

Welsh Voices and the Magical Localisation

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Abstract:

The Celtic, and its relationship with the historic and mythological in multimedia, is investigated by Simon Nugent who deems it as a term that ‘connotes a distinct culture and race of people, primarily located in Ireland and Scotland, but also in Cornwall, Galicia, Brittany, and Wales’ (Nugent 2018:107). However, the Celtic often tends to be used as an example of northern medievalisms to fetishize lost histories, in multimedia, rather than explicitly relate to any Celtic region. Whereas Nugent identifies the primary focus of Celticisms to be that of Scottish and Irish heritage, Welsh Celticisms and voice have been used in several localized Japanese video games to characterize the magical ‘other.’

Whilst Welsh voices are used consistently within Western film and television to denote Wales, across diverse multimedia spaces like *Star Trek: Discovery* (d. Fuller & Kurtzman 2017) and *The Last Kingdom* (BBC & Netflix 2015), Welsh Celticisms appear fixed in the magical in video games. English localizations of Japanese games use Welsh voices to encourage a connection with these magical spaces, and Celtic fetishized histories, for players who can identify this accent – which is primarily British audiences.

This paper will highlight the effect of using Welsh voices to worldbuild and narrate a mythological and magical space across a combination of accent, language, and music. I will identify how Welsh voices appear in localizations of Japanese RPGs (Role Playing Games) so consistently by analyzing games such as *Ni No Kuni (Level-5, 2013)*, *Xenoblade Chronicles 2 and 3* (Monolith Soft 2017 & 2022) and *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022).

Keywords: Welsh, Accent, Video Games, Audio, Localization.

Introduction

Video game localizations are the act of translating and adapting language and voices to different countries. The international aural accessibility of localizations, unlike straight translations, can create authentic experiences that sound as though each language is the original of the game. Localizations can include changes in scripts, additions of colloquialisms, and accents to worldbuild organic game worlds. Scholars such as William Gibbons, however, argue the issues with localizations as they can erase cultural nuances from diverse developers across the globe:

At its best, localizing music can help a diverse range of players connect with games in a personally meaningful way; at its worst, it obscures the artistic achievements of composers and sound designers across the globe, and homogenizes musical culture in a potentially detrimental way. (2021: 360)

Although there are initial shortcomings with localizations, as outlined by Gibbons, the focus of this paper lies with the othering of cultures within the localization itself. I will specifically be focusing on the Welsh accent in localizations and their positioning within the magical. The magical localization is a pattern within video games that have been localized from non-English speaking countries to English. The magical localization often engages with various British accents to identify magical creatures. These accents reflect popular media’s use of

accents in fantasy, attributed to Peter Jackson's 2001 *The Lord of the Rings* film series; London Orcs, West Midlands Hobbits, Scottish Dwarfs, and Queens English Elves. Although defining of the fantasy genre, *The Lord of the Rings* emits Welsh accents. Welshness, however, appears in many localized video games to identify witches, fairies, and other occult beings. Throughout this paper I will be identifying tropes of Welshness and the Welsh accent seen throughout literature and film. Furthermore, I will showcase how these tropes are used variably, but consistently, throughout European and Japanese RPGs.

Accents and Multimedia: Celtic and Welsh Images

In the 20th Century, the BBC forced a 'monovocality' on its broadcasts and stopped regional broadcasters from using their accents in 'serious talks, features or drama of other than regional import.' (Cohen 2017: 78) This 'monovocality' included the erasure of the Welsh accent along with other regional accents. Alongside this, the BBC in Wales tried to create a sense of Welsh nationalism even though the country 'was divided between the industrial cities and mining villages of the south and the more rural north.' (Hajkowski 2010: 169) As North and South Wales differ both in culture, language, and accent, as nations tend to be diverse in these spaces, the romanticization of Wales (valleys and paganism) live on in the media. Literature that focuses on the Welsh Celtic incorporates the mythology and history of Witches and man-wolves. The Welsh Celtic is unique in its treatment of witches from the rest of Europe, as the witches of Wales were not burned at the stake: 'Left to their own devices, the Welsh peasantry did not usually take their witches to court, nor did the Irish or the Gaelic-speaking Scots.' (Aaron 2013:141) British voices and accents are a normality in the fantasy genre of media, but in modern video games and localizations of non-English speaking games, there is a pattern of using southern Welsh (Cardiff, Newport) accents to define the magical. In western video games however, the Welsh language and accent is used as representational of Welsh cultures: In *Sid Meier's Civilization V* (Firaxis Games 2010) the Welsh language is spoken by the leader Boudicca the Great of the Celts; *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (Ubisoft Montreal 2020) incorporates the Welsh language spoken by non-playable characters.

Celticisms in media and literature intersects with Welshness and influences its use in video games. According to Darryl Jones, 'the familiar discourses of Celticism enabled writers to slip easily across the border between these two worlds, the occult universe and the political nation.' (2014: 32) The border between the real world and the magical world, that is enabled by celticisms, occurs often in literature and film that uses the occult to fashion horror. In literature, the decadence of Welsh author Arthur Machen and their use of the 'occultism, paganism, non-mainstream eroticism, sexual diversity, the femme fatale, violent and strange deaths, and the simultaneous investment in and disavowal of bourgeois identities.' (Denisoff, 2018: 4) In film, K.J. Donnelly defines the occult as a part of sound because 'the word 'occult' merely means hidden or unapparent; it should not be equated with sinister or evil characteristics.' (2014: 2) As arguably not sinister, the occult as the hidden or unapparent can be linked to accents in multimedia, and the possible meanings that underly these elements of place and culture. In video games, Rachel Collyer discusses the widespread use of celticisms in music to display the historical:

The conflation of Celtic sound with medieval music is comparatively new, with Haines observing that Irish-Celtic music invaded the scores of medieval-themed films in the 1990s. Filmic Celtic medievalisms have been identified in recent game scores. [...] Celtic sound offers a fresh, if incongruent, dynamic with its overlays of druidic magic and spiritual connection to the natural world. (2023: 7-8)

Celticisms display an amalgamation of different cultures and countries. Simon Nugent defines celticisms as something which ‘connotes a distinct culture and race of people, primarily located in Ireland and Scotland, but also in Cornwall, Galicia, Brittany, and Wales’ (2018: 107). In the fantasy genre especially, celticisms and folk traditions are used to portray the 'other', the occult, the unknown. Leppälahti identifies ‘the fantasy process’ through a diagram and identifies that from a 'shared fantasy pool' an author will create material that, if fans and readers accept the motifs of the text, will become part of this 'shared fantasy pool.' (2018: 182-184) Folk tradition, according to Leppälahti’s diagram, enters the shared pool by being brought in by the author during their choice and composition. (Leppälahti & Tolley 2018: 182-184) As the fantasy world grows larger with each accepted iteration of content, we begin to see tropes and commonalities, like the use of a Scottish accent to connote Dwarves; the fantasy pool holds myriad images and ideas from Welsh folklore.

The Wolf Man and the Welsh Witch

The Welsh wolf is a familiar trope of celticisms, especially in the horror genre of golden era Hollywood cinema, such as *The Wolf Man* (1941) by American-German Hollywood writer Curt Siodmak. In *The Wolf Man*, Wales is used as the border between the supernatural other and the real world; ‘the film demonstrates this by imagining Wales in much the same way as Universal horror films had imagined Transylvania – the two places seem to border each other in the film’s cultural imaginary.’ (Jones 2014: 34) These borders and portals to the supernatural can be observed in media such as *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) miniseries by director Mike Flanagan, and *Ju-On: The Grudge* by director Takashi Shimizu (2003). These horror stories use a house as a border between the supernatural and the real world and entrap anyone who enters the house to be haunted. Like these houses there are locations, such as the border between England and Wales, that are used as a space which house the occult, a literal border with the supernatural being on the Welsh side of the border: ‘geomantic omphalos, the borderland between the two worlds, and a series of English incomers and tourists find themselves caught in this portal’ (Jones 2009: 40)

Because of the use of Wales as a place for the occult and supernatural consistently across literature and film, the Welsh accent is subsequently placed within tropes that links to 'the land' and the pastoral:

Edward Williams (1747– 1826), who took the colorful name Iolo Morganwg, worked to restore the old bardic order. He invented and fostered the cult of druidism, and claimed that the Welsh bards were the heirs of the ancient Druids. Welsh antiquarians rediscovered the connections between the Welsh and the ancient Celts. Wales came to be constructed as a 'land of song' (an image constantly exploited by the BBC). Welsh music proliferated, and wealthy patrons organized harp societies. (Hajkowski, 2010, p.169)

The ‘land of song’ and druidism engages Welshness in the supernatural and pagan, although somewhat forced by those such as Edward Williams. Therefore, the Welsh accent also becomes a part of this pagan world, and thus may have led to its use in identifying witches and the magical in video games.

The English localisation of the Japanese role-playing video game *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware, 2022) incorporates both the Welsh witch and wolf man in its main story line. The player meets Ranni the Witch, who has a Welsh accent and is played by Welsh actress Aimee-Ffion Edwards. There are many situations in which the player can meet Ranni for the first time, and the player can react to the quests she gives in different ways. The player can work with Ranni's wolf man guardian Blaidd ('blaidd' being Welsh for wolf). Blaidd has a human figure with a wolf's head and speaks also in a Welsh accent. The player can work with Blaidd throughout the narrative, however Blaidd is destined to go mad Two fingers (a manifestation of powers) but will cause Blaidd to go mad if Ranni does not complete her destiny, which she does not.¹ The player has a choice to make with Blaidd, either slaying them or imprisoning them forever whilst they still lose their sanity. Regardless of the player's decisions on Blaidd's fate, the man-wolf will inevitably go mad which mirrors the curse of the werewolf in western and Celtic fiction. The use of the Welsh language to make references to witches and wolves is not unique to *Elden Ring*, however. *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD PROJEKT RED, 2015), which I will look at later in this paper, also uses Welsh to signify the wolf; Although the main character Geralt of Rivia is not physically a wolf man, he is referred to as 'the white wolf' and, by some in the game world, the Elder Speech (Welsh) version 'Gwybliedd'.

Localizations and Erasure

The erasure of Welsh culture has been occurring since the destruction of the language as Englishmen saw that the accumulation of lesser cultures as a natural occurrence. The problematic author H.P. Lovecraft specifically uses a 'degeneration' of language in *The Rats in the Walls* (1923), a short story set on the border of Wales. As a character goes mad in the narrative, their language devolves 'down an imagined evolutionary ladder from modern English to Renaissance English, to Middle English, to Latin, to Irish, before finally settling on gibberish as he chews away on his neighbour's face.' (Jones 2009: 41) Although Welsh is not specifically noted here, the demotion of the characters speech to Irish, right before gibberish, shows Lovecraft's attitudes to celticisms – especially as the location is also close to Wales and the occult border. Even within Wales there is an erasure of the Welsh language and accent as writers present Welshness as horror or occult. Returning to *The Wolf Man*, Jones provides a description of Welsh erasure even though the film is set within a Welsh village:

Llanwelly is in fact a fantasy Welsh village where Englishmen, Russians, Hungarians and Americans happily coexist, but where there are no actual Welsh people – even Ralph Bellamy plays the local police chief, a boyhood friend of Larry's who has lived in Llanwelly all his life, with an accent that sounds as if he has never left Bellamy's native Chicago. (2014: 34)

This strange erasure continues in video games. In the Polish role-playing video game, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (*The Witcher 3*), the Welsh language is used to portray witches and the occult races. *The Witcher 3* incorporates the Welsh voices to highlight the Cronos of

¹ A greater explanation of the quest lines and intersections between NPCs can be found on the *Elden Ring* Wikia: <https://eldenring.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Characters>

Crookback Bog, three grotesque witches who harass the main character, Geralt (and the player), and belittle his manhood. I found the significance of the Welsh language in the game when analyzing *The Witcher 3* in my PhD thesis. The ancient language of the world, Elder Speech, is based on Welsh but has been erased by dominant cultures:

Elder speech takes influence not only from Welsh but also Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Where *môr* is considered the word for sea, the similar Scottish Gaelic and Irish word *muir* also refers to sea, and the Irish word *mór*, translating to large, can be attributed to the *mor* in Morhen. The accumulation of languages to symbolise the aesthetics of Kaer Morhen, an ancient, large white fortress which used to be adjacent to a sea, shrouds the language in a sense of the historic. [...] the limited use of Elder Speech, because of the persecution of non-human races, mimics the loss of the Welsh language after the Middle Ages. The anglicisation of Wales, after an era of prosperity in the Middle Ages, eroded the use of the Welsh language by the landed gentry as England attempted to unify Wales. (Smith 2020: 172)

I highlight here the erasure of Welsh and the correlation between it and the witcher world of Elvish persecution. I later draw a distinct line between this ancient race, magic, and the Welsh language used by the crones. These ancient and magical witches are particularly grotesque visually but are also set apart from others in this world through their relationship with Elder speech through their Welsh accents. Their accents 'other' their beings further, in a world rich with British accents. The lead localizers of *Witcher 3* argue, in a YouTube documentary, that there was no 'original language' for the game, as they developed each language simultaneously. They also discussed the flexibility of naming practices across languages, as they would ask translators to not directly translate but to find words in their languages that suit. (Noclip 2017) This is a positive direction from lead localizers, however later in the documentary Borys Pugacz-Muraszkiewicz talks about the English localization and the myriad British accents that worldbuild the different nations and people. In this identification of the various accents, Pugacz-Muraszkiewicz states that they felt comfortable using the Welsh language for the supernatural and 'If it's weird, it's Welsh.' The reduction of Welsh to 'weird' is due to the accent representing the people of Aedirn in *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (CD PROJEKT RED 2011) which the player does not visit in *The Witcher 3*.

The degeneration of the Welsh accent from representative of a nation to horrific, and weird creatures, is unflattering. Both Welsh and Celticisms have been used to highlight the occult and degenerate in literature and media far before *The Witcher 3*. Japanese role-playing video game localizations also use Welsh accents to highlight the magical but do not erase the culture in later games. The following case studies will highlight where Welsh accents are used in localization and how they link to the magical and the stereotypical tropes that are used here.

Ni No Kuni: Fairy Standup

Welsh accents in Japanese video games are attributed to fairies, witches, and other magical or occult beings. The Japanese role-playing video game *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* (Level-5 2013) draws on the border between the supernatural and the real world, a border that is defined by the Welsh accent. Unlike *The Witcher 3*, an international game where the

localizations are created simultaneously (Noclip 2017), Japanese is the original language for *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch (Ni No Kuni)* and the English version is the only audio-based localization.

Ni No Kuni was developed by Level-5 and animated by the film studio Studio Ghibli, with music composed by Joe Hisaishi. The game follows the magical and otherworldly nature that often occurs in Studio Ghibli films like *Spirited Away*, as *Ni No Kuni* translates to second world. The game begins in a 1950s style American town, Motorville, with a young boy named Oliver (the player character). After being targeted by the white witch from the 'other world', so that Oliver cannot fulfil a prophecy of saving the world, Oliver is saved from drowning by his mother who subsequently dies from a weak heart. Depressed by his mother's death, Oliver sheds tears onto a doll created by his mother and unwittingly revives Mr. Drippy, the Lord High Lord of the Fairies. The accents in this initial part of the English-speaking localization provide hidden messages to the players on the plot. Although everyone in Motorville speaks with an American accent, Oliver's mother has a soft stereotypical Queen's English accent. This is one of the first hidden plot points in the game as the narrative points later that Oliver's mother may have a connection with the 'other world', the magical world. The accents of the 'other world' are British, rather than American, which provides a distinction between the two worlds. As Oliver brings Mr. Drippy back to life, the player is affronted by a strong Welsh Accent. During an insensitive first meeting, as Mr. Drippy berates Oliver for being a 'cry-baby bunting' and staying in his room for three days mourning his mother, we learn that Oliver's tears have broken a curse placed on Mr. Drippy.

One of the locations in the game is the fairyground, in which we learn that Mr Drippy's Welsh accent defines the fairy race. There are no other characters in the game world, outside of fairies, who have a Welsh accent and thus Wales connotes these magical creatures.² The localization of the fairies, however, does not solely use the Welsh accent, but incorporates colloquialisms found in Wales, like 'tidy.' During a cutscene in which the player watches two fairies enact a comedy routine, we hear general colloquialisms within the act: 'mun', 'en't it, though', 'youer', and a reference to 'Widow Twankey' the female character typically played by an older man in the pantomime *Aladdin*. This localization draws on regionality and culture to 'other' the fairies, but also draws on niche British theatre like 'Widow Twankey.' In this moment, the race of Faeries and the culture of Wales have been combined. Visually, the fairy village contains traditional Japanese festival stylings, such as red lanterns and market stalls typically found in an *ichiba* or *matsuri*. The music continues to highlight the difference and jovial nature of the faeries through its Studio Ghibli stylings composed by Hisaishi. 'The Fairyground' musical cue is a swung version of Mr. Drippy's theme, and the music doubly highlights the 'otherness' of the fairies in this world through the music. The still magical, but non-fairy, city of Ding Dong Dell (like the English Nursery rhyme 'Ding Dong Dell' or 'Ding Dong Bell') follows Western medieval tropes in the music by incorporating recorders and bodhrán style drums to symbolize a stereotypical medieval, Middle Ages, Tudor style civilization. As Daniela Fountain describes, 'the sixteenth century musical world in film, however, manifests itself through the extensive use of the lute and, perhaps less frequently, of the recorder and the viol in a consort setting.' (2018: 60) Ding

² The English localization of Mr. Drippy is voiced by Welsh actor Steffan Rhodri, and the original Japanese Mr. Drippy is voiced by Arata Furuta who has an Inner Kansai, Kobe, accent. Where anime characters are often played with standard Tokyo accents, the Kansai accent offers a distinction between Mr. Drippy's magical nature and Oliver in the Japanese version. The distinction between the Kansai and Tokyo accents is not dissimilar to the difference between an American English and Welsh accent.

Dong Dell follows this manifestation of music which is also imposed by the leader of Ding Dong Dell, a cat King dressed in a Tudor style with a royal accent.

Unlike the city of Ding Dong Dell, the fairyground is set in the forest which mirrors the similar placements of Wales and the Welsh language in a natural or 'rugged' landscape, as previously highlighted by Hajkowski (which also occurs in the placement of Welsh accents in the rural Crookback Bog of *The Witcher 3*).

Where *Ni No Kuni* uses the Welsh accent as a border for another, magical, world (we meet Mr. Drippy before entering or knowing of 'other world'), other uses of the Welsh accent highlight just the magical or a specific race that is not entirely human in appearance.

Xenoblade Chronicles: Feline Phenomenon

Xenoblade Chronicles is a series of role-playing games that follow a set cast of characters across large worlds made from enormous god-like entities. The first *Xenoblade Chronicles* (Monolith Soft, 2010) has a cult following of players as the game was reviewed well in Europe and Japan but was not released in America. Due to the lack of American release, the localization focused on British talent for the voice actors, and thus British accents were incorporated. The popularity of accents in *Xenoblade Chronicles* are disputed on forums and have confused some gamers who are used to hearing American accents in the English dubbing and localization of the Japanese game. However, British voices defined the series.

Xenoblade Chronicles 2 (Monolith Soft, 2017) followed suit with British voices and introduced further accents like Scottish and Welsh to highlight unique races and civilizations. The Welsh accent is attributed to the Gormotti race, a race of characters with feline attributes, such as cat ears. We first meet a Gormotti character named Nia who is also accompanied by a talking Blade companion (a weapon race which the player uses to fight battles) who is a white tiger named Dromarch. The accent here is attached to the 'otherness' of Nia, especially as this is the first time the player and player character have met a Gormotti. The Gormotti are also a naturalistic race which draws on the tropes of Wales being of the land. Not quite a man wolf, the female feline draws on the same origins of the Welsh beast by using the Welsh accent.

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 (Monolith Soft, 2022) further draws attention to the border between the Welsh accent and the occult. *Xenoblade Chronicles 3* is a combination of the previous two iterations and, again, draws on the accents to populate its world and characterizations. Like *Ni No Kuni*, the game is set in a 'second country' which is a combination of the two worlds of *Xenoblade Chronicles 1* and *2* through an in-game narrative natural disaster. The characters and races of *Xenoblade Chronicles 3* represent the races from 1 and 2, who are opposed to each other in a perpetual war. Each race uses the accent attached to them in their respective games, and thus the feline race continues to have Welsh accents in the most recent iteration of the game. The almost occult nature of Nia and others of her race draws on the fantastical and attaches the Welsh accent to the fantastical again.

Conclusion

Across literature, film, and video games, the Welsh accent is used as the occult, the supernature, as witches, and beast men and women. How the Welsh accent became a part of

the occult is outlined through its myriad folklore and history with witches. This, however, has been a culture adapted and changed by Wales' history with England, and the willingness of the English to romanticize the environment of Wales. Wales became associated with the pagan and druids, which has eventually filtered to the occult, supernatural, and magical. Localizations draw on these tropes attached to the Welsh accent. Welsh voices and Celticisms are drawn on as borders to other, magical worlds, which has been attributed specifically to the border between England and Wales.

Welsh accents in European localizations focus more on the representation of people (although *The Witcher 3* moves away from that). Japanese video game localizations, however, repeatedly attribute Welsh accents to the magical and the occult. Japanese localizations appear to use the Welsh accent in a similar way to literature and the focus of Wales as a magical and naturalistic landscape.

This paper has outlined some of the reasons why video game localizations use Welsh accents and languages to identify the magical. This has not been an exhaustive list of video games which use the Welsh voice in this manner, but outlines some patterns throughout multimedia.

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