

1599 and Essex's Irish Rebellion

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James Shapiro: Thanks for coming out on this snowy night. I feel like it's "we few, we happy few" who have braved the weather to be here. And I'm really delighted, always, to be at the Folger. And very, very happy to be introduced by Mike and to be with you here today from now until 6:55, when I'm instructed to throw everyone out of this room so that they can prepare for tonight's show. And I'm happy to lead you into that extraordinary exhibit on Ireland, which is the first time the Folger, I believe, has done an exhibition on Ireland.

I also want to say, doing my sound check tonight, it's usually not a lot of fun and you do the "One, two, three, testing. One, two, three." But today I got to do, onstage with this beautiful set, the great Crispin Crispian speech of Henry V, until the sound guy cut me off halfway. I got a couple of more lines in. But they said that was enough.

Let me talk to you for the next 40 minutes, or talk at you for the next 40 minutes, on Shakespeare, *Henry V*, and Ireland. And then we'll have 10 minutes for Q & A. And I'm delighted to entertain any questions you might have. Shakespeare famously began *Henry V* with a Chorus who challenges us to use our imaginations to time travel. "Let us, ciphers to this great account, / On your imaginary forces work."

"For 'tis your thoughts," he adds, "that now must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times, / Turning th' accomplishments of many years / Into an hour-glass."

I'd like to offer a lesser version of that here, challenging you all to imagine what it was like to be sitting in an audience at one of the first productions of *Henry V*, 400 years ago, in the spring of 1599. And to that end, I'll do my best to share with you what you need to know about what was going on in that world, in England and in neighboring and rebellious Ireland, so that you can be familiar with what Shakespeare would have expected his first audiences to know, and fear, about that moment.

There's one thing that you should know as you engage in this bit of time travel. Had you seen staged, sometime in 1598, Shakespeare's *Second Part of Henry IV*, you would have learned what he had promised in the sequel, *Henry V*. Here's what Shakespeare wrote in the epilogue to that play—the only time, I might add, that he ever offered "coming attractions," and he probably regretted it as soon as he did: "[I]f you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our

humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France.”

In other words, expect to see Will Kemp back in the role of fat Jack Falstaff, and expect a love story in there as well, with fair Katherine of France. Well, events would overtake that early vision of the play. Kemp would quit the company, and *Henry V* would have to do without his clowning. And yes, there would be a bit about Katherine of France, but contemporary events, as we shall see, had changed so dramatically that the play that Shakespeare finished writing had little resemblance to the one promised there.

Since you, as playgoers in London, had seen *The Second Part of Henry IV*, the news both at home and abroad had been unrelentingly grim. The mood had turned dark in August 1598, when reports of a catastrophic military defeat in Ireland reached and shook England. News of the annihilation of English troops at Blackwater in Ulster spread quickly. On the last day of August, John Chamberlain wrote in London to his friend Dudley Carleton, “We have lately received a great blow in Ireland... This is the greatest loss and dishonour the Queen hath had in her time.” Chamberlain was amazed at the enormity of the defeat, and yet, he noted that it hadn’t really sunk in. He writes, “it seems we are not moved with it, which whether it proceed more of courage than of wit I know not, but I fear it is rather a careless and insensible dullness.”

Out of overconfidence, or perhaps disrespect for the military skill of the Irish rebels, the English had not yet woken up to what was in store for them. The crushing loss dashed hopes for peace with Spain, put a severe strain on England’s financial resources, and made the unfilled office of the deputy of Ireland a far more vital post than it had been just a month earlier.

Now, the root cause of this military disaster can be traced as far back as the twelfth century and the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, after which the kings of England declare themselves, as well, lords of Ireland. The English presence in Ireland over the following centuries had never really displaced the power and authority of local Gaelic lords. Irish politics, in other words, remained decentralized. Clans and feuding chieftains—who ruled over people rather than territory—remained the dominant political force.

The influence of the Old English, as the Anglo-Norman settlers were called, did not extend much farther than the major ports and towns and the area around Dublin, which was called the Pale, where the English administered the country. The English, in other words, made very few inroads north and west, and successive English kings were content to let surrogate feudal lords, to whom lesser lords paid tribute in exchange for protection, manage things in their absence.

This often anarchic state of affairs took a turn for the worse under the Tudors. Because Henry VIII decided to declare himself King of Ireland, no longer just lord of Ireland, and also, for good measure, supreme head of its Church. Hereafter, it was decided, the Irish would speak English and abandon, as well as their language, their Catholic faith.

The Tudor fantasy of imposing English religion, law, language, primogeniture, dress, and, of course, civility failed to have the desired effect. To the bewilderment of English observers, the rude Irish clung to their strange and barbarous customs--and I'm smiling, because I'm married to a woman with Irish citizenship.

And, to their consternation, many of the Old English settlers had, over the course of several centuries, gone native, adopting Irish customs and marrying into local families, vastly complicating loyalties and alliances between the Gaelic, the Old English, and the New English inhabitants—and unnerving those committed to preserving a pure and unsullied Englishness.

Queen Elizabeth's Irish policies were characterized by incoherence and neglect. The queen was too miserly to pay the huge price to subdue Ireland and too distracted by other concerns to acknowledge the weakness of her colonial policies. The impression left on a visiting French diplomat in London was that, and I'm quoting, the "English and the Queen herself would wish Ireland drowned in the sea, for she cannot get any profit from it; and meanwhile the expense and trouble is very great, and she cannot put any trust in that people."

The Elizabethan policy of expropriating huge swaths of Irish land and inviting Englishmen over to settle on these "plantations" provoked local resentment. Irish rebels looked to Spain for support and rallied followers around their threatened Catholic identity. Meanwhile, each short-lived English viceroy, who was suspected back in the English court, lacking support for ambitious reforms, bewildered by Ireland's complex political landscape, and often corrupt and brutal, failed in turn to establish either peace or stability. Elizabeth's muddled and half-hearted strategies were penny-wise and pound-foolish: in the last two decades of her reign she would spend two million pounds—an extraordinary amount—and the lives of many English conscripts in ongoing efforts to pacify Ireland.

By the mid-1590s, chieftains opposed to English rule managed to put their differences aside long enough to unite under the leadership of a small group of Irish lords, most prominent among them the Ulsterman Hugh O'Neill, known to the English as the Earl of Tyrone, or simply Tyrone. Tyrone was now about 50 years old. He had spent some of his formative years among the English in the Pale, was fully versed with English military strategy, and was a brilliant, if slightly overcautious, commander.

William Camden, the British historian, gives a thumbnail sketch that conveys the grudging admiration the English had for this adversary: Tyrone "had a strong body, able to endure labor, watching, and hunger. His industry was great, his soul large and fit for the weightiest business. Much knowledge he had in military affairs, and a profound dissembling heart." Tyrone's fellow Irishman, Peter Lombard, rounds out this portrait, describing him as a leader who knew how to keep his "feelings under control," yet one who also knew how to exercise his charisma. Lombard writes, "He quite captivates the feelings of men by the nobility of his looks and countenance, and wins the affection of his soldiers or strikes terror into them." By 1598, Tyrone

and his allies O'Donnell and Maguire were ready to strike hard at the English when the opportunity presented itself.

The immediate cause of the defeat of the English at Blackwater—also known as the Battle of Yellow Ford—can be traced back a year to December 1597, when Lord Burgh led 3,000 soldiers and 500 cavalry from Dublin to the Blackwater River, a strategic junction near Armagh leading up to Ulster. The English military in Ireland were convinced that the only way to cut off the head of the Irish rebellion was to go after Tyrone in his home base of Ulster. And the sure way to do that was to land forces from the north at Lough Foyle—tying up Tyrone's defenses and then laying waste to his native grounds—while at the same time, controlling the entry into Ulster from the south by establishing a series of key garrisons along the way from Dublin through Dundalk, Newry, and Armagh.

To this end, on 14 July 1597, Burgh's forces dislodged a small contingent of Tyrone's men who were guarding the Blackwater ford and established a small garrison there. But this was supposed to be part of a chain of garrisons, and until those other garrisons were built, the Blackwater fort remained vulnerable, its 300 troops too isolated to resupply. Shortly after, Burgh, like so many of the English commanders in Ireland before him, took sick and died. The establishment of another garrison up at Lough Foyle and this pincer movement never took place.

So Tyrone let one of his periodic truces with the English lapse, and he and his allies went on the offensive, catching the English off guard at both Leinster and Blackwater. Tyrone decided it was just easier to starve the English troops than assault them directly, so the Blackwater garrison of 300 men was soon reduced to eating first their horses, and then grass and roots.

The best military minds that the English had in Ireland said, abandon this outpost. But their advice was ignored. Sir Henry Bagenal, an old campaigner, volunteered to lead an English army out of Dublin to resupply Blackwater. I think his motivation for this was that Tyrone had eloped with his sister Mabel seven years earlier, and this was his chance to pay back. You can just imagine the departure: Bagenal's well-equipped army of close to 4,000 foot soldiers and 320 cavalry departing from Dublin in early August 1598. It must have been a very comforting sight to the English settlers there.

Well, Bagenal's army left Dublin, passed through Armagh, and by the 14th of August, they marched the final stage to Blackwater, with Bagenal dividing his large army into six regiments: two in front, two in the middle, two in the back. The idea was that, if they were attacked, they would, like an accordion, close up. It was the worst possible tactic imaginable.

After marching a mile through sniper fire, the English vanguard pressed to the point near the Callen Brook known as the Yellow Ford, where it had to pass through a long trench through the bogs. The fort was now in sight, and you can imagine the starving 300 waving their caps, seeing the lead column coming to their relief. But at this point the lead English column fell into disarray.

A heavy artillery piece, which they were dragging along, got stuck in a ford, and the gap between the front regiments and the others began to widen. The vanguard received orders to close the gap, but it was turned back, and the Irish closed in on them at that point and put them "to the sword without resistance."

The English, at this point, panicked. Bagenal was in the middle of the three groups. He rushed forward and was shot through the head. His regiment suffered the same fate as those in the vanguard. Retreat was now urgent. It was chaotic. And then there was a huge explosion (probably set off by the spark from a lighted match of an English soldier replenishing his supply of gunpowder). Chaos ensued, and black smoke enveloped the English troops. Raw recruits ran for their lives and "were for the most part put to the sword."

Hundreds of the Irish in Bagenal's army—because the English didn't want to bring over all their own soldiers, so they paid to have Irish fight for them—turned tail and joined up with the Irish, who were now attacking the British. The rearguard regiments rushed forward, only to be put to the sword themselves and charged by 2,000 Irish foot soldiers. The surviving English officers were barely able to manage a retreat. And of all those troops who had marched so proudly out of Dublin, only 1,500 of them were able to survive. They rushed back to Armagh and holed themselves up in a church there with enough food to last for eight or nine days. Meanwhile, the Irish forces stripped the dead and beheaded the wounded.

With Bagenal dead and several thousand troops killed or wounded, nothing now stood between Tyrone and the undefended English in Dublin, the heart of English rule. And if the Spanish had been able to capitalize on this and send Tyrone long-promised reinforcements, the situation would have been dire indeed. Seeing no choice, the English lord justices in Dublin sent Tyrone a groveling letter, begging him not to inflict "any further hurt" and warning him that Elizabeth would be angry if he did so. Elizabeth got a copy of this and she was incensed at their cowardice. She wasn't holed up in Armagh.

Unbeknownst to the lord justices, Elizabeth, and against the advice of his supporters, Tyrone decided to give them generous terms and let the English leave Armagh. He also let the starving troops at Blackwater put down their arms and walk away. He passed on his chance to drive into Dublin because he assumed that this pincer movement was still going to go on, and he wanted to protect his flank. It was just a cautious miscalculation that would prove disastrous in the long run for Tyrone.

While Dublin and its environs were spared, Irish forces elsewhere in the country set to work during the summer and autumn of 1598, determined to uproot the plantations of the New English who had appropriated their land. And that includes such great English writers as Raleigh and Spenser. Spenser hightailed it out of there down to Cork and sailed to England and died a week after he arrived there. If you were an English plantation owner with thousands of acres in Ireland, this was not a good time. Tobie Matthew wrote to Dudley Carleton in

September that since "the great overthrow" at Blackwater, there were "four hundred more throats cut in Ireland."

The desire for revenge and the satisfaction derived from Irish bloodletting is conveyed in some lines of verse of my favorite Renaissance poet, John Donne. Even the best poets can get bloodthirsty. Here's a couple of lines about Donne's view of Ireland at this time: "Sick Ireland is with a strange war possessed / Like to an ague, now raging, now at rest, / Which time will cure, yet it must do her good / If she were purged, and her head-vein let blood." Let's go after the Irish in the North.

Now, the Earl of Essex—the most charismatic man in England, the queen's favorite, who had recently fallen out of favor with her—weighed in on who should lead a retaliatory force. When his friend Lord Mountjoy's name was put forward, Essex opposed the idea, arguing that Mountjoy lacked military experience and was, frankly, too bookish. As each candidate in turn was proposed, Essex found grounds for objecting; only, he said, "some prime man of the nobility" would do, someone "strong in power, honor, and wealth, in favor with the military men," who "had been before general of an army." It soon became obvious, as the historian William Camden notes, that "he seemed to point with the finger to himself."

His enemies enthusiastically endorsed sending Essex. At the least, he'd be overseas and unable to interfere with their designs at court. And Essex knew well enough that once out of the queen's orbit, his enemies would try to poison her against him. But he was trapped: He couldn't stand watching a lesser man lead so great an army.

But England, at this time, had no standing army to send off to fight, so troops would have to be conscripted. The number of Englishmen rounded up from villages or urban streets to fight abroad kept growing and growing in the 1590s. The number drafted in the first six months of 1599 alone was 7,300. Apprentices and unmarried men in London of lower social stations had special cause to be fearful.

To Londoners in particular, the crown's demand for fresh troops must have seemed insatiable. Local authorities didn't hesitate during Elizabeth's reign to raid fairs, ale houses, inns, and other popular meeting places. The authorities could count on a good haul at the playhouses as well. And there's a lovely account from 1602 when Philip Gawdy writes that there "hath been great pressing of late, and strange, as it ever was known in England. All the playhouses were beset in a day and very many pressed from thence, so that in all there are pressed 4,000." I just imagine soldiers breaking open the doors to the theaters, hauling out everybody who was single, or for that matter, unwilling here to pay a bribe, and sent off packing to fight in Ireland. It must have been a very uncomfortable feeling for playgoers or churchgoers at that time.

Of course, you could be sent packing to Ireland, but you could always try to creep back to London. And in October 1598, 300 Londoners who had been rounded up and shipped off mutinied and decided to come back, and Shakespeare and everybody else would have known

about this. When they arrived in a town called Towcester, they just refused to go any further. And there may well have been widespread sympathy for such an action by men yanked out of churches, inns, or playhouses to die in Ireland, ill fed, poorly armed, poorly trained, even more so after the news trickled back of the disaster in Blackwater.

John Baxter, who knew the situation on the ground in Ireland well, spoke of "the poor English" who "are half dead before they come there, for the very name of Ireland do break their hearts, it is now so grown to misery." Richard Bagwell records a Cheshire proverb at the time: "Better to be hanged at home than die like dogs in Ireland."

As 1598 came to a close, Essex remained uncommitted about whether he'd be willing to lead this army. John Chamberlain writes at the time, "the matters of Ireland stands at a stay or rather goes backward, for the Earl of Essex's journey thither, that was in suspense, is now, they say, quite dashed." The reversals were maddening, and the nation waited for a sign that its most heroic and charismatic military figure would agree to lead the greatest English army into battle since the days of Henry VIII.

By the spring of 1599, it would have been impossible for Londoners to see a play about Henry V's celebrated invasion of France without reflecting on the fate of Essex's much-anticipated campaign in Ireland. Ireland haunts Shakespeare's play and seeps into it at the most unexpected and even unintended moments, such as when the queen of France, later in the play, who has never met her future son-in-law, Henry V, greets him with the words, "So happy be the issue, brother Ireland." That's a pen skip for Shakespeare. She should have said "brother England." And every editor, including Barbara Mowat, who is here, I'm sure, has corrected that. But, just so you know, Shakespeare's thinking Ireland, and instead of writing England, makes that mistake.

For much of the play, allusions to the current crisis in Ireland are fleeting, such as the offhand remarks about Irish kerns and bogs. When Gower, an English captain, speaks of a soldier who wears "a beard of the general's cut," his reference to the Earl of Essex's famous and distinctive square-cut beard collapses the distance between Henry V's world and their own, and it wouldn't have been lost on London's playgoers. There are also glancing allusions to the kind of bitter conditions their fellow countrymen were facing at that moment in Ireland, with "winter coming on and sickness growing / Upon our soldiers," that's the line from *Henry V*. And the stage direction in Act 3, Scene 6—"Enter the King and his poor Soldiers"—would also have evoked with surprising realism England's poorly outfitted forces in Ireland.

Only in the play's final act (some spoiler alerts here!) does Essex's imminent Irish campaign, long submerged, break the surface of the play. Temporarily abandoning the make-believe world of theater, Shakespeare invites his playgoers, his fellow Londoners, to think not about Henry V, but about the near future, the day when they will pour into the streets of London to welcome home Essex, "the general of our gracious empress," Elizabeth. It's an extraordinary moment

and really the only time in Shakespeare's plays that he breaks theatrical illusion and redirects our attention away from the make-believe world of his play to the real world outside the theater.

These are the lines from the Chorus to Act 5: "But now behold, / In the quick forge and workinghouse of thought, / How London doth pour out her citizens. / The Mayor and all his brethren in best sort, / Like to the senators of th' antique Rome, / With the plebeians swarming at their heels, / Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in— / As, by a lower and loving likelihood / Were now the general of our gracious empress, / As in good time he may, from Ireland coming, / Bringing rebellion broachéd on his sword, / How many would the peaceful city quit / To welcome him!"

As we shift perspectives from Henry's triumphant return to Julius Caesar's to Essex's, much gets blurred. The passage speaks to the audience's understandable desire to leap over time, for the imminent Irish campaign to be over.

When examined more closely, however, the Chorus's comparisons prove disquieting. Caesar had entered Rome harboring thoughts of returning the republic to one-man rule, and his short-lived triumph and tragic end were already on Shakespeare's mind. Scratch the surface, and the analogy to Essex's forecast return "with rebellion broachéd on his sword" is no less troubling. Henry was a king. In contrast, Essex, like Caesar, was a military hero, feared by rivals who sought his overthrow because they believed he would be king.

Essex's enemies, William Camden, again, noted, seeing how the earl wished "nothing more than to have an army under his command," feared that Essex "entertained some monstrous design." His enemies may have felt their concern justified when Essex's own followers claimed that he was descended from "the blood royal of England."

There's no evidence that Shakespeare's play would ever have been performed before Elizabeth. By the end of the year political events would have made that impossible. Despite its initial popularity, its focus on sensitive contemporary events, including Essex, ensured that *Henry V*—at least in its original form—appears to have had one of the shortest first runs of any of Shakespeare's plays.

After it was "sundry times" performed by the Chamberlain's Men in 1599, a copy of it was first "stayed" or delayed, and then, having undergone extensive cuts, rushed into print in 1600 in a stripped-down version that eliminates all the Choruses, all mention of Essex, Ireland, Scotland, collusion between crown and church, and anything else that might cause political offense. And it's a much shorter version of the play. It certainly looks like the company, in light of unfolding events, was trying to cover its tracks.

Those seeking to pinpoint Shakespeare's political views in *Henry V* will always be disappointed. The play is not a political manifesto. Shakespeare resists reveling either in reflexive patriotism or in a critique of nationalistic wars, though the play contains elements of both. *Henry V*

succeeds and frustrates because it consistently refuses to adopt a single voice or point of view about military adventurism—past and present.

Shakespeare was aware that on some deep level, as their brothers and husbands and sons and cousins were being shipped off to fight in Ireland, Elizabethans craved a play that reassuringly reminded them of their heroic, martial past. What better subject than the famous victories of Henry V? The siege at Harfleur would be a triumph, compensating for the humiliating defeat of besieged Blackwater. But Shakespeare also knew that this same audience—already weary of military call-ups and fresh demands to arm and victual troops, and unnerved by frightful reports from settlers and soldiers returning from Ireland—was by the eve of Essex's departure of two minds concerning this campaign.

Henry V, thus, takes its place among the many stories circulating in London at this anxious time—from the gossip at court and in the taverns to the official sermons and royal pronouncements justifying the imminent military expedition—and yet somehow Shakespeare's play manages to encompass them all. It wasn't a pro-war play or an anti-war play. It was a play about a nation going to war.

In responding to his audience's mixed feelings, their sense that the war was both unavoidable and awful, Shakespeare fills the play with competing, critical voices: the backroom whispers of self-interested churchmen, the grumblings of low-life conscripts, the blunt criticism of worthy soldiers who know that leaders make promises they have no intention of keeping, the confessions of so-called traitors, the growing cynicism of a young boy off to the wars, the infighting among officers, the bitter curses of a returning soldier.

For the innovative (and for Shakespeare, unique) experiment of introducing each act with an extended prologue spoken by the Chorus, a sense of counterpoint sharply defines the structure and rhythm of the play, as the Chorus and the ensuing stage action offer competing versions of what is taking place on stage. And you'll hear that in the opening Chorus of Act 2. "Now all the youth of England are on fire, / And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies; / Now thrive the armorers, and honor's thought / Reigns solely in the breast of every man. / They sell the pasture now to buy the horse." By March 1599, this inflated rhetoric would have produced a wince or two among muster-weary Londoners, few of whom, except for a handful of hopeful gentlemen volunteers, were planning now to "sell the pasture to buy the horse" and follow Essex into battle for greater rewards.

Shakespeare also introduces in *Henry V* what would later become a staple of English comedy and the subject of this talk in early March, the stage Irishman. Captain Macmorris appears in Act 3, entering in the company of a Scottish captain named Jamy. Tellingly, both disappear from the play before the decisive battle of Agincourt, unlike their fellow captains—the Welsh Fluellen, and the English Gower. A scene that shows Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and English captains united against a common enemy prophetically anticipates the notion of a united kingdom. But these

kingdoms were far from united in 1599, and some were downright hostile during the reign of Henry V.

That Shakespeare portrays these nations as allies is all the more strange, given the warning earlier in the play that if Henry's not careful, as soon as he goes off to war in France, the Scots will attack England's "unguarded nest." With the king of Scots the leading contender to succeed Queen Elizabeth, Henry's warning that "the Scot, / ... hath been still a giddy neighbor to us" seems uncharacteristically impolitic on Shakespeare's part. Many in the audience no doubt knew that the Scottish mercenaries were fighting alongside the Irish awaiting Essex's invasion in Ireland, even as anyone familiar with the chronicles on which Shakespeare drew would have know that Scot and Welsh forces fought alongside the French against Henry V, while, confusingly, the Irish fought with Henry.

The collision of past and present alliances becomes even more complicated when we turn to the fantasy, then, of English and Irish fighting side by side in Shakespeare's play. Even before the desertion of troops at Blackwater when the battle started going badly, the English had been ambivalent about Irish mercenaries. After that defeat, a serious effort was made to purge the English army of Irish soldiers. Irish captains were held particularly suspect. And it's no surprise, then, in Shakespeare's play, when the Welshman Fluellen starts telling the Irish captain Macmorris that "there is not many of your nation—" He never gets to finish that sentence in the play because he is bitterly and angrily cut off by the Irishman. "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?"

Obviously, there's some sensitivity about this. This hot-blooded Irishman even threatens to cut off Fluellen's head. Macmorris's name may prove a clue to his defensiveness. The so-called Old English, or Anglo-Normans, who would have been in Ireland since the twelfth century, had adjusted to local custom by changing from Fitzmorris to Macmorris. So, no wonder, then, that this part-English, part-Irish, part-Norman Macmorris is really so touchy about his unfixed national identity. What is his nation? Is he English? Is he Irish? An Anglo-Irish mutt? If so, what about his loyalties? As a frustrated Irish captain in the English army named Christopher St. Lawrence put it: "I am sorry that when I am in England, I should be esteemed an Irishman, and in Ireland, an Englishman."

Even as Shakespeare was exposing contemporary prejudices towards England's Gaelic neighbors, he was revealing traces of his own. If we look from the vantage point of 1623 at the Folio text of this scene (and that can be traced back to Shakespeare's own manuscript), the speech prefixes permit a glimpse of how Shakespeare himself imagined his characters throughout the scene of the four national stereotypes. Shakespeare begins by writing their names, but soon he just switches to "Irish" and "Scot." The Englishman always gets called "Gower." But soon it's just "Irish," "Scot," "Gower," and then, "Fluellen." So you can see his own nation has an individuality. But these Gaelic ones do not.

Shakespeare's interest in national stereotypes in this play is closely related to his obsessive interest in the play in dialects and in the connection between nationality and language. In addition to the distinctive and often comic English dialects spoken by Macmorris, Jamy, and Fluellen, there's the broken English spoken hilariously by Katherine of France--or not so hilariously, I suppose—the schoolboy French that Henry falls back on when wooing Katherine, and the slightly muddled French spoken by the prisoner Monsieur le Fer. And we're even treated to an extended and obscene English lesson in which the sexual surrender of Katherine is prefigured.

One result of this mangled English is that the characters have a great deal of trouble understanding what others mean or say, English lessons notwithstanding. There's a telling example of this cross-cultural confusion, with an Irish twist, in a scene in which the braggart Pistol can't believe his good fortune that a wealthy Frenchman has surrendered to him. Pistol's always speaking in borrowed, secondhand language, and it tends to be stitched together from other people's scraps. When he hears French and sees treasure in the scene, his mind immediately runs to that popular Irish ditty, "Calen O costume me," which he mangles, as you'll hear in a minute. He orders a French soldier to yield to him. The Frenchman replies that he's a gentlemen of good quality. Pistol, hearing his French, turns that perfectly good French into "Calen O costume me," itself a corruption of Irish for "Young maiden, my treasure." So you can just follow the associations. Shakespeare knows just enough Irish to work this in as a big joke, which is going to go by all of us, including me, when we see it, if it's not caught, because it doesn't work four centuries later.

The reach of the war extended into every corner of England, including Shakespeare's native Stratford-upon-Avon, which, in June 1601, petitioned to "be eased of the charge" of a man named Lewis Gilber, a "maimed soldier" who had returned from Ireland. Gilbert was a butcher and probably knew the Shakespeares, or they knew him. We don't know what he was like before he came back maimed from Ireland. But in the years after his return, he was a public burden and a danger to his community—accused of forcible entry into a local shop, failure to pay his debts, and finally, he stabbed a neighbor to death with "a long knife" in a quarrel. Through bitter war veterans like Pistol, Shakespeare also hints at the corrosive and unavoidable national cost of this Irish war.

Let me conclude, though, on a more optimistic note as troops are about to leave London in March 1599, because the people going to see *Henry V* when it was first staged had no idea whether Essex was going to crush the Irish or be defeated. In fact, no news was allowed to be spread for months, and there was really a silence. So there was a great deal of anxiety building up at this time.

But imagine yourselves, patriotically, a week or so before you go to see this play: In the early afternoon of March 27, 1599, the Earl of Essex and thousands of his troops and followers assemble on Tower Hill, the open field just north of the Tower of London. Their departure for the

war was theatrical, down to the timing--the procession got underway at just the hour London's plays began in the afternoon.

Here's John Stow's description: at "about two o'clock in the afternoon," Essex "took horse in Seething Lane, and from thence, being accompanied with diverse noblemen and many others, himself very plainly attired, rode through Grace Street, then Cornhill, then Cheapside, and other high streets, in all which places and in the fields, the people pressed exceedingly to behold him, especially in the highways, for more than four miles' space, crying and saying, 'God bless your Lordship, God preserve your Honor,' and some followed him until evening, just to behold him."

But this dramatic sight of a powerful English army heading off to crush the Irish rebellion was undermined—at least for the superstitious—by the weather (a nice objective correlative to what's going on outside), which the army could no more control than the players could.

"Out of nowhere," historian John Speed writes, there struck "a strange thunderclap in a clear, sunshine day." Physician and prognosticator Simon Forman, who was another eyewitness, offers a more detailed account. After an hour or so, he writes, "It began to rain and at three 'till four there fell such a hail shower that was very great." The weather then turned even darker: "It thundered withal and the wind turned to the north and after the shower was past it turned to the southeast again, and there were many mighty clouds up, but all the day before one of the clock was a very fair day and clear."

Anxious Londoners read these as ominous signs. It made so powerful an impression that the translator John Florio, a decade later, included it in a dictionary definition of the word *ecnéphia*, "a kind of prodigious storm coming in summer, with furious flashings, the firmament seeming to open and burn, as happened when the Earl of Essex parted from London to go for Ireland."

Shakespeare also took notice, and would soon work the disturbing image of this "civil strife in heaven" into his next play, *Julius Caesar*. "When these prodigies / Do so conjointly meet, let not men say / 'These are their reasons, they are natural,' / For I believe they are portentous things / Unto the climate that they point upon."

But that is another play and a story for another day.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]