

Lord Watchout

A comical Medieval tale from Wales

**By
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Solo version
a one-act play

Liberally adapted from
The Mabinogion

No badgers were harmed in the writing
of this play

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Cast of Characters
(played by the same actor, with a
little help from the audience.)

BARD:

LORD WATCHOUT:

SHEPHERD:

RHYS:

RHODRI:

RHIANNON:

MAM:

VARIOUS PEASANTS:

GWAWL:

Scene 1

Already on stage is a map of the UK, and a whiteboard or flip-chart.

[enter Bard, carrying props, which he places on a table at the side of the stage, while nodding pleasantly to the audience... Bard then steps to front of stage]

BARD:

Welcome. I'm gonna tell a tale that will take us on a journey back in time. A Looooooooooooooooong way back. That's "long" with a capital "L" and 14 "o"s, A Looooooooooooooooong time.

We have a written version of this tale that's 800 years old plus some loose change.

Before that for many years it was one of the stories told by the bards.

The bards weren't allowed to write their stories down. They had to remember them word for word - like I'm doing right now.

And even for the bards, it was a story of the times of legend. As I said, a Looooooooooooooooong time.

The legend comes from ancient Wales. In case you're not sure where that is, take a look at this map.

[points to map] Wales is the sticky-out bit on the left here.

The story is set here, in the southwest corner.

Oh, yes, I want to tell you a little something about the Welsh before we start.

See, they do have a habit of exaggerating. Nothing is ever ordinary for the Welsh - everything is the biggest or the smallest or the best or the worst.

One Welsh guy I knew has told me every year since I was this high that the current winter is the worst in living memory. Which is statistically unlikely. But very Welsh.

And, since the story is from Wales, the name of our hero is a Welsh one. His name is "Pwyll". That's P-W-Y-L-L.

[the Bard writes PWYLL on whiteboard]

[Google for the pronunciation which is something like 'pu-ichhkk'. Most of the names aren't as difficult as that one]

You'll notice that there was a distinct shortage of vowels in ancient Wales...

I'll leave room here to write up a couple more names later on.

But don't worry, I won't be saying the name "Pwyll" too often. Firstly, it's hard work and gives me a sore throat.

Secondly, the front three rows would need umbrellas.

And thirdly, if there's any actual Welsh-speakers in the audience, my pronunciation is appalling.

[sprays throat with sore throat stuff]

Now, the name "Pwyll" actually means "careful one". This seems to be a bit of ancient Welsh sarcasm because the guy keeps jumping into big steaming piles of ... trouble without a second thought.

You know how, in a horror story you want to tell the people "Don't open that door!

Don't say that name three times!

Don't split up in the woods full of murdering maniacs!"?

Well, I feel like that, every time I tell this tale.

I want to shout out "WATCH OUT!!!!" every time he's about to do something ridiculous... And that's why I like to call him "Lord Watchout".

Which is lucky - it's easier than saying "Pwyll"! Oh, and also, it is the name of the show.

Now, there's something I want you guys to do, cos there's only one of me up here, and it's a BIG story. I want you to join in from time to time.

Whenever Lord Watchout is about to do something stupid without thinking it through, I'd like you to shout out to him. In Welsh. "Ofalus, Pwyll!"

Incidentally if there are any real Welsh speakers here, sorry about the bad grammar. As well as the dreadful pronunciation. Anyhow, it's your turn now. "Ofalus, Pwyll!"

[holds up a sign with the words on]

AUDIENCE:

[attempts to say] Ofalus, Pwyll!

BARD:

Never mind, then. Let's do it in English. I'll need three people to help me out with crowd control here. You three will do. No, no you stay there I'll come down to you.

[hands out signs with words on to three nearby audience members. -

the signs say "Watch", "Out" and "Lord". The words are on both back and front so that everybody can see them.]

You are number 1,

[points]

You are number 2,

[points]

and You are number 3.

[points]

When I point at you, stand up and hold that up so everyone can see it.

And the rest of you, when they hold up the signs you all shout out what they say. Let's try it...

[points at no 1]

AUDIENCE :

Watch!

BARD:

You sit, And now you...

[points at number 2]

AUDIENCE:

Out!

[motions number 2 to sit and points at no 3]

AUDIENCE:

Lord!

BARD:

You again!

[points at no 1]

AUDIENCE:

Watch...

[points at no 2]

AUDIENCE:

Out!

BARD:

Well done. Once more, let's put it together.

[points at 1,2,3,1,2.]

AUDIENCE:

Watch..out...lord..watch...out!

BARD:

Good. Perhaps he'll even take some notice. Though I very much doubt it. He didn't the last time I told this story. Or the time before. Anyway, let's begin. Lord Watchout was out hunting with his men one day and came to a hill just outside the town of Arberth.

[he picks up the 'Lord Watchout' hat]

... oh, yes, when I'm wearing this I'm being Lord Watchout... I'll be playing just about all the parts in this story, and you'll see when I change from character to character by subtle little signs like this.

[demonstrates, putting hat on]

WATCHOUT:

Now I'm Lord Watchout...

[swap]

BARD:

Now I'm me. Now I'm...

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

A shepherd.

[swap]

BARD:

Now I'm me again.

If I could act we'd do it that way instead. Instead I have a box full of props.

Scene 2: Arberth

WATCHOUT:

Now I'm Lord Watchout.

We're hunting wild boar. Be vewy vewy quiet.

[swap]

BARD:

He passed by a shepherd out working in a field .

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

Nice hat!

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Thanks.

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

You some sort of lord or something?

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Yes, I am, as it happens. 'Lord Watchout' is the name.

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

Well, don't go up that hill by there, then.

[swap]

BARD:

There are a few things about this story that make me suspect that life in ancient Wales was not exactly full of interesting things to do. Here comes the first of them. Let's see if you can work it out.

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Don't go up that hill? How's that, then?

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

It's a special magic hill, see? Any lord or king or whatever that goes up that hill will be badly beaten up and wounded in a mysterious manner or...

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Or what?

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

Or they will see a great wonder.

WATCHOUT:

Well, then...

[swap]

BARD:

Time to do your stuff...

[points at 1.2.3.1.2]

AUDIENCE:

Watch out, Lord Watchout!

BARD:

He's not listening, you know, Up he goes.

See, this is what makes me think life then and there was not exactly full of incident. I mean, if someone said to me -"I dunno: You could see something interesting; or you could get beaten to a pulp. It's 50/50 really." - then I'd likely stay at home and play Scrabble. Mind you that might have been difficult back then what with the shortage of vowels and all.

But you could easily give the whole 50%-chance-of being-maimed thing a body-swerve, and be at home watching "Gordon Ramsey Swears a Lot" or something. But not Lord Watchout, oh no. As soon as he hears this, he's off up the hill as quick as he can go.

[pause for effect]

Luckily for him, he doesn't get his butt kicked.

After a few slightly nervous minutes, what does he see but a girl riding a horse?

Now she's very pretty, she's wearing a dress made out of what appears to be golden silk, and the beautiful white horse she's riding on is remarkable.

The story tells us that the girl was very attractive.
Indeed, looking at her, Lord Watchout said to himself...

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Duw, but she's tidy.

[swap]

BARD:

Well, what he actually thought was...

[consults a copy of the Mabinogion which he picks up from the props table] [swap]

WATCHOUT:

'Every maid and every lady I ever saw is as nothing beside her.'

[swap]

BARD:

But then again, as I said, the Welsh are prone to exaggeration.

[he waves his copy of the Mabinogion around]

Why, in the "Mabinogion" itself, which is where this story comes from, there are fifty three women who are "the fairest that the world had ever seen".

Well, maybe not fifty -three. That's my Welsh DNA making itself felt. But several anyhow. And then there was Goewen. Goewen was only "the fairest of all the women of her day", which, comparatively, makes her a bit of dog really.

[adds the name to the whiteboard]

Anyway, a girl you quite fancy riding a rather nice horse hardly qualifies as a "Wonder", does it? So obviously there's more to come. Though he did wonder who she was...

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

I'd like to speak to that lady. Maybe she'd like to go out with me - probably a romantic date at the fish and chip shop on Friday. Go ask her who she is, Owen.

[swap]

BARD:

...says Watchout to his right-hand man. Off he goes, running down the hill toward her.

Now at this point I need two volunteers from the audience. So we can see what's going on.

*[selects one man/boy and one woman/girl.
Introduces them to the audience. gives Rhiannon prop to girl and Owen prop to boy. Instructs them.]*

[to girl]

...I need you to cross the stage very slowly and gracefully on your horse. Can you do that? Slower, slower. I've got some story to get through before you get to the other side...

[to boy]

...and can you run really fast on the spot? That's it. And look puzzled. You'll see why in a second.

See, here's a funny thing, and this is where the wonder begins: Owen runs down the hill as fast as he can, but although the girl is going very slowly, by the time he gets there she's a long way away. He runs after her, but the faster he runs, the further away the girl seems to be.

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Now, that IS a wonder. Hey, you, supporting character number two, go back to the court and bring me a horse.

[swap]

BARD:

But by the time supporting character number two, whose name incidentally was "Rhodri", got back with said horse, the girl was nowhere to be seen.

[adds 'Rhodri' to whiteboard]

So Watchout goes home. He can't stop thinking about her

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

I can't stop thinking about her!

[swap]

BARD:

See?

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

I'll be back tomorrow, and this time I'll take my fastest horse with me.

[swap]

BARD:

Who's name, incidentally, was "Ron".

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

And my fastest rider

[swap]

BARD:

..."Rhys"... *[adds 'Rhys' to whiteboard]*

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

No chance she'll get away this time without me at least getting her phone number. Oh, wait, they haven't invented phones yet. I'll have to get her name or something. Unless of course this time when I go up the hill I get seriously wounded...

[swap]

BARD:

You'd think there was an easier way to get a date, really, wouldn't you? Couldn't he have gone to OKWelshpeoplemeet.com? Anyway, he goes back the next day, making sure to take Rhys and Ron with him. Hunting is forgotten all about, it's straight to the hill outside Arberth.

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

Nice hat!

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

I know, I know, are you a lord, don't go up the hill, we did all that yesterday. Go and get on with some shearing or whatever it is that shepherds do.

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

It's all very well for you, you get to chase lovely magic women in gold dresses.
All I get is a Moorschnucke or the occasional Barbados Blackbelly...

[swap]

BARD:

Those are breeds of sheep, by the way...

[swap]

SHEPHERD:

Thank you... or a walk-on part in the "Cry Wolf" story.

[swap]

BARD:

But Watchout takes no notice, and up the dangerous hill he goes.

[points, 1,2,3,1,2]

AUDIENCE:

Watch out, Lord Watchout!

BARD:

See? He takes no notice at all!

Well, a little while passes. They're all still worried about the 50/50 odds of being beaten up, but you and I know there's a lot of this show left, and it's not going to go "This time he got beaten up, The End".

So I won't leave you in suspense: Watchout doesn't get the walloping he half expects. And then... the girl is suddenly there again, calmly riding the horse. Dressed all in gold of course, and looking if possible even lovelier than before. The lovely white horse is stepping out as daintily as you can imagine. And Watchout is awestruck, simply awestruck.

So if our lady in gold can come back over here.. and I'm going to need someone to be Rhys.

[hands 'Rhys' props, introduces him to audience]

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Rhys!

[swap]

BARD:

Say "Yes, Lord Watchout!"

RHYS:

Yes, Lord Watchout?

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Go find out who the hell that girl is. No horse ever born is faster than, um....

[swap]

BARD:

[looking at Mabinogion] ..."Ron".

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

Ron. Thank you,

[swap]

BARD:

You're welcome...and off goes Rhys, riding Ron. But get this: by the time Rhys gets to the bottom of the hill,

[moves Rhys]

she's gone past.

[moves girl]

And by the time he gets to here...

[moves Rhys]

[moves girl]

she's a dot in the distance.

What's more, though the lady's white horse never so much as breathes hard, and Rhys nearly ruins Ron by riding him so hard, she just gets further and further away.

OK Golden Girl, you can go back into the audience now. I'll need you once more.

[Rhiannon returns to audience as Bard leads applause]

Eventually, an exhausted Rhys, on a really, really exhausted Ron, returns to Lord Watchout to report:

[swap]

BARD:

[hands a note to Rhys]

Read this out.

RHYS:

My lord, we couldn't get anywhere near her. I don't understand it.

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

There's magic here, Rhys. I mean to get to the bottom of this.

[swap]

BARD:

...and we're done with you, my friend.

[Rhys returns to seat as Bard leads applause]

[swap]

RHODRI:

Can I say something, my lord?

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

What is it, supporting character number two?

[swap]

BARD:

Whose name, remember, was "Rhodri"

[swap]

WATCHOUT:

All right, what is it, "Rhodri"?

[swap]

