from the pattern of textual transmission described above. The nature and shape of such a motif appear to have prevented it from undergoing a substantial change during the process of transmission. Even after Christian elements have imposed themselves on the pagan narrative, the motif always

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<sup>360</sup> *Aided Con Culainn*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>361</sup> The Fomoire are the “race ennemie des occupants successifs de l’Irlande, quels qu’ils soient, et qui s’opposent à eux par tous les moyens. [...] ils représentent essentiellement les forces démoniaques, infernales et obscures. [...] dans tous les récits où il en est question ils sont dépeints comme physiquement horribles, difformes et méchants” [enemy race of all the successive occupants of Ireland, whoever they are, and who oppose them by all possible means. [...] they essentially represent evil, infernal and obscure forces. [...] In each story in which they are involved, they are depicted as physically hideous, deformed and wicked] (Guyonvarc’h Le Roux 1986, p. 391).



links war and trees. Such common nouns have a universal application, and are, therefore, more likely to remain unchanged and point to clear meanings over time. What changes from text to text is the way in which this motif is used. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in Holinshed's and Boece's chronicles, the witches' prophecy is equivocal, to use a term that was topical in Shakespeare's time.<sup>362</sup> They tell Macbeth that he will be safe as long as Birnam wood does not come to Dunsinane. Of course he believes this can never happen and thinks himself free from danger as a consequence. In this Macbeth is on the side of reason. Yet, as the witches prophesied, the 'forest' actually does move toward Macbeth's fortress. Did Shakespeare simply accept, and appropriate the substance of the myth or did he transform it? In *Macbeth* the myth is presented as a military stratagem, involving soldiers carrying tree branches. However, the vision turns out to be equivocal because it admits of two interpretations, and Shakespeare's deployment of the narrative at this point in *Macbeth* stands on the boundary between reason and magic.<sup>363</sup> Of course, trees cannot walk, although in the source of the prophecy there is an ancient force at work in the ambivalent figures of the Weïrd Sisters. Their ambiguous magic seems to point to a mythological past. Although that mythology is not fully and unequivocally represented as a source of the action in the play, it underlies the prophetic narrative, and gives an unmistakable force to the structure of the tragedy. In the mythological texts, however, the story line forsakes the path of practical reason in favour of a supernatural excess that claims for itself an objective existence to the extent that the war literally happens, and that the enchanted trees actually fight.

In *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (whose name is anglicised as 'Moytura'), a promise of vegetal war is to be found, emanating once more from the witches' utterance:

'And you, Bé Chuille and Díanann,' said Lug to his two witches, 'what can you do in the battle?'

'Not hard to say,' they said. 'We will enchant the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth so that they will be a host under arms against them; and they will scatter in flight terrified and trembling'. (*Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, 1512, ed. Gray 1982, sections 116-117, online)

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<sup>362</sup> See James Shapiro, *1606 William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*, Faber & Faber, London, 2015, chap. 9 Equivocation, p. 178-207.

<sup>363</sup> See also Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist Tragedy* (1611), act 2, scene 1, when a thunder storm is seen by Borachio as a 'fearful noise' and by D'amville as a "mere effect of nature". Fear of natural phenomena and science are at work in this scene, showing the tendency of a period to adopt in turn both ways of thinking. Shakespeare did so once again with reference to "these late eclipses in the sun and moon" in *King Lear*, act 2, scene 1 (see James Shapiro, *op. cit.* p. 84, who speaks of a "cultural fault-line between natural and supernatural explanations").

This magic of enchanted trees seems to be fairly common in mythological texts.

Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux demonstrate the analogies between the two previous Irish extracts and a Welsh poem from the *Book of Taliesin* (beg. 14<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>364</sup> entitled, the *Kat Godeu, The Battle of Godeu, or Le Combat des arbrisseaux [Fight of the Little Trees]* which, they argue, inspired Shakespeare in *Macbeth* (1986, p. 151, tr. CSL). Pierre Le Roux stresses the complexity of the poem, arguing that it deals with “[é]tats multiples de l’être, transmigration des âmes, combats d’arbres, sans compter les inévitables ‘interpolations chrétiennes’” [multiple states of being, transmigration of souls, battles of trees, not to mention the inevitable Christian interpolations] (P. Le Roux 1959, p. 186, tr. CSL). In the following quotation from the *Kat Godeu*, Christian and Celtic motifs are intricately intertwined, since here it is God himself who is responsible for the enchantment:

There was a calling on the Creator,  
Upon Christ for causes,  
Until when the Eternal  
Should deliver those whom he had made.  
The Lord answered them,  
Through language and elements:  
Take the forms of the principal trees,  
Arranging yourselves in battle array,  
And restraining the public  
Inexperienced in battle hand to hand.  
When the trees were enchanted,  
In the expectation of not being trees,  
The trees uttered their voices  
From strings of harmony,  
The disputes ceased. (l. 47-61) (*Kat Godeu*, ed. Skene 1968, vol 1, p. 278)<sup>365</sup>

However, after these preliminaries, and far from a harmonious outcome, the narrative turns its attention to the battle and we observe a literal combat between the trees:

The alder-trees, the head of the line,

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<sup>364</sup> A MS of the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the Hengwrt collection, in 1868 the property of W. W. E. Wynne, Esq. of Peniarth (Skene 1868 Vol II, p. 108).

<sup>365</sup> The text in original Welsh is available in Skene 1968, Vol 2, p. 137-146. The text in French is in Guyonvarc'h, 1980, p. 55.

Formed the van.  
 The willows and quicken-trees  
 Came late to the army. (l.75-78) (*ibid.*, p. 279)  
 [...]  
 The elm with his retinue,  
 Did not go aside a foot;  
 He would fight with the centre,  
 And the flanks, and the rear. (l.102-105) (*ibid.*)  
 [...]  
 The oak, quickly moving,  
 Before him, tremble heaven and earth.  
 A valiant door-keeper against an enemy,  
 His name is considered. (l.126-129) (*ibid.*, p. 280)

Neither Guyonvarc'h nor Le Roux mention the war forest episode contained in the Second Branch of the Welsh *Mabinogion*, *the Branch of Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*. According to this story, on hearing of the ill treatment that Matholwch, King of Ireland, inflicts upon his sister Branwen, Bendigeidfran and his army sail toward Ireland:

Matholwch's swineherds were on the sea shore one day, busy with their pigs. And because of what they saw on the sea, they went to Matholwch.  
 'Lord,' they said, 'greetings.'  
 'May god prosper you,' he said, 'and do you have any news?'  
 'Lord,' they said, 'we have extraordinary news; we have seen a forest on the sea, where we never before saw a single tree.'  
 'That's strange,' he said. 'Could you see anything else?'  
 'Yes, lord,' they said, 'we could see a huge mountain beside the forest, and it was moving; and there was a very high ridge on the mountain, and a lake on each side of the ridge; and a forest, and the mountain, and all of it was moving.'  
 'Well,' said Matholwch, 'there is no one here who would know anything about that unless Branwen knows something. Go and ask her.' Messengers went to Branwen.  
 'Lady,' they said, 'what do you think it is?'  
 'Though I am no "Lady",' she said, 'I know what it is: the men of the Island of the Mighty coming over, having heard of my punishment and dishonour.'  
 'What is the forest we saw on the sea?' they said.  
 'Masts of ships and yardarms,' she said.  
 'Oh!' they said. 'What was the mountain they saw alongside the ships?'

‘That was Bendigeidfran my brother, wading across,’ she said. There was no ship big enough for him.’

‘What was the very high ridge and the lake on each side of the ridge?’

‘That was him looking at this island,’ she said. ‘He is angry. The two lakes on either side of the ridge are his two eyes on each side of his nose’. (*The Mabinogion*, ed. Davies 2007, p. 29)

The exaggerated proportions involved clearly point to a mythological tale. Although the forest is associated with the sea here, the martial resonance is clear. The ruse is common to all of the narratives in that an army is mistaken for a moving forest. However, in contradistinction to *Macbeth*, there is no sign in the *Branch of Branwen* of any will on the part of Bendigeidfran to trick his opponents purposely by disguising his army.

According to Guyonvarc’h, the motif of the vegetal war is also present in a modified form on the continent, in Celtic Gaul. Livy produces an account of the battle between the Gauls and the Romans in the forest of Litana in which the trees were used not for camouflage, but as weapons:

Just as these measure were being taken, a fresh disaster was reported – for fortune was piling one upon the other for that year – namely, that the consul designate, Lucius Postumius, had perished, himself and his army, in Gaul. There was a huge forest called Litana<sup>366</sup> by the Gauls, by way of which he was about to lead his army. In that forest the Gauls hacked the trees to right and left of the road in such a way that, if not disturbed, they stood, but fell if pushed slightly. Postumius had two Roman legions, and had enlisted from the coast of the upper sea such number of allies that he had twenty five thousand armed men into the enemy’s territory. The Gauls had surrounded the very edge of the forest, and when the column entered a defile they pushed against the outermost of the trees that had been hacked near the ground. As these fell, each upon the next tree, which was in itself unsteady and had only a slight hold, piling up from both sides they overwhelmed arms, men and horses, so that hardly ten men escaped. For after many had been killed by tree trunks and broken branches, and the rest of the troops were alarmed by the unforeseen calamity, the Gauls under arms, surrounding the whole defile slew them, while but few out of so many were captured, – the men who were making their way to a bridge over a river, but were

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<sup>366</sup> Gardner Moore’s edition notes that the forest of Litana was situated “near Mutina (Modena), and northwest of Bononia (Bologna)” (1940, p. 81).

cut off since the bridge had by that time been occupied by the enemy. (Livy XXIII, 24, ed. Gardner Moore 1940, p. 81-83)

Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux argue that this account of an actual historical event (216 BC) occupies a position somewhere between history and myth. They note that neither magic nor the druids are mentioned in this context. Yet, not only is the stratagem of the rows of trees falling on the Roman soldiers not historically verified, but it also appears to work too perfectly not to arouse suspicion. Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux explain the trajectory of the narrative by suggesting that Livy somehow introduced a Gallic myth into Roman history.<sup>367</sup> The sheer numbers involved point to myth: twenty five thousand soldiers decimated by an army of trees is hardly credible in the world of actual military tactics. Between myth and actual military strategy is where *Macbeth* is situated. It is as if Shakespeare himself had established a connection between history and myth which led him to appropriate a motif coming from his own Ancient past.

The presence of the walking forest in Roman versions, in the Medieval transcriptions of Celtic stories, in Holinshed's and Boece's Chronicles, and in Shakespeare's drama, attests that the motif had filtered down through time and, notwithstanding the possibility of his collaboration with Thomas Middleton, was available to Shakespeare by the time he came to write *Macbeth*. It demonstrates that the audiences in Shakespeare's time were receptive to such motifs and that traces of an Ancient native culture still existed and were recognised in the popular culture of Renaissance England.

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<sup>367</sup> Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux specify their indebtedness to Pierre Le Roux (*op. cit.*) who first worked on the connection between myth and history as regards the walking forest motif.

## Chapter 6

### *King Lear*: lost paradise

We have already explored the mythic foundations that underpin Shakespearean texts in the chapter on *Macbeth*. With *King Lear* we suggest that a Celtic reading of the play will contribute towards the completion of a full understanding of its tragic and wild dimension.

The very name of Lear, as it has already been noted earlier in relation to Gollancz, points to mythology, to the ancient insular god designating the ocean. His mythic stature associates him with the primitive founding gods, and he is linked to the Tuatha De Danann and to the mother goddess of Ireland Dôn or Dana.<sup>368</sup> His name is written Llŷr in the Welsh Mabinogi and Ler or Lir (genitive) in the Irish texts that have survived. He is the father of Manannan, one of the most important gods of the mythological cycle.<sup>369</sup> However, beyond his status of father and primordial divinity, the only narrative in which Ler appears is *Oidhe Chloinne Lir (The Death of the Children of Ler)*, transmitted at a later stage from the earlier appearances and highly Christianized. We have already observed that links with Shakespeare's play are scarce (see supra, chapter 2 and Annex for more details). Geoffrey integrated him into his *Historia* under the name of Leir, as did Holinshed in the Chronicles, and the story was developed in the anonymous play: *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (first registered performance and license 1594, first printing 1605).<sup>370</sup> The plot in Geoffrey and in the 1605 *Leir* closely

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<sup>368</sup> Guyonvarc'h and Le Roux note that: "On a douté expressément – et inutilement – de l'existence de cette divinité qui représente un des aspects des origines des Tuatha Dé Danann" [The existence of this divinity who represents one of the aspects of the origins of the Tuatha De Danann was expressly – and uselessly – put into question] (1986, p. 401, tr. CSL).

<sup>369</sup> O'Curry notes that Manannan Mac Lir is "Manannan, the son of Ler, the great Tuath de Danann chief, merchant and navigator, whose chief residence was Inis Manannain, or Manainn, that is, Manannan's Island, now corruptly called the Isle of Man" (O'Curry 1858, p. 380).

<sup>370</sup> Another play with a similar overall pattern of division of the kingdom set in the legendary pre-Roman past of Britain is *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine, the eldest son of King Brutus* (1595, anonymous). As Brutus's first son, Locrine was one of the legendary ancestors of Leir in Geoffrey's Chronicle. The play could have been written by the same dramatist as the anonymous *Leir* (ed. Lee 1909, p. xxi). It was misattributed to Shakespeare and its writer could be George Peele. Available at: <https://www.folger.edu/lochrine#page/leaf+C3+verso/mode/2up> (accessed 27/08/19).

resembles the basic structure of Shakespeare's play. Roth and Guirand note this link between mythology, the Chronicle, and Shakespeare:

À la déesse Dôn, s'apparente par quelque lien, sans que l'on sache trop bien lequel, le dieu Llyr (gal.) ou Ler, nom qui probablement désigne l'Océan. Son surnom, Llediaith (= à la demi-langue) laisse entendre que l'on comprend mal ce qu'il dit. Geoffroi de Monmouth, dans ses chroniques, l'assimile à un ancien roi de Grande Bretagne; et par l'adjonction de détails sans doute empruntés à quelque événement historique, il s'est humanisé jusqu'à devenir le roi Lear de Shakespeare.

[To the goddess Dôn, is connected by some link, without knowing precisely which one, the god Llyr (Welsh) or Ler, name which probably designates the Ocean. His nickname, Llediaith (half-tongued) supposes that it is difficult to understand him when he speaks. In his Chronicles, Geoffrey of Monmouth assimilates him to an ancient king of Britain; and, with the addition of details, without doubt borrowed from some historical event, he was humanized until becoming Shakespeare's *King Lear*]. (In *Mythologie Générale, Mythologie celtique*, G. Roth and F. Guirand, 1994 (1935), p. 210, tr. CSL)

The connection between Shakespeare's Lear and the Ancient god is all the more credible as Geoffrey, who was himself very likely of Welsh origin, transmitted at least the name and maybe certain motifs or Ancient traits, to later generations.

In *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare's Plays vol. VII*, Geoffrey Bullough acknowledges that "Lear may have been a creature of Celtic legends" (p. 271), but he doesn't develop this speculation. He also writes that Lear was a Celtic sea god and that contrary to Geoffrey's mention in the *Historia*, he may have had nothing to do with the foundation of Leicester (p. 272). Bullough goes on to argue that Shakespeare may have read Geoffrey in the original Latin *Historia* or "taken details from citations of Geoffrey by more recent writers" and he cites Perrett who traced Lear's intemperance and rashness to Geoffrey's account and Layamon's *Brut* (p. 273). Both integrate Celtic traits thereby suggesting Shakespeare's exposure to Celtic cultural elements.

In "Du *Brut* de Lazamon, au *King Lear* de Shakespeare : l'ellipse ou la 'tierce place'" (2013), and in "Du *King Lear* de Shakespeare à la légende de Brut : texte, intertexte et transtextualité" (2009) Danièle Berton Charrière studies the tensions and the voids between plays and Chronicles, traces the Brut legend to their confluence of Roman, Greek and Celtic

roots (2009, p. 49), acknowledging that in *King Lear*, “les cultures chrétienne et celte, ainsi que le Moyen-âge et la Renaissance qui s’entremêlent au sein de l’écriture, semblent y trouver des points de convergence au travers du schéma ternaire fondateur et structurant” [Christian and Celtic cultures, as well as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which intertwine within the writing seem to find there points of convergence through the ternary founding and structuring pattern] (2013, p. 208, tr. CSL). Her remarks on the intrinsic value of number three in the play also contribute to the highlighting of its Celtic substrate.

In *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic* (2014), Janet Clare compares intertextual references between *Leir* and *Lear*, imagining a discourse about the reception of the first play but eventually leaving the matter undeveloped in her argument. She acknowledges the ostensibly pagan world of *Leir*, together with the presence of folk-tale and oral culture, “evident” she argues, in the love test (p. 217). Bullough observes that in Shakespeare “the love-test is less thoroughly explained than in *Leir*. Apparently it is a mere whim of the old King, who at the moment of abdication wants to be assured that he is much beloved. [...] By omitting the preparatory matter of the old play, Shakespeare makes [Cordelia’s] bold understatement a hammer-blow to the audience as well as to Lear himself” (Vol 7, p. 287). Let us recall what happens at this point in the play: on the verge of dividing his kingdom between his three daughters, Lear speaks:

LEAR

Tell me, my daughters –  
Since now we will divest us both of rule,  
Interest of territory, cares of state –  
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where nature doth merit challenge. – Goneril,  
Our eldest born, speak first. (1.1.48-54)

The two elder daughters praise their father and when it is finally Cordelia’s turn to speak, she says: “Nothing, my lord” (1.1.87). Against her father’s desire to be publicly adored by his daughters in exchange for land, she claims her right to love him just as a daughter should do: “Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more, no less” (1.1.91-93).

The motif of the love-trial, already present in Geoffrey (ii.11, p. 81) is also to be found in the Gaelic Glenmasan Manuscript, labeled liii of the Scottish Collection in the Advocates’



Library, in Edinburgh. It came to be known as ‘Glen-Masan’ because of an inscription on the inner side of the first leaf stating that it was written there: “Gleannmasain an Cuige la deug don ... Mi ... do bhlian ar tsaorrse Mile da Chead Trichid sa hocht” [Glenmasan, the fifteenth day of the ... month of the year of our Redemption, one thousand two hundred thirty and eight] (Mackinnon 1904, p. 3). Mackinnon affirms that the existing copy of the manuscript is not earlier than the late 15<sup>th</sup> century but may well have been transcribed from an earlier manuscript dating from 1238. He goes on to argue that: “One may go farther, and say that the contents of our MS. were reduced to writing long before 1238 AD. The traditions recorded are placed immediately before the great Ulster war which culminated in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, i.e., in native chronology, shortly before the commencement of the Christian era” (*ibid.*, p. 4). Thus, the motif seems to belong to Ancient Gaelic tradition (Irish and Scottish) that must have been somehow accessible to Geoffrey, since he subsumes it into his narrative, as we are going to see shortly. The episode is part of the tale of *Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach*, one of *The Three Sorrows of Storytelling*. King Conchobar wants the best of his men to go and fetch the valorous sons of Usnach who have been exiled to Scotland,<sup>371</sup> and bring them back to Ireland. But first, in order to decide who will go, he asks his three most valiant warriors to declare who ‘loves him most’:

‘Who will go upon that (message)?’ said they all. ‘I know’ said Conchobar, ‘that it is one of Naisi’s prohibitions not to come to Ireland in peace, except with **three** men, namely Cuchulainn son of Subaltam, and Conall son of Aimirgin, and Fergus son of Ros; and I shall (now) know which of these three men loves me most.’ **And he took Conall into a place apart, and asked him:** ‘What would you do, royal-hero of the world, if you were sent for the sons of Uisnech, and that they were destroyed notwithstanding your safeguard and honour, which I do not purpose to do?’ ‘No the death of one man would result from that,’ said Conall, ‘but no Ulsterman whom I could lay hold of would escape from me without death and destruction and slaughter being inflicted upon him.’ ‘That is true, Conall,’ said Conchobar; ‘now I understand that you love me not.’ **And he sent Conall from him; and Cuchulainn was brought to him, and he asked the same thing of him.** ‘I give my word,’ said Cuchulainn, ‘if you were to search eastwards unto

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<sup>371</sup> Deirdre, Naisi and his two brothers fled to Scotland to escape Conchobar’s wrath after Deirdre refused to marry him. She fell in love with Naisi and talked him into leaving Ireland and living in exile in Scotland, in peace. But Conchobar wants the best warriors of the Red Branch, and Deirdre, back to Ireland and he lures them back with false promises transmitted in earnest by his envoy. Here, Deirdre’s birth, education, and meeting with Naisi and his brothers is not told and the manuscript opens with Conchobar’s great feast in Emain Macha. The love-test follows rapidly after the beginning.

India, I would not take a bribe in the globe from you, but you yourself would fall in that deed.' 'That is true, Cu, that not with me... and now I perceive that (I am) not hated by you.' **And he sent Cuchulainn away, and Fergus was brought to him. And he asked the same thing of him.** And this is what Fergus said to him: 'I promise not to take your blood,' said Fergus; 'and yet there is not an Ulsterman whom I should lay hold of who would not find death and slaughter from me.' 'It is you who shall go for the children of Uisnech, royal soldier,' said Conchobar; 'and set forward to-morrow,' said he, 'for it is with you they will come.' (tr. Mackinnon 1904, p. 17, my emphasis in bold letters).

The first similarity between Conchobar and Leir is that they are king figures both pointing to the mythic element in the narrative. We have already sketched Leir's vague portrait, not much being known of the sea god; here is, condensed, a summary of Conchobar's narrative environment in the Ulster cycle of Irish mythology:

Ulster cycle, Irish Ulaid Cycle, in ancient Irish literature, a group of legends and tales dealing with the heroic age of the Ulaid, a people of northeast Ireland from whom the modern name Ulster derives. The stories, set in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, were recorded from oral tradition between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century and are preserved in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts *The Book of the Dun Cow* (c. 1100) and *The Book of Leinster* (c. 1160) and also in later compilations, such as *The Yellow Book of Lecan* (14<sup>th</sup> century). They reflect the customs of a free pre-Christian aristocracy who fought from chariots, took heads as trophies, were subjects to taboo (geis), and were influenced by druids. Mythological elements are freely intermingled with legendary elements that have an air of authenticity. Events centre on the reign of the semi-historical King Conor (Conchobar mac Nessa) at Emain Macha (near modern Armagh) and his Knights of the Red Branch (i.e. the palace building in which the heads and arms of vanquished enemies were stored). A rival court at Connaught is ruled by King Ailill and Queen Medb. The chief hero of the Red Branch is the Achilles-like Cú Chulainn, born of a mortal mother, Dechtire, the sister of King Conor, and a divine father, the god Lug of the Long Arm. (Britannica.com)<sup>372</sup>

Thus, Conchobar (anglicized form: 'Conor') is not a primitive divinity belonging to the founding mythology of *The Book of Conquests of Ireland* like Leir, but he is part of the later

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<sup>372</sup> Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/Ulster> (accessed 27/08/19).

Ulster cycle. He is a great king, at the head of a famous house, The Red Branch, composed of not less famous warriors. In certain respects, these men resemble Lear's train of warriors, although their number appears more and more reduced as the story unfolds. The taking of the heads as trophies illustrates further our study of the severed head motif in *Cymbeline* and *Macbeth*, and the *geis* evoked above is a purely Celtic trait, a prohibition, something that cannot be avoided under any circumstances; this is similar to the fact that Naisi cannot come back from Scotland in peace, except with one of the three men named by Conchobar: Conall, Cú chulainn or Fergus.

The number three is also reminiscent of what we have seen so far with the triad motif: three soldiers to fetch three brothers, three questions and three answers. However, the warriors do not bear the same names, nor are they brothers, and therefore they do not constitute a true triad. The questioning, repeated three times, seems to be a narrative process and a mnemonic means of storytelling, as Rachel Bromwich argues it was the case concerning *The Triads of Ynys Prydein* (2014 (1961), p. liv). Hence Janet Clare is correct in her perception of residual orality in the love-trial motif of the 1605 *Leir* (2014, p. 217). Associations are easier to remember than single isolated facts and the figure three offers a possibility of evolution, with a beginning, a middle and an end, as Berton-Charrière citing de Bruyne observed: “[t]rois est le premier nombre parfait, puisqu’il a un commencement, un milieu, une fin. Chacune de ces parties a le même rapport à l’unité” [three is the first perfect number, since it has a beginning, a middle part, an end. Each of these parts has the same relationship to unity] (Berton Charrière 2013, p. 209, citing de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 1998, vol. 1, p. 87). A logical development and mnemonic techniques of repetition aid the purpose of remembrance and oral transmission.<sup>373</sup> Thus, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* has preserved this oral mode of telling stories coming from Ancient Celtic culture in Lear’s successive interrogation of his three daughters. The only notable difference is that in the plays – *Leir* and *Lear* – the king and the princesses are on stage at the same time and overhear each other’s answers, while in the Glenmasan manuscript, as well as in Geoffrey, the king questions the three persons separately. The ritual of having each candidate come and then be sent away also helps the audience to follow the development of the narrative, each step at a time, allowing each situation to build on the next one (see the words in bold in the extract from the Glenmasan manuscript above).

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<sup>373</sup> The particularities of oral culture, mnemonic techniques and storytelling skills linked to Shakespeare and the Early Modern society would require more space than we have here and will be the object of a further study.

So far as we can tell, this reference to the love-test in the Glenmasan manuscript has never before been identified as a ‘resource’ for Shakespeare’s play. This connection with a narrative relating pre-Christian ‘events’ demonstrates that a residual part of Ancient native oral culture is present in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and this opens the way for a deeper analysis of the Celtic cultural elements. The progressive study so far unfolded and the exploration of the various motifs already analyzed allow us to attempt a Celtic reading of *King Lear*, without forgetting that other structural elements are also present in the foreground of the play.

The Classics, especially Seneca, play a large role in *King Lear*, as Colin Burrow has demonstrated:

The play is deeply influenced not just by Seneca the dramatist, but by Seneca the philosopher, with whom it repeatedly argues. Seneca was the greatest and the most accessible classical theorist of anger, which is of course superabundant in *King Lear*. Seneca also in his essay *De Beneficiis* set out a vision of society as an exchange-mechanism in which gifts and gratitude provide the foundations of all social interchange. In the *De Beneficiis* Seneca also repeatedly poses paradoxical and dangerous questions, like whether the benefit given by parent to their children is the greatest benefit of all – to which Seneca returns a defiant ‘no’. These questions become part of the argument of *King Lear*. (BSA Conference 2014, text reproduced with kind permission of the author)

At least two of the play’s central issues can be illustrated with reference to Senecan ideology: dominant anger and filial debt. We will not develop further the relationship between Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity (see Colin Burrow’s dedicated chapters in *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 2013, p. 186-201), but we acknowledge its presence in the forefront, during a period deeply influenced by the Humanist tradition and the rediscovery of the Classics.

Furthermore, another structural element appears in the foreground of the play. Helen Cooper observes that the doctrine of salvation, fully expressed in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, emanating from the Roman Catholic ideology, includes the terrible events of the Passion and Crucifixion as the means by which fallen mankind can be restored so that the Bliss of Heaven becomes once more possible. Cooper also notes that romance, and its “typical pattern of an opening disruption of a state of order, followed by a period of trial and suffering, even an encounter with death, yet with a final resurrection and better restoration, offers a secular

equivalent to that divine order: a ‘secular scripture’ in Northrop Frye’s phrase” (*ibid.*). Parallels are clearly observable in the structure of *King Lear*, to the extent that the weight of tragedy overcomes the happy ending usually found in romance, and pain, trial and endurance, the bulk of every romance (Cooper p. 88), end here in death. Also, Lear faces what can be called an inner quest, which combines the religious search and romance quest, the *peregrinatio in stabilitate*, the pilgrimage without movement, as Cooper identifies it, where “fear is a state of mind, and some romance terrors are as much inward as outward” (p. 84), although in Shakespeare’s play Lear moves out and faces the elements in the tempest scene, like Myrddin the wild, or Lancelot both of whom exiled themselves in the wild. As a last example augmenting this list, the penitential quest, a model familiar from early 14<sup>th</sup> to late 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as one of the most difficult experiences, is emphasized by the romance narratology of excess (Cooper p. 88), and this anatomy of excess is also present in Lear’s progress.

Thus, the Christian redemptive pattern and its doctrine of atonement, i.e. the hero’s “restoration of his earthly happiness before his pious death” (Cooper p. 94), is a prevailing trajectory in *Lear*, that must also be considered along with the issue of the genre of the play. Cooper summarizes the two narrative lines: “Tragedy is the genre in which consequences far outweigh initial errors; romance is the genre in which such grim consequences are not the final word, but can be followed by bliss within this world. The romances of atonement offer a this-worldly equivalent to the Church’s stress on the forgiveness of sin” (Cooper, p. 88). Bullough summarizes Lear’s ‘pilgrim’ side: “he has far to go before he becomes ‘the pattern of all patience’, and his pilgrimage through madness to self-knowledge, altruism, humility and repentance is traced with a skill of genius” (Bullough vol. 7, p. 297). The progress of the tragic line prevents Lear from overcoming fate in the final analysis, but at least, in the reconciliation with Cordelia, and recognition of his error, there is a hope of forgiveness for him in death, at the end of the play.

However, beyond Christian redemptive patterns, there are also Celtic motifs, which we will argue, contribute to the play’s strength and depth. The love-trial motif is one of them, and its function clearly refers to the main structure of the play. Lear’s fatal decision was triggered from the start by the death of his wife and by his use of the love test. As the extract from the Glenmasan manuscript suggests, in the Ancient tradition, such a ‘love test’ amounted to proving the ‘love’ i.e. fidelity to a sovereign by convincing him he would not be harmed by subjects. Geoffrey probably modified this tradition to apply it to a demonstration of filial love.

Both senses are related to affection and attachment,<sup>374</sup> but in *Lear*, the anatomy of excess oversteps reason and triggers chaos. Reading the Celtic sub-strata, following Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome, implies detaching oneself from the norm and creating fleeting lines of connection that open out onto a new Shakespearean resource. The motifs we offer in this last chapter dedicated to *King Lear* are: the relationship between kingship and the bear, the relationship between the King, the Queen and the land and, finally, the Otherworld.

### **1. Kingship and the bear: evolution and relic of a Celtic motif**

After introducing the subject by explaining the Celtic conception of the bear as a royal symbol, the reason for the bear's downfall, measuring his status in Early Modern England, we will develop the figure of Lear as a 'bear king', also in relation to Arthur and Macbeth. The second part of this argument will be devoted to the figure of Gloucester, Lear's double, and his blindness, and finally we will question the function of the bear motif as regards the main theme of the play, and its representation in theatre. The overall purpose is to measure what is left of the Ancient motif in Shakespeare's plays, and to analyze its function.

In *L'ours, histoire d'un roi déchu* [*The Bear, History of a Fallen King*] (2007, tr. CSL), French historian Michel Pastoureau demonstrates that the bear cult has extremely deep roots, anterior to the most remote Antiquity, even before Neolithic times. To his knowledge, the most ancient statue made by man was a bear and dates from 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. It was found in the cave of Montespan, in Haute Garonne in France and testifies to early magic-religious rituals probably linked to hunting (p. 40-41).<sup>375</sup> The proximity between man and bear dates back to pre-historical times when it was not uncommon for both to share caverns (p. 23), and from this proximity a certain form of assimilation may have led to an identification of man with the figure of the bear and his physical strength. He goes on to argue that the efforts deployed by the Church over almost a thousand years to eradicate the pagan bear cults demonstrate their deep and Ancient roots (p. 42).

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<sup>374</sup> The first sense of 'love' in the *OED* encloses "[s]enses relating to affection and attachment: a feeling or disposition of deep affection or fondness for someone, typically arising from a recognition of attractive qualities, from natural affinity, or from sympathy and manifesting itself in concern for the other's welfare and pleasure in his or her presence (distinguished from sexual love at sense 4a); great liking, strong emotional attachment; (similarly) a feeling or disposition of benevolent attachment experience toward a group or category of people, and (by extension) toward one's country or another impersonal object of affection" (*OED*<sup>1</sup>). This also includes filial love, and by extension, through the love for one's country, the love of the sovereign is impersonated.

<sup>375</sup> On the walls of the Chauvet cave, several silhouettes of red bears are drawn (dating about -32000 to -30000), and in one of the most remote rooms in the depth of the cave, a bear skull was voluntarily left and exposed on a rock, hereby suggesting a primitive cult, or at least the admiration of men for this wild animal.

Pastoureau summarizes the problematic of the bear motif, related to the evolution of the status of the animal over time:

[c]hez les Celtes – comme chez les Germains, chez les Baltes et chez les Slaves – , l'ours est le roi de tous les animaux et, ce faisant, l'animal royal par excellence. Il le restera dans une large partie de l'Europe chrétienne pendant tout le haut Moyen-Âge, et même encore au lendemain de l'an mille, jusqu'à ce que l'Eglise, adversaire déclarée de l'ours, réussisse enfin à installer sur ce trône symbolique un autre fauve : le lion.

[For the Celts – as for the Germans, the Baltic and Slav people –, the bear is the king of all animals and as such, the royal animal par excellence. He will remain as such in a large part of Christian Europe throughout the Dark Ages, and even after the turn of the millennium, until the Church, declared adversary of the bear, at last succeeded in placing another wild beast on this symbolic throne: the lion] (Pastoureau 2007, p. 52, tr. CSL).

In *As You Like It* (1598), Oliver stresses “the royal disposition” of a “lioness” (4.3.113, 116), possibly alluding to Elizabeth I, and in *Twelfth Night*, the lion is considered by Olivia as noble while the wolf is vicious (3.1.127, and corresponding note). Philippe Walter argues that the destitution of the bear and the enthroning of the lion as king of the animals became visible in literature in *Le Roman de Renard*, between 1150 and 1250, at the same time as the Arthurian tale was developing. He also notes Pastoureau's mention of the Dutch version of *Le Roman de Renard* in which it is said that the bear was ‘once’ king of animals (Walter 2002, note 29 p. 97, citing Pastoureau 1986, p. 171). Animals came to embody human characteristics and it was also true for the bear which, because of its proximity to man and its threatening bestial behaviour was considered evil.

Several characteristics were attributed to the bear and contributed to his downfall: laziness, lust, and rage amongst others. Their presence in Shakespeare's plays suggests that the bear was part of the current discourse of Early Modern London. In *Measure for Measure*, Barnardine, who himself carries the name of the bear, allusively evokes one of the animal's traits: “Away, you rogue, away; I am sleepy” (4.3.29). Although his drowsiness comes from a severe ingestion of alcohol (line 42 he says he has been drinking all night), the allusion to the bear's sleepy, and lazy, nature is only half disguised. Furthermore, Barnardine, as a dissolute prisoner living in a gaol can be assimilated to a caged, possibly hibernating bear, sleeping in his den.

In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia, in love with Viola disguised as Cesario declares: “Have you not set mine honour at the stake / And baited it with all th’unmuzzled thoughts / That tyrannous heart can think?” (3.1.116-118). This complex motif needs to be explained in two phases since it integrates at the same time the cruel ‘sport’ of bear-baiting and female honour, i.e. chastity and therefore sexuality, an element that is also linked to the image of the bear in this cluster of meanings. Let us start with a brief overview of the function of bear baiting, a common entertainment where an animal – a bear or bull – was tied to a stake by a rope or a chain, and dogs were let loose to harry them. In London, the places dedicated to these bloody but highly popular entertainments were on the South bank of the Thames in the borough of Southwark, not far from the Globe theatre. They were the Bear Garden, the Paris Garden, and the Hope with its moveable stage performed both bear baitings and plays, thus creating a proximity between the ‘play house’ and the ‘bear house’; as Terence Hawkes notes, both were “perceived as dealing in the oral opposite of an abstract, academic and written-down law” (Hawkes 2002, p. 92). As Hawkes goes on to observe, names were given to popular bears, like Harry Hunks of the Bear Garden, who was regularly whipped: “His human name and the hint of a recognizable ‘personality’ makes it difficult for us to comprehend the attraction of his regular, carefully staged whipping” (Hawkes, p. 87).

Hawkes argues that “bear baiting belongs to and evokes a pre-literate, oral sphere of concrete, unanalyzed custom, myth and folk-tale – of ‘lore’– to which a written, abstract, codified rationally based set of equivalences and injunctions – a reified ‘law’ – must inevitably be opposed” (p. 92). We are not sure exactly which pre-oral culture Hawkes is referring to here, although it seems to us that it is not part of Celtic culture. Rather, the practice of mistreating the bear was induced by the Church’s definitive sentence against him: “ursus est diabolus” [the bear is the devil], pronounced by Saint Augustine at the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century. Pastoureau states that this was the origin of the elaboration of the Christian symbolising of the animal over centuries (Pastoureau 2007, p. 153).

At the heart of this Christian symbolic practice was the animality of the bear and its resemblance to man: it could walk on two feet, was said to make love like man and was omnivorous. This semblance evoked a mirror image of man, but its evil side, the element of animal instinct that had to be fought in man, and the bear’s hirsuteness expressed a free-ranging animality, doubled with what was thought a “rampant and unrestrained sexuality”



(Hawkes p. 90).<sup>376</sup> This is why the Church waged such a war against the bear, and why Saint Augustine, preoccupied with erasing man's natural instinct, issued his sentence against the animal.<sup>377</sup> The practice of bear-baiting is a prolongation of this fight against a particular instinct. Hawkes argues that "[u]ndoubtedly, at some level, bear-baiting acts out the mastery of human culture over an unredeemed 'natural' world", and he adds that the process also has to be deconstructed insofar as there was no 'nature' here and that man was only fighting the produce of his own construction (Hawkes, p. 91). It was in fact the product of the Christian Church's construction over the centuries. In the Middle Ages, the bear came to occupy the first place in Satan's bestiary to be finally dethroned by other animals at the end of the Medieval period, but lust was part of the five capital sins associated with the bear (Pastoureau, p. 167, p. 243, p. 245-246).

Topsell's *The Historie of Four-footed Beasts* (1607), describes this characteristic, reflecting that the ideology of Early Modern time, followed from the Medieval conception. Stories about maids being abducted and raped by bears were frequent<sup>378</sup> and Topsell qualifies the species "of a mose venereous and lustfull disposition, for night and day the females with most ardent inflamed desires, doe provoke the males to copulation, and for this cause at that time they are most fierce an angry" (1607, p. 37, l. 7-9). Pierre Damien, one of the precursors of the great reform of the Church in the 11<sup>th</sup> century separated the bear species into male and female: the first incarnates furor, i.e. wild strength, anger, violence, and the second embodies lust, sexual appetite (Pierre Damien, *De bono religiosi status*, c. 1060, in Pastoureau, p. 238). We will come back to the notion of 'furor' in relation to Lear, but the last remarks about the female bear's sexual appetite allow us to come back to Olivia's statement of being symbolically baited at the stake by Cesario's 'thoughts'. Olivia is thus depicted as the female bear expressing her desire for a boy who has tied her to the stake, has made her the victim of what she herself would like to be an 'unmuzzled' game of love, i.e. the free expression of desire. Furthermore, as Hawkes notes, the verb 'bait' offers two opposed areas of meaning: the straightforward sense of teasing, tormenting, and persecuting, and the now archaic sense

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<sup>376</sup> Pastoureau states that more than any other features, his supposed lubricity and taste for debauchery contributed to demonize the bear (p. 99).

<sup>377</sup> Pastoureau notes that Saint Augustine also issued a statement against the lion, saying that: "In istis duabus bestiis idem diabolus figuratus est" [in these two beasts, it is the Devil himself who is incarnated] (in *Sermones*, XVII, 37, tr. CSL from the French). Pastoureau goes on with saying that Saint Augustine maintained this line of thought which influenced Medieval discourse for a long time. The bear suffered most from it but the lion too, because its assimilation with the Devil postponed its definite recognition as king of animals for about eight centuries (Pastoureau 2007, p. 161).

<sup>378</sup> Topsell narrates the story of Phillipus Coseus of Constance who "did most confidently tell [him] that in the Mountains of Savoy, a Beare carried a young maide into his denne by violence, where in venereous manner he had the carnall use of her body" (1607, p. 37, l. 10-12).

of (stopping) to feed, rest, refresh, nourish or sustain, as in ‘to bait a horse’, especially during a journey (Hawkes, p. 106). Thus, Olivia, the female bear tied to the stake, finds herself both tormented and nourished by Cesario’s ‘thoughts’, and the imagery of the bear both sustains her fantasies, and expresses her passion. Shakespeare encapsulates a cluster of meanings in these two lines, referring to a very common entertainment and to conceptions concerning the bear that were part of the social discourse of his time, thus demonstrating how central the animal figure was. Before moving on to *Lear*, our last example that will illustrate the bear in Shakespeare’s plays while also contributing to the identification of the animal’s place in Early Modern times, is related to another of his characteristics as evil and fierce beast.

In Topsell’s *Historie*, at the very beginning of the chapter on the bear, the first information available signals the status of the animal and reveals the conception of the time. The ‘epithites of the bear’, a list of qualifying terms found among Greek and Latin authors, define the animal: “Aemonina beares, armed, filthy, deformed, cruell, dreadfull, fierce, greedy, Callidonian, Erymanthean, bloody, heavy, night-ranging, lybican, menacing, Numidian, Ossean, headlong, ravening, rigide and terrible beare” (1607, p. 35, l. 11-14). In this long list of mostly negative appellatives, the term ‘Callidonian’ is worth noticing. It relates to Scotland as the origin of one of the most famous bears. This is telling as regards *Macbeth*, when he too uses the imagery of the bear tied to the stake in 5.7 and 5.8., and we will return to it. In *Twelfth Night*, the character of Malvolio, Olivia’s steward, embodies the evil aspect of the bear; both are related to each other by their connection to animality.<sup>379</sup> His Italian name literally means ‘I dislike’, and is related to ‘ill will’, as in ‘mala voglia’, but ‘mal’ is also a negative word meaning ‘evil’, as in ‘malevolent’, the opposite of ‘benevolent’ (Benvolio, in *RJ*), or as the Arden edition of the play states, it also means ‘sickness’, and indeed Olivia accuses him of being ‘sick of self-love’ (*TN*, p. 158).

Malvolio, so it appears because of his name, finds himself the object of Sir Toby’s and Fabian’s plan, a bear to be baited:

SIR TOBY     Wouldst thou not be glad to have the niggardly,  
rascally sheep-biter come by some notable shame?

FABIAN        I would exult, man. You know he brought me out  
o’ favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here.

SIR TOBY     To anger him, we’ll have the bear again, and we

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<sup>379</sup> This is verified again in the exchange they have in 3.4: [Olivia] “Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?” / [Malvolio] “To bed? Ay, sweetheart, and I’ll come to thee” (3.4.28-29). Although the scene is a succession of misunderstandings, the allusion is there which matches the characters’ association with the reputedly lusty bear.

will fool him black and blue, shall we not, Sir Andrew? (2.5.4-9)

Malvolio appears as the mean, wretched, worthless man deserving to be beaten black and blue, i.e. taught a lesson that will shame him absolutely. But also, they want to 'anger' him, that is to say, to tease him and bait him, thereby triggering his natural beastly wrath. And indeed, they will torment him, in comic mode, until he is caged. Of course the image of Malvolio with his yellow stockings is ridiculous and laughable, but the under-layer is more tragic than comic and as Hawkes observes: "Malvolio's final cry 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' suddenly turns him into a whipped, tortured bear, beset by baiting dogs" (p. 94). The tragic undertone refers to the downfall of a once admired wild animal, once the symbol of royalty, decimated, tamed, captured, ridiculed as in *Le Roman de Renard*, and baited. As Hawkes writes, "[b]ear baiting was an institution in Britain, at its peak when Shakespeare was writing" (p. 84); the numerous references to the entertainment in the plays attest to it. What is more, their presence allows us to consider the motif of the bear with all its implications, as part of these con-text of the plays. The Ancient Celtic traits will only serve to further illustrate an already present dynamic feature of Early Modern society.

### **1.1 The bear king**

The place of the bear in Early Modern England is paradoxical because it was not only limited to popular bear baitings which were, it should be added, also supported by both Queen Elizabeth and King James. The bear remained an emblem of power, to a certain extent. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth's close friend, favourite and counselor used the badge of the Earls of Warwick: the (white) bear and the ragged staff as a personal badge and seal, and as the crest of his coats of arm. He surmounted it with a coronet, reputedly given to him by Queen Elizabeth herself. The bear appears to be linked to a very influential courtier in the close company of the queen, whose ambition was to marry her. It was retained as a symbol of power from the Middle Ages, and is still today the emblem on the flag of Warwickshire. However, one can notice the evolution of the status of the animal in that emblem, since the bear is muzzled and attached to a staff by a chain. The symbol here is that of man's domination over wild nature. It is in keeping with the value attributed to the animal: admired, given as a present and kept in the royal menageries of Europe. During the Middle Ages, the bear was one of the most valuable gifts a king could offer to another sovereign, especially a white bear (Pastoureau, p. 84). Leicester's use of the emblem of the Earls of

Warwick is in keeping with that tradition of the powerful but captive animal. Through its colour but also its captivity, the white bear on the walls of Leicester Hospital recalls the crouching white stag of Wilton's diptych. The white animal is always seen as a 'passeur' to the Otherworld, therefore domination over such animals, translates as a desire to show one's power over this world and the other. Besides, bear and stag were both considered for their sexual and warlike power, from Celtic time through the Middle Ages and beyond. Here the evolution from the Celtic conception of the 'ursine' king, through to the Christian period appears, where the sexual and warlike power of the animal must be subdued, yet paradoxically continue to be praised. The bear is asked to span a wide range of significations between being wild and combative on the one hand, but also being subdued and baited on the other. In the relatively new social order, where the purpose of killing the wild animal is no longer to internalise its strength but to dominate it, and where dominating the nature of the bear amounts to taming the nature of man. The Celtic conception differs insofar as the animal's powerful nature is seen as being internalized in the sovereign.

Let us first briefly recall the etymology of the word 'bear' in relation to kingship, before dealing with Lear, his capacity for anger and his links with animality.

The name of the bear in Celtic languages has already been evoked: *artos*, Irish *art*, Welsh *arth*, Breton *arzh*, which is part of the Welsh name of Arthur, derived from an Ancient Brittonic form *artoris* in which only the suffix is of Latin origin (Chevalier Gheebandt 1982, p. 716, p. 78). The name of Arthur is intrinsically associated with the bear, thus revealing a link between kingship and the wild animal. Pastoureau also notes two further etymological lines: one of them is a common Germanic root *ghwer* or *bher*, meaning 'the strong, the violent, the one who hits and kills'; or, in Indo-European, as Sanskrit root *par* or *bar* meaning 'brown' and 'shiny'. The adjective *barun*, *braun*, in several Germanic languages means 'brown and shiny'. The name of Berowne in *LLL* comes from this etymology. Furthermore, Orsino ('little bear') in *TN*, is the Duke of Illyria, the play's most potent male protagonist; he is not a king, but a duke, therefore an 'orsino', a little bear.<sup>380</sup> The name of the bear continues to be linked to power. At the same time dark and shiny, the bear is for Ancient societies a lunar animal; an animal associated with the night, but a shiny night with a cold nocturnal light (Pastoureau, p. 71). Lear appeals to "The Mysteries of Hecate and the night" as much as to the "sacred radiance of the sun" (1.1.110-111), thereby relating himself both to the bear and the

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<sup>380</sup> The collocation of Orsino and Valentin, one of his attendants in the same play recalls the story of *Valentin and Orson*, the two sons of the Emperor of Constantinople, a highly popular Medieval tale still in vogue in Early Modern times. It was staged by the Queen's Men in the years 1590s (Pastoureau, p. 277, Cooper, p. 1).

lion, lunar and solar animals par excellence, and asserting the multifold cultural resources of his character.

In relation to anger, Bullough states that “[i]n *Leir*, the King is a weak old man, sketched without depth or complexity, who after his outburst against Cordella endures without anger except for an occasional flash of bitter irony. Shakespeare’s monarch is violent, intemperate, resistant to the wrongs he has to suffer” (vol 7. p. 297). In German pagan traditions, rituals involved being invested with the power and strength of the animals by eating their flesh or dressing in their hides (Pastoureau, p. 69). The word ‘berserker’ or ‘berserkir’, from the Icelandic meaning ‘bear coat’ designates half-naked semi-bestial warriors who descended into a trance when fighting.<sup>381</sup> In Celtic tradition, the bear symbolizes the emblem of the warrior caste, just as the wild boar represents spiritual power. Its strength illustrates the figure of a powerful king.

This relationship between the former king of animals and kingship is illustrated in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, a play set in Ancient times when this tradition was active. During the tempest scene in act three, Lear seems to identify himself with the bear in his address to Kent:

LEAR

Thou think’st this much contentious storm  
Invades us to the skin: so ‘tis to thee,  
But where greater malady is fixed,  
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou’dst shun a bear,  
But if thy flight lay toward the **roaring** sea,  
Thou’dst **meet** the **bear** i’ the **mouth**. When the mind’s free,  
The body is delicate: this tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,  
Save what beats there, filial ingratitude.  
Is it not as this **mouth** should **tear** this hand  
For lifting food to’t? But I will punish home;  
No, I will weep no more. In such a night  
To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure.  
In such a night as this? O, Regan, Goneril,

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<sup>381</sup> ‘Berserker’: 1822, “a wild Norse warrior, who fought on the battle-field with a frenzied fury known as the ‘berserker rage’” (*OED*). Pastoureau refers to the chess pieces made of walrus ivory in Norway and found in the sand on the Isle of Lewis (British Museum). Among them, there are three warrior pawns, dressed in long hairy shirts and represented in such a frenzied state that they eat their shields (Pastoureau, p. 66-67).

Your old, kind father, whose frank heart gave you all –  
O, that way madness lies, let me shun that;  
No more of that. (3.4.6-22, emphases are mine)

Despite his age, weakness and the disease that infects him (we will come back to ‘the mother’ shortly), Lear’s power is still visible. He is infuriated by his elder daughters’ lack of consideration for him, and their refusal to give him hospitality. As a result, he wanders on the heath, at night, and in a storm. Here the bear, the lunar animal, is abroad, and at night. He does not feel the rain on his skin because, he says, it is a lesser cause of trouble than his ‘malady’, but the tempest infects his mind and body, and enrages him. Baited by his own family members, if his wrath is allowed free rein he will be reduced to devouring his own flesh: “Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand / For lifting food to it?” (l. 15-16). He has nourished his enemies but now he can only turn his wrath against himself, for his enemies have become his own children, his own flesh and blood.

In the first part of the passage, up to line 16, he expresses his anger and identifies himself both with the bear and the ocean, two attributes referring to his status as Ancient king (the bear) and to his godly nature (the ocean). These attributes articulate themselves in one single adjective, ‘roaring’ – since both the sea and the bear can roar. His flow of speech is rather constant and fluid, the sentences not too short, but ideas come and go like the ebb and flow of the waves while the bear image does not seem to connect with the first three lines that are concerned with the storm and his ‘malady’. He is Lear, the man, and the king, weakened by his daughters’ collective treachery, but he is also ‘Ler’, the sea, the ocean, that roars as loud as the bear with which he identifies himself. The mouth of the bear (line 11) triggers the parallel with ‘this mouth’ (l.15), and the devouring metaphor also starts here, with the paronomastic effect in ‘meet’, ‘meat’ (l. 11). Lear equates the roaring sea with being in the mouth of a roaring bear and he becomes that bear, capable of eating his own flesh in a frenzy of madness, like the berserker,<sup>382</sup> the ‘bear coat’ or ‘bear skin’, the one who embodies the bear.<sup>383</sup> Following Ancient rituals, the declining king who needs to recover his warlike nature,

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<sup>382</sup> ‘To go berserk’ is a familiar expression in modern English, that means ‘to be deranged or frenzied’.

<sup>383</sup> In Orson Wells’s film version, Macbeth wears what looks like a bear coat as a kingly attire. An illustration by Nawel Louerrad illustrates this aspect of the bear skin and shows the former quality of a fallen king: Lear, barefoot and visibly depressed is wearing what looks like a bear coat. This vision foregrounds the pathetic side of the character and reveals the absurd, as directors like Peter Brook did, having in mind the work by Samuel Beckett and the criticism of Jan Kott in *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (English version 1964) (last references in *KL*, p. 26).

will repossess the strength he once had, the strength of the bear, by eating his own flesh.<sup>384</sup> The whole speech descends into madness, a madness that Lear himself strives hard to consciously reject.

Paradoxically Lear comes back to a certain amount of reason when he acknowledges that “that way madness lies” (l. 21). He establishes some distance from the wild speech he has just uttered by pronouncing the very word ‘madness’, by releasing it through utterance. In the second and last part of the speech cited above, from line 16 onwards, after unleashing his rage and reaching the climactic metaphor of self-devouring, he seems to leave the world of myths and Ancient culture and returns to more pragmatic matters. The conjunction ‘But’ (l. 16) and the following negation ‘No’ (l. 17) mark a pivot in Lear’s mind which becomes factual and rejects his former emotional state: he is out in the night, under the storm, and it is Regan and Goneril’s fault, and “No, [he] will weep no more”. He calms down for a short period punctuated by moments of ‘madness’, still accompanied by the storm, in which he strips himself physically and mentally by tearing his clothes: “Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, / bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings: come, unbutton here” (3.4.107). Lear compares himself here to the bare, forked animal, i.e. to a baited bear, with a paronomastic pun on bare / bear. He is denuded of his train and status, he is ‘unaccommodated’ i.e. denied basic comfort, and he goes back to an animal state of ‘b(e)areness’.

The proximity between animality and humanity requires some comment because as Pastoureau observes, “un des trois principaux thèmes mythologiques associant l’être humain et l’ours est celui de la métamorphose” [one of the three main mythological themes associating man and bear is metamorphosis], and he cites Callisto and Iphigenia turned into bears in Classical mythology as examples (p. 45). By metaphorically considering himself a bear, as we have demonstrated, Lear reaches and regains a mythological status, albeit a degraded one, since the image used is that of the baited bear.<sup>385</sup> Macbeth, another sovereign, uses the same metaphor, as we have seen in the previous chapter,<sup>386</sup> and Macbeth becomes the Caledonian bear whose baiting to death the audience will observe and be entertained by. The

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<sup>384</sup> About the tendency to bite, the note in *King Henry VIII* says: “Mad people were assumed to have a tendency to bite; madness in general was often particularized in images of lycanthropy” (H8, p. 258). Pastoureau observes that the berserkers were all ‘Garous’ not werewolves but ‘werebears’ (p. 67). In the *Roman de la Manekine* by Philippe de Rémi (13<sup>th</sup> century) a daughter, Joïe, eats off her hand to avoid marriage (in Cooper, p. 125).

<sup>385</sup> The identification of Lear as a baited bear is again confirmed in 3.6, when he says, in a hallucination: “The little dogs and all, / Trey, Blanch and Sweetheart, see they bark at me” (3.6.60-61). The metaphor is used to describe how he is assailed by his daughters.

<sup>386</sup> Macbeth: “They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, / But bear-like I must fight the course” (5.7.1-2), and “I will not yield / To kiss the ground before young Malcom’s feet, / And to be baited with the rabble’s curse” (5.8.25).

identification of Lear with a baited bear is again confirmed in 3.4, when he says, almost in a hallucination: “The little dogs and all, / Trey, Blanch and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me” (3.4.60-61). The metaphor is used to describe how the king is assailed by his daughters, but the motif of kingship is not far behind that of the bear, and the one who chases the baiting dogs away is Edgar, the future sovereign and Lear’s successor, but who is still disguised as Tom the beggar:

EDGAR: Tom will **throw his head** at them: avaunt, you curs!  
Be thy mouth or black or white,  
Tooth that poisons if it bite;  
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,  
Hound or spaniel, brach or him,  
Or bobtail tyke or trundle-tail,  
Tom will make him weep and wail;  
For with throwing thus my head,  
Dogs leap the hatch and all are fled. (3.6.62-70, emphases mine)

These lines are “the last rhyming jingle in the play” but the throwing of the head is said to remain unexplained (*KL*, note p. 291). However, we argue that this answers the preceding image of the baited bear and Tom is now throwing his bear’s head at the dogs, that is to say, roaring at them with a wide open mouth, as a bear would do. The focus is clearly on the animal’s mouth and teeth, most visible when a bear roars. Furthermore, according to Tospell’s *History* (1607), “a secret” in the nature of a certain white bear was related to its mouth, insofar as their breath was poisonous, and they could vomit blinding phlegm:

[t]here are white bears in Misia, which being eagerly hunted, do send forth such a breath, that putrieth immediately the flesh of the Dogges, and whatsoever other beast commeth within the savour thereof, it maketh the flesh of them not fit to be eaten: but if either men or dogs approach or come nigh them, they vomit forth such abundance of Plegme, that either the hunters are thereby choaked or blinded. (Topsell 1607, p. 36, l. 49-53)

Topsell writes that he is reporting Aristotle, but this reference would have to be checked, and such putrefying capacity resembles a characteristic of the devil, with which the bear was identified during the Middle Ages. In any case, Edgar’s rhyming jingle invokes this powerful



ability of the bear to poison his enemies and to make them flee by 'throwing his head' at them, i.e. frightening them away with his terrible roar.

In *King Lear*, a further reference to the bear occurs when Albany speaks of the king as: "A father, and a gracious aged man / Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick" (4.2.42-43). 'Head-lugged' means "pulled by the head or baited, and so enraged" (*KL*, note p. 313). The metaphor is extended further by Albany who acknowledges the king's strength and impressive aura. After his former treason, Albany eventually sides with Lear and probably feels guilty for having opposed him. Therefore, Lear appears as a powerful figure capable of belittling the most enraged bear. In the light of what we have seen, we would expect that such a dominant animal and mythological figure would intimidate a 'head-lugged' bear. Albany refers to himself licking Lear, like a submissive bear. In the same speech, Albany also feeds the self-devouring metaphor attached to the bear figure, and to the roaring ocean with its bear-mouth. He blames Lear's daughters for the ill treatment they have inflicted upon him and says that without the aid of the heavens and their spirits, monstrous consequences would ensue:

ALBANY

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
It will come:  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep. (4.2.47-51)

The first lines point to the mythic and the religious (Lear is a sea god), and the last two refer to Lear eating his own hand. The complex cluster of meanings confirms Lear's divine, human and animal natures.

Therefore, it is all the more true, as Bullough suggests, that "to regard *King Lear* as a study of 'Wrath in Old Age' (L. B. Campbell) is to oversimplify" (Vol. 7, p. 297). Wrath is expressed in many ways in the play, but it is not in *Leir*: the wrath of the bear, the wrath of the king, that of the ocean, all make the analysis diverge from concluding that this is simply a matter of senility on Lear's part (see also Bullough Vol. 7, p. 273). As we have already suggested, Lear has a double in the character of Gloucester; and this double also embodies the figure of the bear.

## 1.2 Lear's double: Gloucester

Doubles appear frequently in romance structures, as Helen Cooper observes, when two different knights, alternatively or in addition, may effectively be doubles of each other. And she also mentions subtle structural interlacings in Medieval works and subplots in Renaissance plays, where there is no subordination of one element over another, as in the 'sub' prefix (Cooper 2004, p. 58, p. 63). Gloucester brings crucial elements to the plot and acts as a mirror image of Lear, the bear-king.

On the point of being enucleated on a charge of treason and as a result of Regan's and Goneril's command, Gloucester says: "I am tied to the stake and I must stand the course" (3.7.53). The sentence is similar to Macbeth's in 5.7.1-2 and contributes to the prolongation of Lear's metaphoric animal status. Therefore, Gloucester appears as a parallel bear patriarch, about to be exposed to an ignoble treatment, as a Lear substitute, as his reply to Regan's question, asking why he sent the king to Dover, shows:

REGAN           Wherefore to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Because I would not see thy cruel nails  
Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister  
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.  
The sea, with such a storm as his bare head  
In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up  
And quenched the stelled fires. (3.7.54-60)

The animal metaphor is present in this speech, as well as the sea imagery all of which point to Lear's mythological status. Gloucester refers to Lear's "bare head" exposed in the storm outside at night, which, in the same paronomastic effect, causes the 'bear' to rise again to the surface of the text,<sup>387</sup> and he also comments on the effect of a potential enucleation of the king by his daughters, whereby analogously the sea has unleashed such an energy that it will surge and extinguish the fires of the stars. Lear, the sea-god would have swelled and showed his strength.

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<sup>387</sup> In *The Historie of four-Footed Beastes*, Topsell notes that "[t]he head of the Beare is his weakest part (as the hande of a Lyon is the strongest) for by a small blow on his head he hath often bene stricken dead" (1607, p. 38, l. 34-35).

Before going back to Gloucester's chastisement, another animal metaphor attracts attention and requires comment. Lear's surrogate compares Goneril to a boar, who would have stuck "boarish fangs" in the king's "anointed flesh", had he not protected him by sending him to Dover. In Celtic symbolism, the bear is associated with the regal function and the wild boar with the sacerdotal function. The image of the boar sticking its fangs in the bear's flesh amounts to a conflict between sacerdotal and regal functions. Furthermore, the fact that this is perpetrated by a woman signals the intervention of a goddess of sovereignty. As we have already suggested, Goneril and Regan appear as members of a triad of goddesses who chose the fate of kings. Incapable of ruling according to their conception, the sovereign is destined to die (we will return to this in the second part of this chapter).

However, as a surrogate, Gloucester comes to bear the physical illustration of Lear's parallel incapacity: he is enucleated (3.7.66-83), and each is a metaphor of the other. In 4.1, after his torment, Gloucester wants to commit suicide and goes to Dover cliffs to do so, led by an old man and by his son Edgar disguised as Poor Tom. Bullough thinks that the motif is borrowed from Sidney's *Arcadia*, "where the blind Prince of Paphlagonia tries to persuade his good son to lead him to the top of a rock so that he can throw himself off it" (*KL*, note p. 308 referring to Bullough, p. 403-404). Furthermore, the motif can also be illustrated by the continuing metaphor of the bear via several references pointing to the Early Modern and the Celtic con-texts. In *The Historie of four Footed Beastes*, Topsell notes that "[a] beare is much subject to blindness of the eyes" (p. 39, l. 20). The natural tendency to blindness has a metaphorical resonance in *King Lear* with its symbolically blind bear-king and his enucleated surrogate. In "Harry Hunks, Superstar" (2002), Terence Hawkes observes that in bear baiting "the chaining to a stake and the whipping of a blinded bear was part of the spectacle" (p. 85). Gloucester's ordeal also corresponds to the Early Modern discourse of bear baiting. In Celtic literature, the blinding of King Eochaid parallels Lear-Gloucester because of the regal function of Eochaid who is blinded (*The Siege of Howth*, from Harleian 5 280, fo. 54b (15<sup>th</sup> century), in *Revue Celtique* 8, p. 49, seen in Guyonvarc'h Le Roux 1986, p. 164).

Lear's double, Gloucester, further illustrates the relationship between bear and king in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and prolongs the double run on metaphor involving the bear and the ocean. Far from the image of the Ancient powerful bear, the prevailing feature is that of the tormented animal. If the silhouette of the Celtic ursine sovereign is perceivable in the background, that of the fallen king of animals inhabiting the area of the theatres on the Southern bank of the Thames takes precedence. Harry Hunks and his fellow bears with their

tormented wild nature inspired enigmatic scenes in the theatre and the function of the animal in drama acts as an image of their disruption of order.

### 1.3 Staging the bear: *The Winter's Tale*

The relationship between the bear baiting arena and the theatre building intensified when Henslowe and Alleyn obtained the patent of the Bear Garden in 1604. This provided a direct access to the animals whose hides could be used to create costumes for the plays, or, that could appear onstage. Most certainly, as Helen Cooper notes, a bear-suit was used when the Queen's Men prepared to stage *Valentine and Orson* around 1595 because in the performance of the play, "the omission of the bear on stage would have been sorely felt" (Cooper, note 1 p. 431), and it would have been difficult to use real animals. Cooper goes on to argue, the same bearsuit would have been exploited in other plays containing bears, like *Mucedorus*, *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* (1585-1595) in which 'a Bear or any other beast' appears in the opening dumb-show, or *Cox of Collumpton* (1599) (Cooper, p. 1-2, and notes p. 431), and *The Winter's Tale* (1611). Barbara Ravelhofer's "Beasts of Recreation: Henslowe's White Bears" (2005) takes "a fresh look at the old question whether animals were used in *The Winter's Tale*, *Mucedorus* and other select plays and masques of the period" (Ravelhofer 2005, p. 287). What matters is that the symbolic presence of the bear is sufficient to allow interpretation, as we have seen in various ways with *King Lear*. For the purposes of this argument, it is not necessary to consider whether a real bear may have crossed the stage chasing Antigonus in *WT* or a man wearing a bear-suit.<sup>388</sup>

*Twelfth Night* refers to a character being pale "as if a bear were at his heels" (3.4.287), but in *The Winter's Tale*, Antigonus is pursued by a bear. The unexpected apparition of the animal onstage in act 3 raises questions. This scene has a high theatrical value, and the matter is associated with the narrative function of the scene rather than the difficulty, imaginary or otherwise, of its staging. In the light of what has been discovered concerning the bear and its relation to kingship, the passage can be understood as a demonstration of regal power in

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<sup>388</sup> Michel Pastoureau discussing the border between man and animal, evokes the position of the Church who issued interdictions to wear an animal, especially a bear's disguise, in the Middle Ages (2007, p. 115-119). He notes that: "L'ours est par excellence l'animal des déguisements – lui-même ne ressemble t-il pas à un homme déguisé? – et jusqu'à la fin du Moyen-Âge, voire plus avant encore, de nombreux prélats répéteront, sans être vraiment obéis, qu'un bon chrétien ne doit pas 'faire l'ours'" [The bear is the animal of disguise par excellence – does he not himself look like a man in disguise? – and until the end of the Middle Ages, even later than this, numerous prelates repeated, without being particularly obeyed, that a good Christian must not 'play the bear'] (p. 117).

action. The suddenness of the action and the condensed time leading to it often contribute to the vision of the scene as a burlesque event, but the context of the storm and the fading light add a further layer of interpretation. The questions that are raised relate to the metaphorical functions of the characters involved: what is this bear emerging unexpectedly, pursued by a pack of dogs and pursuing Antigonus? Who or what does this bear refer to? In order to approach and interpret this intriguing episode, it is necessary to go back to the preceding scene, i.e. Antigonus's dream (3.3.15-45), and also to the intrinsic dreamlike quality of the play.<sup>389</sup>

Antigonus says that Hermione, the queen, appeared to him in such a way that he was unsure whether he had been dreaming or not: "ne'er was a dream so like a waking" (3.3.18-19). His vision reflects the whole play's ethos which is presented as a tale, or a dream. After all, this is what Archidamus announces in the opening scene of the play: "We will give you sleepy drinks" (1.1.13). A dream, like theatre, is inspired by 'truth of life' but it cannot pretend to show 'real life'. This is why audiences have been asked to accept what Tzvetan Todorov calls the "presupposed" of theatrical experience, without which no performance can be effectual: "Les présumés doivent être vrais (ou tenus pour vrais par l'auditeur)" [Presupposed must be true (or held as true by the audience)] (Ducrot, Todorov, 1979, p. 347). In other words, an audience has to suspend its disbelief, in order to accept something that they know is not true for it to function on stage. In connection with the bear scene, the difficulty of accepting the 'presupposed' lays open to question the whole verisimilitude of the scene: even though the mariner who led Antigonus and Perdita to the coast of Bohemia warned that "this place is famous for the creatures / of prey that keep upon't" (3.3.11-12), the apparition of the bear seems sudden and lacks motivation with the result that Antigonus's "exit, pursued by a bear" (3.3.57.1) almost appears as comic.

Given the Celtic origins of the figure of the bear, we may wonder why it is that animal that appears at this point in *The Winter's Tale* and not another menacing wild beast. Bear and bull baitings were frequent occurrences in the theatre's vicinity. But the bear was a symbol of the king in Celtic tradition, and we may wonder how much of that tradition remains to this incident in the play. In *WT*, the perspective of the relationship between kingship and the bear invites us to establish a parallel between the animal and King Leontes.<sup>390</sup> In the play,

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<sup>389</sup> References to *WT* are not from Arden 3 but from the Oxford Shakespeare edition by Stephen Orgel (2008, 1996).

<sup>390</sup> In *WT*, the clown's remark in 4.4 equates the king with the bear: "He [the king] seems to be of great authority: close with him, give him gold and though authority be a stubborn bear, yet he is oft led by the nose

Antigonus is charged to abandon Perdita whom Leontes believes to be the fruit of the adulterous queen's relationship with Polixenes, the king of Bohemia. To this extent, Antigonus is acting as Leontes's proxy. As symbolically and metaphorically part of the king's body, he is a metonymic extension of the king himself. If we have associated the bear with the Celtic king, then what we have is the sovereign's proxy pursued by an animal that is a metaphor for the king himself. As in *King Lear*, the ruler appears to be engaged in an act in which he is devouring himself. This would make the deployment of the symbolic figure of the bear something that is much more sinister, displacing the king's (Leontes) savagery onto one of his vassals who is acting as his proxy.

This interpretation is in accordance with part of Hawkes's reading when he parallels Leontes's savage law with the off stage 'dining' of the bear on Antigonus: "[the creature's] off-stage 'dining' – reported with appropriate immediacy as happening 'Now, now' – becomes the pivotal occasion where a comic rustic lore at last starts to undermine by parody the inhuman savagery of the law of Leontes's court" (Hawkes 2002, p. 99). Returning to the Celtic Antiquity of the motif allowed us to develop further the connection between the king and the bear. This interpretation is in keeping with the plot of the play insofar as Leontes creates the conditions of his own disaster, as Hawkes observes, citing this extract in which he describes Leontes as "a bear-like actor figure hissed at by jeering spectators" (2002, p. 97):

#### LEONTES

Gone already!

Inch-thick, knee deep, oe'r head and ears a forked one!

Go play, boy, play, thy mother plays and I

Play too, but so disgraced a part, whose issue

Will hiss me to my grave; contempt and clamour

Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. (1.2.183-188)

Leontes addresses his son, the boy Mamillius, and behind the discourse of cuckoldry and the meta-commentary on 'playing', the baited bear figure appears who proleptically foresees his own end. Leontes endangers his kingdom, his madness deprives him of an heir, and he sends his daughter to what he thinks will be a certain death. His power, cruelty and jealousy devour him, as surely as the bear devours Antigonus. A king deprived of judgment cannot reign according to Celtic tradition, and Leontes certainly lacks temperance or judgment. What we

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with gold" (4.4.794-796). In a syllogism, if the king is of authority and authority is a bear, then the king is a bear. The remark designates Polixenes, the king of Bohemia, but through him it is the regal function that is pointed at.

experience on the oneiric beach of Bohemia is the symbolic death of the king. The same auto-destruction as in King *Lear* is visible here, but the difference between the two plays lies mainly in the question of genre: Leontes's death remains symbolic because the play is a comedy, thus all ends well, and the tale encourages dream-like fantasies of animal metamorphosis. What is unusual in *The Winter's Tale* is that while the seriousness of Antigonus's death might be ameliorated we do not know until the end of the play what has happened to Hermione, the queen.

As Cooper notes, the bear was an “enthraling story element” in romance, and she adds that it was “used to tell a story about providence, the disruption and restoration of order and lineal succession, innocence accused and vindicated” (Cooper, p. 2). This is what happens in *The Winter's Tale*, where the motif of the bear, illustrated in romance stories and part of the ‘literary competence’ of Elizabethans and Jacobean, also refers to Ancient kingship as we have demonstrated. Its irruption in the play, albeit brief and unexpected, feeds into the play's main themes. The presence of these different narrative strands or memes in *The Winter's Tale* points to a series of motifs that serve to augment what Burrow has identified as references to Antiquity. Once again, and even within the romance genre, various incidents contribute to chains of transmission that aid the process of decoding and expand the complex rhizomatic structure of the dramatic narrative.

To summarize, in the internal layers of the text, skillfully intertwined in the complex fabric of the play, a Celtic motif lies hidden: the bear king. For Colin Burrow, Antiquity is ‘wild’: “The ‘classical’ for Shakespeare is a whole world of unruly authorities fighting together to spit out passion” (2018, p. 50). Although he means here Classical Antiquity, we argue that Celtic Antiquity also has an inherent wildness, and with roots in the insular native past, the motif of the bear is one emblematic element that ‘spits out passion’ and rage. But the cause of Lear's outburst is first and foremost the tragic disappearance of his queen.

## **2. The King, the Queen and the land**

Bullough observes that contrary to the 1605 *Leir*, Shakespeare omits to mention Lear's dead wife at the beginning of the play (Vol. 7, p. 287), he does not introduce Lear's mourning as an important factor in what follows.<sup>391</sup> Bullough also notes that in the 1605 *Leir*, the reason for the king's abdication is novel and he adds: “the burial of [his] wife has just taken place, and

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<sup>391</sup> We know that the queen is dead by the only direct reference Lear makes to his wife, when he addresses Regan saying: “I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb” (2.2.320-321).

she is mourned in Christian terms as having lived ‘a perfit patterne of a virtuous life’. Without her the old king feels lost and wished to divide his kingdom and then abdicate” (Vol. 7, p. 278). Indeed, in the play, Leir’s will is to advance his daughters’ states “In royal marriage with some princely mates: / For wanting now their mother’s good advice, / Under whose government they have received / A per fit pattern of a virtuous life: / Left as it were a ship without a stern” (1605, 1.1.9-13). The queen governed her household and was a ‘stern’ or support as much for the daughters as for the king, who now feels at a loss what to do and decides to delegate his power. In *Oidhe Chloinne Lir*, the only story in which the mythic Ler appears as a proper character, the death of his queen also triggers the action. We will argue that in the light of the queen’s death, a Celtic reading may apply to Shakespeare’s play, relating to the marriage of the king to the land and the symbolic value of the queen as a prosperity goddess. At a mythological level, Ler, the Ancient god is linked to Dana, the mother goddess; therefore, in analyzing the aspect of myth inherent in Lear and his queen it is possible to uncover the relationship between the king and the nourishing mother, i.e. the land. Miranda Green explains this relationship:

As is the case with many polytheistic systems, the Celtic gods were everywhere: each tree, lake, river, mountain and spring possessed a spirit. This concept of divinity in nature gave rise to many cults and myths associated with fertility. The most important of these were concerned with the mother-goddess who presided over all aspects of plenty and prosperity, both in life and after death. In Irish mythology, it was the union of the mortal king with the goddess of the land which promoted fertility in Ireland. (Green 1993, p. 50)

The absent queen in *Lear* plays a central part insofar as she creates a void in which the whole action of the play is precipitated. The queen’s ‘desertion’ implies that the king cannot provide any assurance of prosperity for his kingdom, and as a consequence he has to be deposed, as we will see. Of course, in Shakespeare’s play this is not an orthodox deposition, since in accordance with Celtic myth the figure of the queen represents the land. But first, let us discuss the motif of marriage between the king and the land as it emerged in the Early Modern con-text with the accession of James I and VI to the throne of England.



## 2.1 James VI and I: the Scottish sovereign and the land

As Michael Enright notes, in his first address to the English Parliament in 1604, “James VI and I personified his two kingdoms as a bride and the king of the island as her spouse: ‘What God hath conjoined then, let no man separate. I am the husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife’” (Enright 1976, p. 29, citing *The Politicals Works of James I*, ed. McIlwain 1918, p. 272). James clearly used this image in order to convince Parliament to proceed to the official union of the crowns, saying “I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable to think that I that am a Christian King under the Gospel, should be a Polygamist and husband to two wives...” (*ibid.*). The argument he developed was unconvincing to some members of parliament and the union of the crowns was not legally official until the Act of Union in 1707. However, Enright goes on to analyze James’s rhetoric of marriage to the land, arguing that it extended beyond the political sphere:

For James, this union of his kingdoms was not merely a political act: he saw it as a union ‘in my person’ and a ‘Union which is made in my blood’. Anyone ‘that impugneth them [the two kingdoms] doth but endeavour to separate that which God hath put together’. In the ‘sacred conjunction of wedlock’ God had given him cause ‘to embrace them both with equal and indifferent love’. Indeed, ‘God and Nature’ together made this union ‘fastened and bound up by the wedding Ring of Astrea’. (Enright 1976, p. 29, citing *The Politicals Works of James I*, ed. McIlwain 1918, p. 273, 32, 33, 273)

James had integrated his sacred union with the land celebrated by ‘God’ and ‘Nature’ ‘in his blood’. His statement offers a syncretism of Christianity, and Celtic (‘Nature’) and Classical (‘Astrea’) antiquities, a feature that seems to be recurrent in Early Modern discourse. Enright goes on to note that together with Welsh ancestry from Henry VII Tudor (Welsh:Tudur), James claimed to be of Irish descent, when he wrote that he was a “monarch sprung of Ferguse race” (Enright 1976, p. 31, citing *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. Craigie 1958, ii, p. 69). Tales of sovereignty were also told in Scotland, like the story of Lughaid Laighe and the loathly lady, a hideous hag who turned out to be a sovereignty goddess.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Enright develops the narrative of Lughaid Laighe as well as the two Medbs as goddesses of sovereignty: Medb Cruachna and Medb Lethderg, and he notes that the concept of the transformation of the hag travelled from Ireland to England, Scotland, Wales and Brittany, and that a characteristic feature of tales of sovereignty is that the protagonists often hunt for a deer before their encounter the goddess (1976, p. 32-33).

Therefore, as Enright argues, James was certainly aware of the matrimonial tradition involving the wedding between the king and the land: “He had inherited a crown which had connections with the Celtic past of Scotland, and when he used the marriage metaphor, he may have been drawing from Celtic tradition” (p. 32).

Enright also develops the concept of the king-making ceremonies as “wedding feasts”, that was still applied in Ireland at least until the Middle Ages:

This marriage of the king and goddess was institutionalized in Celtic king-making ceremonies. A feast or banquet took place which, significantly, was known as *banais rigi*, ‘wedding feast of kingship’. It was an essential part of the ceremonies and it was not restricted to the high king alone, for each lord was similarly ‘wedded’ to his own territory. In 1310 the inauguration of a king of Connacht was described by one of the annalists as a ‘wedding feast’ and it was followed by the king’s ‘sleeping with the province of Connacht’; and each of the three oldest royal seats of Ireland (Tara, Emain Macha, and Cruachu) had its own ‘wedding feast’. (Enright 1976, p. 34)

The tradition is not merely anecdotal and it was still part of contemporary discourse in Early Modern Ireland as Enright goes on to note in the case of “Eochaidh O’Headusa, a contemporary of James VI, [who] addresses his chief Mag Uidhir as ‘Ireland’s spouse’” (p. 34), and he differentiates the situation between Ireland and Scotland as regards this tradition. However, we may add that when James acceded to the English throne, his Scottish court accompanied him and along with them a whole culture was transported:

In England, by the seventeenth century, such beliefs had been allegorized and their more primitive versions largely forgotten. This was less true in Scotland. There the goddesses were Scotia, Caledonia and the Old Woman of Beare. As in Ireland, they were earth-mothers who represented the sovereignty of the kingdom, and, like all Celtic goddesses, they were at once warrior and hag, mother and virgin – the bringer of fertility and the destroyer of the soil. (Enright 1976, p. 34-35)

This imagery brings us back to the relation between *Macbeth* and the Three Sisters as sovereignty goddesses, from which it is possible to postulate a link with Lear’s daughters. However, it is difficult to ascertain precisely the extent to which discourse about sovereignty goddesses was part of the Early Modern English con-text. Some of the stories told in Scotland

may well have travelled to the South, and Arthurian tales and other narratives belonging to the matter of Britain also circulated. Furthermore, the fact that James VI and I used the wedding metaphor in 1604, in his first address to Parliament shows that the tradition was significantly current in his own thinking. The metaphorical relationship between king, land and goddess was also reified in the tradition of stones of destiny.

The Lia Fáil in the sacred site of Tara<sup>393</sup> in Ireland and the Stone of Scone in Scotland both share elements of the same belief,<sup>394</sup> as described by Enright:

Closely intertwined with the marriage theme is another cultural belief which was also common to both branches of the Gaelic race and of which James VI was well aware. This lies in the peculiar connection that all Celts thought to exist among sacred stones, sovereignty and royalty. For even if the goddess represented the earth, she had a particular affinity for the rocks upon the earth and her spirit was believed to reside in these rocks. Thus the Irish *Lia Fail* (Stone of Fate) and the Scottish Stone of Scone were sacred objects for many centuries. People believed that the female sovereignty resided therein and that she would scream or speak when the rightful king of the land either sat on the stone or stood on it. The phallic symbolism here is plain. (Enright 1976, p. 35)

The phallic shape of the stone and the voice of the goddess represent the male and female principles bound together in the concept of sovereignty. The Scottish Stone of Scone had been taken to England by Edward I when he invaded Scotland in 1296 and it remained in London until it was returned to Scotland in 1996. In 1307, the stone was placed in a specially built throne called the Coronation Chair and James VI and I was the first sovereign in 300 years to be crowned on the stone of his ancestors, as Enright observes (p. 36).<sup>395</sup> The symbol was

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<sup>393</sup> Guyonvarc'h notes about the Stone of Fal that "dans tous les textes elle symbolise le pouvoir et la légitimité de la royauté suprême de Tara. Elle est réellement l'*omphalos* ou pierre centrale d'Irlande, là où aboutissent les frontières et les routes principales des quatre autres provinces de l'île. La Pierre de Fal criait sous chaque roi qui devait s'emparer légitimement de la royauté et, sans son cri, il n'y avait pas de Souveraineté. Cuchulainn la brisa de son épée parcequ'elle était restée silencieuse lorsqu'il avait posé le pied sur elle. Le sens de Fal est mutlipie, en premier 'haie' et 'souveraineté'". [In all the texts it symbolizes the legitimate power and sovereignty of the supreme royalty of Tara. It is actually the *omphalos* or central stone of Ireland, where all the frontiers and main roads of the four other provinces of the island converge. The Stone of Fal screamed under each king who had to legitimately take possession of royalty, and without its cry, there was no Sovereignty. Cuchulainn broke it with his sword because it did not scream when he set foot on it. The meaning of Fal is multiple, the first is 'hedge' and 'sovereignty'] (Guyonvarc'h Le Roux 1986, p. 388, tr. CSL).

<sup>394</sup> There were other stones like the Mullamast Stone, also linked to a pagan cult of fertility and situated in a territory that invested kings: "Mullamast was the seat of the kings of the Leinster territory of Uí Dúnlaighe that also supplied provincial kings" (National Museum of Archaeology, Dublin, text from "The Treasure", 2016).

<sup>395</sup> Enright notes that "the Great O'Neill, who made his submission to King James in 1603, was traditionally recognized as king when he stood on a rock which screamed under him" (1976, note 3, p. 35).

intended by Edward I to establish the practice that English monarchs would also rule over Scotland. James, as a Scottish monarch, could not have ignored the tradition transmitted down over the ages: he ruled over England and Scotland, and he was, therefore, symbolically married to both territories, hence his remark in favour of union before Parliament in 1604. Enright speculates that James could have encountered such a tradition in texts, but he omits consideration of the oral tradition, and he concludes that for King James, the marriage of the king and the land was a “sincerely held hierarchic idea” but also “a valuable propaganda piece that was “flexible enough to appeal to the most”, while it was at the same time “deeply rooted in custom”; and he goes on to argue that “[i]t was also, in substantial measure, the proposed fulfilment, under Christian guise, of an age-old Celtic kingship ritual by a monarch profoundly influenced by tradition” (1976, p. 40). Therefore, James appears as a syncretic monarch who embodied a combination of Ancient ritual and custom and Christian religion. This syncretism is also illustrated in *King Lear*, a monarch appealing to the doctrine of atonement who also reflects Ancient practices linked to prosperity.

## **2.2. King Lear: the untrue sovereign**

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare represented the (in)fertility aspect of this myth, and this is made visible during the whole storm episode. It begins in 2.2 when Lear first registers his own psychological anxiety and it continues through much of act 3, when Lear is exposed to the natural elements, and also when he was reportedly seen wearing a crown of weeds as Cordelia regrets in 4.4. In this scene, Cordelia is back in England with her French forces in an attempt to regain the throne for her father, who was seen wandering on the heath, like a madman:

### **CORDELIA**

Alack, 'tis he. Why, he was met even now  
As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud,  
Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
With burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,  
Darnel and all idle weeds that grow  
In our sustaining corn. (4.4.1-6)

The comparison “as mad as the vexed sea” again associates Lear with the mythic ocean-god Ler and also recalls the roaring of the bear, because the two images were previously evoked together. An attentive audience would have identified the wild effect created by this

association of the bear with the sea. Here, the sea is ‘vexed’, agitated, distressed, and it reflects Lear’s state of mind: he is ‘mad’, erring in nature and uncontrolled. Cordelia orders a group of soldiers, to search for her father and “search every acre in the high-grown field” (4.4.6-7) where he was last seen.

Firstly, we will see that this scene is associated with the summer season, the solar aspect of the king and the promise of an abundant crop, and then we will study the composition of Lear’s ‘crown’ in detail, which will produce a significant contrast between the myth and Lear’s situation. As R. A. Foakes notes in the Arden 3 edition of the play, “Lear seems to emerge from the storm scenes into a more summery world burgeoning with plant life in the *high-grown field*” (KL, Note p. 321). The summer season corresponds with the time when crops are harvested and fruit abound. Traditionally, the Celtic calendar celebrated the fertile season on 1st August, during the feast of Lughnasadh, ‘the assembly of Lug’, in honour of the abundance and prosperity guaranteed by the efficient government of the sovereign. Its central date of celebration was 1<sup>st</sup> August, but the festivities lasted a month. It is also, theoretically, the beginning of autumn (Guyonvarc’h Le Roux 1986, p. 403, Green 1993, p. 55). The solar aspect attached to Lug, the king of gods, focuses on the general figure of the king, and on his responsibility for a prosperous kingdom. To the summer season and the king is attached the wealth and generosity that characterize the third function according to the Dumézilian approach. This third function is a *sine qua non* condition designed to fulfill the complete requirement of a trifunctional sovereign. In *King Lear*, the solar strength of the king is expressed as early as the first act, when Lear recognized both man’s power and weakness in the face of Nature: “by the sacred radiance of the sun [...] from whom we do exist and cease to be” (1.1.110-113). The pronoun ‘we’ may refer to man in general or to the king alone. Lear’s words accentuate the regal link to the sun and refer to its symbolic aura that allows living things to grow and prosper under him.

This quote from the National Museum of Archaeology in Dublin describes the specific role of the king as a provider of prosperity:

The symbolic marriage of the king to the earth goddess was to ensure the well-being of the people through the fertility of the land and abundant yields of corn, milk and milk products. [...] Ancient kingship was a sacred office guarded by an elaborate complex of ritual and taboo in which it was the king’s role to keep nature and society in equilibrium. If the king proved himself a just ruler then the land would respond with an increase in its fertility leading to an abundance of

corn, cattle, milk and acorns, and the rivers would abound in fish. The weather would prove mild and clement, and there would be general prosperity and security. Conversely, the reign of an untrue king would be characterized by famine, storm, pestilence and war. (National Museum of Archaeology, Dublin, text from the exhibition “Kingship and Sacrifice”, 2016)

Some of these features appear in *King Lear*, such as the ongoing presence of the storm for five scenes, related to the king’s state of mind, and the expected abundance but, in this case, lack of crops, especially ‘corn’ because ‘idle weeds’ grow in its place. What we have in the extract from *KL* cited above is therefore the depiction of an ‘untrue’ king. Lear appears as the king of nonsense, and the relationship between the king and the fertility of the earth is transformed into an absurd vision where the promise of abundant crops ends up as a crown of weeds. Moreover, Lear is crowned with plants that are neither beneficial nor useful, because he is the source of ‘idle weeds’, and ‘darnel’, that is to say ‘ryegrass’, which is a parasitic weed.

Among the great variety of plants that his crown is composed of, there is ‘rank fumiter’, i.e. fumitory, “a weed also known as smoke of the earth because it sprawls vigorously” (*KL*, note p. 321), therefore, it is an invasive plant, as are ‘furrow-weeds’, another type of grass. There are also stinging nettles and the dangerously poisonous hemlock, while burdocks resemble a thistle that sticks to clothes and animal hair; it is worth noting that the Latin name for burdock is *Arctium*, from the Greek *arktos* meaning ‘bear’, probably because of the hairs that cover the burdock’s fruit. The bear-king emerges again and appears to be associated with his abortive harvest, threatening the well being of the realm to the point of representing a death hazard by poisoning, while the king’s inability to produce edible crops endangers his people’s survival and summons the shadow of famine. His failure sentences the realm and its inhabitants metaphorically to ‘take the hemlock’. Under such circumstances, the king is deemed ‘untrue’ since he cannot fulfill the nourishing function, and the result is that war looms over the kingdom.<sup>396</sup>

Lear has become like Merlin ‘the wild’, he is ‘*mad*’ as the stage direction indicates in 4.6 when he enters ‘*crowned with wild flowers*’ (4.6.80-1). The Fool has disappeared from the play after 3.6.82 and Lear seems to have taken on his role as a mad seer, as an Ancient druid,

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<sup>396</sup> This aspect of the king’s loss of his queen and the ensuing decline of the realm is illustrated in John Boorman’s film *Excalibur* (1981), inspired from Thomas Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*. As soon as he loses Guenevere, Arthur appears physically and mentally depressed and wishes to abandon the Grail’s quest. What seems to be coming from the king’s madness precipitates the realm into chaos, yet the main cause is the desertion of the queen. The film powerfully depicts the decayed state of the land.

as we have seen. Like him, he is lucid in his madness and blames his daughters for his downfall. He acknowledges his position when he says: “I am the natural fool of fortune” (4.6.187), playing on the words ‘fool’ and ‘nature’ as a reflection on his present condition.<sup>397</sup> However, Lear the mad druid, the wild man exiled in nature, also begins to reaffirm his status as king. His proximity with Nature, the goddess, whose attributes he has come to wear seems to give him enough confidence to reclaim the regal status he had previously forsaken: “I am the King himself” (4.6.83-84), and “Ay, every inch a king” (4.6.106) and again “I am a king, my masters, know you that?” (4.6.196). Yet, despite this assertion of power, despite his attempt to get closer to nature, i.e. the goddess, and despite his younger daughter’s attempt to save him, Lear will die.

### 3. Lear’s other world

There are several ways of considering Lear’s death: the Christian doctrine of atonement and redemption pattern is the most obvious but the Celtic rhizome opens up other lines of flight or deterritorialization as Deleuze and Guattari term them (tr. 1987, p. 9). The following interpretation leads us even further away from the established territory of Shakespearean studies, integrating deep strata of Celtic tradition linked to the Otherworld, with the paradoxically material immateriality of the world beyond death. First, the notion of time is important in relation to Lear, then, we will consider two possible interpretations of the play, the first related to the Ancient tradition of sacrifice, the ritual killing of Irish kings, and the second illustrated by Celtic narratives of sojourns in the Otherworld.

#### 3.1 Time

Time is an important concept in Shakespeare’s plays and a full discussion would require more space than we have here. However, in *King Lear*, the very few indications of time are worthy of note as far as Lear’s death and Celtic traditions are concerned. We have seen that Lear’s crown of weeds, with cuckoo-flowers and other plants is an indication of Lughnasadh, the harvest season feast, i.e. summer time. The play’s gradual evolution towards death parallels the decaying of nature, a characteristic of the autumn season, and we sense that the season is changing from summer to autumn, taking us further into the season that is ethnologically

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<sup>397</sup> Edgar also confirms Lear’s position as a ‘Fool’ in an aside after Lear spoke: “O matter and impertinency mixed, / Reason in madness” (4.6.170-171).

associated with the genre of tragedy. Lear verbalizes this change in his address to the Gentlemen who has come to take him back to Cordelia: “No seconds? All myself? / Why, this would make a man a man of salt, / To use his eyes for garden water-pots. / Ay, and laying autumn’s dust” (4.6.190-193). He is once more registering the emotional shock of being deprived of his train of soldiers and thinks he will now be mistreated here. The image of the ‘autumn dust’ announces the events to come: after summer weeds, the realm will continue its autumnal course toward decay.

These subtle temporal indications confirm the high strong connection between the play and nature, and the relation to Celtic feasts is, therefore, worth exploring further. After Lughnasad, the autumn feast is Samhain, the beginning of the dark season, but also the beginning of the Celtic year. It was celebrated in the *Trinuksamoni*,<sup>398</sup> the three nights of Samhain, between 31<sup>st</sup> October and 2<sup>nd</sup> November. The play’s last act and its precipitated course of action illustrate this crucial moment in Celtic narratives concentrating on specific plots, as Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux note:

- implying a royal meeting or banquet;
- describing a conflict with Otherworld powers, the intervention of powers coming from the Otherworld in human affairs, or, potentially, a temporary irruption of humans into the Otherworld;
- orchestrating [...] the death of a king or a hero for practically invariable reasons: breaking or violation of prohibitions, misconduct or unfair war.

(Guyonvarc’h Le Roux 1986, p. 257, tr. CSL)

*King Lear* begins with a royal meeting and the action is proleptic of the death of a failing king. In this context, the relation to the Otherworld is worthy of our attention. One of the major characteristics of the feast of Samhain is the ritual banquet, and even if this is not in *King Lear*, there is an emphasis on the sovereign’s recurrent preoccupation with eating well and being well taken care of that moves the action in this direction, together with the regular feasting of his train of soldiers that cause Goneril such inconvenience: “Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires, / Men so disordered, so debauched and bold, / that this our court,

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<sup>398</sup> This reference comes from the Coligny calendar, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, that indicates the month of *Samon* and the *Trinuksamoni*. Discovered in Coligny (Ain, France) in 1897, it is a bronze table measuring 1.48m by 0.90m, found broken in 150 fragments. It is written in a Latin cursive but the language is Gaul. This ‘luni-solar’ calendar adds intermediary months to create a correspondence between the solar year and lunar year. Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux note that the calendar always used the night as basic unity and the disposition of the months and years corroborates Pliny’s observation of thirty year druidic centuries (Guyonvarc’h and Le Roux 1986, p. 259-260). In *King Lear*, the Celtic lunar calendar illustrates Edmund’s “For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines lag of a brother?” (1.2.5).



infected with their manners, / Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust / make it more like a tavern or a brothel / than a graced palace.” (1.4.232-236). This banquet of a hundred knights is reminiscent of the ritual banquet of Samain, reserved for men, and for a specifically military assembly (Gyonarc’h and Le Roux 1986, p. 256).

The Fool had announced the malleability of time when he said, after uttering his prophecy, that Merlin would pronounce the same words when his time comes: “This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I speak before his time” (3.2.95). Shakespeare does not need the action to take place in the dark season to concentrate events, though. In *King Henry VIII*, the plot spreads over more than twenty-five years, from 1519 to 1545. Such a wide span seems inconceivable to the French theatre of the time, which strictly observed the three unities of time, place and action. Henry Suhamy evokes the “stratagème dit du double temps [qui donne l’] illusion d’un resserrement de durée. [...] En vertu de ce fameux double temps et de l’étrange loi de relativité qui régit la durée des évènements, un court séjour à Belmont équivaut à un trimestre à Venise” [so-called stratagem of double time [which gives the] illusion of compressed time. [...] In virtue of this double time and of the strange law of relativity that directs the length of events, a short stay in Belmont equates a trimester in Venice] (Suhamy 1996, p. 169 and p. 211). Distortions of time are frequent in Shakespeare and also in Celtic narratives.

Lack of space prevents us from developing the question further but in relation to *Lear*, a Celtic reading leads the interpretation towards a specific period of the year, the major feast of Samain which concentrates time and events, as Gyonarc’h and Le Roux note: “A Samain meurent les dieux et les héros, ont lieu toutes les batailles de la mythologie et de l’épopée. Tous les évènements importants s’y concentrent, y ont leurs signes avant-coureurs aussi bien que leurs épilogues. Le temps entier s’y résume” [At Samhain gods and heroes die, all the mythological and epic battles take place. All important events concentrate then, with their forerunning signs and their epilogues. The whole time is condensed at that moment] (1986, p. 258). Therefore, time in *King Lear* is a significant component of the atmosphere of the play. It is linked to the king’s evolution, from his marital status to the land to his death. It is also an indicator of the possible presence of the Otherworld, insofar as Miranda Green notes: “Samhain was a time of ritual mourning for the death of summer and a period of great danger, a boundary between two periods, when time and space were temporarily frozen and normal laws suspended. The barriers were broken: Otherworld spirits could walk on earth and humans could visit the Underworld” (Green 1993, p. 55). The specific period of time and the

Celtic tradition of sovereignty incarnated in the marriage between the king and the land favours two interpretations as far as Lear is concerned. The first consists in the necessary sacrifice of the failing king.

### **3.2 Death and sacrifice**

According to archaeological records, the untrue king who failed to guarantee prosperity for his realm could be put to death as a sacrifice to the displeased goddess. The works of Eamonn Kelly and the exhibition *Kingship and Sacrifice* in the National Museum of Archaeology in Dublin detail the ritual killing of human beings as a practice that was not exclusive to Ireland but also to Britain and northern parts of Europe. However, in Ireland, the practice has been demonstrated as associated with kingship and sovereignty rituals. Kelly summarizes the tradition in Ancient Irish society:

In ancient Irish society, the king was the most important personage and sacred prohibitions attended his office to show him as the mediator between supernatural powers and his community. The inauguration of a king was a wedding ceremony in which the king – as representative of the sun god; married the earth goddess – who represented the land over which he ruled. [...] However, being the powerpoint upon which social equilibrium depended was not without inherent dangers. Should his reign not bring about the expected prosperity, it could result in the ritual death of the king through human sacrifice at the hands of his people. [...] The evidence suggests that the tradition of king-killing persisted in Ireland from the Early Bronze Age, around 2,000 BC, down to the introduction of Christianity in the fifth century AD. Many aspects of kingship ritual continued in Ireland until the loss of political power by the remaining Gaelic lordships at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (Kelly 2014, p. 15, p. 17, and p. 69).

We have demonstrated Lear's solar character and his failure as agent of prosperity and balance. Kelly's archaeological research accords with certain Irish mythological narratives listed and commented upon by G. F. Dalton in his article "The Ritual Killing of the Irish Kings" (1970). Dalton confirms the date of such sacrifices at Samhain and he details the modes of death, one of them being a suggestion of "death by the elements – earth, air (or

wind), fire (or sun) and water – or two or three of them” (Dalton 1970, p. 1).<sup>399</sup> Lear’s long wandering in the storm (water) and under the sun can be interpreted as just such a ritual killing. Dalton also signals private assassination as another mode of death, which happens in *Mac* but not in *KL* although Gloucester’s blinding may be perceived as the beginning of a killing ritual.<sup>400</sup> A third mode of death is referenced in Irish narratives as poison or drugs, that were not necessarily lethal (Dalton 1970, p. 1). Lear’s frequent hallucinations and delirium may point to some kind of situation of this sort. The mythic strata of Lear’s story allow for the sporadic appearance of such motifs within the play. Since the marriage ritual of the king and the earth was known in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it can be reasonably inferred that the tradition of the ritual killing of kings was also, to a certain extent, part of the early-Modern context.

In the play, Lear’s torment is not openly revealed as coming from the absence of a queen, but his infliction, his ‘greater malady’ (3.4.8) is called ‘the mother’: “O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / *Hysterica passio*, down thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element’s below” (2.2.246-248). The note in *KL* reads: “a disease mainly of women [...] that arose from the womb and took them ‘with choking in the throat’. It was called ‘*Passio Hysterica*’, or, in English, the mother, or the suffocation of the mother” (*KL*, note p. 241-242). Lear suffers from a feminine disease which causes him ‘sorrow’, i.e. deep sadness. Shakespeare knew about the disease, but he obviously plays on the polysemic aspect of the term when in the same scene he refers to his children’s mother (“I would divorce me from thy mother’s tomb” 2.2.320). The sorrow comes from the mother, and the malady appears as a mere pretext that masks a deeper cause: Lear is sad because of the death of his queen. The Celtic reading offers a further illustration summarized by Kelly: “legendary Irish queens could function as sovereignty goddesses not only in the role of a king’s sexual partner but also in that of his mother, the dynastic founder” (2014, p. 30). For Lear, lacking the company of a sovereignty goddess means that he is unworthy of reigning, and so must be replaced. This is what happens in the last two acts of the play: Edgar gradually replaces Lear, as we have seen

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<sup>399</sup> Dalton recounts Laeghaire’s death by such means: “Laeghaire tried to extract the Borama [i.e. cattle tribute] from the Leinstermen. He was defeated and captured, and was only released after swearing an oath by the Elements that he would make no further attempt. He broke his oath, and died ‘between Eire and Alba’ in fulfilment of a prophecy. ‘Maybe it was his guarantees to the Leinstermen, the Sun and Wind, that killed him’, says A.U. *Bórama* gives a few words of explanation of a death by the Elements: ‘the earth to swallow him up, the sun to burn him, and the wind to depart from him’” (Dalton 1970, p. 10, citing *The Annals of Ulster and Bórama*).

<sup>400</sup> E. Kelly notes that mythological narratives show the sign of a triple murder: “according to ancient Irish mythology, a special form of ritual killing was reserved for kings. It was referred to as a ‘threefold death’ and involved a combination of a number of methods of killing including hanging, strangulation, drowning, poisoning and various types of wounding by axe, sword or bludgeon”, and he goes on with observing that “multiple injuries to some of the bog bodies are consistent with the practice of ritual killing” (2014, p. 10).

with the bear sovereign, he is perceived as having “royal nobleness” by Albany at 5.3.174, and is given the final words of the play.

In a mythic reading, Lear’s daughters and their husbands stand as the triads who deny him the right to reign, because he has failed in his role as a sovereign, in a way similar to what the triads in *Macbeth* do to the untrue king. Regan and Goneril execute the sentence, like bloody crows of battle, while Cordelia stands apart. After disappointing her father during the love test and triggering his anger, she appears as the most complete trifunctional queen of all: she is warlike (in 4.4. she enters with drum and colours, surrounded by soldiers, at the head of French forces), generous (she rescues and heals her father after he has been exposed to the storm and the sun) and endowed with spiritual qualities (she prays and invokes benevolent forces in 4.4.15-20). In Geoffrey’s version, she succeeds her father and rules over Britain for five years, as an accomplished queen, before being deposed by her nephews who imprison her (*HRB*, ii 15, p. 86).<sup>401</sup> In the Folio, Goneril resembles the Weïrd Sisters, transformed into a witch, wearing a beard, as Lear sees her: “Ha! Goneril with a white beard?” (4.6.96). This vision installs Lear’s daughters in the position of hags, i.e. goddesses of sovereignty who can make or destroy kings. *King Lear* is thus the depiction of the slow but steady demise of an untrue or no longer competent monarch by the female principle of sovereignty. Balance is destroyed and restored only when a new monarch comes, as in *Macbeth*. Furthermore, in the rhizomatic network of *King Lear*, the semantic chain of time and Samhain leads the interpretation further to emphasize the presence of the Celtic Otherworld in the play.

### 3.3 Lear’s sojourn in the Otherworld

Lear’s words: “I would divorce me from thy mother’s tomb” (3.2.320) implies that he sees himself as lying in the grave with his wife. The meaning is symbolical and refers to the king’s sorrow, but it may also be interpreted literally to suggest that Lear is a visitor to the Otherworld during the period of Samhain, when the doors between the two worlds open.

At the beginning of the play, Lear is in such a despairing mood that he wishes death to come, or rather, he wishes to join death:

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<sup>401</sup> She then kills herself (*HRB*, ii, 15, p. 87), thereby recalling powerful Celtic figures like Deirdre, who, in some versions, squashes her skull against a rock rather than suffer a married life with king Conchobar (see CSL “Deirdre, Grainne and Medb, Three Mythical women Shaping Scotland”, Presses Universitaires de Franche Comté, upcoming).

## LEAR

Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose.  
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided  
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburdened crawl toward death. (1.1.35-40)

Age seems to have overcome Lear and he appears incapable of walking. He will not be able to confront his fate standing but instead he will crawl toward death. However, later in the play, when he has abandoned his ruling function, he indulges in hunting and feasting with his men. This is rather surprising and leads us to consider old age as an excuse that will enable him to absolve himself from his regal function. According to an earlier interpretation, Lear can no longer reign because he has lost the legitimacy brought by the goddess of sovereignty. Sorrow and incapacity intermingle in Lear's demeanour and he yearns for death. However, he is not allowed to relinquish power on his own accord, as Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h observe: "La royauté ne se perd que par les armes ou par la mort" [Royalty can be lost only by arms or by death] (1991, p. 128). Lear senses his incapacity, but his attempt to escape from power can be perceived as a supplementary failure. Since death has not sanctioned the end of his reign, he has exposed himself to great danger by frequenting the Otherworld as a living being.

The Celtic Otherworld has specific qualities, as Green notes:

The mythological traditions of the vernacular literature project the image of the Celtic Otherworld, to which humans passed after death, as an ambiguous place. Much is told about the Happy Otherworld, where the dead live again in a world very much like that of earth but better. Here there is neither pain, disease, ageing nor decay; it is a world full of music, feasting and beauty, though there is still combat between heroes. The other aspect of the Otherworld presents sharp contrast: it can be a sombre place full of danger, especially if visited by humans before death. (Green 1993, p. 72)

Green goes on to list the Celtic narratives in which heroes attempt a journey to the Otherworld: Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed stays in Annwn (or Annwfn) (the Welsh name of the Otherworld) for a year, a place of intoxication and plenty and Oisín visits the Irish Tir na n'Og (the 'land of Forever Young'); and Bran's voyage leads him to the island called the Land of Women, a timeless world full of magic, enchantment and music, "an idealised

mirror-image of the human world". But when humans return home, and touch their native soil, they meet again with human time, they age and die. This is what happened to Oisín and to Bran's men (Green p. 73). Lear hunting with his train evokes a soldier enjoying the Otherworld's life and he wishes to continue, supported by his daughters. Yet, the three goddesses of sovereignty do not accept this and they preside over his doom. Green's statement illustrates this point:

The sombre aspect of the Otherworld is equally represented in myth. Samhain, at the beginning of November, is a dangerous time, a kind of limbo where the barriers between the real and the supernatural world are temporarily dissolved, and where humans and spirits can penetrate each other's space, thus upsetting the normal balance. As a land of the dead, the otherworld can be dark and frightening. (Green 1993, p. 74)

*King Lear* blurs the limits, to the point that all landmarks are lost, as Lear's 'madness' suggests. He sees his younger daughter as a spirit: "You are a spirit, I know; where did you die?" (4.7.49), and he does not know whether he himself is alive or dead: "You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave. / Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound upon a wheel of fire that mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead" (4.7.45-48). These lines evoke further the mode of death by the Elements of which Lear is the victim. Fire and water mix in this image and contribute to Lear's torment. Live humans who experience the Otherworld while alive expose themselves to such dangers. Green evokes Arthur's, Cú Chulainn's and King Conaire's ordeals in this respect; the latter, she notes, encounters "the Irish goddess of destruction, the Badbh, who appears in triadic form as three hideous black hags, naked and bleeding, with ropes around their necks. The symbolism of death, perhaps even of human sacrifice, is intense here" (1993, p. 74). Therefore, King Lear, like King Conaire encounters the Badbh, the three goddesses of sovereignty who, displeased by his failure, work to bring about his death. Lear's daughters are the 'mother's' prolongation in both senses. They are the daughters, but like the 'mother', they implement the 'great malady' in Lear as Lady Macbeth makes sure to accomplish the Weïrd Sisters' prophecy. Triplicate goddesses of Sovereignty, each has her role in the untrue king's downfall. And the queen, the Mother, reigns by her absence.

## Conclusion to Chapter 6

We have demonstrated that a Celtic reading of *King Lear* emphasizes its full tragic dimension together with its mythological content. If Christian and Classical models prevail – and Lear does often show a human profile more than a godly one – relics of an Ancient culture scattered in the play can now be revealed. Further than conventional intertextual analyses, the hypotext containing the love trial reveals a connection of motifs between Celtic literature and Shakespeare, while the rhizomatic semantic chain of the bear pattern invades the play providing a wild, powerful and animal aspect to Lear's character. The binary structure involving Lear and Gloucester reflects the animal motif and opposes the ternary combinations of the three daughters and their husbands. The marriage between the king and the land resonates in the Early Modern con-text thus making apparent the powerful interaction between native and Early Modern cultures in Shakespeare's time, while contributing towards the generation of new meanings in the play. Temporal indications in *King Lear*, albeit infrequent, relate the action to the Celtic feasts of Lughnasadh and Samhain, and invite us to follow a 'line of flight' that leads us to an unexplored territory that relates to kingship and sacrifice, and to a worrying otherworldly dimension. According to this 'deterritorialized', unconventional interpretation, Lear's daughters are revealed in their most horrid aspects, the hags of sovereignty who side with the mother to destroy their king; this even includes Cordelia, the ideal heart ('coeur idéal'), who stands apart as redeemer. However, there are obvious limits to this underground rhizome and the Christian doctrine of atonement prevails in the end, with the three daughters' deaths; although even here it is possible to regard them as returning to their Otherworld dwelling.

## General Conclusion

In his general conclusion to *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough cites R. B. Heilman assessing that Shakespeare in “[h]is poetry was fed on myth, but he has also been engaged in mythopoeic activity” and Bullough goes on to argue that:

This does not, however, mean that Shakespeare, like Shelley and Keats, was in the habit of creating personages out of natural and ethical forces, or that he saw his plays as concerned with ‘the death and revival of the year’. He was not an ancient myth-maker but a projector of modern stories in sophisticated form. Yet by some instinctive drive within him, and perhaps also through habit learned in his boyhood at Stratford, he was attracted more than most poets of his time to those ‘patterns of imagination that haunt, create wonder in, human minds, for generation after generation’. (Bullough, Vol. 8, p. 368, citing Heilman and Holland)

Without precisely defining it, this statement affirms the presence of an Ancient tone in Shakespeare’s plays, an element linked to nature and myth, but different from the later Romantic exultation of such forms, an intrinsic quality involving an “instinct” at work that creates haunting “patterns of imagination”. We have endeavoured to demonstrate that this major aspect of Shakespeare’s compositional practice is powerfully illustrated by resurgences of native cultural strata that are inherent to his style.

Where instinct prevails, the conscious awareness of the writer is not required to reach myth that is situated beyond language and beyond literature, as Roland Barthes puts it:

La langue est donc en deçà de la Littérature. Le style est presque au-delà : des images, un débit, un lexique naissent du corps et du passé de l’écrivain et deviennent peu à peu les automatismes de son art. Ainsi sous le nom de style, se forme un langage autarcique qui ne plonge que dans la mythologie personnelle de l’auteur.

[A language is therefore on the hither side of Literature. Style is almost beyond it: imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art. Thus under the name of style a



self-sufficient language is evolved which has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology] (Barthes, *Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture*, 1953, p. 12, tr. Lavers and Colin 1967, p. 10).

The past of the writer naturally feeds his work as a major resource. Barthes insists on the dimension of the body as a major organic component situated in a space beyond language and beyond literature, and through which the writer establishes himself as the 'passeur' of his own past culture and mythology.

In the semi-literate and semi-oral Early Modern society, resources are not only in print but are also transmitted via the oral word, in the confluence of discourses and con-texts. Barthes points to the mythic dimension within the writer's body, and Bullough acknowledges that Shakespeare appealed to his own past and to 'patterns of imagination'. The 'memes' described by Helen Cooper, or archetypal structures imprinting the human mind provide definitions to these patterns and make the transmission process visible from the oral Celtic and Celto-Roman cultures to the Medieval period of their written transcriptions and from there to the Early Modern context.

Our thesis has pointed out that at least part of the Shakespeare's 'mythology' is connected to the residual Ancient roots of his own culture and irrigated the text of his plays, forming a rich underlying rhizomatic structure. The insular factor certainly helped preserve the Ancient traits that were uncovered, even though they lay hidden underneath more visible interpretative strata. Roman and Christian filters especially, sometimes make the identification process uncertain, notwithstanding the fact that cultures developed common features over time independently from each other. However, specific motifs exist that could be unearthed, and their narrative function within Shakespeare's plays has also been revealed, thanks to Colin Burrow's theory.

As Burrow demonstrated, references to Classical Antiquity feed in the main themes of the play, in what appears to be one of Shakespeare's compositional practices, especially from the 1590s onwards. After studying the relevance of this method to Celtic motifs, we found that it also applied to insular Antiquity, which allowed equating Celtic Antiquity with the Classical one to a certain extent, even if one is murmuring underneath while the other is more visibly apparent. This 'haunting' murmur that remained undefined in the above quote is intrinsically part of Shakespeare's 'style' and can now be qualified as coming from this Celtic culture that was relegated to the margins. It is difficult to measure the proportion of the resource within Shakespeare's work and other influences significantly prevail, but we may

now safely advance that Celtic motifs are far from being anecdotal, their ‘voice’ being heard on a regular basis even in plays that are not set in a Celtic context.

Our introduction was inevitably of a certain length because the novelty of the subject required preliminary precautions and detailed explanations especially as regards the Celtic Culture. The notion of ‘Celtic’ is still debated today and covers a wide range of domains. The appreciation of the term ‘Celtic’ was designed to render familiar a culture and a tradition that have not been clearly received historically. Ideologies and popular considerations often led the concept of ‘Celtic’ far from its archaeological, linguistic and mythological roots, paving the way to fantasized conceptions that are the domain of social studies, beyond the scope of the present thesis.

The work of Sir Israel Gollancz concerning Hamlet provided a first example of Celtic resources in Shakespeare and of the embedded presence of Celtic motifs in a confluence of other cultures<sup>402</sup> – Scandinavian, Germanic and Classical. This confluence widens the corpus of data that is potentially relevant to our research and welcomes inter-disciplinarity at the core of the project. Anthropological studies acknowledged the cultural transmission in Aboriginal oral societies over thousands of years and this, together with the common insular factor between Australia and the British Isles, favours the hypothesis of a continuum between Celtic Antiquity and the Early Modern time. Yet, in England especially, Classical and Christian periods added on filters to native features thereby composing the palimpsestic cultural history of the British Isles. This, together with a certain apprehension to deal with oral culture, contributed to keep the subject of Celtic resources in Shakespeare’s plays unearthed, hidden behind more visible interpretative strata.

Methodological tools provided a frame and a guideline that helped uncover numerous motifs. Gérard Genette offered the basic framework to exceed the intertextual dimension privileged in traditional source studies. His notion of palimpsest also describes the various interpretative filters that built over time. Barker and Hulme coined the notion of con-text as ‘text to be read with’, thereby involving the notion of discourse, and Maingueneau distinguished the discursive community. These terms all contribute to the description of ideas and discourses that were circulating in Shakespeare’s time through various means such as broadside ballads, prompt books, prophecies, pamphlets, but also via plays. Colin Burrow provided an essential means of reaching beyond the excavation of motifs by analyzing their function within the plays.

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<sup>402</sup> The notions of ‘confluence and influence’ are part of the historian Peter Lake’s terminology (see *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage: Power, and Succession in the History Plays*, 2016).

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomatic structure favours a non-hierarchical circular and heterogeneous vision that includes multiplicities. The method they suggest offers a safe way to enter complexity and to venture in unknown territories with a scientific step by step approach. It fits our research insofar as it allows freedom from already existing hierarchical models together with integrating them in its structure. Finally, the term 'resource' suggested by John Drakakis imposes itself as most conveniently describing "the variety that inheres in this important aspect of Shakespeare's complex processes of composition" (Drakakis 2018, p. 75). Source studies may therefore become resource studies, thereby acquiring the whole dimension of an expanding rhizomatic structure, and transtextual relations open to include non-textual resources such as oral discourse and archaeological data.

In the first chapter, we were particularly attached to uncovering the characteristics of Ancient Celtic literary tradition in order to make their presence in Shakespeare's plays visible and recognizable. This was achieved via the character of King Arthur, and the Arthurian matter, that was the open door to this research project because prior to this thesis, previous investigations made us aware of the Celtic origin of the matter of Britain, which enabled us to detect motifs first in *King Lear*, and later in other plays. We explored Arthur's aura in the Chronicles in order to provide a preliminary study of Celtic motifs, tracing relations to *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, and also in order to better appreciate the discrepancy in the treatment of Arthur's character between the Medieval period and the Renaissance.

The second chapter focused on Arthur's dimension and downfall in Shakespeare's plays, presenting a detailed account of Arthurian references in *King Lear*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *1 and 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. Medieval romance provided a canal of transmission and evolution of the matter of Britain into the Early Modern era, and Helen Cooper's monograph *The English Romance in Time, Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (2004) was an essential aid to our demonstration. This chapter forwarded information about Arthur's castle Camelot, his court and the world of women as related to Celtic goddesses; and the study of the character of Queen Guinevere first introduced the path of transmission from Celtic to Christian conceptions as regards women. Finally, the reference to Merlin in *King Lear* sketched the Ancient figure of the druid in a duplicate form in Lear and his Fool; and the prophecy, so common a feature in Celtic tradition, also proved a motif that resonated in the politics of Early Modern time, thereby acknowledging another path of transmission related to orality.

In the third chapter, we demonstrated the English renaissance vision of ‘borderers’, i.e. the Celtic speaking margins of the British Isles: Wales, Ireland and Scotland, in *Cymbeline*, *Henry V*, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *King Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Macbeth*, with an insight in Thomas Dekker’s *The Welsh Ambassador*. The main theme developed in this chapter was the dialogue between the centre and the margins, and the consequent hierarchy implied in the ambient discourse concerning ‘national’ identity in Shakespeare’s time. Notions of social status and language were particularly salient in the definition of this hierarchy and in Shakespeare’s nuanced treatment of the multicultural discursive communities that existed among his contemporaries.

Chapter four analyzed tensions and Celtic motifs in the Celto-Roman context of *Cymbeline*, one of the two instances of Shakespeare’s plays set in a Celtic historical time together with *King Lear*. Investigations in the Chronicles and in the Early Modern historical con-text enabled to enhance a turning point and a paradox in Early Modern ideology that had started in the Middle Ages, insofar as the society was striving to be Roman in ancestry and in quality. Shakespeare subtly articulated this vision and also provided his contemporaries with a perception of their own insular past. *Cymbeline* also integrates motifs that a Celtic interpretation significantly enriches. Dealing with the warrior and warfare techniques, the motif of the severed head was developed according to the Classics, archaeological data, Irish and Welsh narratives and the Early Modern con-text. Then, the theme of music and the Otherworld led us onto the path of spirituality, itself further illustrated by women figures in *Cymbeline*, in relation to fairies, the queen and the Celtic goddess par excellence – Nature.

Chapter five built on the development of the goddess in Celtic tradition, illustrated by the two-fold figure of the fairy-hag. In *Macbeth*, we discussed the foul and the fair sides of the play, studying the characters’ names according to Jean Berton’s analysis of Gaelic onomastics, and going on with the characters of the Weïrd Sisters, and of Lady Macbeth, who was seen as a ‘redeemed hag’. This emphasized a profoundly differential structure in the play that led us to a further exploration of magic and the supernatural in Shakespeare’s work, separated as it is in two distinct representations: the dark fairy and the enchanted fairy world. After *Macbeth* and its dark tragic setting, *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* provided us with a development of the ‘light’ side of magic, envisioned through the characters of Prospero, Titania and Oberon, and Puck-Hobgoblin-Robin Goodfellow. Finally, our demonstration led on to the walking forest motif in *Macbeth* which in itself summarizes the evolution from Celtic tradition to the ambivalence in Shakespeare’s treatment of magic. This

section revealed references in the Welsh, Irish and Continental narratives which prolong Shakespeare's equivocal vision of the three Sisters' prophecy of Birnam Wood walking to the fortress of Dunsinane. *Macbeth* and the theme of magic in Shakespeare revealed a path of transmission that was deeply influenced by the Christian religion, whose ideology differentiated two aspects that were previously the two sides of the same coin in Celtic tradition: dark and white magic. Shakespeare articulates this dichotomic vision because *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth* are significantly separated in genre, but he also suggests the oxymoronic intricacy of benevolent and malevolent magic within each play.

The sixth and final chapter focused exclusively on *King Lear*, offering a Celtic reading of the play through three motifs: kingship and the bear, the king, the queen and the land, and finally the Otherworld. Each motif was studied through its resonance in the Early Modern context like the popular bear baitings or King James's marital relation to the land, but they were further illustrated by Ancient meanings that revealed previously unexplored aspects of the play.

Therefore, this research has unearthed more than was expected in relation to this fascinating subject. The relative absence of previous treatment in the domain of Celtic resources required a progressive discussion of the most obvious aspects of the question to then evolve into more abstract and speculative grounds. We favoured a safe, careful and gradual progress into a previously unexplored territory. We followed the rhizome, sometimes indulging in the development of Celtic narratives so as to provide an insight into the culture, but focusing back on Shakespeare and the presence of residual Celtic motifs in his plays.

Much could have been developed for which we lacked space in the present format of the thesis. The figure of the author that is so fluctuating in Shakespeare's time appears as an inheritor of oral tradition in which there was no personal 'work' but collective narratives. Consequently, the art of storytelling, specific to oral societies, is an object for a further study. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare uses prologues before each act and appeals to the audience's imagination to convey battles or an army crossing the Channel. This a priori banal technique encloses characteristics of the oral that would be worth exploring into more depth. The same is true with the fairy world and especially the green world, in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or its mock creation in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. We occasionally mentioned Celtic feasts, particularly Samhain, Lughnasadh and Beltane, but their development in relation to Shakespeare's works is yet to come, especially as regards the month of May. Furthermore, an authorial dimension and intentionality are not of primary concern as determinants for the

transmission of Ancient motifs to exist, and Shakespeare can be considered as a 'passeur' of his native culture. However, the subtle process of creation, drawing on Ancient resources, could be developed further in an interdisciplinary approach with cognitive sciences.

Furthermore, in the light of the present research, new projects may emerge, such as the creation of a digital interactive mapping of Shakespeare's resources. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome', this could relate to the Celtic domain and be extended to other areas. A two year research work is envisaged by applying to Marie Sklodowska Curie European program for postdoctoral research. The scheme's frame makes it possible to plan training periods in any domain the research necessitates, which would be an invaluable opportunity to develop our knowledge in Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic and also in Latin, in order to reach the original documents and corpus.

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari advocate the free 'nomadic' agency of thought that they term 'the war machine', against the assertive 'State apparatus':

The problem is that the exteriority of the war machine in relation to the State apparatus is everywhere apparent but remains difficult to conceptualize. It is not enough to affirm that the war machine is external to the apparatus. It is necessary to reach the point of conceiving the war machine as itself a pure form of exteriority, whereas the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A thousand Plateaus*, tr. Masumi and Brian, 1987, p. 354)

Proceeding with their argumentation against a rigid form of thinking, they cite Marcel Proust, for whom the book was like a pair of glasses to be tried on, to see if the perception of things could be significantly improved with it (1976, p. 72). The present 'book' provides new features that illustrate Shakespeare's particular style, and it is hoped that it will be comparably efficient to produce an enjoyable reading of his plays.



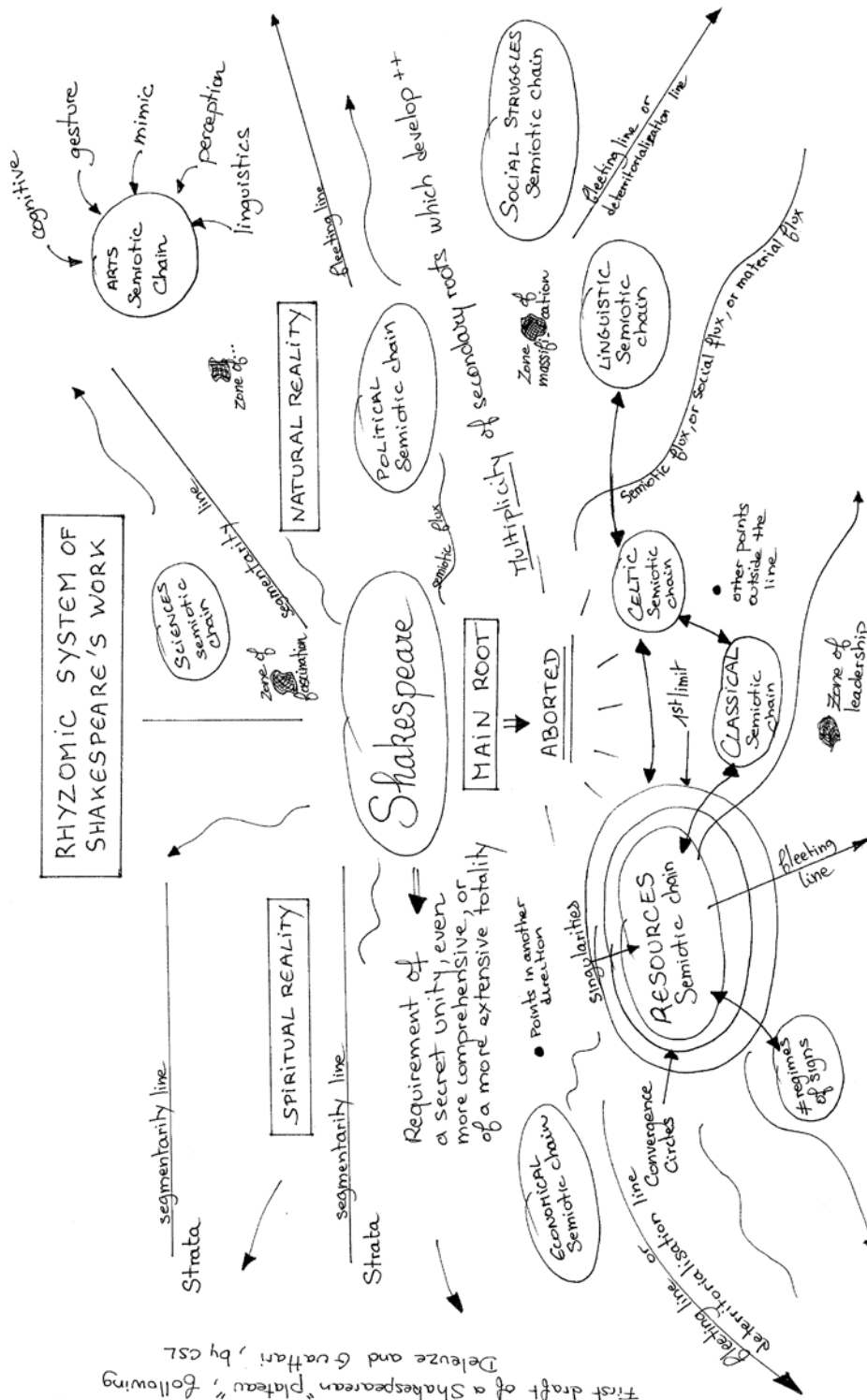
# ANNEXES





**Annex to the introduction:**

**A preliminary study of the rhizomatic system of Shakespeare's work, by CSL**



First draft of a Shakespearean "plateau", following Deleuze and Guattari, by CSL

**Annex to the introduction: illustration**



Sir Henry Lee (1533-1611), by Antonis Mor (1568).  
A favourite of Queen Elizabeth.  
The 'true-loversknots' and armillary spheres that decorate  
his sleeves were personal emblems of the queen and  
probably refer to Lee's role as Elizabeth's champion.  
(NPG, London, photograph by CSL)

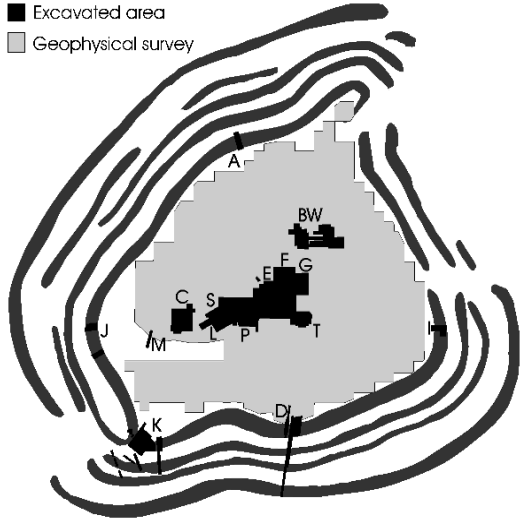
Annex to chapter 1: illustrations



Old Sarum



A reconstruction showing how the Iron Age hill-fort may have appeared in about 100 BC.  
© Historic England, illustration by Peter Dunn



Alcock's work on Cadbury Castle 1966-1970.



South Cadbury Castle



King Arthur (2004)



Clive Owen as King Arthur, 2004





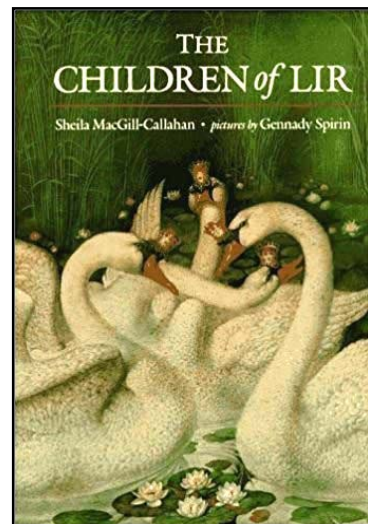
A reconstruction of a Romano-British warlord, based on archeological evidence. By David Lloyd Owen, Camelot Research Committee, Osprey Publishing



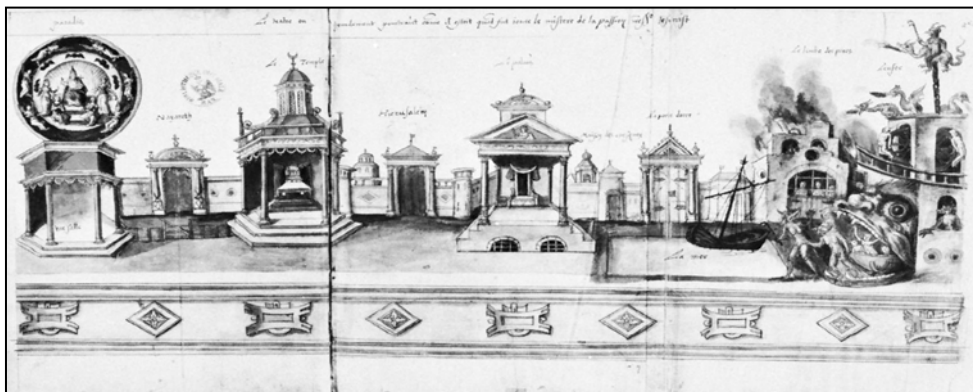
Roman infantryman, Britannia, 4th century AD. By Richard Hook, Osprey Publishing



Statue of a Celto-Roman goose crested war goddess. 2<sup>nd</sup> half 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD. Museum of Brittany, Rennes, France.



Front Cover, the Children of Lir, retold by Sheila MacGill-Callahan with illustrations by Gennady Spririn, 1993.



Setting for the Valenciennes mystery play, with the gigantic hell-mouth on the right hand side. Miniature by Hubert Cailleau, 1547, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

## Annex to chapter 2: *The Children of Lir*

Ler is often cited as Manannan's and Branwen's father in the Welsh *Mabinogi*. He is an ancient figure belonging to the origins of Insular Irish mythology,<sup>403</sup> but the only story in which Ler intervenes as a mythic character proper is *Oidhe Chloinne Lir* or *The Fate of the Children of Lir*.<sup>404</sup> The tale involves a transformation into swans, which accords with our present argument but bears little similarity to Shakespeare's play, although some points may be noticed. *The Tragedy of the Children of Lir* is part of the *Cycle of Ulster* in Irish mythology. Since about the 18th century, there has been a tendency among scholars to group this text together with *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh* (*The Tragic Fate of the Sons of Uisnach*) and *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann* (*The Tragic Fate of the Children of Tuireann*) under the collective title *Trí Truagha na Sgéalaigheachta* (*The Three Sorrows of Storytelling*).<sup>405</sup> The oldest manuscript available dates from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (N° XXXVIII in the Scottish collection). Guyonvarc'h explains (1986, p. 401) that it was transmitted at a late stage and Christianized. Magnus Maclean suggests that the tale was seen by Nutt and Mackinnon as a possible Celtic version of another one entitled *Seven Swans* (1902, p. 144), thus placing it within a tradition of swan stories<sup>406</sup> and not exclusive to Celtic culture. Maclean adds that *The Children of Lir* was "once very popular" (*ibid.*) and that it survived in Ireland up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at least; one of the most popular versions was that of Sheila MacGill Callahan's (1993). This is how the story develops according to Maclean's retelling:

In a conflict with the Milesians, the Tuatha de Danann were defeated, and found it necessary to deliberate on the policy they must pursue and the king they should elect. Various candidates were eligible, but Bodhbha Dearg was ultimately chosen. In high dudgeon, Lir, who sought the exalted position for himself, left

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<sup>403</sup> "Ler [...] the father of Manannan, one of the most important gods of the mythological cycle. The name is obviously metaphorical (a secondary sense is 'multitude, abundance') and it originally refers to the ocean as 'vast and flat stretch of water' [...]. The existence of this divinity which represents one of the original aspects of the Tuatha De Danann was expressly – and uselessly – questioned" (*ibid.*, tr. by CSL).

<sup>404</sup> Several translations of the title exist, such as *The Violent Death of the Children of Ler*, *The Tragic Fate of the Children of Ler*, *The Tragedy of the Children of Ler*, since translations for *Oidheadh* or *aided* are a) violent death, b) an act of killing and c) In a more general sense an unpleasant fate, a plight. See the *Electronic Dictionary of Irish Language* at <http://www.dil.ie/866> (accessed 25/02/19).

<sup>405</sup> [http://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Oidheadh\\_chloinne\\_Lir](http://www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Oidheadh_chloinne_Lir) (accessed 25/02/19).

<sup>406</sup> *The Six Swans* collected by the Grimm Brothers or *The Wild Swans* by H. C. Andersen both follow the same pattern of a widowed king remarried to a wicked queen who turns his children into swans and *Swan Lake* is yet another story of magic and transformation into swans.

the assembly and returned to his own Sidh<sup>407</sup>. So far from retaliating, the new ruler, when Lir's wife died, sent for him and offered him his choice of three of the most beautiful and best instructed maidens in all Erin. He took the eldest of the sisters and married her. But she died, leaving four handsome children, a daughter and three sons<sup>408</sup>. A second time Lir had his choice, and Eva, sister number two, came a spouse to his home at Sidh Fionnachaidh. A devoted stepmother she proved to the children, till by and by green jealousy infected her. She saw that their father would often rise from his bed in the dawn of the morning and go to theirs to fondle them. (Maclean, p. 144)

The jealous stepmother, whose Irish name is Aoife, attempted to have them executed by servants, but they refused to undertake the task. She tried to do it herself but could not accomplish the task, out of weakness. However, she did not give up, and this is how, according to Maclean she finally achieved her aim:

She got the children to bathe in Lake Dairbhreach, and once there, by druidical enchantment she transformed them into four beautiful snow-white swans. As such for 300 years they swam back and fore on the smooth lake, then for 300 in the Sruthna Maoile (off Kintyre), and 300 more at Iorus Domnann and Innis Gluaire, in the Western Sea.(Ibid.)

It is said that the end of the children's torment would continue until a prince from the North named Larguen would marry a princess from the South named Becca. Although Aoife eventually repented her evil deed she could not undo her spell, but as compensation she granted the children of "the use of their Gaelic speech, of their human reason, and the power of singing sweet, plaintive fairy music, surpassing all known in the world in its harmony and soothing influence" (*ibid.*, p. 145). However, on hearing of her mischief, the king, Bodhbha Dearg punished Aoife by turning her into a demon of the air, the creature she most abhorred. At last, Saint Kemoc, (or Saint Patrick himself in another variant) arrived as their savior, "bringing the light of a pure faith [and] the voice of a Christian bell" (p. 145), and they resumed their human shape, received baptism and died. The ending tells of the Christianization of the tale but also illustrates what happens to enchanted beings once they return to human life. Although the birds can fly between this and the Otherworld, they retain

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<sup>407</sup> That is to say to his own Otherworld dwelling.

<sup>408</sup> Lir has four children, Aedh, Conn, Fiachna and Fionnghuala, three boys and a girl.

the characteristics of fairy beings and cannot die. Time in the Otherworld is not human time and after 900 years, the children die once they return to human form.<sup>409</sup>

This is a substantial departure from the narrative in Shakespeare's play but a few points may be noted. First, Lir's wife is dead and Lear's queen has just died. This is made explicit in the anonymous *King Leir* (1605) and only implied in Shakespeare's version, but this fact is of major importance for a "Celtic" reading of the play that will be discussed in Chapter 6. Lir is given a choice between three women while in Shakespeare's play the three women are not potential wives but daughters. Some kind of transposition of status from dead mother to the daughters seems to be at issue here. Hypothetically, a displacement may have occurred from the figure of the wife to the daughter over time and in the wake of the gradual disappearance of the purely magic elements of the swans.

The Saint Kemock or Saint Patrick ending in *The Children of Lir* shows strong signs of Christianization and the ending of *King Lear* can be seen as part of a process of the king's redemption in accordance with Christianity. It can be argued that in both stories, ancient lore and magic are brought into alignment with Christian views. However, in *King Lear*, if the ancient context is essential to the reenactment of a long lost past, it is nonetheless reconstructed in accordance with 17<sup>th</sup> century culture, with the magic elements relegated to a secondary position and often treated as comedy, as we have seen with Arthurian references. *The Children of Lir* retains strong characteristics of Celtic narrative, magic being the most prominent and the strange numerological treatment of time: the three times three hundred year errand of the children as swans. Its temporal location is supposed to be at the beginning of times, since it involves the Tuatha de Danann and Lir, who are primary Gods of Irish mythology. Therefore, between Lir and Lear, there is a gap between mythology and a pseudo-history that seems to be directed towards a Medieval attempt to provide a historical ancestry and a cultural identity for the British people. Monmouth retained mythic elements in his invention of a genealogy of kings but dispensed with a considerable amount of ancient matter in the process.

To conclude, the links between *The Children of Lir* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, are not as obvious although the similarity of the name indicates the possibility of an ancient

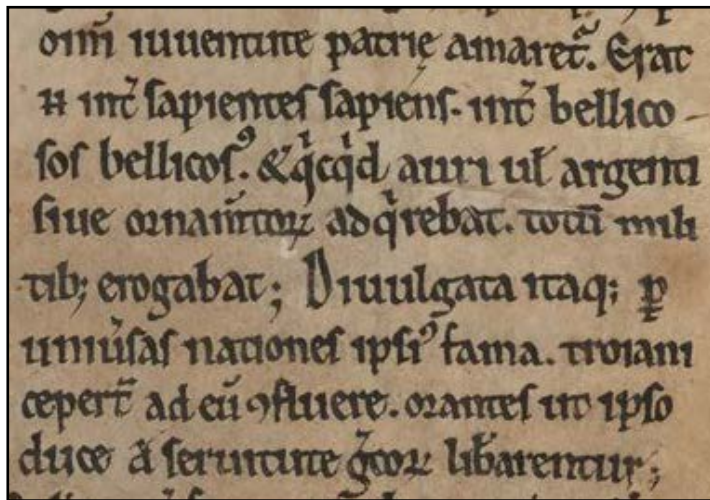
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<sup>409</sup> Numerous examples exist of the difference between human time and what can be called "fairy" time. The difference of time between the two worlds is explicit in the story of Oisín and Níav, in the Finn cycle, where Oisín, taken to the Isle of the Youth by Níav of the golden hair is only allowed to go back to the human world for a short moment, but under no circumstances must he touch the ground, she tells him. He agrees with the conditions and rides the sea on Níav's white mare. But inevitably, Oisín falls from his horse and ages instantaneously.



mythological character resurfacing in Shakespeare. The death of Lir / Lear's wife and the possible displacement of the three wives onto the three daughters, together with the motif of the triad appear as blurred motifs, (see Chapter 5), while the swans, the very centre of the Lir story, are not present at all in *King Lear*. Yet, this story of *The Children of Lir*, however different it appears from Shakespeare's play, cannot but give it another dimension. In any case, Lir and Lear are preoccupied with women, be they wives or daughters, and they are both caught within a triad of females who for Lear, push him toward his death.

Annex to chapter 2: illustrations



Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*,  
 MS 6040, 1176, f4r., Gallica.Bnf.fr.



The Wilton Diptych, exterior.  
 National Gallery, London.



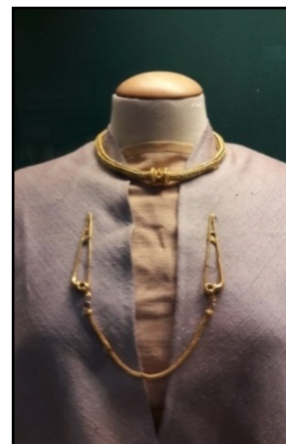
Stone relief of Cernunnos, with antlers and ram-  
 horned serpents forming his legs, Cirencester,  
 Gloucestershire. Photograph Betty Naggar.



Poseidon fighting the giant Polybotes under  
 the eyes of Gaia. Signed by Aristophane,  
 c. 410-405 BC. Berlin, Antikemuseen.



The Great Torc, Snettisham, buried 100 B.C.,  
 British Museum, London. Photograph CSL



The Winchester Hoard,  
 75-25 BC. British Museum, London.  
 Photograph CSL.



‘The youthful and precocious Merlin reads his prophecies to Vortigern’,  
 from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Prophetia Merlini*,  
 MS Cotton Claudius B VII f.224, 13<sup>th</sup> Century, British Library



Merlin, represented as ‘the wild’, with foliage around his waist and looking  
 toward the future. Illustration from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* by Hartman  
 Schedel (1440-1514), illustrated by Michael Wolgemut and Wilhem  
 Pleydenwurff, published in 1493



**Annex to chapter 3: illustration**



Boudicca, queen of the Iceni, Bronze sculptural group located on the north side of Westminster Bridge, London, executed between 1856 and 1883 by Thomas Thornycroft, and erected in 1902

Annex to chapter 4: illustrations



Representation of Cunobelin's silver coins, Group C types. Philip De Jersey.

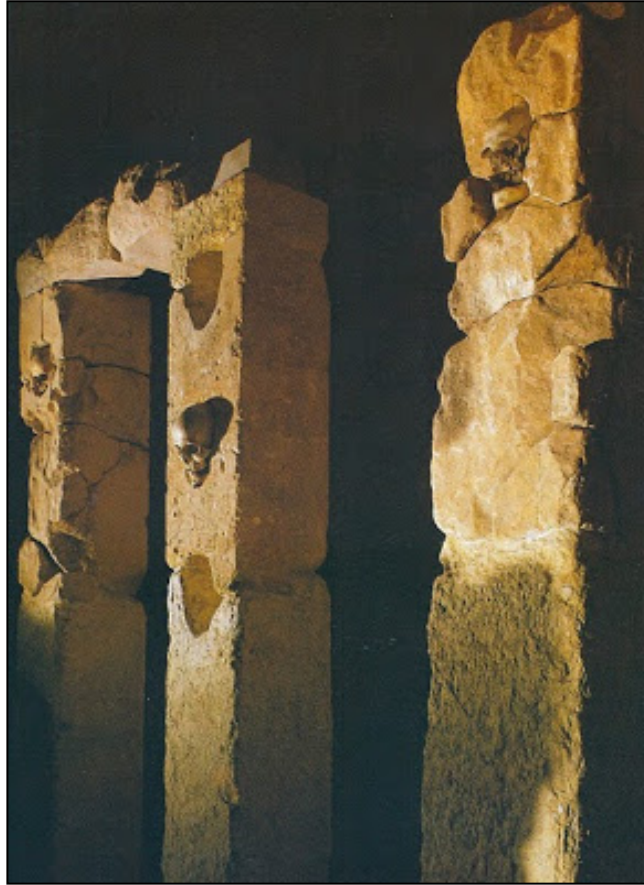


'The Trvve picture of one Pict', engraving by Theodor De Bry, from Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590)



The Irish banquet, plate V in John Derricke's *Image of Irelande* (1581)



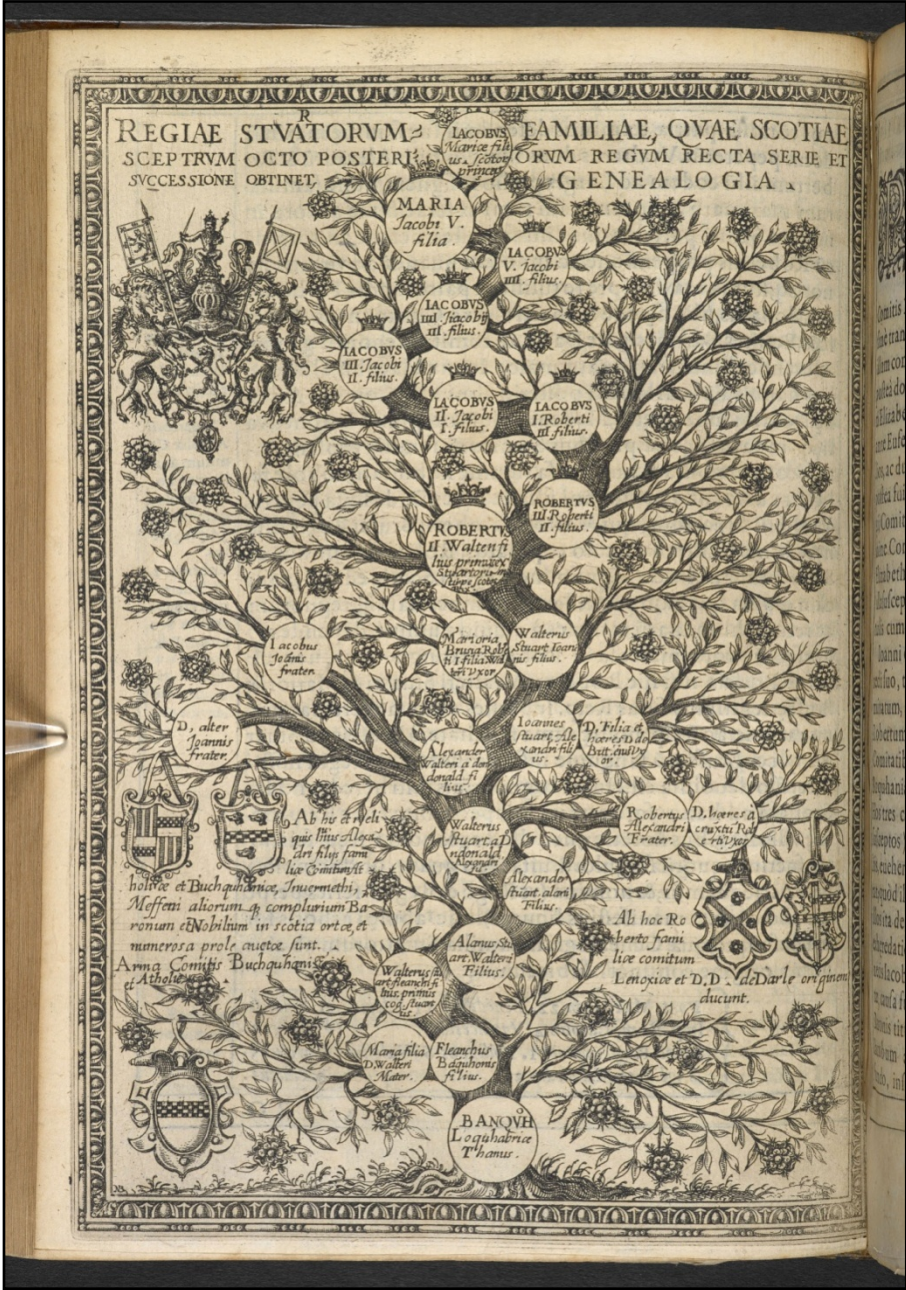


The sanctuary of Roquepertuse and the  
Celtic cult of the head



The three matres, Housesteads Roman fort, U.K  
Photograph by CSL

Annex to chapter 5: illustration



The genealogy of Banquo  
 from John Leslie, *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum* (1578).  
 British Library



**Annex to chapter 6: illustrations**



King Lear by Nawel Louerrad (2011)



The berserkir from the Lewis chess set. British Museum, London.  
Photograph by CSL.



The “Bear and Ragged Staff”, the emblem of the Beaumont and Beauchamp families, Earls of Warwick, became the device of the Dudley family, surmounted by an earl’s coronet, reputedly given by Queen Elizabeth I.



Several versions of the bear and the ragged staff adorn Leicester Hospital in Warwick.



“Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, and great-great-great-great grandson of Richard Beauchamp, is known to have used the combined device of the bear and the ragged staff frequently as a badge and seal and as the crest on his coat of arms”

Sometime between 200BC and AD100 this bronze plaque was cast into a lake at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey. The elaborate 'triskele' (three-legged design radiating from a centre), may represent the relationships between the living, the dead and the gods or the ongoing cycle of birth, life and death.

(adapted from the National Museum of Wales's website)



Crescentic plaque from Llyn Cerrig Bach, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Cardiff, National Museum of Wales.



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