Chapter 5

Vagabonds and minstrels in sixteenth-century Wales

Richard Suggett

THROUGHOUT much of late medieval and early modern Europe, from Poland and Russia in the east to Wales and Ireland in the west, itinerant minstrels entertained noble and plebeian audiences. Wandering entertainers may well have provided (as Burke has suggested) one of the unifying elements within European popular culture. A pan-European tradition of minstrelsy, crossing social and cultural boundaries, is an appealing idea, but the differences as well as the similarities between minstrels need to be appreciated. A diversity of vernacular terms for minstrels conveyed status differences as well as different performance skills among the entertainers. Some performance genres travelled better than others. Low-status physical performers – acrobats, jugglers and dancers – probably moved more easily between different language and cultural groupings than verbal performers, who might have high status within their own speech communities. Traditions of minstrelsy that gave high prestige to oral poetry and the music that accompanied recitation, and were tightly related to internal social structures, may have been important for defining local solidarities but might be regarded externally as ludicrously unmusical. However it is clear that, despite a diversity of performance genres, minstrels considered as a professional occupational grouping shared recognizably similar historical experiences of itinerancy, episodic persecution, and attempts at self-protection through membership of fraternities. Minstrels were culturally important as entertainers, social commentators and remembrancers but their mobility, communication in oral rather than written genres, and increasingly marginal position in the sixteenth century have made entertainers particularly elusive for the historian. Understandably, since sources are generally meagre and difficult to locate, there have been few regional studies of itinerant entertainers and their genres of performance.¹

This chapter is a case study of entertainers in a particular locale – Wales – during a period of rapid social and cultural changes, and it attempts to answer some basic questions about performers and performance: who were the minstrels; what were their genres of performance; was there legal discrimination against entertainers and, if so, when; and did minstrels have strategies for professional survival? Wales is particularly significant for the history of late medieval and early modern European minstrelsy because there has been extensive preservation in manuscript of poetry, particularly praise poetry, that was, initially at least, declaimed by professional performers before an audience.² Moreover, abundant legal records, a bureaucratic consequence of the Acts of Union with England, have survived, providing uniquely in the British context a view of minstrels from the administrative as well as the literary perspective.

VAGABONDS AND MINSTRELS

Information about minstrels in the sixteenth century often derives from hostile sources, generally by the exponents of ‘high’ or courtly traditions seeking to distance themselves from a ‘low’ tradition of minstrelsy, and from legal and administrative records, especially statutes and proclamations that viewed entertainers – broadly defined – as troublesome and idle wanderers, regarding them as ‘vagabonds’ who were to be punished with increasing severity. Tudor anxiety about vagabonds was sharply expressed in several coercive statutes between 1530 and 1597.³ The later Tudor vagrancy legislation has been suggested as a cause of the decline of minstrelsy in England and Wales. In particular, the 1572 Vagrancy Act specifically redefined minstrels and other unlicensed entertainers (fencers, bearwards, common players, and jugglers) as vagabonds; a proviso to safeguard Welsh minstrels was rejected by the Commons.⁴ Rather perplexingly, given this discrimination against entertainers, few minstrels have been identified as victims of the legal process in England, although this may be an aspect of the uneven survival of the legal record.⁵ However, clearer documentary evidence survives for campaigns against minstrels in Wales, and also in Ireland.

Locating vagabonds and minstrels and other wanderers on the margins of settled society depends on the survival of the appropriate historical record. In Wales the survival of a substantial proportion of the records of the assize courts or Great Sessions, established by the second Act of Union (1543), exceptionally allows the recovery of a series of sixteenth-century prosecutions of vagabonds and minstrels. There are inevitably chasms in the record but it is clear that a campaign of legal harassment against minstrels was begun a generation before the 1572 Act and involved the multiple prosecutions of entertainers as vagabonds.

Minstrels were indicted at the new Welsh assize courts in the decade immediately following the second Act of Union. Prosecutions were initially concentrated on the Chester circuit, that is in the three counties of north-east Wales (Flintshire and the newly-shired counties of Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire) and in the adjoining English county of Cheshire. The first prosecutions occurred in 1547, the year of Edward VI's accession, when a bill of indictment was laid against twelve minstrels in Flintshire. Three years later, in the spring sessions 1550, more than thirty minstrels were prosecuted throughout north-east Wales: four minstrels were indicted in Flintshire, eight or more in Denbighshire and at least nineteen in Montgomeryshire. The mid-Tudor prosecutions concluded in 1552–53 with the grand-jury presentment of eighteen or more minstrels in Cheshire and of sixteen 'vakabonds cawlyng them selyffs mynstrells' in Denbighshire. These indictments reveal a regional core of more than fifty professional entertainers working in mid-sixteenth-century north-east Wales.⁶ The minstrels' sense of shock and betrayal was clearly expressed in a poetic complaint – a remarkable survival – specifically prompted by the indictment of the 'craftsmen in poetry and music'. The anonymous author regards Denbighshire as cursed and condemns those who had indicted the minstrels instead of supporting them. The poet emphasizes the traditional role of the bards and urges the men of Gwynedd to call the minstrels home where their craft is still respected.⁷

It must be emphasized that the evidence for the multiple prosecutions of vagabond-minstrels in mid-Tudor Wales appears to be unique among surviving legal records of the British Isles. This is not to say, of course, that parallel campaigns against minstrels did not occur outside Wales. However, discrimination against vagabonds is hard to chart, partly because of the uneven survival of the legal record and partly because the summary punishment of vagrants permitted by the legislation before 1572 could leave little or no trace in the formal legal record. There are occasional hints of organized local searches for minstrels in England. In 1556 a general order was made by the Marian Council against 'players and pipers' strolling through the kingdom spreading sedition and heresy, but if this instruction resulted in multiple prosecutions the evidence has disappeared with the destruction of the greater part of the mid-sixteenth-century assize records.⁸

There are grounds, however, for thinking that the administration in Wales was disposed to view minstrels with particular disfavour. There were numerous wanderers in sixteenth-century Wales, but it is very striking that by and large minstrels were the only type of vagabond prosecuted at the mid-Tudor assizes. Sixteenth-century Welsh minstrels fell foul of general reforming concerns about vagrancy but, additionally, they could be regarded as suspect persons because of their adherence to Welsh language and custom. Fifteenth-century minstrels had been suspected of sedition and their sixteenth-century successors still cultivated the poetry, genealogy and history that helped

sustain a sense of a separate Welsh identity. In this sense minstrels maintained 'sinister usages and customs' which the Act of Union (1536) resolved to 'extirpate' because they tended to undermine the unity of the realm. It was probably not coincidental therefore that minstrels were prosecuted so soon after the Act of Union.⁹

Minstrels were prosecuted sporadically in Elizabethan Wales but it becomes increasingly difficult, especially after the 1572 Act, to distinguish entertainers from other wanderers who were regularly indicted as vagabonds. Multiple prosecutions of vagabonds, wanderers and suspect persons, including vagrant women, took place in Glamorgan in 1560, 1577 and 1586 but minstrels were not separately identified among them. In addition, new itinerant groups, which may have included entertainers, were discriminated against. A band of forty 'vagrant personnes terming themselves Egiptiens' was rounded up in Radnorshire in 1579 for prosecution under the 1562 Act that had made travelling as a gypsy a capital crime. Their fate is unknown, but two wayfarers arrested in Glamorgan in 1599 were indicted as 'egyptians', convicted and sentenced to hang as felons.¹⁰ The last clearly identifiable campaign against minstrels occurred in early seventeenth-century west Wales when a determined effort was made to rid Pembrokeshire of strolling musicians. In 1620 the grand jury made a presentment of the fiddlers, harpers, crowders, tabour-players and pipers who wandered up and down the country like rogues. One minstrel was ordered to keep to his parish, but six musicians were sent to the house of correction which must then have become something of a minstrels' academy before the musicians were taken into service.¹¹

WHO WERE THE MINSTRELS?

Who were the minstrels? A first step towards answering this fundamental question is to recognize the diversity of entertainers in Wales beyond the poets of high status who inevitably dominate the literary sources. Nevertheless, it is not particularly easy to distinguish between different types of entertainer, especially as ambiguity was inseparable from the terms used to designate minstrels. Minstrels were commonly called *clêr* in Welsh and the term could be used inclusively, to refer to all poets and musicians, but in other contexts the term designated lesser entertainers, especially versifiers of low standing. Status differences among the minstrels were important, and numerous terms were used to disparage entertainers regarded as inferior, including the expressive *clêr y dom*, or 'dung-flies'.¹²

The overwhelming majority of minstrels in Tudor Wales were professional entertainers who were masterless and itinerant, without the retainer's livery or badge, and sought patronage and employment wherever they could. There were many minstrels but, generally speaking, little is known about their

social origins, ways of life and genres of performance. Numerous minstrels are simply names; many more have been completely forgotten. The mid-Tudor indictments of minstrels at the Court of Great Sessions are therefore particularly important since, exceptionally, they identify by name some sixty entertainers and other wanderers, most of whom would be otherwise unknown. The parallel with Ireland in the same period is striking. About fifty or so versifiers and other entertainers have been found in 'fiants' or warrants for pardon after indictment or outlawry, but less than a dozen of these minstrels can be identified with any certainty from literary sources.¹³

The recovery of long-forgotten minstrels from archival oblivion is doubly rewarding: not only are the identities of individual minstrels restored but, more generally, their names disclose some details about the structure of minstrelsy. The entertainers who were prosecuted were, without an exception, men, and it appears that in sixteenth-century Wales women were excluded from minstrelsy and public performance.¹⁴ Names are revealing about the specialisms, origins and 'personas' of the male minstrels. Minstrels shared with other wanderers, including outlaws, a fondness for by-names that touched on different aspects of wayfaring life and obscured, doubtless sometimes deliberately, a former identity. The romantic identification of the minstrel's independent, mobile and masterless life with the outlaw, who belonged to no particular place and lived from day to day, is suggested by the name sported by one poet – Robin Hwd. In 1550 the indictments against several minstrels carefully distinguished between official and unofficial names: Thomas Tyvie alias 'Brythyll Brych', Owen ap David alias 'Oweyn Trovednoth' and Robert ap John ap Rheinallt alias 'Hodyn Siglen'.¹⁵

The professional names that entertainers adopted reveal different aspects of the minstrels' life although the meanings of some aliases remain ambiguous or obscure. Some epithets referred to the elusive and striking creatures of the wild with which the wandering minstrels may have fancifully compared themselves: *Brythyll Brych* or 'speckled trout'; *Hodyn Siglen* or (probably) 'wagtail youth'. The sobriquets of *Rees Du Cwrw*, presumably a lover of beer (*cwrw*), and *Richard Penhayarn* or 'Ironhead' convey the comforts and knocks of vagabond life. The names of a few minstrels reveal former or dual occupations: Richard 'Grydd' or shoemaker and David 'Talyer' or tailor. This was to be expected as the tailor's occupation, and sometimes the cobbler's, was peripatetic. The physical appearance of some minstrels, especially their hair colour, was denoted by common descriptive terms (*du* 'black'; *melyn* 'yellow'); blindness (*dall*), a disability widely associated with minstrelsy, is sometimes referred to.¹⁶ Several vagabonds were called *bedlem*, from the English 'bedlam', and *gwyllt*, literally 'wild'. These names presumably referred to the wandering insane or persons of unpredictable behaviour rather than minstrels, but there was a loose association between wandering, wildness, and minstrelsy.¹⁷ Those who chose to spend the night on *Gwely Idris*, a bed

of stone on the summit of Cadair Idris, one of the wildest mountains, would be transformed (according to a late sixteenth-century source) into either a poet (*prydydd*) or a lunatic.¹⁸ The muse (*awen*) might appear to a man in a dream and drive him to lead a wandering life as a poet. The muse, according to one account, appeared like a hunter in the wild 'with a garland of green leaves' about his head, a quiver of arrows on his back, and a hawk upon his fist whose quarry was the sleeping future bard.¹⁹

Frequently a minstrel – like numerous other craftsmen – was known simply by his specialism: *Ffowc Ffidler* – Fulk the fiddler; *Dafydd Llwyd Delynor* – David Lloyd the harper; *Henry Grythor* – Henry the crowder; *Ieuan Brydydd* – Ieuan the poet; and so on. Sometimes a wandering minstrel's name revealed the area he originally hailed from. Thomas *Tyvie*, indicted three times in north-east Wales in the 1550s, presumably came from the Teifi Valley in the south-west; Huw *Arwystl* identified himself with the extensive lordship of Arwystli in Montgomeryshire; Thomas *Gwynedd* adopted the ancient territorial name for north-west Wales; several notable minstrels were called *Penllyn* after a particular district in north-west Wales. The locational names adopted by the bards tended to be tracts of country or rivers, rather than the more specific settlement names more characteristically adopted as nascent surnames in the same period.²⁰ This of course expressed the wandering nature of the minstrel's profession. The late medieval poets had had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards those boroughs regarded as centres of English influence, but towns were increasingly important to the sixteenth-century Welsh minstrels as centres of patronage and bases for perambulations, and several poets and musicians can be identified as town dwellers.²¹

Welsh minstrels were indicted collectively, but this was not because they travelled in troupes. However, pairs of minstrels commonly travelled together for musical considerations as well as for companionship and safety. An account of payments made to minstrels in Anglesey at the end of the sixteenth century shows that the pairing of poet and musician in various combinations was rewarded: poet and harper, reciter and harper, poet and crowder. Apprentices were formally recognized among the bards and might travel with experienced master poets or musicians. Rowland David of Narberth was prosecuted in 1615 not only for wandering up and down the country with his 'fiddell or crowde' but also for keeping two 'preety' youths whom he was training 'in the same trade or scyence'.²²

Using the names and styles recorded in some indictments, and relating them to literary sources, a picture can be built up of the different skills of the minstrels. Poets, harpers and crowders predominated. These were the minstrels (*gwŷr wrth gerdd*) with skills regarded as traditional, some of whom were recognized as 'graduates' in the 1523 and 1567 *eisteddfodau*. David Powel in 1584 succinctly described the three sorts of minstrels 'in vse in the countrie of Wales to this daie'. The *beirdd*, or bards, were 'makers of songs and odes

of sundrie measures, wherein not onlie great skill and cunning is required; but also a certeine naturall inclination and gift'. The poet's calling in particular was regarded in some ways as involuntary – an unpredictable gift from God that was sometimes taken back. As Aubrey was told, 'In Wales are some bards still who have a strange gift in versyfying; but the fitt will sometimes leave them, and never returne again.' The accomplished poets were also *arwyddfeirdd* (herald-bards) who kept records of '[g]entlemens armes and petegrees' and were 'best esteemed and accounted of among them'. Equal in status to the poets were the 'plaiers vpon instruments, cheefelie the Harpe and the Crowth'. Minstrels of the third type were reciters or declaimers (*datgeiniaid*) 'which doo sing to the instrument plaiied by another' or (according to another source) declaimed while beating time with the end of a staff (*datgeiniaid pen pastwn*).²³ The structure of minstrelsy in Ireland and Scotland, which also privileged the spoken or (more probably) chanted or sung word of the poet, was similar.²⁴

The records of the Great Sessions also reveal the lively presence of other types of entertainers who are rarely mentioned in the literary record – dancers, acrobats, and jugglers or magicians. Two dancers were included in the first prosecution of minstrels in 1547: Richard *Dawnsiwr* of Ruthin and Huw *Dawnsiwr* of Beaumaris; and others were subsequently indicted. There are no clues to the type of dancing they performed, unless the nicknames of some minstrels – 'wagtail', 'trout', and 'barefoot' (*troednoeth*) – referred to barefooted leaping and jumping. The names of several jugglers have been preserved, and the interesting epithet *hudol* ('magician', 'conjuror') which has late medieval resonances occurs several times. John Hudol was arrested on three occasions. In 1547 he was styled vagabond of Ellesmere; in 1550 he was called a juggler from Welshpool; later, in 1553 in Denbighshire, he was described as a fiddler. This case is instructive: it illustrates the mobility of minstrels, reveals the importance of towns to them, and suggests that some minstrels would have had more than one performing skill.²⁵

The indictment of eighteen minstrels at Chester in 1552 provides an illuminating inventory of the instruments favoured in mid-Tudor Cheshire that contrasted with the specialisms of exactly contemporary Welsh minstrels.²⁶ In Cheshire there were equal numbers of fiddlers and pipers (eight are named), three taborers as well as two harpers, one luter, and two 'seggers', a term that probably designated reciters or storytellers ('sayers'), about whom it would be interesting to know more. The dominance of the fiddle, pipes (most probably bagpipes) and tabor, essentially instruments for the dance, clearly emerges. The most popular Welsh instruments were either poorly represented in Cheshire, in the case of the harp, or completely absent, as with the crowd. Crowders and harpers are the most frequently named musicians in Welsh legal documents in the second half of the sixteenth

century and their stringed instruments often accompanied the voice of the poet.²⁷

Welsh entertainers formed a relatively closed group. Significantly, no Welshman was included among the seventeen minstrels indicted in Cheshire in 1552 and, conversely, very few English entertainers appear to have wandered the Welsh countryside.²⁸ Some Welsh minstrels travelled in England but they were probably not numerous. Although Welsh harpers might have a curiosity value, Welsh singer-poets were liable to find themselves treated as inferior minstrels in England or denied a reward.²⁹ Minstrels have been regarded as an exceptionally mobile occupational grouping, straddling different languages and cultures, but the Welsh and English minstrels occupied different aural as well as geographical spaces. Crucially, in Wales there was an emphasis on the spoken word among entertainers. Poems were declaimed to the specialist accompaniment of the harp or crowd. This was an aural delight in Wales, but to mid-Tudor English ears the Welshman's voice accompanied by the plucked horse-hair strings of the harp sounded 'much lyke the hussying of a homble be.'³⁰

The names of several poets have been preserved among the vagabond-minstrels. Ieuan Brydydd, indicted in Denbighshire in 1553 for 'going about with a harpe', and his namesake Ieuan Brydydd y Coweyneon, indicted in Montgomeryshire, were poets whose names are not otherwise recorded. But Richard Brydydd Brith (Richard the 'speckled' or 'freckled' poet) was indicted twice, possibly three times, as a vagabond before graduating as a licensed poet at the 1567 *eisteddfod*. The compositions of several other vagabond-poets can be identified in literary sources. The best-known of these versifiers was Robert or Robin Clidro, indicted in 1547, a complex figure with a considerable reputation whose wit and popularity were perhaps threatening to the poets of high status, one of whom composed a mock obituary on the vagabond-poet while he was still alive.³¹

Usually vagabond-minstrels appear socially undifferentiated in the legal record, but the 1550 prosecution of minstrels in Montgomeryshire conceded that there were status differences among them. Some minstrels were prejudicially referred to as vagabonds, others were neutrally called harper or crowder according to their specialisms; a few were termed yeoman, but two minstrels were styled gentlemen: the accomplished poet Huw Arwystl and the harper Dafydd Llwyd Delynor. Both are also named in a broadly contemporary list of expert musicians and their apprentices working in north-east Wales.³² These bards were exceptions that proved a general rule: there was a minstrel élite, the technically accomplished poets and musicians, especially the graduates of the *eisteddfodau*, who by and large managed to escape prosecution as vagabonds.

The occasions for performance brought together the vagabond-minstrels and the bards and musicians of high status. The statute of Gruffudd ap

Cynan specifies the seasons and occasions when the poets and other minstrels were to visit patrons: the Christmas, Easter and Whitsun seasons, patronal festivals, weddings and funerals. Elegies, some probably commissioned and composed in advance, were 'brought home' following the death of a patron and publicly recited. The circuits (or *clera*) of gentlemen's houses, theoretically at least, were undertaken at intervals of three years. At the appropriate season, especially 'the loytring time betweene Christmas and Candlemas', the minstrels, expert and inexpert alike, converged on the hospitable halls to 'singe songes and receave rewardes'.³³ Contemporary references show that numerous minstrels could be rewarded at the same house at the same time. Five named *mynstrells* were paid sums varying from two to ten shillings each for providing Christmas entertainment at Lleweni (a major Denbighshire house) in 1555, and forty years later thirteen minstrels celebrated Christmas at the same place. In the mid-sixteenth century, Wiliam Penllyn, the chief harpist, recorded in his patron's poem-book the names of eight other minstrels who had visited Moelyrch, Denbighshire, during the Christmas holidays. Revealingly, they included three crowders who had been indicted as vagabonds in 1550. A generous and hospitable patron would be much visited. The memoranda of an Anglesey gentleman show that he rewarded nineteen minstrels on twelve separate occasions between Christmas Eve and Candlemas 1594–95.³⁴

Although several minstrels might gather at a patron's house, performance was not collective but essentially an individual (or dual) affair. Minstrels were in competition with each other and this meant that there was antagonism and rivalry between them. Tension between poets found expression in 'debate poems', and sometimes ill-feeling between minstrels led to violent confrontations. The Montgomeryshire grand jury in 1561 made separate presentments of two Welshpool crowders, James Grythor and Robert Jones, for assaulting each other, considering one as bad as the other. In 1600 there was grave suspicion that a harper, Jenkin ap Syr David, had been involved in the death of the poet Hugh ap John alias Prydydd, whose corpse had been found under Llanidloes bridge the morning after a Mayday 'merry-night'. The harper, who seems habitually to have carried a 'crab-cudgel', had quarrelled with the poet at the merry-night but, by his own account, had remained with the company until dawn when he went out into the streets and roused some of the townsfolk, one after another, with the serenade *Hwntus Up*, that is 'The Hunt Is Up'.³⁵

A number of minstrels were accused of capital felonies. One may instance Griffith ap Howell alias Dawnsiwr, a Cardiganshire entertainer, who was hanged for the murder of a Cardigan burgess in 1546, and Philip ap Rees ap Howel Pibydd, a Pembrokeshire piper, who was found guilty of grand larceny with judgment of death in 1550. Robert ap Huw, a young Anglesey harper, was suspected in 1600 of a catalogue of offences, mostly hanging

felonies, that included abduction, burglary, and gaol-break, but he evaded recapture long enough to benefit from James I's general pardon and subsequently became a notable musician sporting the royal badge in silver on his harp.³⁶

The uncertainties and opportunities of life on the road, as well as the financial cost of the sociability of the tavern, may have tempted minstrels to theft and other crimes. But, of course, not all minstrels were thieves, drunkards, or quarrelsome. The systematic prosecution of minstrels as suspect persons in mid-Tudor Wales shows that entertainers were rounded up as a matter of policy rather than for crimes committed by them as individuals. It is important to explore why this was so.

WHY WERE MINSTRELS PROSECUTED?

Why were minstrels prosecuted as vagabonds in Wales? The question requires a number of related answers rather than a single explanation. There was certainly a moral panic about vagabonds in the mid-sixteenth century and the ruling class sometimes expressed contempt for them in the most extreme language. The mid-Tudor multiple prosecutions in Wales may have been prompted by circular letters from the Privy Council to all justices requiring them to enforce the vagrancy laws.³⁷ But it needs to be emphasized that minstrels were prosecuted not because they were simply regarded as a type of vagabond. Itinerant and masterless men of different definition were numerous in mid-sixteenth-century Wales, but it is significant that the mid-Tudor wanderers prosecuted as vagabonds were almost exclusively minstrels. The mid-Tudor prosecutions of entertainers in Wales seem to have been an initiative from the Council in the Marches and the Welsh judges that reflected not only the circumstances of the time but also the historical experience of the English administration in Wales which had explicitly linked minstrels and vagabonds as suspect persons since the fifteenth century.

More immediately, the indictment of minstrels has to be understood in the broad context of Tudor social and moral reform.³⁸ Minstrels were unlucky in that they straddled in a negative way a whole series of overlapping administrative concerns about suspect strangers, rumour-mongers, unlawful assemblies, vagrants, alehouses and unlawful games. The mid-Tudor State regarded the proliferation of alehouses and their link with illegal games and 'light persons' as a fundamental social problem requiring reform. Sir William Herbert (one of the twelve privy councillors) appointed lord president of the Council in the Marches in April 1550, strictly instructed the sheriffs and justices of the peace of the new Welsh shires to put into execution the statutes against vagabonds, unlawful games, alehouses and 'blynd innes'.³⁹ The subsequent campaign against the alehouse and its way of life can be reconstructed

from the record of crown business at the Great Sessions. Prosecutions of unlicensed alehouse-keepers, players of unlawful games and those who lodged rogues and vagabonds are regularly found in the gaol files. Minstrels were in part casualties of the campaign against unlicensed alehouses and unlawful games. Alehouses provided places of rest for the minstrels (especially if access was denied at the great houses) and places to entertain where a ready-made audience was collected. When minstrels were prosecuted at the assizes there were generally indictments in the same session against other representatives of the alehouse culture. Sometimes minstrels were themselves prosecuted for playing unlawful games or keeping unlicensed alehouses. Three separate indictments can be traced against William Goch, a crowder prosecuted in 1550 as a vagabond-minstrel, for keeping 'tables' and other unlawful games at his alehouse in Welshpool.⁴⁰

Sir William Herbert seems to have secured the co-operation of the Welsh élite for the implementation of the Council's reforming policy. However, reform was not a uniform process. The concentration of prosecutions in north-east Wales is striking and reflects the geographical closeness of the counties of the Chester circuit to Ludlow, the seat of the Council in the Marches, and the position of the chief justice of Chester as the premier Welsh judge and *ex officio* a senior member of the Council (usually the president's associate or deputy).⁴¹ The prosecution of seventeen Cheshire minstrels at the Great Sessions in 1552 seems to have been an extension of the concerns in Wales.⁴²

Sir William Herbert drew a distinction between 'evil and seditious people', who were the enemies of good order and obedience and should be sharply punished, and 'good and obedient people' who observed the king's ordinances and commandments and must be 'comformably used'. There was a pervasive sense in which minstrels could be regarded as suspect and potentially dangerous persons who challenged the established social order. Simply as wanderers, the minstrels touched a raw nerve in a society whose rulers saw vagabonds as threatening social stability. Even by their clothes, minstrels may have challenged social hierarchy and the sumptuary laws forbidding excess in apparel. Above all, participation in the alehouse culture rendered suspect the adherence of the minstrels to good order. As a memorandum from the Council in the Marches put it, the resort of vagabonds, sturdy beggars and other idle persons to the alehouse left no kind of disorder unattempted.⁴³

But minstrels were also suspect persons because of their capacity for social comment. The bards in their praise poems emphasized the traditional duties and behaviour appropriate to their gentlemen patrons.⁴⁴ The other side of the poetic coin was satire which eroded personal authority and social standing. The significance of satire in the later medieval and early modern periods cannot be doubted although a vast amount of poetic invective has certainly

been lost.⁴⁵ Satire was inseparably associated with the wandering bards, particularly those of low status. The succinct description of the Highland 'jockies' as strolling minstrels who 'go up and down using Rythmes and Satyrs and are plentifully rewarded' approximates to a description of the life of a wandering poet in Wales.⁴⁶ In Wales those wanting entertainment (recalled a Catholic exile writing in the 1560s) would call for a harper and a declaimer who would either praise virtuous actions or satirize 'evil tricks', whichever was wished for. It was considered demeaning for a poet of high status to indulge in satire needlessly; silence or the lack of praise was enough. But, of course, theory and practice might not coincide, especially as poets were expected to be witty and scabrous as entertainers. Repartee between poets was much enjoyed as a performance genre. The 'butt of the bards' (*cyff clêr*) was a chief poet who was set to compose a poem on a frivolous subject at a feast, and who had to withstand the lampoons of his fellow but lesser bards. Two poets (*clerwyr*) would stand before the company at a feast, 'the one to give in rime at the other extempore to stirre mirth and laughter with their wittie quibbes'.⁴⁷

The temptation to satirize was personal or financial. Firstly, poets would satirise those who had displeased them: ungenerous patrons, rival poets, and so on; this was characteristic and personal to the poet. But, secondly, satire was also composed to order, for a fee, to ridicule people against whom the poet might have no personal animosity. This amoral practice was particularly associated with versifiers of low status. Satire and slander, even when devoid of political content, was an expression of unruly and anti-social behaviour by minstrels that displeased the authorities, and sometimes prompted legal action both for the punishment of rhymers and for compensation by aggrieved parties. Complaints about libellous verse can be found in the surviving records of most courts of any consequence and the versifiers are sometimes named. In 1590, for example, Rosser ap Rosser, 'a vacabound and a loyttringe person', was accused of making songs and rhymes 'sclaundringe and dispisinge' divers men and women on the borders of Brecknock and Radnorshire.⁴⁸

The subversive power of satirical verse, especially when it was political in nature, was well understood by the State. There was a connection between satire and sedition, and the composers of satirical rhymes might also try their hands at irreverent poems about the great public figures of the day, challenging the established social order. Richard Edwards, the author of libellous poems in Welsh about his Shropshire neighbours, was also accused in the Star Chamber of composing political libels in English against the late Queen Elizabeth, the Scottish lords associated with James I, as well as a biting epitaph on Sir Robert Cecil, the Secretary of State, who had taken a close interest in libellers.⁴⁹ Rhymes, libels, and 'pasquils' became an increasingly popular vehicle for generally anonymous social and religious comment in sixteenth-century London and the provinces, but by and large political

verse seems to have been an English-language genre.⁵⁰ However rhymes and songs by schismatics and Catholics were an instance of dangerous verses that might be composed in Welsh, sometimes by quite humble songsters. One of the damaging accusations at the trial of Richard Gwyn, the future Catholic martyr, was that he had recited certain rhymes of his own making against married priests and other matters (subsequently circulated in manuscript) and had bestowed a nickname on the chief justice of Chester. Satirical rhymes and nicknames were of course part of the stock-in-trade of minstrels. Richard Gwyn was not a minstrel but his later life as a wanderer and suspect person was in some ways an exaggerated version of the fugitive existence of the vagabond-minstrel.⁵¹

Minstrels were wanderers and therefore people with news, and probably disseminators of rumour and sometimes of prophecy. But it would be forcing the evidence to argue that minstrels were seditious in a consistent political sense. The poets' generally pragmatic attitude to the religious changes of the sixteenth century after the Edwardian Reformation is particularly instructive. The transition to Protestantism involved a fundamental adjustment for the poets, and included the loss of monastic patronage, but it is particularly striking that the minstrels, with a few exceptions, followed their secular patrons in abandoning Catholicism.⁵²

Nevertheless the poets did maintain a consciousness of the Welsh as a separate people with their own language and traditions, and in this deep if rather diffuse sense minstrels could be regarded as subversive. Indeed the historical experience of the crown administration in the Principality and March since the fifteenth century gave the idea of the minstrel as a suspect person a much sharper definition in Wales than in England. Henry IV's punitive legislation against the Welsh in the aftermath of Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion, enacted in 1402 and confirmed in 1446–47, included, significantly, a statute against minstrels who were classified as a type of vagabond. The Act referred to the 'many diseases and mischiefs which have happened before this time in the land of Wales by many Wasters, Rhymers, Minstrels and other Vagabonds', and ordained that no minstrel should make 'gatherings upon the Common people there'.⁵³ There were several important ideas here. Minstrels were clearly regarded as seditious. In particular, the bards wrote prophetic poems (*brudiau*) that were anglophobic in sentiment, foreseeing the defeat of the English by the Welsh and the restoration of freedom.⁵⁴ Additionally, the fees and gifts expected by minstrels as a reward for their services were viewed as a kind of extortion and their itinerant way of life as a type of vagabondage.

These late medieval administrative worries about minstrels were still recognizable in mid-Tudor Wales and Ireland. The prosecution of minstrels in Wales was paralleled in Ireland. Ordinances of 1534 decreed that 'no Iryshe mynstrels, rymours ... ne bardes' should demand rewards within the

Englishry upon pain of forfeiture of goods and imprisonment. Official policy was especially directed against poets who praised as 'valiauntes' the gentlemen who indulged in extortion, robbery and other abuses. The Irish statute of 1549 ordered that no poet should compose any praise poems to any person except the king. In the mid- and late Elizabethan drive against Irish malefactors and rebels, the bards, rhymers and harpers were specifically included among the vagabonds, 'horse-boys', and other masterless and idle men who were to be whipped, banished, and, in extreme cases, punished by death.⁵⁵

Welsh minstrels in the sixteenth century were certainly capable of sustaining a kind of counter-culture at communal meetings reminiscent of medieval gatherings that had challenged English authority and were akin to contemporary Irish hill-top assemblies that attracted (according to Spenser) 'all the scum of the country'.⁵⁶ If a report to the Council in the Marches on the state of religion in north Wales *circa* 1600 can be taken at face-value, on Sundays and holidays men, women and children from every parish would meet at hill-side gatherings arranged by chief minstrels (*pencars*) where harpers and crowdors would 'singe them songs of the doeings of theire auncestors', especially of the wars against the English, declaim their pedigrees at length to show their descent from the Welsh princely houses, and relate the lives of 'prophets and saincts of that cuntrie'. 'There could be no more convincing picture', comments Rees Davies on this passage, 'of the cultivation and transmission of a historical mythology, and its natural links with genealogy, amongst the population at large.' The detail of this account cannot be corroborated, but the mid-Tudor poetic complaint on the indictment of minstrels asserted the traditional role of the poets in Gwynedd as maintainers of prophecy and remembrancers of the genealogies of 'chieftains' and heroes (including Llywelyn, Bleddyn, the otherwise forgotten Rhys Hefaid, and Emrys) who had lived before 'foreigners' settled among them and were also praised.⁵⁷ Other sources of the period confirm that communal gatherings, particularly of youth groups, took place at 'playing-places' in north Wales.⁵⁸

These gatherings might well have been considered unlawful assemblies in the mid-Tudor period. Sir William Herbert's instructions to the Welsh justices bade them 'geve good heede that no assembles or gathering togethers be suffered' without good cause. The new statute (1549–50) for the punishment of unlawful assemblies was to be put into execution and the statute read in every market town once every three weeks. These instructions have to be understood in the context of an insecure government shaken by revolt. The Welsh justices were given a policing role. They were to make diligent search for 'tellers of newes, berers of tales, secrete whisperers of the kynge or the counsaile' and purveyors of 'blynd and false p[ro]phises'. These 'naughtie and p[er]niciouse p[er]sones' were to be apprehended, secretly examined, and punished without delay in a public place.⁵⁹

The State's concern with 'blind and false prophecies' was understandable

because of their association with rebellion. The very serious revolts of 1549 in Yorkshire and East Anglia had been buoyant with prophecies. Less than a generation before in Wales, the revolt of Rhys ap Gruffydd which ended with his execution in 1531 had been encouraged by a prophecy that played upon the significance of the raven as Rhys's family badge. The prophecies of Merlin and Taliesin were enduring. At the hill-side gatherings in north Wales, already mentioned, the traditions of these 'intended prophets' were recited.⁶⁰ Prophetic sayings and millennial rumours were on the lips of many people in late sixteenth-century Wales – an opaque 'babble of the base sort' who included vagabonds. A Welsh vagabond wandered to Oxford in 1599 bringing the rumour that Edward VI, the boy-king, had not died but yet lived in Scandinavia.⁶¹ So addicted were the Welsh to the prophecies of Merlin and the 'fond fables' of Taliesin, and other *Bardi Brytannorum*, that an aspiring Cardiganshire sheriff promised to bring Sir Robert Cecil 'such volumes of prophecies' as would make a memorable bonfire in London. This may have been an exaggeration, but a vast quantity of written prophecy was in circulation. In the major collections of Welsh manuscripts some twenty large compilations of prophetic verse and gnomic sayings still survive from the sixteenth century, as well as earlier and later volumes.⁶² The compiler of one mid-Tudor collection made in central Powys noted the sources of several prophecies, some of which were oral. 'Thomas Gwynedd & Edward Powel sayd yt' is glossed against a characteristically opaque prophecy on the destruction of three lions by an arrow. Thomas Gwynedd may be identified as a vagabond–minstrel prosecuted in 1547 and again in 1550 under the intriguing alias 'John Newydd' or 'New John'.⁶³

Minstrels were professional remembrancers who serviced the collective memory that related to events, the genealogies of the living, and the voice of prophecy. In some ways minstrels, more specifically poets, were regarded as inheritors of special – if fragmentary – ancient knowledge that had been dissipated by wars and the destruction of bardic books. According to William Salesbury, 'the commune answer of the Walshe Bardes', when anyone 'cast in their teath' the 'folyshe vncertaintie and the phantasticall vanities of their prophecies' and other matters, was to allege in excuse that most of their 'bokes and monuments' had perished in the Tower of London or had been destroyed in Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion. Not one volume had escaped that was not 'vncurablye maymed, and irrecupablye torne and mangled'. The bards themselves had been persecuted. Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, a leading power-broker, explained that Edward I 'caused our bards all to be hanged by martial law as stirrers of the people to sedition; whose example, being followed by the governors of Wales, until Henry the Fourth's time, was the utter destruction of that sort of man'.⁶⁴

The story of the Edwardian massacre of the bards, first recorded in the sixteenth century, expressed both the idea of the continuity of minstrelsy in

Wales from an early period, but also the dangerous nature of the bardic calling whose practitioners could be suspected of sedition. A dual challenge faced the bards for much of the sixteenth century: how to preserve and protect their arcane knowledge and how best to present themselves as loyal subjects who should be adequately rewarded for practising their craft skills.

STRATEGIES: THE SESSIONS OF THE BARDS (THE 1523 *EISTEDDFOD*)

It is important to appreciate that while minstrels might be viewed from the outside, especially by administrators and legal officials, as an undifferentiated group, there were long-established status differences and tensions among the poets, musicians and other entertainers. There are disparaging late medieval bardic references to unnamed ‘worthless’ poets and musicians, the minstrels of the dung-heap (*clêr y dom*), who seem, nonetheless, to have been welcomed in the halls of the gentry.⁶⁵ The idea of two types of minstrelsy – a distinction between respectable and disreputable minstrels – was clearly expressed in the ‘statute’ prepared for the *eisteddfod* or sessions of minstrels. The first (1523) and second (1567) *eisteddfodau* were key events in the perception, organization and control of poets and musicians and other entertainers. Although ‘degrees’ were awarded, the primary aim of these sessions was not competitive but aimed to regulate the minstrels and their craft according to the provisions of a bardic ‘statute’.

The ordinances for the *eisteddfodau* were included in the grandly called ‘Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan’ (*Ystatud Gruffudd ap Cynan*), after the twelfth-century king of Gwynedd. Numerous manuscript versions of the bardic statute are extant, and they testify to the interest of patrons and performers in the rights and privileges of the poets and minstrels and their anxiety to maintain them.⁶⁶ The ‘roll’ of the *eisteddfod* begins with the proclamation of a session to be held at Caerwys, a Flintshire borough, by commission of Henry VIII ‘to bring order and control to the craftsmen in poetry and music’ according to the statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan and to certify and confirm those judged to be master craftsmen and apprentices of various degree. It then recites the statute, giving the requirements for degrees or ‘grades’ in poetry and music and the restrictions and privileges of the master craftsmen and their apprentices, including the fees payable to them. An important section considers the conduct appropriate to minstrels and the penalties for those who misbehaved.⁶⁷

The statute, although it probably contains some archaic elements, was essentially a ‘pseudo-antique’ document, presumably specially prepared in advance of the 1523 *eisteddfod* where it was ratified.⁶⁸ The attribution of the ordinances to Gruffudd ap Cynan gave authority to a document which, while

purporting to be ancient precedent, was actually an innovative instrument for regulating the bards. The statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan can be understood in part as an early sixteenth-century attempt to organize the bards which drew on some of the features of the late medieval craft guilds or associations. Minstrelsy – because it was a peripatetic occupation – was difficult to organize as a fraternity but in late medieval continental Europe there were urban-based organizations of minstrels with regulatory statutes. Guilds of minstrels with ordinances had been established or refounded in sixteenth-century England, notably the Company of Musicians of London (1500) and the Fraternity of Minstrels in Beverley (1555). Minstrels' courts ratified entertainers in Cheshire and Staffordshire (the Honour of Tutbury), and the Beverley Fraternity purported to control minstrels in the northern English counties between the rivers Trent and Tweed. The mid-sixteenth-century restatement of the privileges of the Beverley fraternity, entered in the 'great book' of the town, invoked the authority of King Athelstan in much the same way as the bardic statute was legitimized by Gruffudd ap Cynan's name.⁶⁹

Craft associations organized their members hierarchically into masters and apprentices and privileged them by excluding non-members from practising their crafts. The protection of the interests of the bardic fraternity is clearly discernible in the detailed provisions for apprenticeship in the bardic statute. The bardic statute emphasized the mystery of the poetical and musical crafts, the craft of the tongue (*cerdd daſod*) and the craft of the string (*cerdd dant*), and the long apprenticeship with three grades needed to attain full understanding of a craft before qualification as a master craftsman. A bardic apprenticeship might last nine years, two years longer than the theoretical length of a craft apprenticeship. The bardic statute and the *eisteddfod* recognized the separate specialisms of poet and musician (harper and crowder) with apprentices, and also the occupation of declaimer (without an apprenticeship). Other entertainers were by implication excluded from the dignity of recognition as craftsmen in poetry and music. A late sixteenth-century hierarchy of minstrels contrasted the four types of graduate minstrel (poet, harper, crowder, reciter) with four *ofergerddorion* or inferior entertainers: the piper, the taborer, the fiddler (or player on the three-stringed *crwth*), as well as the juggler or magician.⁷⁰

The named patrons of the *eisteddfod* were key officials in the administration of north Wales who controlled a vast swathe of territory from Anglesey to the Marches. The *eisteddfod* was held before the sheriff of Flintshire, with the consent of the chamberlain of Gwynedd and the steward of the lordship of Denbigh. They had the counsel of Tudur Aled, the pre-eminent master-poet, and Gruffydd ap Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan, a gentleman bard, as well as many unnamed 'gentlemen and wise men' who may have assisted (perhaps in the manner of juries) in verdicts and judgments.⁷¹ A list of the graduates of the *eisteddfod*, which is probably incomplete, has been preserved. Sixteen

apprentices of various grades were recognized and the award of silver prizes or trophies confirmed the status of the most eminent practitioners of each craft: the silver harp to the best harper; the silver *crwth* to the best crowder; the silver tongue to the best declaimer. Tudur Aled's status as chaired poet was acknowledged by the award of a silver chair. The silver prizes were probably worn at the neck as symbols of the authority of the master craftsmen.⁷²

The 1523 *eisteddfod* was a remarkable demonstration of regional dominance by Welsh power-brokers on whose authority the crown's administration in Wales depended. Understandably, the *eisteddfod* has been discussed largely in a literary context. But the *eisteddfod* has also to be understood in a political sense as an expression of the status of its patrons as influential administrators, a demonstration of their power to command, which showed their concern for order and government within their sphere of influence.

The bardic statute prepared for the *eisteddfod* expressed the dual interests of both minstrels and their patrons in much the same way as craft guild ordinances reflected not only the interests of craftsmen but also the reality of municipal control.⁷³ The statute authoritatively recognized the separate crafts of poet, crowder and harper and the long apprenticeship needed to learn the mysteries of each craft. Musicians and poets who had not been apprenticed or entertainers of other types were by implication to be excluded from the rewards of the minstrels' craft. But, for their part, the accredited poets and musicians were to behave peaceably and to be of service to all faithful subjects of 'the prince' (that is, Henry VIII) and his officials. Detailed and revealing regulations for the conduct of the minstrels were set out: they were not to get drunk or to brawl; they were not to propagate insulting or scandalous songs, especially those disparaging women; they were not to frequent taverns or hidden places to play dice, cards and other games. An extraordinary passage suggests that if a minstrel offended, he was to be punished by losing the contents of his purse to those who apprehended him. It is difficult to know how this precept was interpreted in practice.⁷⁴

The prohibition against playing dice and other games, it may be noted, is entirely consistent with an early sixteenth-century date, and other elements of Tudor reforming policies seem to be reflected in the statute. Early Tudor legislation on unlawful games and vagabonds (1495) was comprehensively restated in 1511–12, made perpetual in 1514–15, and reinforced by several proclamations between 1526 and 1528.⁷⁵ Crucially, minstrels were enjoined by the bardic statute not to follow the practices of vagabonds (*arveroedd vacabwmdys*). This seems to have been the first use of the quasi-legal and pejorative English term 'vagabond' in a Welsh-language text.⁷⁶ The maintenance of a clear distinction between vagabonds and minstrels was to become increasingly vital for the craftsmen in poetry and music and it is significant that the mid-Tudor prosecutions of vagabond-minstrels took place between the first (1523) and second (1567) sessions of the bards.

LICENCES AND REWARDS

According to David Powel (1584), the bardic statute or decree (glossed as 'a verie good lawe against abuses in musicians') was 'oftentimes allowed by publike authoritie of the cheefe magistrats' in Wales, 'as appeareth by sundrie commissions directed to diuers Gentlemen in that behalfe'.⁷⁷ This was a reference both to the *eisteddfodau* and to the licensing system that arose from them.

Between the first and second *eisteddfodau* a licensing system developed. The surviving licence issued to Gruffudd Hiraethog, a herald-bard, is a document of great interest dated 1545/46 (year 37 of Henry VIII). The date may have been significant: it coincided with a proclamation ordering all vagabonds including common players to the galleys. The licence recited in Welsh that Gruffudd had served his apprenticeship, was competent, and able to go forth and receive gifts from noblemen and commoners. The document was signed and sealed by two squires and by Gruffudd's teacher, the master-poet (*pencerdd*) Lewys Morgannwg, who was recognized as the pre-eminent bard in Wales.⁷⁸ Gruffudd seems to have carried on his bardic itineraries not only the licence – a prudent precaution – but also an impressive copy of the statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan engrossed on a parchment roll some seven feet long when unfurled that became worn from constant perusal.⁷⁹

In broad terms, despite its special context, the bardic licence was not greatly different from other licences or 'placards' issued in the same period authorizing the collection of benevolences from place to place. By statute (1534) it was expressly forbidden to gather any 'comortha' (Welsh *commorth*: 'aid') or benevolence within Wales and the March without the written licence of the king's commissioners. This was a restatement of earlier ordinances against 'comorthas'. In July 1526 the Instructions to the Council at Ludlow expressly required it 'to punish all persons who levied any comortha or other exaction' that were contrary to the king's former instructions. These former instructions cannot now be traced, but the ordinances against *commorthau* stemmed from orders made in 1494 and promulgated at the Sessions for North Wales which in their turn had drawn on Henry IV's anti-Welsh legislation.⁸⁰

'Comortha' was an ill-defined but deeply entrenched term in the Anglo-Welsh legal vocabulary of the Principality and March and covered a wide range of customary gifts, loans, rents, exactions, and collections made at specially organized bid-ales and games. It is clear from contemporary sources that the minstrels' reward could be regarded as a form of 'comortha' and therefore, presumably, forbidden unless licensed. The 1402 statute had explicitly ordered 'that no waster, rhymur, minstrel nor vagabond be in any way sustained in the land of Wales to make comorthas or gathering upon the common people there'. Nearly 200 years later the rewards given to

minstrels were still included among a list of payments bestowed 'by way of comortha'. One thousand pounds a year was said to be 'consumed' in this way.⁸¹

Crown administrators in the second half of the sixteenth century regularly expressed concern about the gathering of 'comorthas'. The practice was viewed as a 'grett hurte and extorcion done to the people' in mid-Tudor Wales. 'Comorthas' were regarded as pernicious partly because they were often a disguised form of extortion by local élites, revealing the weakness of the State, and partly because the constant levying of money, livestock and other goods impoverished the country. The payments for protection and other favours demanded by officials, especially sheriffs and their bailiffs, resulted in numerous prosecutions for 'comortha' throughout the sixteenth century. This was extortion of an obvious kind. However, the dominant meaning of 'comortha' gradually shifted from the exactions levied by the powerful to the collections made by the poor, that is from extortion to begging. By the early seventeenth century 'Comorthaes and beggeinge or vnlawfull gatheringe of Money' were explicitly linked as offences to be enquired into by the Council.⁸² Elizabethan prosecutions for 'comorthas' increasingly concerned customary loans and payments reinterpreted as disguised forms of begging that encouraged the increase and mobility of the idle poor.

By the mid-Elizabethan period itinerant minstrels were in a very difficult position – not only could they be apprehended as vagabonds but they were also vulnerable to accusations of soliciting for unlicensed *commorthau*. The second *eisteddfod* (1567) has to be understood as a renewed attempt by the bards of high status to protect their position by excluding the less accomplished minstrels and legitimately claiming the rewards of the bardic itinerary through a licensing system. It seems from the commission for the *eisteddfod* that the lord president of the Council, Henry Sidney, had been petitioned while travelling in Wales and had 'perfect understanding' of the accustomed place and rewards of the of the *eisteddfod*. No doubt the herald-bards had made much of Sidney's ancestry: he could claim descent from Gruffudd ap Cynan who was credited with the statute for regulating the bards and minstrels.⁸³

The commission, given in the queen's name at Chester, recited that 'vagraunt and idle persons naming theim selves mynstrelles, rithmers and barthes' had grown into an intolerable multitude. The 'shameless disorders' of these vagabond minstrels had often 'disquieted' gentlemen in their houses and also hindered the expert minstrels 'in tonge and con[n]yng' from gaining their living by discouraging them from travelling. The commission gave a year's warning to all those who intended to earn their living by minstrelsy that they should attend an *eisteddfod* at Caerwys and 'showe furthe their learnings'. Open proclamation was to be made in the towns and markets of the five shires of north Wales that the assembly of minstrels was to be

held at Caerwys on the Monday after the Feast of the Blessed Trinity 1567. Twenty-one commissioners drawn from the north Wales gentry were appointed who had 'experience and good knowledge' in the bardic 'science'. The silver harp was to be awarded and the expert poets and musicians granted degrees appropriate to their skill. Those deemed unskilful were to be given 'straight monycion and commandment' in the Queen's name to return to honest labour or risk being taken as sturdy and idle vagabonds and punished according to statute.⁸⁴

It is impossible to know now how many minstrels attended the 1567 *eisteddfod*; only the names of the successful have been preserved. Eighteen minstrels were recognized as master-poets and musicians, together with thirty-five apprentices of various degrees. The proceedings of the assembly were to be certified to the Council; presumably this would have incorporated a list of those minstrels confirmed by the commissioners as graduates and licensed to go on the bardic itinerary. A copy of the certificate from the commissioners granting the degree of *pencerdd* or chief bard to Simwnt Fychan has survived. The certificate, signed by several commissioners, ordered that the poet was to be welcomed in all appropriate places and rewarded according to his grade.⁸⁵

The purpose of the degrees and licences awarded at the *eisteddfod* was to restrict the rewards of the bardic itinerary to the accredited minstrels. This was a strategy of 'social closure' that emphasized the training, knowledge and respectability of the accredited bards and musicians and introduced scarcity into the profession by driving out the unlicensed entertainers who formed an 'intolerable multitude of minstrels'.⁸⁶ A rough-and-ready calculation based on the number of minstrels named in the legal record suggests that for every licensed bard there may have been three or four vagabond-minstrels. It is difficult to know to what extent unlicensed minstrels were subsequently taken up as rogues and vagabonds. Minstrels were not distinguished in the Elizabethan legal record from other wanderers who were regularly indicted at the Great Sessions, but there were certainly some casualties among the unlicensed entertainers. In the year after the *eisteddfod* ten vagabonds, mostly apparently minstrels, were apprehended in Flintshire and there were prosecutions in successive years. Dr Elis Prys, the principal commissioner of the *eisteddfod*, proved to be a harrier of vagabonds. A group of six vagabonds arrested at Ysbyty Ifan in June 1578 were questioned by Prys. Five confessed without further explanation that they led idle lives as rogues or beggars wandering 'from countrey to countrey'. The sixth, Owen ap Thomas of Denbigh, explained that he had 'wandered abroad' for three years as a 'rhymor' because 'he can make songs or rymes'. Prys was unimpressed and promptly committed the unlicensed poet to gaol to await indictment as a vagabond at the next sessions.⁸⁷

BARDIC CRISIS

In 1594 the Council in the Marches was petitioned for a commission to hold a third *eisteddfod*. According to the petitioners, eleven of the north Wales gentry, the 'worthier sorte' of minstrels, had been 'earnest suters' for the *eisteddfod* that would distinguish skilful, honest and sober poets and musicians from 'loyterers and drones'. The petition emphasized the three categories of the worthier sort who were to be maintained and encouraged: the *byrdh* or 'Welshe poetes' who also knew the truth of pedigrees, arms and descents, the players on the harp and *crwth*, and the reciters who sang to instruments played by musicians. The various degrees of proficiency and experience were to be recognized and the silver prizes – the chair, harp, crowd and tongue – awarded to the most skilful as masters or doctors of their 'science'. The unskilful were to be taken up as rogues and driven to labour, or punished if they continued to wander. Only the skilful were to be permitted to travel among men of 'worshipp, gentillitie and power' who would maintain them.⁸⁸

The commission for a new *eisteddfod* was not awarded. It is likely that an assembly of the bards was by then considered something of a legal and cultural anachronism. The 1572 vagrancy legislation already specifically provided a mechanism for licensing minstrels. More fundamentally, minstrels had become vulnerable to the consequences of changing values among their patrons. By 1594 it was probably too late to protect the status and rewards of the skilful bards. The petition recognized a change in attitude but blamed it on the importunate inferior minstrels: 'by the multitude of the unskillfull their [the bards'] callinges & sciences are not studied or regarded'. Crucially, the social system that had sustained the music and poetry of the bards of high status had been changing since the mid-sixteenth century. The poetic complaint on the indictment of minstrels had attributed their prosecution to 'misers' who presumably wanted to avoid the social obligation of giving feasts and rewarding minstrels.⁸⁹ The decline in hospitality offered to the bards had the appearance of individual acts of meanness; it was, however, an expression of deep-seated social changes. Honour and reputation for the gentry were no longer directly linked with feasting, giving entertainment and earning a reputation for generosity. As a consequence, hospitality and rewards were not offered as a matter of course to the itinerant bards who had formerly amplified the reputations of their hosts. The poets complained increasingly that they were without honour, that Welsh-language learning was no longer respected and that the doors of the mansions were closing against them.⁹⁰

The process of change was surprisingly rapid as the decline in hospitality was compounded by the anglicization of the gentry.⁹¹ Shortly before the petitioning for the third *eisteddfod* an Anglesey gentleman-poet, Robert ap Ifan of Brynsiencyn, had concluded his transcription of a bardic grammar

bitterly conscious that poetic knowledge was a fading interest for his class. He contrasted the poor status of the minstrel of his own time with the golden age of the bards when Gruffudd ap Cynan's statute had established the rewards and courtesies due to poets and musicians. At the time of writing (in 1587) it was more profitable to be a pilferer or pickpocket than a good minstrel practising his craft. The poor minstrel wandered here and there seeking company but people avoided him lest they would have to reward him with more than a halfpenny's worth of ale.⁹² Within a generation after 1594 the professional poet able to earn a living from visiting gentry houses had more-or-less vanished, and bardic lore and the appreciation of strict-metre poetry became the preserve of a small minority of antiquarian-minded gentlemen and clerics. As one antiquary explained, writing in the first half of the seventeenth century, 'at this time all the greate knowledge of the bards, there credyt and worth is altogether decayed and worne out, so that at this time they are extinguish[ed] amongst us'.⁹³

MINSTRELS AND FESTIVE CULTURE

However some professional musicians were able to flourish outside the walls of the great houses, especially in the context of the alehouse, the fair and the revel. The details of six musicians prosecuted as rogues in Pembrokeshire in 1620 provide a profile of the professional wandering minstrel in early seventeenth-century Wales. These minstrels were variously described as a fiddler, a piper and fiddler, a crowder, two harpers, a taborer and harper, and a taborer. Two significant facts need to be emphasized. Firstly, there were no poets or rhymers among the minstrels. Secondly, these musicians were not indicted for seeking rewards from the gentry but had been wandering up and down the country, particularly at 'sheer[ing] time' or 'wool time', which were presumably communal or neighbourly seasonal tasks.⁹⁴

Changing musical taste was reflected in the preference for new types of musical instrument. Professional crowders, once numerous and some of great repute, faded quickly from the scene in the first half of the seventeenth century as the crowd was replaced by the fiddle. There was only one crowder among the strolling musicians prosecuted in Pembrokeshire in 1620; in north-east Wales, once the stronghold of the *crwth*, John Lewis Mone (Siôn Lewys Môn), crowder, listed among several 'idell p[er]sons, loyterers and nightwalkers' in Denbighshire in 1612, appears to have been one of the last professional crowders.⁹⁵ Harpers were more resilient as popular entertainers within Wales, or as household musicians to romantic or conservative gentry families, although the nature of the instrument changed as the single-strung harp was eventually replaced by the larger triple-harp.⁹⁶

There are more references in seventeenth-century sources to fiddlers,

pipers, drummers and taborers, some of whom wandered the countryside, than to harpers and crowders. The combination of pipe and tabor was to become 'exceeding common' in the seventeenth-century border counties where 'many Beggars begd with it' and 'the Peasants danced to it'. Taborers and pipers were rarely found among the sixteenth-century Welsh minstrels but they seem to have become more numerous in the seventeenth century. Two of the six entertainers prosecuted in Pembrokeshire in 1620 were taborers, one of whom was also a harper. By the mid-seventeenth century the classic combination of pipes and tabor was found in Cardiganshire where Griffith ap Evan of Caron was prosecuted for 'wandringe up & downe' the county 'w[i]th a taber, & pipe, roguinge & begginge'.⁹⁷

The tension between traditionalist poet-minstrels and non-traditional musicians was expressed in a number of poems. In a satire on the fair, Siôn Mawddwy (*fl.* 1560–1613), an itinerant bard, described the alien music and dancing at a shire-town where the Great Sessions were held. The town was crowded with people and entertainers but the poet remained empty-handed there. In revenge he satirized the Englishness of the town, the undignified minstrels, their excruciating music and absurd instruments: the rebec, lute, tabor, bandor and pipes. According to the poet, one piper (perhaps a former soldier) wore a filthy breast-plate or cuirass; another minstrel with a 'dung-pipe' (*bawbib*) clenched between his teeth had the fixed smile of a scarecrow.⁹⁸ Poets reserved particular venom for the bagpiper whose windbag and pipes invited many ludicrous comparisons. Poets and pipers were in competition and the music of the pipes was increasingly preferred to the poets' words. 'By the saints of heaven' – exploded Lewys Dwnn – 'every Englishman [or anglophile] calls for a pipe rather than a poet of high repute'.⁹⁹

The instruments that the bards detested – fiddle, pipe and drum or tabor – were louder than the single-harp and the *crwth* and seem primarily to have been played to accompany dancing rather than as an accompaniment for the voice. Dancing became a dominant form of recreation in late Tudor Wales, displacing other forms of entertainment. The poet's livelihood was threatened by the enthusiasm for private and public dancing. 'This is not good', complained Siôn Mawddwy, observing dancers 'shaking their tails' at the fair. Edward Maelor (*ob.* about 1603), a poet and crowder, was quite explicit that poets were no longer respected and their craft had been displaced by the dance. He expressed his complaint in a poem addressed to a faithful patron. The poets, he says, no longer received invitations to perform and doors were closed against them. If the poet went to a playing-place ready to show his expertise, more often than not there would be a dance – 'a freewheel bounce' – at the expense of the muse and the carefully crafted poem.¹⁰⁰

Professional dancers, as already noted, had a place among the entertainers of mid-sixteenth-century Wales but as virtuoso or solo performers. In the second half of the sixteenth century dancing in Wales was transformed by

country dances that – a crucial development – eroded the distinctions between audiences and performers. Scattered references show that group dances, including the morris dance performed by troupes of amateurs rather than solo professionals, became popular in seventeenth-century Wales, especially at the alehouse and revel.¹⁰¹

In north-east Wales at the end of the sixteenth century there is evidence for the growth of a festive culture, especially in the towns, that gathered pace in the first half of the seventeenth century and was generalized into the countryside after the Restoration.¹⁰² These summer feasts included large public gatherings at which music and dancing were important elements. At Gwersyllt, Denbighshire, in July 1633, for example, it was estimated that some 4,000 people had gathered for ‘morris daunsinge, druminge, fidlinge and other idle sportes’. This was a recreational culture in which the poets had only a marginal presence and some turned their backs on the towns. Edward Maelor, poet and crowder, composed a satire on Llangollen specifically after he ‘had not soe much as his dinner’ at the town wakes.¹⁰³ Siôn Mawddwy, a professional poet, felt he had the status of a lowly servant (*gwas isel*) at the fair where his craft was disregarded. The poet described how he was surrounded by alien sounds ranging from the ‘giggle-gaggle’ of the English spoken word (rendered *ffrit ffrat, whit what, when*) to the inharmonious music of the pipes likened to the noise of wasps in a sack or the honking of a multitude of geese. The poet longed to be with his patron where his craft was respected.¹⁰⁴ However, the professional poets, harpers and crowders were losing the patronage of the gentry and at the same time had no real role as entertainers in the new festive culture where dancing was preferred to listening.

CONCLUSION

The dominant themes relating to minstrelsy in early modern Wales, especially as they emerge from the legal record, have as much to do with power and social control as with culture and performance. The mid-Tudor prosecutions of vagabond-minstrels not only provide a remarkable snapshot of minstrelsy in mid-sixteenth-century Wales but also an illustration of the capacity of the Tudor State for social control through the new legal system that had incorporated the Welsh gentry. Minstrels were an early casualty of the supervisory role of the new Welsh justices appointed after the Act of Union. The mid-sixteenth-century prosecutions coincided with a period of political tension, but the idea of the minstrel as a seditious vagabond had a long historical pedigree in the administration of Wales reaching back to the legislation enacted in the aftermath of Owain Glyndŵr’s revolt.

The connections between vagabondage and minstrelsy were complex and

manipulated. There were long-term pressures affecting minstrelsy. On the one hand, minstrels were vulnerable to the State's concern about loitering and idle persons; marginal and itinerant ways of life could be redefined as vagabondage and their income as begging or extortion. On the other hand, minstrels of high status tried to protect their position through a strategy of social closure that acknowledged and rewarded their skill and learning through a licensing system but excluded the unlicensed minstrels as rogues and beggars. This strategy was only partially successful. Low-status entertainers were prosecuted as vagabonds, rather than the bards and musicians of high status and the graduates of *eisteddfodau*, but the distinctions between different types of minstrel became blurred. In the long run social and cultural shifts devalued the cultural capital of the bards, especially the poetry that had helped legitimate the status of patrons regarded as leaders of their localities. The social system of clientage with strong vertical links that had favoured bardic patronage was steadily transformed into a class system in which feasting and entertainment as expressions of local patronage that enhanced the prestige of hosts became unimportant. More generally, there was a broad change in taste that favoured public and private dancing and its music at the expense of poetry and its characteristic musical accompaniment. The context of patronage changed as the locus of popular entertainment shifted from the household to the alehouse and the open-air fair and revel. Festive culture, dominated by dancing, favoured new types of entertainer but in the process the music and action of the dance silenced the spoken word of the professional poet.

NOTES

- 1 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), ch. 4, especially 94–102, for references and problems of definition. The literature on minstrels is extensive but, because of the nature of the sources, tends to deal with courtly musicians. Recent valuable case studies of entertainers include: Russell Zguta, *Russian Minstrels. A History of the Skomorokhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); John Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989); Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100–1300* (London: Dent, 1989); Timothy J. McGee, 'The Fall of the Noble Minstrel: the Sixteenth-century Minstrel in a Musical Context', in Leeds Barroll (ed.), *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1995), vol. 7 98–120. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), is a comparative study of entertainers in verbal traditions. Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago, IL, and London: University Chicago Press, 1999), is an innovative discussion of the significance of the aural dimension in popular culture.
- 2 See generally, Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); A.O.H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (eds), *A Guide to Welsh*

- Literature*, vol. II. 1282–c. 1550 (Swansea, Christopher Davies, 1979); R. Geraint Gruffydd (ed.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, vol. III. c. 1530–1700 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); the studies by D. J. Bowen of poets and patrons in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are particularly relevant, especially the series ‘Beirdd a Noddwyr y Bymthegfed Ganrif’, parts I–III, *Llên Cymru*, 18 (1994–95), 53–89, 221–57; and 19 (1996), 1–28. The forthcoming *Records of Early English Drama: Wales* (in the REED series published by the University of Toronto Press), edited by David Klausner, will make available many primary sources. The manuscript tradition is discussed by Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press and National Library of Wales, 2000) and Graham Thomas, ‘From Manuscript to Print – I. Manuscript’, *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, III. 241–62.
- 3 Enforcement of the pre-Elizabethan legislation is discussed by Marjorie K. McIntosh, ‘Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England’, *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), 209–45, and C. S. L. Davies, ‘Slavery and Protector Somerset: the Vagrancy Act of 1547’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 19 (1966), 533–49. Elizabethan and Stuart vagrancy is discussed by A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men. The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), and Paul A. Slack, ‘Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1598–1664’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 27 (1974), 360–79. The continental context is examined by Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
  - 4 Peter Roberts, ‘Elizabethan Players and Minstrels and the Legislation of 1572 Against Retainers and Vagabonds’, in Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain. Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29–55.
  - 5 For some examples, see: Beier, *Masterless Men*, 96–9; G. Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London: Dent, 1977), 138–50; Walter L. Woodfill, *Musicians in English Society from Elizabeth to Charles I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 125–31.
  - 6 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Great Sessions 4/966/6/174–5; 21/8/rex m. 2r; 24/9/rex mm. 3d–4r; 4/1/2/36; Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), CHES 24/92/12. Abstracts of these documents will be published elsewhere. It may be noted that Welsh minstrels escaped prosecution under the short-lived Edwardian ‘slave’ statute.
  - 7 D. J. Bowen, ‘Y Cywyddwyr a’r Dirywiad’, *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 29 (1981), 475–6 (no. 17): *Cywydd a Wnaed am Dditio Gwyr oddi wrth Gerdd Gwynedd*, ‘a poem made about the indicting of the Gwynedd minstrels’. I am most grateful to Prof. Dafydd Bowen for discussing the text of this poem with me and for commenting on a draft of this chapter.
  - 8 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic ... 1547–80*, ed. Robert Lemon (London, 1856), 82 (no. 50); *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI*, ed. W. K. Jordan (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), 37 (searches in Sussex, June 1550); *Acts of the Privy Council* (London, 1892), V. 323 (arrest of minstrels by Sir Henry Tirrell, 1556); surviving English assize records are discussed by J. S. Cockburn, *A History of English Assizes 1558–1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), xi–xiii, 333–4.
  - 9 See further pp. 153–5 of this chapter and the discussion of the Act of Union in ch. 2, this volume.

- 10 NLW, Great Sessions 7/4/July 2 Eliz. (14 vagabonds prosecuted); 7/4/April 19 Eliz. (11 vagrants, 9 of them women, prosecuted); 7/4/April 28 Eliz. (24 prosecuted). Gypsies: Eldra & A. O. H. Jarman, *The Welsh Gypsies: Children of Abram Wood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), ch. 3, esp. 33; NLW, Great Sessions 7/5/July 41 Eliz. (record of the indictment as gypsies of William Barsey of Milton, Devon, and William Lasey of Aberystwyth, both styled labourers).
- 11 NLW, Great Sessions 4/781/4/28r-v.
- 12 *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: a Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1950-), s.v. 'clêr'. The term *clêr* has been much discussed; see generally Huw M. Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1-4.
- 13 Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish Poets, Historians, and Judges in English Documents, 1538-1615', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 36 (1921-24), section c, 86-7: two thirds of these minstrels 'will never be more than mere names to us; their very names in most cases would be forever unknown were it not for their chance preservation in these English records'.
- 14 But for women as patrons and composers, see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Women and Their Poetry in Medieval Wales', in Carol M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 183-201; Nia Powell, 'Women and Strict-Metre Poetry in Wales', in Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke (eds), *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 129-58.
- 15 NLW, Great Sessions 21/8/rex m. 2r; on official and unofficial names, see generally, Richard Suggett, 'The Welsh Language and the Court of Great Sessions', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language Before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 160-1; poems attributed to Robin Hwd are listed in NLW, Index to Welsh Poetry in Manuscripts.
- 16 Examples drawn from the references in note 6; see generally on Welsh names, T. J. Morgan and Prys Morgan, *Welsh Surnames* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1985).
- 17 NLW, Great Sessions 4/968/7/15 (Thomas Bedlem and John Goch Bedlem, 1568); Great Sessions 7/4/July 2 Eliz. (Howell Wylte, 1560). On Myrddin Wyllt, wildness, poetry and prophecy, see A. O. H. Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1960).
- 18 Siôn Dafydd Rhys's treatise on giants in Chris Grooms, *The Giants of Wales: Cewri Cymru* (Lampeter, Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 298-9.
- 19 Cf. the late seventeenth-century account of the sleeping shepherd who became the 'most famous Bard' in Brecknock after encountering the hunter whose hawk flew at him, getting 'into his mouth & inward parts'. He awoke possessed of such a poetic gift that 'he left the sheep & went about the Countrey, making songs upon all occasions': *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. I. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 696.
- 20 Examples from the sources in note 6. See generally, Prys Morgan, 'The Place-name as Surname in Wales', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 29 (1995), 63-75.
- 21 On attitudes to towns, see Helen Fulton, 'Trading Places: Representations of Urban Culture in Medieval Welsh Poetry', *Studia Celtica*, 31 (1997), 219-30.
- 22 Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, *Traddodiad Cerdd Dant ym Môn* (Denbigh, privately

- published, 1989), 21–2, citing Bangor MS 14918, f. 9b; NLW, Great Sessions 4/780/3/63d.
- 23 David Powel, *The historie of Cambria, now called Wales* (London, 1584), 191–2; John Aubrey, *Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1972), 284; Gwyn Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys: the Caerwys Eisteddfodau* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1968), 56–67. See ch. 2 of the present volume for further details of declaimers.
- 24 J. E. Caerwyn Williams and Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), ch. 4; John Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, ed. John Fowles and Rodney Legg (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co, 1980–82), 170–3.
- 25 NLW, Great Sessions 4/966/6/175 (dancers); Great Sessions 4/966/175; 24/9/rex m.3d; 4/1/2/36 (John Hudol); cf. Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues*, 35, for late medieval references to magicians and acrobats.
- 26 PRO, CHES/24/92/12.
- 27 In addition several fiddlers are named in Welsh sources but the term is not without ambiguity and there may not have been a straightforward correspondence between contemporary Welsh and Cheshire fiddlers. In Wales the dominant meaning of fiddle may have been an inferior type of crowd. On Welsh Musical instruments, see the general survey by Iorwerth C. Peate, 'Welsh Musical Instruments', *Man*, 47 (1947), 21–5; Osian Ellis, *The Story of the Harp in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991); D. Roy Saer, *The Harp in Wales in Pictures* (Cardiff: Gomer Press and National Museum of Wales, 1991). Bethan Miles, 'Swyddogaeth a Chelfyddyd y Crythor' (MA thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1983) is a comprehensive account of the *crwth* and crowders.
- 28 The intriguingly named 'The Good Robin', indicted in Flint in 1569, almost alone among vagabond–minstrels in Wales had an English name: NLW, Great Sessions 14/68/Feb. 11 Eliz.
- 29 Cf. the autobiographical poetic complaints of Iocyn Ddu, made to sit among inferior minstrels in a Cheshire hall, and Robin Clidro, unpaid after singing at dinner in Ludow: texts and translations in Dafydd Johnston, *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol: Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Cardiff: Tafol, 1991), 86–9, and Evan D. Jones, 'The Brogyntyn Welsh Manuscripts VI', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 6 (1949–50), 228 and 243. Some references to Welsh minstrels in England are noted in D. J. Bowen, 'Agweddau ar Ganu'r Unfed Ganrif are Bymtheg', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion*, session 1969, part II (1970), 331, n. 242.
- 30 Andrew Borde (or Boorde), *The fyrst boke of the introduction of knowledge made by Andrew Borde, of physycke doctor* (1542), ed. F. J. Furnivall, *Early English Text Society*, extra ser., 10 (London, 1870), 126. On English perceptions of the aural otherness of the Welsh, see Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 298–302.
- 31 See the nuanced portrait of Robin Clidro by Cennard Davies, 'Early Free-Metre Poetry', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, III. ch. 3, esp. 78–81. Indictments in NLW, Great Sessions 4/966/6/175 (Robin Clidro); Great Sessions 4/966/6/174–5 and 4/1/2/36 (Richard Brydydd Brith); Great Sessions 4/1/2/36 & 24/9/rex m. 3d–4r (Ieuan Brydydd).
- 32 NLW, Great Sessions 24/9/rex m. 3d–4r; Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereafter HMC), *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (London, 1899), I part 2, 922.

- 33 Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys: Caerwys Eisteddfodau*, 66–71; E. D. Jones, 'Presidential Address', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 112 (1963), 9–10; 'The Storie of the Lower Burowes of Merthyr-mawr', ed. H. J. Randall and William Rees, *South Wales and Monmouth Record Society*, I (1932), 70–1. The recitation of elegies is discussed in ch. 2 this volume.
- 34 J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'Anglesey's Contribution to Welsh Literature', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club Transactions* (1959), 17, citing NLW, Wynnstay MS. 92, f. 97v; Ifor Williams, 'Cerddorion a Cherddau yn Lleweni, Nadolig 1595', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 8 (1935–37), 8–10; HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, I, part 2 (London, 1899), 641; Wiliam, *Traddodiad Cerdd Dant ym Môn*, 21–2, citing Bangor MS. 14918, f. 9b.
- 35 NLW, Great Sessions 4/124/4/1; 4/139/1B/32 (reference kindly supplied by Murray Ll. Chapman). 'The Hunt's Up' was a popular sixteenth-century minstrel's tune, cf. *Ballads from Manuscripts*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, 2 vols (London: Ballad Society, 1868–72), I, 310–12. My thanks to Bethan Miles for this information.
- 36 NLW, Great Sessions 7/6/Sept. 38 Henry VIII; Great Sessions 7/8/June 4 Edw. VI; Nia Powell, 'Robert ap Huw: A Wanton Minstrel of Anglesey', *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999), 5–29.
- 37 Davies, 'Slavery and Protector Somerset', 537–8; *Acts of the Privy Council*, II, 431.
- 38 See generally, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 39 NLW, MS. 9051E, item 12, abstract in *Calendar of Wynn (of Gwydir) Papers 1515–1690* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1926), 2–3. These undated orders presumably embodied the instructions given by the Privy Council to Sir William Herbert when appointed president of the Council in the Marches: *Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI*, ed. Jordan, 24, 34–5.
- 40 NLW, Great Sessions 4/124/4/1; 4/124/5/72; 4/126/3/42. See generally, Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: a social history 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983), 169–71, for the idea of the alehouse culture.
- 41 Penry Williams, *The Council in the Marches of Wales Under Elizabeth I* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), xiv, 138.
- 42 PRO, CHES 24/92/12.
- 43 *A Calendar of the Register of the Queen's Majesty's Council in the Dominion and Principality of Wales and the Marches ... [1535] 1569–1591*, Record Series, no. 8, ed. Ralph Flenley (London: Cymmrodorion, 1916), 145.
- 44 J. Gwynfor Jones, 'The Welsh Poets and their Patrons c. 1550–1640', *Welsh History Review*, 9 (1978–79), 245–77, esp. 274–7.
- 45 Dylan Foster Evans, 'Goganwr am Gig Ynyd': the Poet as Satirist in Medieval Wales, no. 6 Research Papers (Aberystwyth: Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 1996); Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues*, Ch. 2.
- 46 *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customes Copied by Edward Lhuyd from the Manuscript of the Rev. James Kirkwood (1650–1709) and Annotated by him with the Aid of the Rev. John Beaton*, ed. J. L. Campbell (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, Mistletoe Series, 1975), 40.
- 47 Gruffydd Robert's *Gramadeg Cymraeg* (Milan, 1567) cited by Evans, *The Poet as Satirist*, 26; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. 'cyff clêr'; Thomas Pennant, *Tours in*

- Wales, ed. John Rhys, 3 vols (Caernarvon, 1883), II. 100–1; John David Rhys [Siôn Dafydd Rhys], *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecae Linguae Institutiones* [etc.] (London, 1592), marginal note on p. 147.
- 48 Suggett, 'Slander in Early-Modern Wales', 126; A *Catalogue of Star Chamber Proceedings Relating to Wales*, ed. Ifan ab Owen Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1929), 43; NLW, Great Sessions 13/23/9/unnumbered presentment.
- 49 PRO, STAC 8 James 1/205/21–22; G. Dyfnallt Owen, *Wales in the Reign of James I* (London: Royal Historical Soc. Studies in History 53, 1988), 5. Libels printed in *Records of Early English Drama: Shropshire*, ed. J. A. B. Somerset, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), I. 66–70; II. 546–8, 639–41.
- 50 Pauline Croft, 'Libels, popular literacy and public opinion in early modern England', *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 68 (1995), 266–85; Adam Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), 47–83.
- 51 D. Aneurin Thomas, *The Welsh Elizabethan Catholic Martyrs* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971), 105; cf. Owen, *Wales in the Reign of James I*, 108, n. 95.
- 52 Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), *passim*.
- 53 Acts 4 Henry IV, c. 27; 25 Henry VI; Ivor Bowen, *The Statutes of Wales* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 34, 45. The wording of the original statute is 'Westours, Rymours, Ministrallx & autres vacabondes'; cf. the ordinances in the 'Record of Caernarvon', *Registum Vulgariter Nuncupatum 'The Record of Caernarvon'*, ed. H. Ellis (London: Record Commission, 1838), 238 ('plusours Wastours Rymors Mynistrallx & autres vacabundez') and 132 where an ordinance against 'les Westres Barthes & Rymors' is attributed to Edward I. The meaning of the Anglo-French word rendered 'waster' in the 1543 translation of the statute is not certain. The *OED*, following T. Gwynn Jones, explains 'westour' as a form of the Welsh *gwestur*, 'a vagrant who went about exacting free board and lodging' or 'a bard on circuit': *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), s.v. 'waster', sense 13. On the context of Henry IV's anti-Welsh legislation, see R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn D r* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 281–92.
- 54 See generally, R. Wallis Evans, 'Prophetic Poetry', in Jarman and Hughes (eds), *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol II. ch. 13, and the citations in n. 60 below.
- 55 Cf. Art Cosgrove, 'The emergence of the Pale, 1399–1447', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, vol. II. *Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 555, for the order in 1435 to the 'marshal' of the faithful English minstrels to capture those Irish entertainers regarded as spies and guides; Brian Ó Cuív, 'The Irish Language in the Early Modern Period', in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland*, vol. III: *Early Modern Ireland 1534–1691* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 520–1; J. E. Caerwyn Williams & Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 176–7; Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'An Appeal for a Guarantor', *Celtica*, 21 (1990), 28–37.
- 56 Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn D r*, 34. Irish hill-top assemblies: Marc Caball, 'Aspects of Sixteenth-century Élite Gaelic Mentalities', *Études Celtiques*, 32 (1996), 208 (abolished 1572); Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1972), 30–1.
- 57 Text of British Library Lansdowne MS III, f. 10, in Edward Owen, *A Catalogue*

- of the *Manuscripts Relating to Wales in the British Museum*, Record Series, no. 4 (London: Cymmrodorion, 1900), part I, 72, with clarification of names by Ifor Williams, *Hen Chwedlau* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), i; R. R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400. IV: Language and Historical Mythology', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 6th ser., 7 (1997), 23; Bowen, 'Y Cywyddwyr a'r Dirywiad', 455 and 476.
- 58 Richard Suggett, 'Festivals and Social Structure in Early-modern Wales', *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), 90–1, n. 38.
- 59 NLW, MS. 9051E, item 12.
- 60 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 397–404; Glanmor Williams, 'Prophecy, Poetry, and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales', in *British Government and Administration. Studies Presented to S. B. Chrimes*, ed. H. Hearder and H. R. Loyn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), 104–16; Ralph Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family: a Study in the Wars of the Roses and Early Tudor Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 103–4; Peter Roberts, 'Tudor Wales, National Identity and the British Inheritance', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity: the Making of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35–7.
- 61 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 420–1; Suggett, 'The Welsh Language and the Court of Great Sessions', in *The Welsh Language Before the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Jenkins, 174–6.
- 62 Williams, 'Prophecy, Poetry, and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales', 112–13. Cf. the list of manuscripts in Margaret Enid Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1937), 219–20.
- 63 NLW, MS. 3041B (formerly Mostyn MS. 133), 375–9; HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (London, 1898) I, part 1, 109; NLW, Great Sessions 21/8/rex m. 2r.
- 64 Robert Recorde, *The Grovndes of Artes* [etc.] (London, 1552), dedication to Edward VI, sig. AVv-AVir; William Salesbury, *A briefe and a playne introduction* [etc.] (London, 1550), introduction, sig. Eiir-v; Sir John Wynn, *The History of the Gwydir Family and Memoirs*, ed. J. Gwynfor Jones (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1990), 24.
- 65 Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues*, ch. 1, esp. 34–5; Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales, c. 1415–1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 163.
- 66 Text and translation: 'Statud Gruffudd ap Cynan/The Statute of Gruffudd ap Cynan', ed. David Klausner, *Welsh Music History*, 3 (1999), 282–98. Discussion of different texts in T. Gwynn Jones, 'Bardism and Romance: a Study of the Welsh Literary Tradition', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion*, Session 1913–14 [1915], 240–64; Thomas, 'From Manuscript to Print – I. Manuscript', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature* III. 250, discusses copies including those owned by poets.
- 67 Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys: Caerwys Eisteddfodau*, 42–5. Not all versions state that the *eisteddfod* was to be held 'under the commission of the king'; D. J. Bowen, 'Graddigion Eisteddfodau Caerwys, 1523 a 1567/8', *Llên Cymru*, 2 (1952–53), 128–34.
- 68 Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys*, 43–4; D. J. Bowen, 'Graddau Barddol Tudur Aled', *Llên Cymru*, 18 (1994–95), 98–100.
- 69 Kay Brainerd Slocum, 'Confrérie, Bruderschaft and Guild: the Formation of

- Musicians' Fraternal Organizations in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-century Europe', *Early Music History*, 14 (1995), 257–74; G. R. Rastall, 'The Minstrel Court in Medieval England', in *A Medieval Miscellany in Honour of Professor John Le Patourel, Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, 18 (1992), 96–105; Woodfill, *Musicians in English Society*, 109–20; Bowen, 'Agwedddau ar Ganu'r Unfed Ganrif ar Bymtheg', 327–30.
- 70 John David Rhys, *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecae Linguae Institutiones* (London, 1592), 302; *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, ed. G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1934), 136, 151.
  - 71 The offices held by the patrons of the *eisteddfod* are given in the versions of the proclamation in NLW, MS. 6434D, f. 345v, and Peniarth MS. 75 (transcript in HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, I, part 2 [London, 1899], 503); on the political context, see S. J. Gunn, 'The Regime of Charles, Duke of Suffolk, in North Wales and the Reform of Welsh Government, 1509–25', *Welsh History Review*, 12 (1984–85), 470–8.
  - 72 Bowen, 'Graddegion Eisteddfod Caerwys, 1523 a 1567–68', 128–34. Not all the silver prizes are specifically mentioned until the 1594 petition for a third *eisteddfod*. The silver harp in the keeping of the Mostyn family has survived and is of 'simple workmanship', about six inches long with a loop for a chain: Iorweth C. Peate, *Diwylliant Gwerin Cymru* (Liverpool: Hugh Evans a'i Feibion, 1942), 76, and idem, *Tradition and Folk Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 90 and plate 42.
  - 73 Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of Medieval Towns* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 164–8; Heather Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 29–48.
  - 74 Jones, 'Bardism and Romance', 259–9; Thomas, *Eisteddfodau Caerwys*, 70–3; Klausner, 'Statud Gruffudd ap Cynan', 295.
  - 75 Acts 3 Henry VIII, c. 2; 6 Henry VIII, c. 3; 11 Henry VIII, c. 2; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. I: *The Early Tudors (1485–1553)*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1964), nos 63, 108, 118, 121; R. W. Heinze, *The Proclamations of the Tudor Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 89–94.
  - 76 The term 'vagabond' had been used to designate suspect and wandering persons in the March in the last quarter of the fifteenth century; cf. *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415–1536. Select Documents*, ed. T. B. Pugh (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963), 93.
  - 77 Powell, *The historie of Cambria*, 192.
  - 78 D. J. Bowen, *Gwaith Gruffudd Hiraethog* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), xxvi–vii; HMC, *Report on Welsh Manuscripts* (London, 1905), I, part 3, 1021; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, nos 250, 352.
  - 79 NLW, Peniarth MS 194 described in HMC, *Report on Welsh Manuscripts*, I: 3, 1021–3.
  - 80 Act 26 Henry VIII, c. 6; Ivor Bowen, *The Statutes of Wales, 57; Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, IV, part 1 (1870), 1044 (no. 2331); 'The Record of Caernarvon', 296.
  - 81 Act 4 Henry IV, c. 27 confirmed 25 Henry VI; Bowen, *Statutes of Wales*, 34, 45.
  - 82 Instructions to Lord Compton, 1617, printed in Thomas Rymer, *Foedera* [etc.]

- (London, 1727), XVII. 31–2; Caroline A. J. Skeel, ‘The St Asaph Cathedral Library MS. of the Instructions to the Earl of Bridgewater, 1633’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 6th ser., 17 (1917), 200.
- 83 Text of the commission in HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, I: 1, 291–2. David Powel, *The historie of Cambria*, 440–1, for Sidney’s ancestry.
- 84 HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, I: 1, 291–2.
- 85 Bowen, ‘Graddegion Eisteddfodau Caerwys, 1532 a 1567/8’, 128–34; Evan D. Jones, ‘Simwnt Fychan a Theulu Plas y Ward’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 7 (1933–35), 141–2.
- 86 On the idea of social closure, see Frank Parkin, *Class, Inequality and Political Order* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971).
- 87 NLW, Great Sessions 4/968/7/15; 14/68/Feb. 11 Eliz.; 4/5/2/20 and 47.
- 88 Text of the petition in HMC, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, I: 1, 293–5.
- 89 Ibid.; Bowen, ‘Y Cywyddwyr a’r Dirywiad’, 476.
- 90 On the decline of the poetic tradition, see especially Ceri W. Lewis, ‘The Decline of Professional Poetry’, in *A Guide to Welsh Literature* III. ch. 2; J. Gwynfor Jones, *Continuity and Change in Wales c. 1500–1603. Essays and Studies* (Aberystwyth: University Centre for Educational Studies, 1999), ch. 6; Nia Powell, ‘Robert ap Huw’, 11–13.
- 91 See generally, W. Ogwen Williams, ‘The Survival of the Welsh Language After the Union of England and Wales: the First Phase, 1536–1642’, *Welsh History Review*, 2 (1964), 78–86.
- 92 Lewis, ‘Decline of Professional Poetry’, 60.
- 93 D. J. Bowen, ‘Y Cywyddwyr a’r Dirywiad’, 492 (no. 96).
- 94 NLW, Great Sessions 4/781/4/28.
- 95 Siôn Lewys Môn: NLW, Great Sessions 4/16/4/75.
- 96 Ann Rosser, *Telyn a Thelynor. Hanes y Delyn yng Nghymru 1700–1900* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1981).
- 97 Aubrey, *Three Prose Works*, 299; NLW, Great Sessions 4/781/4/28r–v; 4/884/4/8d; 4/17/5/34.
- 98 Siôn Mawddwy, *Cywydd Dychan i’r Ffair a Moliant Syr Sion Games o’r Drenewydd*, ‘a poem in satire of the fair and in praise of Sir John Games of Newton’: Bowen, ‘Y Cywyddwyr a’r Dirywiad’, 484; T. Gwynn Jones, *Llên Cymru, Detholiad o Ryddiaith a Phrydyddiaeth* (Aberystwyth, 1926), part III, 67–8. Cf. also the earlier satire on Flint and its piper in Thomas Roberts (ed.), *Gwaith Tudur Penllyn ac Ieuan ap Tudur Penllyn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), 51–2, with free translation in *Presenting Welsh Poetry*, ed. Gwyn Williams (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 35–7.
- 99 D. J. Bowen, ‘Detholiad o Englynion’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 15 (1954), 186–7.
- 100 H. C. Jones, *Gwaith Huw Ceiriog ac Edward Maelor* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), xxxi–xxxii, 40–1. I am grateful to Huw Ceiriog Jones for discussing this passage with me.
- 101 NLW, Great Sessions 4/16/1/25; 4/27/1/53; 4/20/4/72–5. Cf. Brinley Rees, *Dulliau’r Canu Rhydd 1500–1650* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952), 18–19, for English terms for dancing in Welsh contexts. The subject needs further exploration.
- 102 Suggett, ‘Festivals and Social Structure’, 79–112.

The spoken word

- 103 Great Sessions 4/20/4/72–5; Suggett, 'Festivals and Social Structure', 92; Jones, *Gwaith Huw Ceiriog*, 136–7.
- 104 Bowen, 'Y Cywyddwyr a'r Dirywiad', 484; Jones, *Llên Cymru*, part III, 67–9, gives 'this, that, which, what, when' as the peremptory English monosyllables.