

**Writing Ireland in the Latin chronicles and
histories of early Plantagenet England**

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Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

University of Dublin

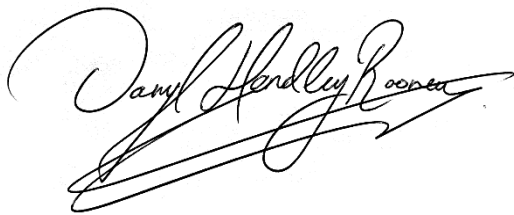
2023

Declaration

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Daryl Hendley Rooney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping underline.

Daryl Hendley Rooney B.A. M.A.

Thesis summary

For too long the Irish works of the medieval cleric and writer Gerald of Wales (c. 1146–1223) have dictated how the supposedly contemporary ‘English’ view of Ireland is portrayed in the historiography. This alleged view posits the Irish as primitive and uncivilised – traits that contemporary writers would have summed up with the use of the term *barbarus*. The historiography paints such denigratory attitudes as being representative of a clear departure from the more positive views that have come to be associated with early medieval opinion, epitomised by the idea of medieval Ireland as an ‘Island of Saints and Scholars’ or, as Ludwig Bieler described it, a ‘harbinger of the Middle Ages’. The dramatic change in attitudes of writers towards Ireland and its affairs in the twelfth century marked what John Gillingham defined as ‘one of the most fundamental ideological shifts in the history of the British Isles’. However, just how extensive was this ideological shift in the chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England? Did contemporary writers really view Ireland as an inherently backwards place inhabited by Christian barbarians? What did the historians and chroniclers have to say about Ireland, its affairs and its people? This doctoral thesis seeks to answer these questions and others through an examination of the extant source material, from descriptive accounts to mere passing references, related to Ireland composed by Latin historians and chroniclers in early Plantagenet England.

Chapter 1 explores classical and early medieval texts in order to establish the common subjects of interest and *topoi* that influenced how Ireland and its inhabitants were perceived and depicted in the pre-invasion period. From the Greek geographer Strabo (c. 63 B.C.–c. 24 A.D.) to the Benedictine monk and English historian William of Malmesbury (b. c. 1090, d. in or after 1142), the geographer and mathematician Ptolemy (c. 100–c. 170) to the missionary and patron saint of Ireland Patrick (*fl.* 5th cent.), these writers present a veritable smorgasbord of details – real and imagined – concerning Ireland, its inhabitants and its affairs that set the tone for how Ireland and the Irish were to be portrayed in the histories and chronicles of early Plantagenet England.

Chapter 2 examines the negative perceptions and depictions of Ireland and the Irish in the chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England. This negative material on Ireland is usually most commonly associated with contemporary views in the historiography. However, the ‘negative’ views seemingly expressed by contemporary writers are more than just the product of contempt, or ‘Hibernophobia’, for they reflect carefully crafted and stylised content that was influenced by many factors, including the expectations of patrons and peers, the intellectual cultures in which writers were educated and/or were producing their works, and the antecedent works that they read. Through a reexamination of Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hibernica* in light of new

scholarly approaches, this thesis affirms that this foundational text on medieval Ireland was a complex, living document that was frequently revised, thus challenging the static view of Gerald and his Irish works as being merely propagandistic. Given the profound influence of antecedent works on contemporary historical and chronicle writing, this chapter argues that while anti-Irish attitudes were a common feature in the sources, we must think more critically about how writers developed such views.

Chapter 3 explores the positive, ambiguous and indifferent views that were expressed in the sources as a counter to the negative or ‘anti-Irish’ material that has come to be generally accepted as representative of the *status quo* in the historiography. Through analyses of subjects such as contemporaries’ responses to the conquest of Ireland, positive descriptions and accounts of Irish music and saints, and cooperation between English and Irish nobles, this thesis shows that attitudes towards Ireland were more nuanced than is traditionally portrayed in the historiography. The barbarian motif that was often used to describe the Irish and their way of life is reexamined and shown to be predominantly used in Latin histories and chronicles when compared to the vernacular sources. One of the most intriguing research findings discussed is that contemporary perceptions and depictions of individual Irish people are generally more nuanced than those of Irish people as a social group. This phenomenon seems to be present in both Latin and vernacular sources.

Chapter 4 problematises the notion of a characteristically ‘English’ (or ‘Anglo-Norman’) view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England. It is argued that positing a homogeneous English stance offers a reductive nationalistic construction that merely perpetuates the binary opposition of the coloniser and the colonised and undermines not only the complexity of the relations between natives and newcomers – as well as their multifaceted identities – in the period but also the agency of the unrecorded, illiterate majority of people who lived in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England. Moreover, reinforcing a homogenous ‘English’ view of Ireland fails to allow for a more nuanced interpretation that incorporates continental influences such as the ideologies of church reform.

By utilising a comparative approach to examine contemporary Latin sources written during the first century or so of English Ireland, what emerges is a hodgepodge of contemporary depictions and attitudes that range from contempt for aspects of Irish life to sympathy for their colonial experiences to admiration for Ireland’s natural environment to more ambiguous and indeed indifferent views. Taken together, this material shows that Ireland, its people and its affairs were malleable constructs for contemporary chroniclers and historians seeking to understand and record for posterity a past, present and future for the inhabitants of early Plantagenet England.

In memoriam

David ‘Davy’ O’Beirne (1994–2018),

A great man for history and a bit of craic, but an even better friend, who is now so sorely missed.

Illustrations

Plate. 1 Map of Europe, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 48r.

Plate. 2 Maurice fitz Gerald, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 39r.

Plate. 3 Two Irish barbarians, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 71r.

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At different stages of the project various people lent their support, feedback and expertise. Special thanks, in no particular order, are owed to Dr Darragh Greene, Emeritus Professor Howard B. Clarke, Timothy O'Neill, Dr Christine O'Neill, Dr Declan M. Downey, Emerita Professor Marie Therese Flanagan, Dr Alexander O'Hara, Dr Dermot McGuinne, Dr Colin Veach, Dr Izzy Fox, Dr Laura Cleaver, Shachar F. Orlinski, Niall Walsh, Dr Amelia McConville, Dr Caoimhe Whelan, Mary Staines, Philip Moore, Dr Martin Clancy, Dr Eoghan Keane, Dawn Seymour Klos and Dr Michel Summer. Thanks to Professors Jane Ohlmeyer, Premesh Lalu and Eve Patten for their continued mentorship. As the School of Histories and Humanities' Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning, Drs Isabella Jackson and Ashley Clements were incredibly supportive during the final months of the project, which was greatly appreciated. Special thanks to Dr Grace Hoffman, Benjamin Errington and John Marshall for kindly proofreading drafts of chapters and providing helpful suggestions and criticisms. I am particularly grateful to Dr Pauline M. Cogan, who has always been a great supporter of my academic endeavours. Without her continued kindness and encouragement this thesis would never have been completed.

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The Trinity College community are immensely privileged to have access to the best library in the country. However, a library is nothing without the knowledge of its librarians. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Tony Carey and Paul Doyle for their assistance and good humour.

Since my undergraduate days, my friendship with Dr Ethna Swan O.P. has been a constant source of general scholarly insights and, most importantly, sage advice on life. Ethna has witnessed, firsthand, the Eucharistic Congress in 1932, the rumblings of WWII in Dublin – being only a stone’s throw from the German bombs that fell near East Wall – and more recent events such as the destruction and devastation wrought by the first Intifada while she was teaching at Bethlehem University in the early 1990s and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite catching the coronavirus at the ripe age of 95, she had no bother telling the virus where to go! Ethna Swan is inspiring in many ways not least that she is, truly, history embodied. As I dealt with Imposter Syndrome and other general insecurities and doubts, as one does, over the course of completing a doctoral thesis, Ethna’s wise words – borrowed from the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI – were always helpful and grounding: ‘Have the courage to be less than perfect’.

Sincere thanks to my *viva voce* examining board: the chair, Professor Patrick Geoghegan; the internal examiner, Dr Peter Crooks; and the external examiner, Dr Michael Staunton. All of the worries and dread-inducing scenarios I had dreamt up in my head in the lead-up were alleviated on the day of the examination thanks to the collegial atmosphere created by the board. What I had feared would be an interrogation turned out to be an immensely constructive discussion. And, dare I say it, an enjoyable one at that. For such an experience, I am eternally grateful.

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Anne and Ronan Allen generously welcomed me into their home as the Covid-19 pandemic reared its ugly head in mid-March 2020 and cast a long and unwelcome shadow over human existence the world over. In the midst of lockdowns and various levels of restrictions, it was the ideal environment in which to continue my research and writing ... and improve my skills in the kitchen! I hope to repay your generosity someday. Ro, as you always recite from Yeats: ‘Think where man’s glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends’. What a glorious time it has been thus far! Sinead, Shane, Ollie and Florence Durkin made for ideal housemates during the final six months of the doctorate. You four taught me much: Sinead and Shane, the importance of resiliency, friendship, family and, most importantly, the dos and don’ts of household renovations(!); four-year-old Ollie, that video-game-playing uncles aren’t big kids, they are just cool; and one-year-old Florence, that every moment offers an opportunity to smile. I do hope that Ollie learned one thing from me: that not all doctors wear stethoscopes!

My parents, Linda and Mark, who never applied too much or too little pressure on me to be anyone in particular or to achieve anything specific, I owe you much. I have heard many stories from peers about the pressures applied by their parents to undertake certain hobbies, to read certain books, and, worst of all, to aspire to certain jobs. When I hear such stories, I am reminded of your attentive yet liberal approach to rearing me and am forever thankful. You have allowed me to pursue the things I love dearly. Ethan, Heidi and Tristan – my poor, unfortunate siblings – thank you for all the love and laughter over the years. As the eldest sibling, it has been an immense pleasure watching you grow into such fine young adults. I cannot convey in words how proud I am of each and every one of you. Someday, I hope to finally convince you three to swap those iPhones for books!

Saoirse Allen, your trojan work making sure that the footnotes and bibliography were in sync and in line with the referencing style was much appreciated. However, any errors that remain are yours and yours alone! All jokes aside, it may sound strange but when I think of you, Saoirse, I am reminded of Pope John Paul II’s personal motto, *totus tuus*, which expressed his Marian devotion. I, too, am devoted to a creature worthy of veneration. All that remains to be said is that your dedication to me over the course of my doctoral project – and indeed over the past near 15 years – merits a similar public acknowledgement of veneration and love, which I hope has now been achieved.

I must acknowledge a debt of a different kind now. I have been blessed to spend innumerable hours under the tutelage and in the convivial company of my grandparents – Anne, Cecilia, Eamonn and Liam – who have thought me so much. Whether it was wise words in relation to jesting and making fun of people (‘If you can’t take it, don’t give it!’) or tasting the unparalleled pleasures of homemade raspberry jam, your support and life lessons, which have come in so many forms, remain foundational for all my endeavours. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

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‘We imagine that we remember things as they were, while in fact all we carry into the future are fragments which reconstruct a wholly illusory past’.

John Banville, *Birchwood* (1973)

‘When the ideal has made its claim upon us, we cannot return to what was before’.

Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (1991)

I dream the dead into a living presence
and shape dead bones into a new design,
let speak again the ages’ buried voices
and so defy the killing power of time.

Brendan Kennelly, *Who Will Solve it? (for J.F. Lydon)* (1995)

List of abbreviations

The style used to reference primary sources will take the form x, y(y) throughout, whereby x indicates volume number and y(y) page number(s) e.g. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. xi, refers to page xi (in ‘Preface’) in volume one of the edition of the *Gesta* as detailed below. In cases where the primary source is edited in a single volume, only page numbers are provided e.g. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 240–1.

<i>AI</i>	<i>Annals of Inisfallen</i> , ed. and trans. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951)
<i>ALC</i>	<i>Annals of Loch Cé: a chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590</i> , ed. and trans. W.M. Hennessy (2 vols, London, 1871)
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
<i>AU</i>	<i>Annals of Ulster, Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster; otherwise, Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: a chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540</i> , ed. and trans. W.H. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901)
<i>AT</i>	<i>Annals of Tigernach</i> , ‘The Annals of Tigernach’, ed. Whitley Stokes, <i>Revue Celtique</i> , 16 (1895), pp 374–419; 17 (1896), pp 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), pp 9–59, 150–97, 267–303 [repr. in 2 vols (Felinfach, 1993)]
<i>Bede, EH</i>	<i>Bede’s ecclesiastical history of the English people</i> , ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969)
<i>CMCS</i>	<i>Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies</i>
<i>DIB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Irish Biography</i>

EHR

Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles*

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *HRB*

Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*

Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio*

Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*

Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium*

Gerald of Wales, *Speculum*

Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*

The English Historical Review

Lestorie des Engles solum la translacion

Maistre Geffrei Gaimar, ed. and trans.

Thomas Duffus Hardy and Charles Trice

Martin (2 vols, RS 91, London, 1888–

1889)

The history of the kings of Britain, trans.

Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966)

The autobiography of Giraldus

Cambrensis, ed. and trans. H.E. Butler

(London, 1937)

Giraldi Cambrensis Itinerarium Kambriae

et Descriptio Kambriae, in *Giraldi*

Cambrensis Opera, vol. 6, ed. James F.

Dimock (RS 21, London, 1868)

Expugnatio Hibernica: The conquest of

Ireland, by *Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and

trans. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin,

1978)

Giraldi Cambrensis Itinerarium Kambriae

et Descriptio Kambriae, in *Giraldi*

Cambrensis Opera, vol. 6, ed. James F.

Dimock (RS 21, London, 1868)

Giraldus Cambrensis: Speculum duorum,

or A mirror of two men. Preserved in the

Vatican Library in Rome, Cod. Reg. Lat.

470, ed. Yves Lefèvre and R.B.C.

Huygens, trans. Brian Dawson, gen. ed.

Michael Richter (Cardiff, 1974)

Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia

Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica, in

Giraldi Cambrensis Opera, vol. 5, ed.

James F. Dimock (RS 21, London, 1867)

- Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical works* *Historical works, the chronicle of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I, by Gervase, the monk of Canterbury*, ed. William Stubbs (2 vols, RS 73, London, 1879–1880)
- Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia* *Historia Anglorum: the history of the English people*, ed. and trans. Diana E. Greenway (Oxford, 1996)
- IHS* *Irish Historical Studies*
- JRSAI* *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*
- La geste* *The deeds of the Normans in Ireland: la geste des Engleis en Yrlande*, ed. and trans. Evelyn Mullally (Dublin, 2002)
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- Matthew Paris, *Chronica* *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani. Chronica majora*, ed. Henry Richards Luard (7 vols, RS 57, London, 1872–1883)
- Matthew Paris, *Historia* *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum, sive, ut vulgo dicitur, Historia minor. Item, ejusdem Abbreviato chronicorum Angliae*, ed. Frederic Madden (3 vols, RS 44, London, 1866–1869)
- MTB* *Materials for the history of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. James Craigie Robertson and J.B. Sheppard (7 vols, RS 67, London, 1875–1885)
- Orderic Vitalis, *HE* *The ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (6 vols, Oxford, 1969–1980)

ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
Ralph Niger, <i>Chronica</i>	<i>Radulfi Nigri chronica: the chronicles of Ralph Niger</i> , ed. Robert Anstruther (Caxton Society 13, London, 1851)
Ralph of Coggeshall, <i>Chronicon</i>	<i>Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum, De expugnatione Terrae Sanctae libellus; Thomas Agnellus De morte et sepultura Henrici regis Angliae junioris; Gesta Fulconis filii Warini; Excerpta ex otiis imperialibus Gervasii Tilebutiensis</i> , ed. Joseph Stevenson (RS 66, London, 1875)
Ralph of Diceto	<i>Radulphi de Diceto decani Lundoniensis opera historica. The historical works of Master Ralph de Diceto, dean of London</i> , ed. William Stubbs (2 vols, RS 68, London, 1876)
Roger of Howden, <i>Gesta</i>	<i>Gesta regis Henrici secundi Benedicti abbatis. The chronicle of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I, 1169–1192; known commonly under the name of Benedict of Peterborough</i> , ed. William Stubbs (2 vols, RS 49, London, 1867)
Roger of Howden, <i>Chronica</i>	<i>Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene</i> , ed. William Stubbs (4 vols, RS 51, London, 1868–1871)
Roger of Wendover, <i>Flores</i>	<i>Rogeri de Wendover. Liber qui dictiur flores historiarum ab anno Domini MCLIV annoque Henrici Anglorum regis Secundi primo. The flowers of history by Roger De Wendover: from the year of Our Lord 1154, and the first year of Henry the</i>

- Second, king of the English*, ed. Henry G. Hewlett (3 vols, RS 84, London, 1886–1889)
- RS *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* ('Rolls Series') (251 vols, London, 1858–1896)
- TRHS *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
- William of Malmesbury, *Gesta* *William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum; the history of the English kings*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, completed by R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (2 vols, Oxford, 1998–1999)
- William of Newburgh, *History* *William of Newburgh: the history of English affairs*, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy (2 vols, Warminster, 1988; Oxford, 2007)

Introduction

‘People think they just want to know the “facts”; they think they believe in some sort of empirical truth, but what they really want is a story’.

Bishop Peter Lombard, *Making History* by Brian Friel

In the Q&A session following a seminar I presented on English views of Ireland in early Plantagenet England at the James Lydon Seminar Series in Medieval History, held weekly during term time in Trinity College, Dublin, Dr Immo Warntjes asked me a simple question: ‘If we took Gerald of Wales out of the equation, what was there to be said about Ireland in early Plantagenet England?’ To some extent, this dissertation seeks to answer that question. For Dr Warntjes was hitting home the somewhat inevitable overreliance on the works of Gerald of Wales in the historiography of medieval Anglo-Irish relations and history.¹ According to Aideen M. O’Leary, Gerald’s Irish works – *Topographia Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* – are seen as ‘the earliest full exposition of a conqueror’s mindset in

¹ The classic biographical study of Gerald is Robert Bartlett’s *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982; reprinted as *Gerald of Wales, a voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 2006)) [the 2006 reprint will be the edition referenced in this thesis]. Gerald’s *oeuvre* is immense – containing twenty-three works in all – and much has been published on the ethnographic aspects of it. The entire corpus is edited in eight volumes within the Rolls Series, see *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, edited by J.S. Brewer, James F. Dimock, and George F. Warner (8 vols, RS 21, London, 1861–1891). Translated editions of his works include: *Gerald of Wales, De principis instructione*, ed. and trans. Robert Bartlett (Oxford, 2018); *The history and topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O’Meara (Harmondsworth, 1982 [originally published 1951]); *Gerald of Wales: ‘The jewel of the church’; a translation of the ‘Gemma ecclesiastica’ by Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden, 1979); *Expugnatio Hibernica: the conquest of Ireland*, ed. and trans. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1978); *Giraldus Cambrensis, Speculum duorum or a mirror of two men*, ed. Yves Lefèvre and R.B. Huygens and trans. Brian Dawson (Cardiff, 1974); *The autobiography of Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. H.E. Butler (London, 1937); *The historical works of Giraldus Cambrensis, containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the conquest of Ireland; the Itinerary through Wales, and the Description of Wales*, rev. and ed. Thomas Wright and trans. Thomas Forester and Richard Colt Hoare (London, 1905).

relation to the island'.² In Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh's estimation they are the 'founding texts for the English writing about Ireland'.³ While, most recently, Nicholas Vincent has asserted that Gerald 'dominates the history of the English conquest of Ireland to an extent not always appreciated'.⁴ Hence, this thesis moves beyond Gerald of Wales as the go-to source for medieval perceptions and depictions of Ireland. It reexamines the longstanding assumption that Gerald's view of Ireland and attitude towards its people and their customs reflected the general contemporary view of Ireland as found in the sources. However, there is a balancing act required. Indeed, despite his dominance over the historiography of the conquest of Ireland and so much else, we simply cannot cast Gerald aside. For 'If we dismiss him [i.e. Gerald] it is we, not Gerald, who must go into outer darkness'.⁵ Rather, we must instead judge Gerald *alongside* his contemporaries in order to compare attitudes expressed towards Ireland and, in particular, its people, thus developing a more nuanced understanding of contemporary views *in toto*, which this thesis shows were far more nuanced and varied than is traditionally assumed in the historiography.

What is more, even Gerald himself requires reexamination on a number of grounds, not least that scholars often fail to consider, for example, the *Topographia* as a unified whole and rather focus on specific excerpts or chapters that support an anti-Irish outlook. Moreover, in studies of Gerald's works on Ireland, audiences' reading practices are very rarely considered in analyses. Many contemporary works, including Gerald's *Topographia* and *Expugnatio*, as well as Ralph of Diceto's *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, contain content sections that would have enabled readers to bypass material that was of no interest to them or irrelevant for their own research needs. This is a fairly common oversight when one considers that historians readily assert that Gerald's works were highly influential and not only justified but encouraged colonial activities in Ireland and abroad.⁶ Furthermore, scholars tend to rely on a single version of the *Topographia* and/or the *Expugnatio* when examining these sources despite the fact that multiple recensions survive with textual additions

² Aileen M. O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe: foreign perceptions of Ireland from Antiquity to c. A.D. 1200', *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 7:1 (2013), p. 2.

³ Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to that land: British perceptions of Ireland from the reformation to the famine* (Gerrards Cross, 1994), p. 7.

⁴ Nicholas Vincent, 'Angevin Ireland', in Brendan Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland, Volume I: 600–1550* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 185.

⁵ F.X. Martin, 'Gerald of Wales, Norman reporter on Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 58:231 (1969), p. 279.

⁶ See 'Introduction' in chapter 2.

and emendations that may affect how one might interpret Gerald's Irish works and his intentions in certain chapters.⁷ As well as these overlooked considerations, the 'conqueror's mindset' that is exposed in Gerald's works on Ireland is but one of *many* contemporary mindsets that permeate these texts. Indeed, at times Gerald wore the mask of an erudite man-of-letters or a proactive reformer or a family man, as well as that of an ambitious conqueror. Thus, one must consider these mindsets together in order to fully appreciate the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* as the highly elaborate texts that they are.

When writers such as William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales wrote about Ireland, they often decided to paint a picture of a place that was primitive, uncivilised and, occasionally, otherworldly – far from the civilised norms of early Plantagenet England – and yet Ireland was a relatively familiar place located only a stone's throw across the Irish Sea. Indeed, while it is unlikely that Newburgh visited Ireland, we know that Gerald travelled there on at least four occasions. Economic and political contact between the peoples of Ireland and Britain had existed for many centuries before the Latin writers of early Plantagenet England wrote about Ireland, with commercial engagement having occurred since at least the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. As well as Gerald of Wales and William of Newburgh, a number of influential and well-connected chroniclers and historians wrote about the Irish experience – the inhabitants, politics, culture and history of the place – without

⁷ See Bartlett for a neat list of the extant copies and chronology of Gerald's works, Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 'Appendix I'. For detailed analysis of the recensions, see Catherine M. Rooney, 'The manuscripts of the works of Gerald of Wales' (unpublished PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2005). The doctoral studies of Amelia Sargent, Sumithra J. David, Nóirín Ní Bheaglaoi and Rooney, mentioned above, have brought new approaches to bear on the *Topographia Hibernica* that have resulted in groundbreaking findings related to the dates, reception, manuscript traditions and recensions of Gerald's first work on Ireland, see Sumithra J. David, 'Looking east and west: the reception and dissemination of the *Topographia Hibernica* and the *Itinerarium ad partes orientales* in England [1185–c. 1500]' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of St Andrews, 2009); Amelia Sargent, 'Visions and revisions: Gerald of Wales, authorship, and the construction of political, religious, and legal geographies in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Britain' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011); eadem, 'Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*: dates, versions, readers', *Viator*, 43:1 (2012), pp 241–62; Nóirín Ní Bheaglaoi, *Editio anceps*: the manuscript tradition of Giraldus Cambrensis' *Topographia Hibernica*' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University College Cork, 2012); eadem, 'Two topographies of Gerald of Wales? a study of the manuscript tradition', *Scriptorium*, 67:2 (2013), pp 377–93. Lindsey Zachary Panxhi's study of the werewolf chapter in the *Topographia* shows how Gerald's textual revisions can profoundly affect how one might interpret his accounts and the resulting implications for how we perceive Gerald's attitude towards the Irish, see Lindsey Zachary Panxhi, 'Rewriting the werewolf and rehabilitating the Irish in the *Topographia Hibernica* of Gerald of Wales', *Viator*, 46:3 (2015), pp 21–40. Building upon Panxhi's groundbreaking scholarship, Keagan Brewer has looked at how Gerald's textual revisions may be an indication of audience disbelief in the more fantastical accounts that feature in the *Topographia*, see Keagan Brewer, 'Talking wolves, golden fish, and lion sex: the alterations to Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* as evidence of audience disbelief?', *Parergon*, 37:1 (2020), pp 27–53.

casting aspersions. These authors, which include the likes of Roger of Howden and Ralph of Diceto, wrote more impersonal and less colourful accounts of their Irish neighbours, which has no doubt resulted in their inferior position compared to the more entertaining and provocative narratives of certain contemporaries. When it comes to scholars' engagement with the foreign sources on Ireland, it has often been the case that he who shouted loudest received the most attention. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that Gerald's works on Ireland have withstood the test of time, and not always for reasons of historical accuracy but rather for their entertainment and shock value. As Juvenal noted many centuries ago, circuses always entertain and pacify the masses. It is this entertainment factor that has drawn some scholars to conclude that contemporary audiences only wanted to read about an Ireland that was backward and fantastical.

For instance, in an article that focusses primarily on evidence from Gerald of Wales, John Brannigan rather reductively asserts that 'Ireland was not of itself an interesting subject for Anglo-Norman readers'.⁸ Although Brannigan does make some basic comparative points with reference to earlier twelfth-century writers, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth and William of Malmesbury, as well as Gerald's coeval William of Newburgh, the confidence underpinning this assertion does not hold up when one considers other contemporary sources. For example, the chronicler and occasional diplomat Roger of Howden provides a lengthy and detailed account of Henry II's expedition to Ireland in 1171/2.⁹ In fact, from September 1171 to April 1172, all Howden writes about is related to Henry's time spent in Ireland.¹⁰ There is nothing fantastical about Howden's account, which is purely political and administrative in focus. Howden, one of the finest chroniclers that medieval England produced, clearly felt that Ireland was an interesting subject worth including in his *Gesta*. Granted Howden wrote about Irish affairs as they related to the deeds of the king of England, nonetheless he wrote about elements of Irish customs that certainly were unnecessary in the broader scheme of things. Ralph of Diceto (*d.* 1199/1200),

⁸ John Brannigan, "'A particular vice of that people": Giraldus Cambrensis and the discourse of English colonialism', *Irish Studies Review* 6:2 (1998), p. 129.

⁹ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, pp 25–30.

¹⁰ John Gillingham has used this as well as analysis of the structure of the *Gesta*'s text as evidence of Howden's presence in Ireland at the time of Henry's expedition there, see John Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century: imperialism, national identity and political values* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 84. As Michael Staunton notes, further evidence in support of Howden's presence in Ireland may be found in the identification of Roger of Howden as 'Roger the Chaplain', who witnessed the Treaty of Windsor in 1175, see Michael Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England* (Oxford, 2018), pp 353–4.

chronicler and sometime dean of St Paul's in London, opened his *Abbreviationes chronicorum* with a description of Ireland and an account of the origins of the Irish and Scots.¹¹ His epitome of chronicles has been described as the 'most ambitious attempt at a world history made until then by an Englishman'.¹² Much like Howden, Diceto's account of Ireland lacks derision and is certainly not concerned with providing entertainment for his audiences. It is noteworthy that both men were well connected to the English court and frequently rubbed shoulders with the good and the great of their times. The credentials of Howden and Diceto are enough to confirm, contrary to Brannigan's assertion, that Ireland was in fact an interesting subject for these writers and by extension, perhaps, their audiences. These examples alone suggest to us that Ireland and its people were not always the recipients of anti-Irish invective. What other evidence might we find, then, in other contemporary sources for perceptions and depictions of Ireland that do not fit the Geraldine paradigm? With that question posed, what follows is a study of perceptions and depictions of Ireland, its people and its affairs written in the Latin chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England.

State of the art

Despite the natural intrigue, certainly for Irish and Celtic studies scholars, surrounding the topic of foreign views of Ireland that occur in the extant medieval sources, it is surprising that there are in fact relatively few studies dedicated to the topic. Most scholarly engagement with foreign views of Ireland has been focused on the early modern and modern periods.¹³ That being said, there have been a number of important studies that have focused in and around the subject. Others have explored aspects of contemporary attitudes towards the Irish in their studies of closely related subjects. With regard to Ireland and Britain specifically, Robert Bartlett, Rees

¹¹ Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10.

¹² J.F.A. Mason, 'Diceto, Ralph de', *ODNB*.

¹³ For instance, Edward D. Snyder, 'The wild Irish: a study of some English satires against the Irish, Scots, and Welsh', *Modern Philology*, 17:12 (1920), pp 687–725; David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: colonialism, nationalism and culture* (Manchester, 1988); Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to that land*; Debora Shuger, 'Irishmen, aristocrats, and other white barbarians', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50:2 (1997), pp 494–525; Joan Fitzpatrick, *Irish demons: English writings on Ireland, the Irish, and gender by Spenser and his contemporaries* (Lanham, MD, 2000); Clare Carroll, *Circe's cup: cultural transformations in early modern Ireland* (Cork, 2001); Jason Harris, 'Ireland in Europe: Paolo Giovio's *Descriptio* (1548)', *IHS*, 35:139 (2007), pp 265–88; Steven G. Ellis, "'Reducing their barbarous wildness ... unto civility": England and "the Celtic fringe", 1415–1625', in Brendan Smith (ed.), *Ireland and the English world in the late Middle Ages* (Hampshire, 2009), pp 176–92; Gisela Holfter and Bettina Migge (eds), *Ireland in the European eye* (Dublin, 2019).

Davies, John Gillingham, Robin Frame, Seán Duffy and others have produced studies that have comparatively examined various aspects of economic, political and cultural history related to the isles. Over the past three decades or so, there has been a notable turn towards comparative methodologies in the historiography. Bartlett's and Davies's works have been particularly important due to their subject range and chronological scope in their comparative studies such as *The making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change* and *Domination and conquest: the experiences of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300*.¹⁴

Over the course of his career, John Gillingham produced a number of invaluable studies on subjects such as the condescending perception of the Irish, Scots and Welsh as barbarians, and the sense of Englishness that emerged following the Norman invasion of England.¹⁵ Gillingham argued that a new and condescending attitude towards the 'Celtic' peoples emerged in the aftermath of the Norman invasion of England, during the early decades of the twelfth century.¹⁶ In particular, William of Malmesbury was identified as one of the early proponents of the Celtic barbarian motif in contemporary works.¹⁷ However, the notion of the Irish being simultaneously Christian and barbarian existed long before William of Malmesbury wrote his *Gesta regum Anglorum*.¹⁸

More than anyone else, perhaps, Robin Frame has illuminated the realities of life on the ground in colonial Ireland and the tension and cooperation, integration and segregation that marked the lived experiences of natives and settlers alike.¹⁹ In addition, Frame's *The political development of the British Isles, 1100–1400* may be regarded as the authoritative introduction to the medieval history of Ireland and the

¹⁴ See R.R. Davies, *Domination and conquest: the experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990); idem, *The first English empire: power and identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000); and Davies' presidential addresses to the Royal Historical Society, 'The peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400', *TRHS*, 6th ser. 4–7 (1994–7); Robert Bartlett, *The making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change* (London, 1993).

¹⁵ John Gillingham's many articles on the subjects mentioned above as well as others have been conveniently brought together and published in a single volume, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*; idem, *The Angevin empire*, 2nd ed. (London, 2001); idem, *Conquests, catastrophe and recovery: Britain and Ireland 1066–1485* (London, 2014).

¹⁶ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 27–31.

¹⁷ For all his criticisms of the Irish people, it is ironic that William's toponymic 'Malmesbury' seems to have derived from *Meildulfesburh* after its supposed Irish founder Máeldub, see Bede, *HE*, p. 514 n.1; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 44–5. Little is known about this supposed Irish founder of Malmesbury; however, for what we do know, see Michael Lapidge, 'Máeldub [Maildulf] (*supp. fl.* mid-7th cent.), abbot', *ODNB*.

¹⁸ See chapter 1.

¹⁹ Robin Frame, "'Les Engleys nées en Irlande': the English political identity in medieval Ireland", *TRHS*, 3 (1993), pp 83–103; idem, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 2012); idem, *Plantagenet Ireland* (Dublin, 2022).

British Isles.²⁰ Seán Duffy has examined the Anglo-Irish, Anglo-Welsh and Hiberno-Welsh relationships during the reigns of a number of Plantagenet kings, ranging from Henry II to Edward I providing invaluable insights into the effects of the English invasion on the relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain.²¹ In particular, Duffy's studies on the royal policies and attitudes of Henry II and John Lackland towards Ireland and its people are particularly insightful.²² As well as the invaluable individual contributions of the above scholars to the field, a number of wide-ranging essay collections have produced significant work related to the subject of international relations in Ireland and Britain during the high Middle Ages and beyond.²³

In more recent times, Michael Staunton's work on twelfth-century historians plying their craft in Angevin England has been a particularly informative and thoughtful contribution to existing scholarship on the nexus of history-writing, politics, and identity construction.²⁴ With regard to English views of their insular neighbours, building upon the earlier work of Marcus Bull, Staunton challenged the prevailing narrative of indiscriminate English prejudice towards the Irish, Scots and Welsh, showing that contemporary writers were critical of the conquest of Ireland, for instance.²⁵ In terms of the vernacular sources, Evelyn Mullally has examined the popular perception of Ireland in the Arthurian romances *Durmart le Galois* and *Les Merveilles de Rigomer*.²⁶ Mullally shows that the author of *Durmart* is familiar with

²⁰ Robin Frame, *The political development of the British Isles, 1100–1400* (Oxford, 1990).

²¹ Seán Duffy, 'Town and crown: the kings of England and their city of Dublin', in Michael Prestwich, Richard Britnell and Robin Frame (eds), *Thirteenth century England X. Proceedings of the Durham conference 2003* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp 95–117; idem, 'Irish and Welsh responses to the Plantagenet empire in the reign of Edward I', in Peter Crooks, David Green, and W. Mark Ormrod (eds), *The Plantagenet empire, 1259–1453* (Harlaxton Medieval Studies XXVI, Donington, 2016), pp 148–66.

²² Seán Duffy, 'John and Ireland: the origins of England's Irish problem', in S.D. Church (ed.), *King John: new interpretations* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp 221–45; idem, 'Henry II and England's insular neighbours', in Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (eds), *Henry II: new interpretations* (Suffolk, 2007), pp 129–53.

²³ R.R. Davies, (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: comparisons, contrasts and connections* (Edinburgh, 1988); Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (eds), *Uniting the kingdom? The making of British history* (London, 1995); Brendan Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: insular responses to medieval European change* (Cambridge, 1999); Seán Duffy and Susan Foran (eds), *The English Isles: cultural transmission and political conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Dublin, 2013).

²⁴ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, esp. chapter 17 for England's relationships with its neighbours.

²⁵ Marcus Bull, 'Criticism of Henry II's expedition to Ireland in William of Canterbury's miracles of St Thomas Becket', *Journal of Medieval History*, 33:2 (2007), pp 107–129; Colmán Ó Clabaigh and Michael Staunton, 'Thomas Becket and Ireland', in Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (eds), *'Listen, O isles, unto me': studies in medieval word and image in honour of Jennifer O'Reilly* (Cork, 2011), pp 87–101.

²⁶ Evelyn Mullally, 'The Irish topography of two Arthurian romances: *Durmart le Galois* and *Les merveilles de Rigomer*', in Howard B. Clarke and J.R.S. Philips (eds), *Ireland, England and the*

the port of Limerick while the author of Rigomer, Jehan, shows a knowledge of the port of Cork. Jehan has a rather unexpected awareness of Irish places such as Meath, Bréifne, Thomand, Desmond and Connacht. While Jehan's attitude is negative towards most of these regions, he writes rather favourably of Desmond and Connacht. Such insights are undoubtedly intriguing. Keith Busby's seminal study *French in medieval Ireland, Ireland in medieval French: the paradox of two worlds* highlights the importance of moving beyond not only the Ireland-England binary in the historiography but also the reliance on Latin sources for insights into contemporary views of Ireland.²⁷ Busby shows that Ireland was a malleable construct for Francophone writers: one that was revealed to the colonists following the 1169 invasion; and one that existed as a land of marvels in romance literature.

In her survey of foreign attitudes towards Ireland from Antiquity to c. 1200 A.D., Aileen O'Leary highlighted the dearth of studies on the subject despite the relative deluge of material originating from a multitude of contexts and in several languages, concluding that such views 'have been discussed peripherally by those considering particular sources, or as brief subsections of larger works, but have never been made the subject of a full investigation.'²⁸ Hence, O'Leary's article provides the first attempt at collecting and comparing views of Ireland before 1200. While her survey of sources is admirable in scope, there is still much to be done to closely examine and contextualise these works for what they tell us about Ireland. Moreover, there are a number of important writers that O'Leary does not consider, especially in the twelfth century, not least Henry of Huntingdon, Ralph of Diceto, Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh.

It seems to me that while these studies have laid the foundations for what we know about the relationships between the peoples of Britain and Ireland, there are many accounts, descriptions and mentions related to Ireland, its peoples and/or its affairs that have hitherto been ignored or found to be irrelevant for the study of perceptions and depictions of Ireland in early Plantagenet England. For example, Ralph of Diceto's account of Hugh de Lacy's death at the hands of an Irish youth whose full name may be confirmed by Diceto himself has a number of implications,

continent in the Middle Ages and beyond: essays in memory of a turbulent friar, F.X. Martin, O.S.A. (Dublin, 2006), pp 88–104.

²⁷ Keith Busby, *French in medieval Ireland, Ireland in medieval French: the paradox of two worlds* (Turnhout, 2017).

²⁸ O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 4.

not least that the murderer's name, in Irish, was somehow relayed to Diceto. In addition to material that has been hitherto underexamined, analyses of the terms used to describe the Irish in Latin and vernacular sources also yield intriguing findings. Building on the shoulders of these aforementioned giants, as well as other scholars, this doctoral dissertation offers a fresh examination of the so-called 'English' view of Ireland during the first century of so-called 'English' Ireland, moving away from what I call the 'Geraldine paradigm' – which reduces contemporary attitudes towards the Irish to being entirely stereotypical and denigratory – that has, until now, dominated the field. The thesis put forth is that through analyses of what historians and chroniclers in early Plantagenet England cared to write about Ireland, its affairs and its people, no matter how provocative or indeed mundane the material, there is a spectrum of attitudes to be found, ranging from contempt to indifference or ambiguity to admiration.

It is tempting to assume that the focus of this dissertation is the binary opposition between the English and the Irish, that is the coloniser and the colonised. At first glance it is easy to think that a study of 'English' writers' portrayals of the Irish during the first century or so of conquest is, at its heart, an attempt to redeem the Irish as a colonised people from the tyranny of their colonial oppressor. One of the objectives of this doctoral dissertation is to cast a critical eye on the futility inherent in national histories and identities in this period in particular given the difficulty of ascribing identities to contemporary authors who more often than not provided little explicit detail regarding their origins let alone their sense of identity. In any case, identity means everything and nothing; it is simultaneously fluid and fixed in expression, depending on the individual espousing some form of shared social group consciousness and the given context. Perhaps, above all others, the great Welsh historian Rees Davies put it best when he described the nature of identity as 'fatally wishy washy'.²⁹ This thesis argues that 'English' attitudes towards Ireland and its people were not as homogenous as historians often make them out to be. Moreover, the demonyms used to describe the colonisers and settlers – 'English', 'Anglo-Norman', 'Cambro-Norman', not to mention the often-unmentioned Flemish

²⁹ R.R. Davies, 'Presidential address: the peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400. I. Identities', *TRHS*, 4 (1994), p. 3.

– are still hotly debated, with no consistency whatsoever in usage within the historiography.³⁰

Any attempt at examining portrayals of the Irish written by writers in medieval England must come to terms with the fact that the extant literary evidence must be used holistically if one hopes to come to any sort of viable conclusion about how twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers constructed their perceptions and depictions of Ireland and its inhabitants. Many medieval writers were influenced by the works they read while in monasteries or at schools in cosmopolitan hotspots such as Paris, Oxford or Bologna.³¹ Much like their early modern and modern counterparts, some of these writers merely rehashed the content of antecedent works, while others chose to build upon this content, telling new and imaginative tales of Ireland and its people. Indeed, for only when one masters that which has come before can one produce truly original work. As the Spanish say: *al maestro cuchillada* – ‘to the master goes the knife.’ For those writers who included material derived from earlier writers, what does it tell us about their views of the world and the people in it? While we can often trace writers’ sources, sometimes we cannot.³² Moreover, most writers never indicate to us when they have lifted material from other sources, and it is not always obvious to scholars unless they have knowledge of original source texts and make the connection, or it is indicated in annotations and footnotes in primary source editions.³³

While there has been much work done on these authors and their works, there is no extended study that compares perceptions and depictions of Ireland and the Irish while situating their works within the associated contexts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as the vast historiography of the classical and early medieval pasts. Indeed, focus usually falls on the twelfth-century writers, especially William of Malmesbury, William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales, while writers

³⁰ See ‘The devil’s in the demonym’ in chapter 4.

³¹ Stephen C. Jaeger, *The envy of angels: cathedral schools and social ideals in medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, PA, 1994).

³² See, for instance, the unidentified quotations in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, p. 360.

³³ Ralph of Diceto is an exception. Indeed, in his *Abbreviationes* he rather incredibly provides a list of famous writers ‘*De viris illustribus quo tempore scripserint*’, many of whom are used by Diceto to directly inform his work, see Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 20–4. The last entry on the list of ‘illustrious writers’ is Ralph of Diceto himself! Who thought Gerald of Wales was the most vainglorious writer of the late twelfth century? See, also, Grover A. Zinn, ‘The influence of Hugh of St Victor’s *Chronicon* on the *Abbreviationes chronicorum* by Ralph de Diceto’, *Speculum*, 52:1 (1977), pp 38–61.

such as Ralph of Diceto, Ralph of Coggeshall and Matthew Paris do not even usually figure in the relevant studies. Thus, this thesis overcomes a major lacuna in the field through its wide-ranging comparisons of contemporary writers and their works.

Methodology

The approach adopted herein is similar to that of Michael Staunton in *The historians of Angevin England*. Staunton approached his subject utilising a comparative approach that closely examined the works of a cadre of Latin writers who plied their craft in Angevin England. Moreover, they were also writing around the same time and concerned with similar topics of interest. The scope here is similar in that multiple Latin writers – specifically those who wrote histories and chronicles – from early Plantagenet England are comparatively examined. The historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England offer us unparalleled insight into foreign perceptions of Ireland and the Irish in the immediate decades following the invasion of the late 1160s. Indeed, unlike the accounts of classical and most early medieval writers, the historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England wrote during a period of unprecedented contact with their Irish neighbours. More than that, some had vested interests in Irish affairs. Indeed, Gerald of Wales's family directly reaped the rewards of conquest on the ground in Ireland. He had also visited the island himself on at least four occasions. While Gerald is a contemporary writer unusual in this regard, there is at least some evidence for Roger of Howden's presence in Ireland during Henry II's campaign therein.³⁴ Moreover, the fact that these works share genre-defining elements, allows for more like-for-like comparisons to be made.

However, while the present thesis focuses on histories and chronicles, it occasionally incorporates vernacular sources and hagiographic material in order to add further nuance to the analyses offered in this thesis. It is important to avail of these auxiliary sources in order to gain some sense of how comparable perceptions and depictions of Ireland and the Irish are dispersed in these texts. For example, in chapter 3, we find that *La geste*, while hardly a pro-Irish source, was not as derisive in its portrayal of individual Irish people compared to its descriptions of the Irish people who are generally portrayed as primitive. Similarly, other sources such as the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* paint more nuanced portraits of Irish individuals

³⁴ See Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 84.

compared to the Irish as a social group. Indeed, most of the contemporary sources that do treat of individual Irish people treat of them with more complexity and, often times, positivity. However, it must be pointed out that when sources do describe individual Irish people they are usually allies of the English or religious men and women, and often Irish saints.

The chapters of this thesis are structured based on thematic subjects, such as depictions of Ireland or Irish sexual mores or attitudes towards Irish bishops and prelates. Focusing on shared subject matter covered in chronicles and histories, such as the conquest of Ireland, rather than examining the sources in a strictly chronological format allows for more fluid prose and comparisons to be made. While every effort is made to balance material written by Gerald with that of other writers, the sheer volume and detail of the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* will inevitably make any study of contemporary perceptions and attitudes towards Ireland and its people top heavy with Geraldine content. This study is no different. While Gerald of Wales features most prominently throughout, I hope, as a counterweight, to have brought new approaches to his works on Ireland and offered new insights, as well as more nuanced interpretations of his most familiar accounts.

Contemporary writers

Any examination of how contemporary writers perceived the Irish must also understand not only the political and economic contexts of early Plantagenet England but also intellectual culture as well, especially the practice of historical writing and its developments. The high medieval period is marked by widespread reforms of religious and economic practices, social structures, and political and legal systems across Europe. In particular, the twelfth century witnessed a *renaissance* (as it has been deemed by numerous scholars) in art, literature and classical education.³⁵ This renaissance was felt across much of Europe – from Toledo to Canterbury – inspired largely by the classical world. The return to Latin classics, Roman law, Greek epics and natural philosophy (what we would call ‘natural sciences’), as well as the addition of Arabic natural philosophy, left an indelible mark on the continent and

³⁵ For a good survey of the widespread influence of the classical renaissance of the twelfth century, see Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (eds), *Renaissance and renewal in the twelfth century*, (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

ushered in an ‘age of fresh and vigorous life’, according to Charles Homer Haskins.³⁶ So much so, in fact, that the twelfth-century renaissance is often viewed as the demarcation point between the early and high medieval periods, and used as a defence against the notion of the Middle Ages being synonymous with the term ‘Dark Ages’ – a counterpoint to the Italian renaissance of the late medieval period. The works of the writers examined herein are often imbued with the much-lauded creativity and classically inspired rhetoric associated with the so-called twelfth-century renaissance. The writers concerned here were the ‘big’ intellectual voices of the period in England writing in Latin. What they may have lacked in physical presence – William of Newburgh referred to his ‘smallness’ hence the sobriquet ‘Parvus’ – they certainly made up for in their intellectual pursuits, the fruits of which have outlived their creators by over 800 years in the case of some writers.

The period being considered here witnessed a rapid increase in the volume of historical writing in England. Writers wrote with growing interest about the events of their own times, especially in the last thirty or so years of the twelfth century as a great many interesting events happened in this period, not least the murder of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, the English invasion of Ireland, the Great Revolt of 1173–4, and the third crusade. The writers analysed are representative of a coterie of religious men, including: ‘the good dean’ Ralph of Diceto, a laborious, capable and generally impartial compiler who sought to record past events as well as contemporary affairs at home and abroad; William of Newburgh, who E.A. Freeman called ‘the father of historical criticism’³⁷, while Richard Howlett, the Rolls Series editor of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, regarded him as ‘a man of unusual moral elevation, mental power and eloquence’ who recorded events with ‘unswerving faithfulness’, remarks which say more about Howlett’s questionable faith in the veracity and intentions of medieval authors than about Newburgh’s character and his approach to writing³⁸; Roger of Howden, a current affairs specialist who recorded events with a ‘a passionless, colourless narrative’³⁹ but was nonetheless – or perhaps because of this – ‘the best historian of the English crown in the twelfth century’⁴⁰; Gervase of Canterbury, a monk and chronicler, who produced

³⁶ Charles Homer Haskins, *The renaissance of the twelfth century* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 8.

³⁷ Edward A. Freeman, ‘Mr Froude’s life and times of Thomas Becket’, *The Contemporary Review*, 33 (1878), p. 216.

³⁸ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett (2 vols, RS 82, London, 1884–1885), i, p. ix.

³⁹ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, i, p. lxix.

⁴⁰ Richard W. Southern, *Medieval humanism and other studies* (Oxford, 1970), p. 150.

an unparalleled history of Christ Church Cathedral and its clergy; Gerald of Wales, a cleric and writer, who was the first foreigner to write extensively about Ireland and its people; Ralph of Coggeshall, a historian and abbot of Coggeshall abbey in Essex, who produced a chronicle that followed the traditional structure of monastic annals to the extent that Joseph Stevenson rather unfairly described it as being ‘of the simplest and most inartistic character’, in spite of this he has written some interesting material on Ireland⁴¹; Roger of Wendover, monk of St Albans, although not a particularly learned nor engaging writer, he was one of the most influential members of the St Albans school of historiography, laying the groundwork for his successors in the scriptorium; and Matthew Paris, who learned the historian’s craft from Wendover, becoming the finest historian that St Albans produced, and whose many colourful, detailed and highly original maps are considered to be of the greatest significance for the development of cartographic concepts in the period.

The reasons why these historians and chroniclers wrote about Ireland, its peoples and/or its affairs are manifold and, at times, quite different. When it came to writing about Ireland, it is prudent to remember that many contemporaries were moved to write about Ireland as they sought to present not only a record of local and national history but also *world* history as well that was often concerned with very ancient (before Christ), ancient (the era of Christianity), and modern (contemporary) events as they were supposed to have occurred. Ralph of Diceto, for instance, structured his *Abbreviationes* into three sections that explicitly corresponded with this tripartite chronology. Gerald of Wales is in a league of his own when it comes to writing about Ireland due to the fact that he wrote two entire books on Ireland. In many ways, his *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* are incomparable to the other works concerned here due to their scope and detail. Moreover, it is impossible to reduce either of Gerald’s Irish works to a single genre, with elements of history, geography, natural philosophy, *mirabilia* and prophesy featuring in both works. Indeed, while the works considered here can generally be classified as chronicles and histories, more often than not, the distinctions between genres were often blurred.

This choice of writers was based on several defining factors: (1) these writers were all ecclesiastics in some shape or form, whether as monks or parsons, canons or abbots, deans or deacons (2) the extent of material on Ireland, its affairs and its inhabitants in these authors’ works was sufficient to afford close examination and

⁴¹ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon*, p. xi.

provide interesting insights into the themes and research questions concerned (3) these chroniclers and historians may be grouped together in terms of the comparable structures, topics and genres found within their *oeuvres* (4) and finally, they were all Latinists. It would be negligent not to mention that there are other works written in England and on the continent of Europe at this time that include material of note related to Ireland, including the vernacular biography of William the Marshal (*L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*), the vernacular verse chronicle *La geste des Engleis en Yrlande* (better known as *The song of Dermot and the earl*), Bernard of Clairvaux's *Vita S. Malachi* and the Lives of Thomas Becket. However, while biographies, verse chronicles and hagiographies are quite different kettles of fish compared to the chronicles and histories that are the focus of the present thesis, these works and others are drawn upon for illustration and comparison where appropriate, often to illustrate contrasting attitudes. Indeed, the importance of multilingualism in the study of the shared histories of Ireland and Britain, as well as the wider insular northwest region, cannot be ignored if we are to gain a more holistic sense of how Ireland and its people were perceived and depicted in the products of contemporary intellectual culture.⁴² To a degree, vernacular texts such as *L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* and *La geste des Engleis en Yrlande* are examined not for what they have to say about Ireland *per se* but rather for what they can tell us about the Latin texts, in comparison, which are our focus here. Utilising these auxiliary sources helps to overcome the overreliance on the Latin works for insights into contemporary perceptions and depictions of Ireland and its people, thus proffering more nuanced interpretations. It is hoped that by incorporating these sources into the analysis that Latin historiography is no longer 'the center even of its own universe', to borrow J.G.A. Pocock's turn of phrase, when it comes to studying foreign attitudes towards Ireland in the period.⁴³ However, in order to fully incorporate the vernacular sources, a very different study would need to be undertaken. Certainly, it would be a worthwhile endeavour, but one for another day.

I have consciously avoided selecting the writers based on their nationality. This dissertation is not an examination of how medieval *English* writers wrote about Ireland, rather it is about how writers *in* medieval England wrote about Ireland and

⁴² Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood's edited collection of essays makes this point plain, see *Crossing borders in the insular Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2019).

⁴³ J.G.A. Pocock, 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *The Journal of Modern History*, 47:4 (1975), p. 621.

the Irish. Thus, I avoid assuming how writers viewed their own nationalities, unless a specific writer explicitly states it himself. For example, while there is every likelihood that Ralph of Diceto was born and reared in England, we are far from certain of his origins let alone his ancestry. There is evidence to suggest that he may have been born in France, although present-day consensus leans towards English origins.⁴⁴ However, nowhere in his works does he mention that he was an Englishman or a Frenchman. But even if he did, it could simply mean that he was born in England and of Norman descent or born in France and reared in England. It is best to save oneself from the myriad of connotations and semantic baggage attached to demonyms, especially as they are often interpreted in light of later cultural and political realities.⁴⁵ In comparison to Diceto, Gerald of Wales was born in Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, yet he did not self-identify as a Welshman, although he did explicitly acknowledge his Welsh roots.

Chapter breakdowns

Although Gerald of Wales was the first foreigner to write extensively about Ireland, its people and its affairs, he was not the first to write about the island. Writers from the Graeco-Roman world were the first to mention Ireland – or *Ierne* or *Hibernia* as it was usually known to them – in their works. Geographers, poets, historians and even a dictator wrote about Ireland, which could represent all manner of things for them. For some, it was an inhospitably cold place lying at the edge of the known world; for others, it was a land of plenty that was chockful of bloodthirsty savages. Although trade between the inhabitants of Ireland and their counterparts in Britain and on the continent was important for international relations and forming new connections, the Christianisation of northern Europe in the early medieval period brought Ireland and its people into the wider purview of Christendom. Writers such as St Patrick and the Venerable Bede attested and, in many ways, defended the Irish as members of the church. As their shepherd, Patrick defended his Irish flock against continued prejudice, while Bede recorded for posterity the immense influence of Irish monks on the development of the early English church. However, early medieval writers did not always look so favourably upon the Irish. This first chapter explores some of the main sources for perceptions and depictions of Ireland, its affairs and its people

⁴⁴ Ralph of Diceto, i, pp xviii–xx.

⁴⁵ See chapter 4.

before the English invasion of Ireland. Through subjects such as Ireland's climate, the customs and characteristics of the Irish, as well as their origins, this chapter shows that Ireland was a place that was perceived to be far-removed from the civilised centres of some writers' societies and cultures, while for others Ireland was a place of succour in times of need and whose inhabitants were righteous Christians doing the Lord's work.

The historiography of Anglo-Irish relations following the tumultuous events associated with the invasion and subsequent conquest of Ireland has perpetuated the view that there were wholesale anti-Irish views in early Plantagenet England. Chapter 2 reexamines perceptions and depictions of Ireland, its people and affairs that may be deemed to be anti-Irish. Particular focus is paid to how the Irish were described in terms of their alleged monstrosity, hybridity and barbarity. A distinction is made between perceptions and depictions that are critical of aspects of Irish life as opposed to being outright anti-Irish. At what point critique becomes mere anti-Irish invective is sometimes difficult to discern. It asks the important question: When we have evidence of anti-Irish descriptions that are influenced by antecedent work, such as Gerald of Wales's description of hybrid Irish-ox men which were heavily influenced by Ovid's account of the Cretan bull, to what extent do these accounts truly reflect the writer's view of Ireland or the Irish?

Having examined examples of negative content related to Ireland, chapter 3 explores positive, ambiguous and indifferent perceptions and depictions. Examining how writers responded to the conquest of Ireland shows that attitudes differed greatly amongst contemporary writers. Writers such as Thomas Becket's biographer, William of Canterbury, were far from impressed with the shedding of Christian blood in Ireland. Even Gerald of Wales criticised his kinsmen's bloodletting in Ireland. The chapter also explores material that has yet to be considered for what it might tell us about contemporary views of Ireland and its affairs. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the barbarian motif that frequently featured in descriptions of the Irish people. It argues that such views were created and promulgated by ecclesiastics writing predominantly in Latin.

Identity is central to one's sense of self, and history is central to one's sense of identity. Thus, a person cannot hope to understand who they are without knowing where they have come from as an individual and as a member of a potential multiplicity of social groups: familial, ethnic, national, and others in between. The

final chapter of this dissertation reexamines the notion of a homogenous 'English' view of Ireland in the period. By problematising the ethnic and national identities ascribed to contemporary writers, this chapter argues that ethnic and/or national affinities were not necessarily the driving forces behind contemporaries' endeavours when we often do not know the origins of writers nor the ethnicities or nationalities that they ascribed to themselves. Moreover, it suggests that it is perhaps more appropriate to conceive of a spectrum of identities and thus a variety of views. Furthermore, while some writers expressed their national and/or ethnic affinities in their works, their lives as ecclesiastics often dictated their outlook and approach to writing about past and current events. Thus, rather than identifying perceptions and depictions of Ireland and its people as reflecting ethnic or national views, it may be more accurate to describe them as the product of intellectual culture.

Chapter 1

Ireland in the pre-invasion imagination

Introduction

A millennium and more before Gerald of Wales penned his renowned denigratory depictions of the Irish people in his *Topographia Hibernica* ethnographers, geographers, historians, philosophers, and even a dictator, had raised up their pens (or styli or quills) to ‘colourfully’ depict Ireland and its people.¹ Although Ireland remained free of the imperial banner of Rome, there was steady contact between Ireland and the classical world: Irish raids on Romano-British coastal settlements, mutual trade of goods and, occasionally, travellers, testify to this, although the extent of contact remains speculative.² Across the classical world, both Greek and Roman writers felt it appropriate to say something – though quite often it was simply something brief – about Ireland and its inhabitants. Some of these writers provided physical descriptions of an island on the edge of the known world. Others described Ireland’s natural resources, presenting the island as a lush and bountiful place, while others wrote cautionary tales about a place full of animalistic savages. These writers had never set foot on Irish soil but were left to their imagination (and often *wild* imagination at that) to concoct their impressions of what the Greeks called *Ιέρνης*

¹ For an extensive list of classical references to Ireland, including the approximate dates of composition and summaries of specific references, see Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world* (Austin, TX, 2001), ‘Appendix two: classical references to Ireland’. While Freeman’s study is more recent and detailed with regard to the classical sources, James F. Kenney’s pioneering work on early references to Ireland should be the first port of call, *The sources for the early history of Ireland: an introduction and guide. Vol.1, ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929), pp 118–38. Aileen M. O’Leary’s whistle-stop survey of foreign views of Ireland from Antiquity to c. 1200 does a good job of compiling and briefly contextualising quite a range of references to Ireland, ‘The heretic and the Hibernophobe’, pp 1–51. Alexander O’Hara and J.-M. Reaux-Colvin’s forthcoming *Savages and saints: Ireland, the Irish, and Irishness from Antiquity to the English conquest* (Princeton, NJ, forthcoming) will be the first book-length study of pre-invasion perceptions and depictions of Ireland and is therefore due to make an important contribution to the field.

² Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, p. xiii; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2004), pp 145–63.

(*Ierne*) and the Romans *Hibernia*.³ These classical, proto-historical accounts of Ireland reflect the interest in and awareness of Ireland in Greece and in the Roman republic and later empire, and provide an insight into the precursory elements of anti-Irish attitudes that later became associated with the expansionist agenda of the Plantagenet kings in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴

In comparison to classical writers, medieval chroniclers and historians in Britain, writing merely from across the Irish Sea, had, too, felt Ireland to be worthy of note in their works. However, there was a stark difference. While Ireland's influence was of little magnitude in ancient times, during the period running from Christian Antiquity to the Carolingian renaissance in the late eighth century, Irish scholars and ecclesiastics had managed to involve themselves in widespread secular and ecclesiastical developments across Europe, most notably in parts of what are now England, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy.⁵ Indeed, Ireland's

³ It is often said that the Latin *Hibernia* is a derivation from the Latin *Hibernus*, that is 'wintry', which was indicative of the cold climate of Ireland from the perspective of the ancient Mediterranean writers and may have been an alteration of the Greek variants of *Ierne* and *Iouernia*. There may, too, have been some influence from the term used for the Iberian peninsula, *Hiberia*. For a list of ancient names for Ireland see Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, 'Appendix three: the names of Ireland'. Interestingly, it has been argued that there was an assumed connection between the word *Ierne* (Ἰέρων) and ἱερός, the Greek adjective for 'sacred', in Greek literary tradition until late Antiquity, see Alexandra Madela, 'The Sacred Island: an ancient name for Ireland', *Classics Ireland*, 26 (2019), pp 25–9. Since Eoin MacNeill, most Irish scholars have thought that *Ierne* and *Hibernia* are attempts to indicate the people called *Érainn*, whom Ptolemy referred to as the *Iverni*. These were the people from whom the island's old Irish name, *Ériu*, derived, see John MacNeill [Eoin MacNeill], 'Ireland according to Ptolemy and other non-Irish authorities', *The New Ireland Review*, 26 (1906–7), pp 6–15.

⁴ C. Warren Hollister and Thomas K. Keefe, 'The making of the Angevin empire', *Journal of British Studies*, 12:2 (1973), pp. 1–25; Davies, *The first English empire*, pp 64, 76–7, 115–16, 178–80; Gillingham, *The Angevin empire*, pp 27–9; Colin Veach, 'Henry II and the ideological foundations of Angevin rule in Ireland', *IHS*, 42:161 (2018), 1–25. The so-called 'twelfth-century renaissance' undoubtedly played a part in how contemporary writers perceived other ethnic groups. The classic study on the return to the classical world is Haskins, *The renaissance of the twelfth century*. For the influence of classical writers on England, see Richard W. Southern, 'The place of England in the twelfth-century renaissance', *History*, 45:155 (1960), pp 201–16; Rodney M. Thomson, 'England and the twelfth-century renaissance', *Past & Present*, 101 (1983), pp 3–21. Stereotyping inspired by classical texts is well attested in contemporary chronicles and histories, see, for example, Diarmuid Scully's study on Gerald of Wales and the classical sources, 'Pagans, Christians and barbarians: the Irish in Giraldus Cambrensis and the Graeco-Roman sources', in Leo Carruthers *et al.* (eds), *Un espace colonial et ses avatars. Naissance d'identités nationales: Angleterre, France et Irlande (ve-xve siècles)* (Paris, 2008), pp 49–59.

⁵ There is a vast literature on this subject. See, for example, Kathleen Hughes, *The church in early Irish society* (London, 1966), pp 91–102; Sven Meeder, 'Irish scholars and Carolingian learning', in Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (eds), *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture and religion* (London, 2016), pp 179–94; Heinz Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1982), esp. Arnold Angenendt, 'Die Irische peregrinatio und ihre auswirkungen auf dem kontinent vor dem jahre 800', pp 52–79, John J. Contreni, 'The Irish in the western Carolingian empire (according to James F. Kenney and Bern, Burgerbibliothek 363)', pp 758–98, and Heinz Löwe, 'Die Iren und Europa im früheren mittelalter', pp 1013–39; Máire Herbert, 'The legacy of Colum Cille and his monastic community', in James P. Mackery (ed.), *The cultures of Europe: the Irish contribution* (Belfast, 1994), pp 9–20; Mary Garrison, 'The English and the Irish at the court of Charlemagne', in P.L. Butzer, M. Kerner and W. Oberschelp (eds), *Charlemagne and his heritage:*

continental influence during the Middle Ages led one medievalist to go so far as to refer to it as ‘a harbinger of the Middle Ages’⁶ while inspiring such embroidered book titles as James J. Walsh’s *The world’s debt to the Irish* (1926) and Thomas Cahill’s *How the Irish saved civilization* (1995).⁷

In the early medieval period, writers including the scholar Nennius (*fl.c.* 770–c. 810), the historian, monk and theologian Bede (*c.* 673/4–735) and the Benedictine monk and historian William of Malmesbury (*b.c.* 1090, *d.* in or after 1142) addressed a variety of topics as they related to Ireland, ranging from origin stories to agrarian practices. Unlike their ancient forebears, these men shared closer quarters to the Irish, who were merely across the Irish Sea, and lived through times when Irish affairs were of ever-increasing relevance as contact between the two largest islands of the Hiberno-British archipelago increased amidst political upheavals and commercial developments. In the examples of classical and medieval descriptions of Ireland and its inhabitants that are addressed herein it is perhaps unsurprising that they are heavily influenced by the contexts of conquest, a topic which will be further fleshed out in the later chapters of this dissertation.

Be it the representation of the Irish as barbarians or Ireland being depicted as an ‘Island of Saints and Scholars’ or as a land of marvels and oddities, by focusing on how Ireland and the Irish were perceived and depicted in classical and medieval works before the invasion and conquest of Ireland in the late twelfth century, this chapter explores the antecedent material that addressed aspects of Irish life and lore before dealing with the historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England in the subsequent three chapters. The multiple examples addressed in this chapter emerged from a variety of contexts influenced by an admixture of personal, professional, cultural, political, and/or economic factors. Moreover, some of the writers discussed had visited Ireland; some knew colleagues and friends who had travelled there for

1200 years of civilization and science in Europe (Turnhout, 1997), pp 97–123; Marie Therese Flanagan, ‘The contribution of Irish missionaries and scholars to medieval Christianity’, in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: revisiting the story* (Blackrock, 2002), pp 30–43.

⁶ Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland, harbinger of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1963), p. vii.

⁷ See James J. Walsh, *The world’s debt to the Irish* (Boston, MA, 1926); Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish saved civilization* (New York, 1995). It is interesting that both of these authors studied at Fordham: Cahill while an undergraduate student and Walsh as doctoral student. It is, however, unsurprising that both were born in New York and their ancestors were of Irish extraction. Recent studies have sought to temper such idealistic views of the Irish contribution to early medieval ecclesiastical and secular developments, see, for instance, Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder’s edited collection, *The Irish in early medieval Europe*.

adventure or to spread the doctrines of the church; while some had to imagine Ireland's shores, its pastures and its people from the confines of their cloisters in Britain or from the similarly disadvantageous viewpoint of the Mediterranean basin, hundreds and even thousands of miles away. This chapter surveys the examples of references to Ireland from the pre-invasion period in order to ascertain the various attitudes expressed in the hodgepodge of information related to Ireland, its inhabitants and its affairs. Of particular interest are the historiographic trends and literary tropes that influenced depictions of Ireland in the classical and medieval periods. Taken together, the range of attitudes expressed towards Ireland and its inhabitants provide a more nuanced understanding of how foreigners perceived Ireland and how English attitudes towards Ireland developed during the high medieval period.

Ireland, a marginal land to all?

Throughout history, human beings' proclivity for travel has, in various ways, dictated the mingling of peoples, the formation of their relationships and the perceptions they developed of one another. However, the writers of classical Antiquity who addressed Ireland – a north-western island situated a thousand and more miles away in the Atlantic Ocean for many of them – had not travelled to Ireland themselves.⁸ So, how did these writers come to know Ireland? Travel to the north-western edge of the known world facilitated early contact or at the very least an awareness of Ireland's existence.⁹ It is supposed that the earliest mention of Ireland is to be found in the works of the Greek geographers, many of whom wrote about the islands of north-western Europe. However, most of this geographical work has not survived the ravages of time and what remains is to be found merely named in lists or in

⁸ Of course, this physical distance varied depending on which antique location one has in mind. There was considerable difference, in terms of physical distance, between the territorial expanses of the Greeks and Romans in continental Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

⁹ For the ancients, the economies of Greece and Rome relied on travel for opportunities to trade and exact taxation, even with supposedly barbarian peoples. A core-periphery system existed, on various scales, at the interface between the Greco-Roman and barbarian worlds, see Barry Cunliffe, *Greeks, Romans, and barbarians: spheres of interaction* (New York, 1988), chapter 1 for discussion of core-periphery systems and chapter 8 for pre-historic trade patterns and trade with the British Isles. See also M. Cary, 'The Greeks and ancient trade with the Atlantic', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 44:2 (1924), pp 166–79; Keith Hopkins, 'Taxes and trade in the Roman empire (200 B.C.–A.D. 400)', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 70 (1980), pp 101–25; Peter Garnsey, Keith Hopkins and C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade in the ancient economy* (London, 1983).

fragmentary form.¹⁰ Rufius Festus Avienus, a Roman proconsul who wrote the *periplus* known as the *Ora maritima* in the mid-fourth century A.D., cobbled together many earlier works to write his descriptions of the coast from Gades (modern-day Cadiz) to Massalia (modern-day Marseille) while digressing on other part of western Europe.¹¹ Avienus's description of Ireland – which will be examined later – is supposed to have originated from sources written many centuries earlier. However, we do not know with any degree of certainty what sources he used. Moreover, as Freeman points out, the uncertainty of Avienus's sources coupled with their intermixture in the *Ora maritima* make it an incredibly problematic source for the early history of Ireland.¹² However, if Avienus's description of Ireland did indeed originate from the early Greek and/or Carthaginian texts, they may be dated, rather incredibly, to as early as the late sixth or early fifth centuries B.C. Hellenistic writers such as Ephorus (c. 405–330 B.C.), Timaeus (c. 356–320 B.C.) and Posidonius (135–51 B.C.) wrote about the lands and islands of north-western Europe and, according to Freeman's bold estimation, 'all may have written of Ireland, but unfortunately no direct reference to the island survives in any of their works'.¹³ Unfortunately, for the earliest accounts of Ireland much relies on such supposition.

Pytheas of Massilia had voyaged to north-western Europe and circumnavigated Britain during the years c. 320 B.C.¹⁴ Pytheas's writings – inspired by his far-flung voyage to Britain – survive only in later writers' works, such as the historian Polybius (c. 200–118 B.C.).¹⁵ It is not known for certain whether Pytheas even wrote about Ireland, let alone visited the island; however, given his circumnavigation of Britain, he may have, at the very least, seen the coast of Ireland. Pytheas was mostly met with scorn by his classical successors and regarded as a generally untrustworthy source due to his erroneous assertions about the location of *ultima Thule*, which was regarded as the farthest northern location in the known world according to Greek and Roman sources.¹⁶ It was generally accepted by

¹⁰ J.J. Tierney, 'The Greek geographic tradition and Ptolemy's evidence for Irish geography', *PRIA*, 76C (1976), p. 257.

¹¹ Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, pp 28, 31–3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ Stanley Ireland, *Roman Britain: a sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (London and New York, 2008), p. 11.

¹⁵ Polybius, *The histories, volume vi: books 28–39. Fragments*, ed and trans. S. Douglas Olson, trans. by W.R. Paton, rev. F.W. Walbank and Christian Habicht (LCL 161, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2010), pp 336–9, 356–7.

¹⁶ Ian Whitaker, 'The problem of Pytheas' Thule', *The Classical Journal*, 77:2 (1981–82), pp 148–64. Interestingly, Gerald of Wales wrote about Thule in his *Topographia*, remarking that while Thule (*Ultra Tylen*) was well-known in the east, it was unknown in the west, *Topographia*, pp 98–100. In

classical writers that little was known about the lands located at the farthest reaches of the known world, so only speculative descriptions were readily recognised. For instance, the Greek geographer Strabo (c. 64 B.C.–c. 23 A.D.) noted:

‘For not only has the man who tells about Thule, Pytheas, been found, upon scrutiny, to be an arch-falsifier, but the men who have been to Britain and *lerne* [i.e. Ireland] do not mention Thule. ... However, any man who has told such great falsehoods about the known regions would hardly, I imagine, be able to tell the truth about places that are not known to anybody’.¹⁷

Strabo’s own incorrect assertions about Ireland’s location – which we shall soon see – are certainly embarrassing when read in light of his unforgiving critique of poor Pytheas. However, such denunciation was a common feature of many ancient works and did not necessarily reflect outright contempt or disrespect for the endeavours of one’s antecedents. The acquisition of knowledge was an important aspect of Greco-Roman culture, so it was in the interest of would-be ethnographers, geographers and historians to assert their knowledge and judgements in order to stake their claim in a highly regarded and competitive literary industry and, more importantly, tradition. Indeed, as Emma Dench has argued, the public condemnation of predecessors added weight to a writer’s characteristic persona and acted as a display of authority.¹⁸

Despite the uncertainty of information about the furthest parts of north-western Europe, Romans and Greeks alike were undeterred and continued to write about Ireland. However, the Romans could reasonably claim to have had more authority on the subject given their relative proximity to the island. The Romans had of course invaded Britain in 54 B.C. during the course of Gaius Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars, with Britain later becoming subsumed by the Roman empire as a province (*Provincia Britannia*) after being conquered by the Gallo-Roman general Gnaeus Julius Agricola.¹⁹ The first certain and datable reference to Ireland in classical works

this chapter, Gerald draws from Virgil, Solinus, Isidore, Orosius and Augustine for information on Thule.

¹⁷ Strabo, *Geography, volume i: books 1–2.*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. Horace Leonard Jones (LCL 49, London, 1917), pp 234–7.

¹⁸ Emma Dench, ‘Ethnography and history’, in John Marincola (ed.) *A companion to Greek and Roman historiography* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2007), i, pp 493–503.

¹⁹ For a classic study of Roman Britain see Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: a history of Roman Britain* (London, 1999), see especially pp 17–28 for Caesar’s expeditions. See also Peter Salway, *A history of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1997).

may be found in the military writings of Julius Caesar.²⁰ Writing around 50 B.C., in his *Gallic wars*, Caesar described Ireland's geographic location: 'The second side [of Britain] bears towards Spain and the west, in which direction lies Ireland, smaller by one half, as it is thought, than Britain; the sea-passage is of equal length to that from Gaul to Britain'.²¹ Caesar had accurately placed Ireland (*Hibernia*) to the west of Britain.²² Although his measurement of Ireland's size as being half that of Britain's is incorrect, it was not too far wide of the mark at a time when more precise measurements were virtually impossible. The distance between Ireland and Britain being of equal length to that separating Britain and Gaul is accurate depending, of course, from where one chooses to measure. Caesar is, however, incorrect in stating that the western side of Britain faces Iberia, with Ireland lying between them.²³ Nonetheless, Caesar's descriptions of the region are remarkable for their general observations.

In *De situ orbis* (also known as *De chorographia*), the oldest extant geography written in Latin, written about 44 A.D., Pomponius Mela writes that *Iuverna* (Ireland) is *super Britanniam* ('above Britain') and more or less equal in area to Britain but oblong in shape with equally extended lateral coastlines.²⁴ Like Strabo, Mela locates Ireland beyond Britain and thus further north. Although, as we shall see in the next section, Mela's Ireland is not the inhospitably cold place of which Strabo writes. Writing around the same time as Mela, Pliny the Elder described Ireland's physical measurements, stating that it was the same breadth (300 miles) as Britain but shorter in length (600 miles compared to Britain's 800), and that the shortest crossing between the islands was from the district of the Silures – or South Wales – which was a distance of some 30 Roman miles, the equivalent of 44 kilometres.²⁵ Interestingly, Pliny names a number of islands lying between Ireland and Britain (*inter Hiberniam ac Britanniam*), including *Riginia* and *Silumnus*, which Pliny's Loeb Series translator H. Rackham translated as Racklin (Rathlin) and Dalkey

²⁰ Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, p. 37.

²¹ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic war*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. Horace Leonard Jones (LCL 72, London, 1917), pp 250–1.

²² Caesar's *Gallic wars* has been credited as the earliest extant and verifiable source for the use of the term *Hibernia*.

²³ This mistake was repeated, later, by Pliny the Elder and Tacitus, see below.

²⁴ George Kish (ed.), *A source book in geography* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 128; Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*, trans. F.E. Romer (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998), p. 116.

²⁵ Pliny, *Natural history*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. H. Rackham (LCL 352, Cambridge, MA and London, 1938), ii, pp 198–9. Pliny listed Mela as an authority for no less than nine books in his *Historia naturalis* while the third-century compiler Solinus also relied on Mela, see *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*, p. 27.

respectively.²⁶ However, the attribution is impossible to verify. What's more, there is the possibility, too, that *Silumnus* may refer to Lambay Island, which is much larger and more visible as a feature in the Irish Sea than Dalkey Island and, moreover, closer to sites in north Co. Dublin that may have had some contact with Rome in later centuries.²⁷ The lack of certainty aside, it is still noteworthy that a writer such as Pliny was able to record even the smaller islands amongst the British Isles around one hundred years or less after Caesar. Clearly, there was increased Roman traffic present in the Irish Sea at this time and, perhaps, improved relations between Ireland and the Roman world.

Writing during the period between Caesar and Pliny, Strabo located Ireland at the northernmost boundary of the inhabitable world: 'Besides some small islands round about Britain, there is also a large island, *Ierne*, which stretches parallel to Britain on the north, its breadth being greater than its length'.²⁸ Later, with regard to Ireland's location, Strabo writes what may be considered one of the most enduring and influential descriptions of Ireland and its supposed (incorrect) location at the ends of the Earth:

'For modern scientific writers are not able to speak of any country north of *Ierne*, which lies to the north of Britain and near thereto, and is the home of men who are complete savages and lead a miserable existence because of the cold; and therefore, in my opinion, the northern limit of our inhabited world is to be placed there'.²⁹

Having called into question the very existence of Thule earlier in his work, Ireland is, according to Strabo, literally at the northern limit of the inhabited world. Thus, Ireland becomes Thule. Although Strabo was incorrect in locating Ireland at so northerly a position, he was certainly en point in describing its breadth as being greater than its length as the *geographical* length is measured east and west while *geographical* breadth, north and south.³⁰ On a very mundane and obvious interpretative level, Strabo's description of Ireland's location, much like Caesar's inclusion of it in the *Gallic wars* or, indeed, Pliny's in his *Natural history*, places

²⁶ Pliny, *Natural history*, ii, pp 198–9. Freeman provides a good overview of the islands and their possible identifications, *Ireland and the classical world*, pp 53–5.

²⁷ Freeman seems to think that *Silumnus* may be one of the Scilly Isles off the coast of Cornwall while *Andros* 'might possibly be Howth or Lambay', see *Ireland and the classical world*, p. 54.

²⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, volume i, pp 258–9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 442–3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 259 n.4.

Ireland geographically in the known world and, perhaps most importantly, outside of the *oikoumene*.³¹ However, on another level, Strabo achieves something more here: he guarantees the integrity of the Roman-centred world by implicitly tying savagery with geographic location.³² Ethnographic traditions were deeply embedded in classical works. As the Hellenistic and Roman realms expanded so, too, did their connections with the peoples of the world. One can find so many instances of the contemporary fascination with the various peoples of the world, especially those located at the farthest reaches of the known world, away from the centres of Athens and Rome. For instance, in Homer's *Odyssey*, the interest in foreign peoples is abundantly clear right from the beginning when we are told that 'Many were the men whose cities he [i.e. Odysseus] saw and whose minds he learned'.³³ Note here that it was the Greek hero Odysseus who learned about other men's minds. There is no sense of reciprocal learning on the part of those foreign peoples Odysseus encountered. Greek and Roman audiences were enthralled with tales of foreign peoples who were often made out to be far more primitive and savage, thus making audiences feel that much better about their own conditions. One effect of the 'ethnographical gaze' was its influence on culture and imperial policy. 'The self-consciously proactive and intrusive nature of Roman rule encourages the idea of putting ethnographical knowledge into practice'.³⁴ Indeed, it was by putting ethnography into practice that Caesar conquered peoples whose names were not known before, thus expanding contemporary geographic and ethnographic knowledge.

The unknown parts of the world were perceived in relation to Greek and Roman geographical knowledge. Thus, both Caesar and Strabo wrote about Ireland's location with reference to Britain and Gaul, which, at that time, were both integral

³¹ The Greeks used the word *oikoumene*, literally 'the inhabited', initially to refer to the inhabited parts of the world as opposed to the uninhabited parts of the world. However, the term developed into a concept that separated the *human*-inhabited world from the supposedly non-human, thus developing the notion of a binary between civilised peoples inhabiting the Greek world as opposed to those dwelling in the further reaches of the world – what A.L. Kroeber described as a 'shift of meaning from the "range of mankind" to "range of man's most developed cultures"', see 'The ancient *oikoumene* as an historic culture aggregate', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 75:1/2 (1945), p. 9.

³² Eric G. Haywood, 'Is Ireland worth bothering about? Classical perceptions of Ireland revisited in renaissance Italy', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2:4 (1996), p. 467.

³³ Homer, *Odyssey*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. A.T. Murray and rev. George E. Dimock, 2nd ed. (LCL 104, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1995), i, pp 12–13.

³⁴ Dench, 'Ethnography and history', p. 501; Klaus Geus and Colin Guthrie King, 'Paradoxography', in Paul T. Keyser and John Scarborough (eds), *Oxford handbook of science and medicine in the classical world* (Oxford, 2018), pp 431–44.

parts of the ever-expanding Roman world, thus revealing their ethnocentricities. Strabo describes the journey from Gaul to Ireland as follows:

‘The voyage from *Celtica*³⁵ to the north is nowadays called the remotest voyage to the north; I mean the voyage to *Ierne*, which island not only lies *beyond* [my emphasis] Britain but is such a wretched place to live in on account of the cold that the regions on beyond are regarded as uninhabitable. And *Ierne* is not farther from *Celtica*, they say, than five thousand stadia; so that about thirty thousand stadia all told, or perhaps a few more, would represent the breadth of the inhabited world’.³⁶

Strabo’s focus on the ‘voyage to *Ierne*’ as being the ‘remotest voyage north’ functions as both a warning and a call to adventure for his audiences. His *Geographia*, a vast work on the peoples and places of the ‘inhabited world’, reflects a deep interest in and remarkable knowledge of not only physical geography but cultural geography as well, on behalf of Strabo himself as a geographer and, indeed, his audience.³⁷ In contrast, Caesar was not writing from the perspective of a geographer or ethnographer but rather that of a military man mindful that the furthest reaches of the world were waiting to be subsumed by the Roman republic. Caesar’s accuracy in placing Ireland geographically speaking is more than likely as a result of the Romans’ aforementioned incursion into the British Isles, which resulted in the Romans experiencing closer quarters to Ireland than the Greeks. Noting Ireland’s location kept it recorded for his contemporaries and future generations keen to expand the reach of Roman rule into lands further northwest. The ambitions of power-hungry Roman rulers to control lands and peoples for the benefit and sustenance of the Roman republic and empire were well known. Indeed, Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica* noted that the emperor Claudius, who had travelled to Britain in 43 A.D. in order to stop a rebellion there, ‘sought to make war everywhere and to gain victories on every hand’.³⁸ Having returned to Rome after spending some six

³⁵ The *Gallia Celtica* was a cultural region in Gaul that comprised of parts of modern-day France, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Germany. Julius Caesar wrote that ‘Gaul is a whole divided into three parts, one of which is inhabited by the *Belgae*, another by the *Aquitani*, and a third by a people called in their own tongue *Celtae*, in the Latin *Galli*’, Caesar, *The Gallic war*, pp 2–3.

³⁶ Strabo, *Geography*, volume i, pp 270–1.

³⁷ Eran Almagor and Joseph Skinner, ‘Introduction’, in Eran Almagor and Joseph Skinner (eds), *Ancient ethnography: new approaches* (London, 2013), p. 9.

³⁸ Bede, *HE*, pp 22–3. Bede derived most of his account of Claudius’s journey and time spent in Britain from the late-fourth-century historian and theologian Orosius, with some additions from his coeval Eutropius, a Roman official and historian, see Bede, *HE*, p. 22 n.3.

months in Britain, a splendid celebration was held to laud the military deeds and successes of the Romans in *Britannia*. Roman rulers had burning ambitions that were difficult to extinguish, that much is true. So, too, did normal Roman citizens who no doubt drew strength from such shows of political dominance, which confirmed to them that their mundane lives were part of something bigger and bolder than they could imagine. Long before Claudius set foot in Britain, such an attitude was neatly captured in the last decades of the first century B.C. by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. In book one of Virgil's epic poem on Rome's origins, Jupiter prophesises to Aeneas the immortal *imperium* granted unto the Roman people as having 'no bounds in space or time. ... empire without end'.³⁹

While Caesar merely relays Ireland's geographic location, for Strabo Ireland's marginality was justification enough to denigrate the inhabitants of Ireland as its distance from the perceived norms of the Mediterranean and Aegean had rendered Ireland a mysterious and almost mythical place. In his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato placed Atlantis beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the promontories that flank the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar, which were seen to be the westernmost extremity of the inhabitable world.⁴⁰ It is interesting, then, that both the anonymous late antique Greek poem known as the *Orphic Argonautica* and the scientific treatise *De mundo*, which was once erroneously attributed to Aristotle, explicitly identify *Ierne* simply as a large island that lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules.⁴¹ With regard to the geographic knowledge of classical writers, Germaine Aujac reminds us that, 'the Mediterranean basin had long remained the best-known part of the inhabited world and the most exactly drawn: distant lands were only vaguely delineated and were inserted into world maps by guesswork'.⁴² As a result, the geographic and cartographic details relayed by classical geographers fit the pre-

³⁹ Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: books 1–6*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G.P. Goold (LCL 63, Cambridge, MA, 1916), pp 280–1.

⁴⁰ Plato's Atlantis was far from the mythical underwater world it is recognised as today. For Plato, the far-off island functioned as an allegory representing the hubris of nations, thus reinforcing his ideal of a just city-state as presented in *De republica*. There has been a wishful attempt to identify Plato's description of Atlantis with Ireland, although it has received little mainstream support, see Ulf Erlingsson, *Atlantis from a geographer's perspective: mapping the fairy land* (Miami, 2004).

⁴¹ Francis Vian (ed.), *Les Argonautiques Orphiques* (Paris, 1987), pp 160–1, l. 1182; *De mundo*, trans. E.S. Forster (Oxford, 1914), chapter 3. Interestingly, Ralph of Diceto mentions that the Scythian ancestors of the Irish had passed through Mauritania, sailed to the Pillars of Hercules and finally arrived in Spain, see Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10, ii, p. 34.

⁴² Germaine Aujac [prepared by the editors from materials supplied by Germaine Aujac], 'The foundations of theoretical cartography in archaic and classical Greece', in J.B. Harley and David Woodward (eds), *Cartography in prehistoric, ancient, and medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago, IL, and London, 1987), p. 144.

conceived notion of climatic determinism as it related to the imperfect representations of the wider world.⁴³ Interestingly, the shape and size of Ireland described by the ancients was a topic that was discussed and indeed depicted in much later centuries by writers including the English historian and cartographer John Speed (1552–1629).⁴⁴

The perception of Ireland as being a distant land where nature had chosen a different course is an oft-found *topos* in classical and medieval works, whereby the Irish Other is defined as being distant from the norm and, by extension, the self. Despite its supposed position at the ends of the earth and the relative lack of knowledge about Ireland and its affairs, the Irish landscape and clime were often the recipients of quite favourable remarks. For instance, the third-century compiler Solinus had written about Ireland in his *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (known also under the title *Polyhistor*) stating:

‘Ireland is close in size [to the island of Britain]; it is an inhuman place due to the ferocious behaviour of its inhabitants, but it is so rich in grazing that the livestock, unless it be taken away from the pastures, is at risk from overeating. There are no snakes there, few birds, and the people are inhospitable and warlike. Victors in battle, having first drunk of the blood of those they kill, then paint their faces with it. Right and wrong is all one to them. There are no bees, and if anyone takes dust or stones from there and scatters them in hives, the bees will swarm off, abandoning their combs’.⁴⁵

Solinus’s description above – a hodgepodge that addresses the Irish landscape, its inhabitants and its purported faunal quirks – covers topics similar to his forebears; however, he is incorrect in asserting that Ireland is similar in size to Britain – a point which was more accurately described centuries earlier by Caesar. Unlike Strabo who was not interested in painting a particularly attractive picture of Ireland, seeming to rather ward off potential adventurers or settlers entirely, Solinus is more ambiguous

⁴³ Benjamin Isaac, ‘Proto-racism in Graeco-Roman antiquity’, *World Archaeology*, 38:1 (2006), pp 32–47.

⁴⁴ Amongst historians of the shared history of Ireland and Britain, John Speed’s name is usually associated with his map of Ireland – known commonly as ‘Speed’s Map of Ireland’ – and, especially, the ethnocentric depictions of the ‘wilde’ Irish on its margins. For details of the ancients’ sense of Ireland’s size and orientation, see John Speed, *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine* (London, 1612), p. 137.

⁴⁵ Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berlin, 1958), p. 100, trans. by Eric G. Haywood, ‘Is Ireland worth bothering about?’, p. 470.

in constructing an image of Ireland by putting forward the pros and cons of Irish life: the landscape is lush and there are few pesky creatures – it seems St Patrick did not have much work to do when banishing the snakes from Ireland – but the natives are warlike and savage, and it is not a place conducive to beekeeping. It is clear that classical descriptions had developed from merely describing the location and size of Ireland as an island to addressing more specific details of the island's flora and fauna. One might speculate that the long-standing presence of Roman control over Britain at the time Solinus was writing, over two hundred years of occupation by that point, encouraged writers to dig more deeply into the lives of their neighbours across the Irish Sea. Classical texts such as Strabo's *Geographia* and Solinus's *Collectanea* functioned not only as repositories of human and physical geographical and historical knowledge but also as proto-travel brochures enticing politicians, military men, as well as would-be heroes, settlers and adventurers keen to seize opportunities in lands that offered access to untapped economic resources such as timber and metals.⁴⁶

More than an island overflowing with bloodthirsty savages and economic opportunity, Ireland may have been associated with some notion of sanctity. The *Ora maritima* of Rufius Festus Avienus, written in the mid-fourth century describes an *insula sacra* located in the west.⁴⁷ The epithet 'sacred island' was given to the place by the ancients, so Avienus tells us. The island was rich in turf, heavily populated by a *gens* called the *Hierni*, and located near the island of the *Albiones*.⁴⁸ Avienus never uses familiar terms such as *Ierne* or *Hibernia* to refer to the island, so one must use the additional details that the sacred island's neighbours were the *Albiones*, which was an ancient term used for the inhabitants of Britain, and the mention of the *Hierni*, as evidence for this sacred island and Ireland being one and the same. Freeman points out that Avienus's usage of the term *Hierni* to describe the island's inhabitants is unique in classical works, but it seems 'a reasonable Roman derivative of the Greek *Iernē*'.⁴⁹ However, the identification of Ireland as this sacred island remains speculative.

⁴⁶ In the classical world, the raw-material resources of western Europe were considerable and particularly desirable for the Greco-Roman socio-economic system. Most important were metals, especially tin and copper. Ireland was particularly productive in copper mining along what is known as the Copper Coast, with mines in Cork and Kerry dating back to the early Bronze Age, see Barry Cunliffe, *Greeks, Romans and barbarians: spheres of interaction* (New York, 1988), pp 9–10.

⁴⁷ See Madela, 'The sacred island', pp 25–9.

⁴⁸ Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

The level of contact between Ireland and the civilisations of Greece and Rome has been much debated.⁵⁰ While the contemporary written evidence is scant, one may turn to the works of the Roman historian and public official Tacitus (c. 55–d.c. 120) for some insight. In *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae* (more commonly known as *Agricola*), Tacitus recalls that the Roman general Gnaeus Julius Agricola, having reached the south-western extremity of Galloway, in Scotland, looked out towards the sea and in the distance caught a glimpse of Ireland, which he reckoned could be conquered with one legion and a handful of auxiliaries.⁵¹ Despite Agricola's overt confidence, such a conquest never materialised. What is most telling about Tacitus's account of Roman plans for Ireland is that Agricola manned with troops that part of the British coast that faced Ireland, not out of fear but in hope of future action.⁵² Controlling Ireland was in Roman minds. Indeed, Tacitus believed that Ireland was a key strategic location for Rome as it was ideally – although erroneously it must be said – located 'between Britain and Spain' and in a commanding location in the Gallic Sea that 'would unite, to their mutual advantage,

⁵⁰ While there is no concrete evidence to suggest a large-scale Roman incursion into Ireland, some have tried to argue the case for a Roman invasion, including Vittorio di Martino, see *Roman Ireland* (Cork, 2003). At the other end of the spectrum, others, including Francis J. Haverfield, have argued that Ireland effectively remained the only 'Keltic' nation that evaded the grasp of Roman imperialism and influence, see Francis J. Haverfield, 'Ancient Rome and Ireland', *The English Historical Review*, 28:109 (1913), pp 1–12. In response to Haverfield's article, R. Knox McElderry noted Haverfield's failure to discuss Juvenal's mention of a Roman invasion of Ireland. Knox McElderry concluded that 'Complete certainty with present evidence is perhaps impossible; but upon a balance of probability the denial of an invasion does not seem to be justified', see R. Knox McElderry, 'Juvenal in Ireland?', *The Classical Quarterly*, 16 (1922), pp 151–62. See also R.B. Warner 'Tuathal Techtmar: a myth or ancient literary evidence for a Roman invasion?', *Emania*, 13 (1995), pp 23–32; William S. Hanson, 'Roman relations with Ireland: a Scottish perspective', *Scottish Archaeological Journal*, 42:1 (2020), pp 91–106. On classical influences on Ireland, see W.B. Stanford, 'Towards a history of classical influences in Ireland', *PRIA*, 70C (1970), pp 13–91; Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, chapter 2 for Latin influences on language in Ireland. Currently, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh is leading a major research project entitled 'Mapping the medieval mind: Ireland's literary landscapes in a global space', which analyses how wider learned trends influenced Irish literary culture. Amongst other areas of investigation, Ní Mhaonaigh is examining the influence of the Bible and classical works on how Irish authors wrote about the Irish landscape in the prose and verse compilation known as the *Dindshenchas Éirenn*, see <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/research-project-grants/mapping-medieval-mind-ireland%E2%80%99s-literary-landscapes-global-space>, accessed 08 September 2022. Isabelle Torrance and colleagues at the Centre for Irish Studies at Aarhus University are conducting a major ERC-funded research project entitled 'Classical influences and Irish culture', which features a useful database of references to classical allusions in Irish literature, see here <https://cllc.au.dk/>, accessed 10 September 2022.

⁵¹ The oft-cited account of Agricola looking across to Ireland from the coast of south-western Scotland may be confirmed, in part, by the excavations of Roman sites in Galloway and Ayrshire, see Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. M. Hutton and rev. R.M. Ogilvie, E.H. Warmington and Michael Winterbottom (LCL 35, Cambridge, MA, 1914), pp 11–12, 70–1. See also Nicholas Reed, 'The fifth year of Agricola's campaigns', *Britannia*, 2 (1971), pp 143–8; Salway, *A history of Roman Britain*, p. 107.

⁵² Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, pp 70–1.

the most effective portions of our empire'.⁵³ Tacitus also proffers some interesting details which are unique to his texts. He tells us that an Irish chieftain or king (*regulus*) was sheltered by Agricola and 'under the cloak of friendship held him in reserve to be used as opportunity offered'.⁵⁴ We are none the wiser to what opportunities this *regulus* was to be applied, but can speculate that he may have figured as a pawn in a potential invasion, or an intelligence source for local logistics, or as a valuable hostage to be returned to the Irish, which may have been the case given that Tacitus remarked that he had fled Ireland because of factionalism. Perhaps more interesting than his potential uses, was how this man from Ireland was treated amongst the Romans. That Tacitus remarks that the Irish king was held under the 'cloak of friendship' suggests that he was treated reasonably well.⁵⁵ Agricola had clearly thought seriously about campaigning in Ireland. Tacitus tells us that the Roman general considered 'that the occupation [of Ireland] would be useful with regard to Britain also; for so Roman troops would be everywhere and liberty would sink, so to speak, below the horizon'.⁵⁶ How Ireland would provide such a link in practice is never fleshed out.

Although military engagement between Ireland and the Romans never occurred, commercial trade, in some form, certainly did. And while it is difficult to propose the extent of trade between Ireland and Roman Britain – and indeed the wider empire – the consensus based on archaeological finds suggests that there was at least some level of mutual commercialism.⁵⁷ In addition, literary evidence further

⁵³ Ibid. The notion that Ireland was so close to Spain was a common misconception in classical and medieval works. It must be acknowledged, however, that the geographer Ptolemy (perhaps in imitation of Marinus) was likely the first writer to correct this misconception, placing Ireland closer to Britain than Spain, see Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, p. 70.

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, pp 70–1.

⁵⁵ No doubt this runaway king was not the first or last Irish person to have had close contact with the Roman military in Britain. There is a possibility that some Irish soldiers served in the Roman army, see Catherine Swift, *Ogam stones and the earliest Irish Christians* (Maynooth, 1997), pp 6–9.

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, pp 70–1.

⁵⁷ This has been most notably evidenced by several archaeological finds of Roman materials, including a coin hoard found in Balline, Co. Limerick; coins discovered alongside skeletons found during works on the north side of Bray Head, Co. Wicklow; and amphorae fragments found in Garranes, Co. Cork, which suggest the existence of wine trading. For details of the Roman materials found in Ireland, see Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, chapter 1; W.H. Drummond, 'On Roman coins found in Ireland', *PRIA* (1836–1869), 2 (1840–44), pp 185–90; Seán P. Ó Ríordáin, 'Roman material in Ireland', *PRIA*, 51C (1945–1948), pp 35–82; J.D. Bateson, 'Roman material in Ireland: a reconsideration', *PRIA*, 73C (1973), pp 21–97; idem, 'Further finds of Roman material from Ireland', *PRIA*, 76C (1976), pp 171–80; Máire and Liam de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland* (London, 1978), pp 25–48; Ewan Campbell, 'The archaeological evidence for external contacts: imports, trade and economy in Celtic Britain A.D. 400–800', in Ken Dark (ed.), *External contacts and the economy of late Roman and Post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp 83–96. Evidence of a Roman settlement likely dated to the first or second century A.D. has been found in Drumanagh, near the village of Loughshinny, in north Co. Dublin, see Barry Raftery, 'Drumanagh and Roman Ireland', *Archaeology*

supports the existence of some form of trade between Ireland and the Roman empire.⁵⁸ Indeed, Tacitus mentions that approaches to Ireland and its ports were known through commerce and traders.⁵⁹ Given that Tacitus's father-in-law was the aforementioned Agricola, his details on Ireland are important for our understanding of contemporary attitudes towards and contacts with the island as well as potential intentions for its conquest.

Despite their military might and ambitions, it would seem that the Romans had not invaded Ireland by the end of the first century A.D. when Tacitus was writing his biography of Agricola. However, this may have changed by the time the Roman poet Juvenal wrote his *Satires* in the early second century A.D. The angry and indignant voice of the narrator in *Satire II* takes Roman male youths to task over their licentiousness, in particular their participation in homosexual acts and relationships, which is a departure from the status quo. In asserting his point, the narrator calls to mind Roman military and political advances in the northern-most parts of the world as well as in Asia:

‘I know that we have advanced our troops beyond the shores of *Juaverna* [i.e. Ireland] and the recently captured Orkneys and the Britons who are contented with the shortest of nights, but the people we’ve defeated don’t do the things which go on in the Rome of the victors. “And yet one Armenian, Zalaces, who was more effeminate than all other Eastern lads, is said to have yielded himself to an impassioned tribune.” Look at the effects of international relations: he had come as a hostage, but here we create—human beings! And if such boys put on Roman ways by staying here longer, they’ll never lack a lover and they’ll abandon their trousers, knives, bridles, and whips’.⁶⁰

Ireland, 10:1 (1996), pp 17–19; Paddy Boyle, ‘Drumanagh—an exciting prospect’, *Archaeology Ireland*, 31:2 (2017), pp 12–14. In addition, coins bearing the names of the emperors Titus, Trajan and Hadrian have also been found on the same site, see Nancy Edwards, ‘The archaeology of early medieval Ireland, c. 400–1169: settlement and economy’, in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, volume i: prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), p. 254; Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: the enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London, 1994), p. 208.

⁵⁸ Christopher Loveluck and Aidan O’Sullivan, ‘Travel, transport and communication to and from Ireland: an archaeological perspective’, in Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (eds), *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture and religion* (London, 2016), pp 21–3.

⁵⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, pp 70–1.

⁶⁰ Juvenal, *Satires*, in *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund (LCL 91, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2004), pp 162–3.

It is unclear what is meant when Juvenal writes that ‘we have *advanced* [my emphasis here and elsewhere] our troops *beyond* the shores of Iuverna’ (*arma quidem ultra litora Iuvernae promovimus*). Is Juvenal suggesting that Ireland was conquered by the Romans or merely that Roman armies had travelled further than Ireland’s location? When one considers the later inclusion of the words *sed quae nunc populi fiunt victoris*, it would seem to imply that the inhabitants of these aforementioned places, perhaps including Ireland, were conquered. Knox McElderry’s spirited argument for not only a Roman invasion of Ireland in 81 A.D. but for Juvenal’s physical involvement in the military operation on the ground, fails to acknowledge the potential – and indeed likely – influence and presence of satirical elements such as exaggeration, caricature and sarcasm in *Satire II*. If what Juvenal writes about Ireland is read with such devices in mind, perhaps, then, Juvenal is drawing on Ireland in order to highlight and ridicule the perceived limits of the Roman-controlled world and the ambitions of those Romans seeking to conquer not only far-off places but the world itself. More so, however, it is interesting that Juvenal flips the common notion that far-flung places were hotspots for moral corruption so that it is rather Rome which is the epicentre of moral degradation.⁶¹ David H.J. Lamour has suggested that ‘The satirist raises the possibility that the military victories of Rome have been undermined by what goes on in the city’.⁶²

Given that this material is not written in ethnographies or geographies but rather satires, Juvenal’s mention of Ireland is perhaps more appropriately read as the exaggerated view of those brash, young men who have idealised the military endeavours of Rome to the point where their patriotic fervour has blinded them to not only the limits of Roman political supremacy but to what it means to be a Roman. It is assumed by these men that Roman forces have taken Ireland along with Orkney. However, similar to the case of Ireland, there is much debate surrounding Orkney’s contacts with Rome. Thus, Juvenal may be satirising the rose-tinted view of Roman imperialists and calling into question the values and actions of his contemporaries. That Juvenal wrote about an Ireland seemingly conquered by the Roman empire or at the very least under the influence of Rome in a satirical work automatically muddies the waters of interpretation. There is, however, at least one certainty that presents itself in Juvenal’s *Saturae*: that people in the early second-century Roman empire

⁶¹ See Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the satirist: a study* (Oxford, 1954), pp 63–4.

⁶² David H.J. Lamour, *The arena of satire: Juvenal’s search for Rome* (Norman, OK, 2016), p. 159.

were aware of Ireland's existence and that there was a developing practice of using the island as a means to reinforce the centrality of Rome as well as to celebrate – and perhaps to critique – its political reach and military successes, both real and imagined. While evidence for a Roman invasion remains inconclusive, there is more convincing material for commercial contacts between the empire and *Juverna*.

The Egyptian-born mathematician Ptolemy, whose early second century map of Ireland and descriptions of its sixteen tribes are among the most intriguing and valuable details emerging from classical Antiquity regarding Ireland, wrote that Marinus of Tyre, the geographer whose work influenced much of Ptolemy's *Geographia*, questioned the reliability of merchants who had said that 'the length of the island *Iwernia* [i.e. Ireland] is twenty days from east to west'. Although it is not made plain, the lengthy journey seems to refer to an east-to-west trip taken by foot rather than by seagoing means. If so, the twenty days' duration does not seem so excessive when one considers the terrain of ancient Ireland, which would no doubt have been difficult for Roman traders to navigate. This, coupled with rest periods and time taken to engage in business, make the twenty-day duration seem more reasonable. What is more, the distribution of archaeological finds discovered can support the existence of such an east-to-west trajectory of commercial activities happening in ancient Ireland.⁶³ Thus, Ptolemy's reference to Marinus suggests that traders were not only operating on the south-eastern seaboard but were also travelling and trading inland.

In addition to the literary evidence for a Roman incursion into Ireland, archaeological evidence has provided mixed support for contact with the island. Although the discovery of Roman material has been commonplace in Britain, such finds have been rare in Ireland. Nevertheless, the material that has been found adds to the mystery of Ireland's alleged experience of a Roman invasion. However, in the cases where material has been found, they have often consisted of single item finds. And so, while invasion may be mooted as one possible origin for Roman coins, amphorae and other materials found in Ireland, other possibilities include: trade with the Roman world via Britain or Gaul; antiquarians or other people accidentally dropping them in much later centuries; that they were brought to Ireland by early Christian missionaries; or that they were part of the spoils taken by Irish raiders from

⁶³ Ó Ríordáin, 'Roman material in Ireland', pp 35–82; Bateson, 'Roman material in Ireland: a reconsideration', pp 21–97; idem, 'Further finds of Roman material from Ireland', pp 171–80.

coastal settlements in Roman Britain.⁶⁴ There may also have been a reconnaissance mission or two to Ireland's shores to investigate the terrain and possible approaches. We know, for instance, that Caesar had sent the soldier Volusenus to gather intelligence in Britain before the Romans had begun campaigning as 'it would still be of great advantage to him [i.e. Caesar] merely to have entered the island, observed the character of the natives, and obtained some knowledge of the localities, the harbours, and the landing-places'.⁶⁵ While there is still much debate surrounding the extent of contact between Ireland and the Roman world, if the Romans did, however, invade the island it was, as R. Knox McElderry put it, 'isolated and had no perceptible consequence'.⁶⁶ Although more Roman material has been discovered since Knox McElderry wrote those words a hundred years ago, his assessment has yet to be convincingly contradicted. Indeed, an Irish Pompei remains to be found.

While Ireland was seen as a land far removed from the civilised cultural centres of Greece and Rome, Ireland's archipelagic neighbour Britain, too, was seen as an island at the edge of the world. The philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea in Boeotia (c.a. 45–120) had recalled the strange and unnatural phenomena associated with the British Isles, including a story about Briareus, a hundred-armed giant in classical mythology, who had trapped the Roman god of time, Saturn, on one of the islands.⁶⁷ Approximately four hundred years later, the Byzantine Greek historian Procopius (c. 500–c. 570 A.D.) described a land known as *Brittia* as a place that was divided by a great wall, which on the east side was a bountiful and fertile land with flourishing cornfields, seasonal fruits a-plenty and an abundance of springs; on the west side, however, was a land left to the wilds of nature's most harsh and testing conditions, including wild and ferocious creatures and a pestilential air that instantly rendered a man lifeless.⁶⁸ Scholars have debated whether Procopius's *Brittia* is a confused account of Britain as he also refers to a place called *Britannia* or whether it is independent of Britain.⁶⁹ However, given the fact that *Brittia* is referred to as an

⁶⁴ Drummond, 'On Roman coins found in Ireland', pp 185–190; R.A.G. Carson and C. O'Kelly, 'A catalogue of the Roman coins from Newgrange, Co. Meath and notes on the coins and related finds', *PRIA*, 77C (1977), pp 35–55; Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland*; Geraldine Stout and Matthew Stout, *Newgrange* (Cork, 2008), pp 92–4.

⁶⁵ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic war*, pp 204–5.

⁶⁶ Knox McElderry, 'Juvenal in Ireland?', p. 151.

⁶⁷ Richard Barber, *Myths and legends of the British Isles* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. xx.

⁶⁸ Procopius, *History of the wars, volume v: books 7.36–8. (Gothic War)*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. H.B. Dewing (LCL 217, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1928), pp 264–71. See also Barber, *Myths and legends*, p. xix.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Procopius, *History of the wars, volume v*, pp 252–3. H.B. Dewing suggested that *Brittia* was probably modern Denmark, *ibid.*, p. 253 n.1.

island containing a great wall (perhaps Hadrian's Wall), there is evidence to suggest that Procopius's *Brittia* is in fact Britain.⁷⁰ However, it is difficult to accept that *Brittia* and *Britannia* were one and the same given that the Caesarea-born Procopius was one of the foremost Roman historians of the sixth century and had even accompanied the Roman general Belisarius in Justinian I's wars. Surely, then, he had some sense of Britain's Roman past. Based on his history, however, the connections between Britain and the Roman empire, which were then based in Constantinople, are difficult to elucidate. Procopius informs us that after the early fifth century 'the Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain, but it remained from that time on under tyrants'.⁷¹ J.O. Ward notes that 'It is taken for granted nowadays that by 527 A.D. the island of Britain had become quite cut off from the Roman empire centred on a far-distant Constantinople'.⁷² Procopius cannot be expected, therefore, to have been an expert on such matters given his distance from north-western Europe and from the times of Roman Britain. But if *Britannia* and *Brittia* were the same place, Procopius constructed an image of a once thriving Roman province that had regressed into the realms of the fantastical and otherworldly.

Fantastical accounts of the archipelago aside, the reality is that for those traders in Roman Britain and Gaul who engaged first-hand with their Irish counterparts, Ireland was likely perceived as a more relatable place than contemporary works portray. Indeed, Tacitus had remarked that when comparing Ireland and Britain, the soils, climates, and the characters and ways of their inhabitants were not markedly different.⁷³ Tacitus's perception was not uncommon. Ireland and Britain had long been closely associated with one another in the minds of classical authors. So much so, in fact, that Ptolemy referred to a diminutive Ireland as 'Little Britain' (*Mikra Brettania*). He is the only classical writer to use this term, although he was merely one among many others who identified a smaller Ireland and a bigger Britain together as the Brettanic Islands.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ E.A. Thompson has convincingly argued the case for this, citing the erroneous translations of H.B. Dewing, editor of the Loeb Series edition of Procopius, as having irreparably confused Procopius's distinctions between *Brittia* and *Britannia*, 'Procopius on *Brittia* and *Britannia*', *The Classical Quarterly*, 30:2 (1980), pp 498–507.

⁷¹ Procopius, *History of the wars, volume ii: books 3–4. (Vandalic War)*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. H.B. Dewing (LCL 81, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1916), pp 20–1.

⁷² J.O. Ward, 'Procopius, « *Bellum Gothicum* » ii.6.28: the problem of contacts between Justinian I and Britain', *Byzantion*, 38:2 (1968), p. 460.

⁷³ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on orator*, pp 70–1.

⁷⁴ See Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, pp 55, 65 n.109.

Based on the classical descriptions of Ireland and its people explored thus far, clearly there was a prevailing notion that Ireland was a primitive land located at the end of the earth. Following the works of the ancients, writers in Britain and on the continent increasingly addressed Ireland in their works. By the eighth century, missionary activities had brought ecclesiastics from Ireland and Britain closer than ever before. Their interactions seemed to have been generally perceived to have been mutually beneficial, with religious from both islands realising that much was to be learned from one another. Specific examples of such collaboration and reciprocity will be discussed later but for now it is appropriate to turn to early medieval writers to gain a sense of how they wrote about Ireland's place in the world.

In the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* – a history of the Anglo-Saxon church up to the 730s that incorporated the influences of the 'four nations' of the isles, namely the Britons, English, Irish and Picts – the Venerable Bede opened his great work by describing the location of Britain, its people and its environs, as well as those of Ireland. Bede described the island as follows: 'Ireland is the largest island of all next to Britain, and lies to the west of it. But though it is shorter than Britain to the north, yet in the south it extends far beyond the limits of that island and as far as the level of North Spain, though a great expanse of sea divides them'.⁷⁵ While Bede was correct in asserting that Ireland is the largest island next to Britain, it is not the accuracy of what Bede has to say about the island that is most important here. More valuable than this is that Bede felt moved to address the situation and inhabitants of both his homeland, Britain, and Ireland *together* in the opening chapter of his history.⁷⁶ That Bede thought of Ireland as necessitating inclusion alongside Britain from the very beginning of his work suggests to us that, to his mind, Ireland held a vital role in English affairs. A.H. Merrills has suggested that this description of Ireland, which follows Bede's account of a 'spiritually, if not politically, unified Britain', implies a spiritual harmony between the two islands.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Bede, *HE*, pp 18–19.

⁷⁶ The chapter title is '*De situ Britanniae uel Hiberniae et de priscis earum incolis*', see Bede, *HE*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ A.H. Merrills, *History and geography in late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 253; Sarah McCann, 'Plures de Scottorum regione: Bede, Ireland, and the Irish', *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies*, 8 (2015), p. 29.

Agriculture, climate and civility

Closely related to the subject of where a land lies, is the lay of that land and the natural resources that it offers its inhabitants. Agricultural practices, being so central to not only economic success but also the sustenance of the day-to-day lives of ancient and medieval people, reflected the perceived primitiveness or civility – reflected by technological and methodological developments in agricultural practices, including the turn from pastoral to arable farming – of a people. Technological innovation has always been a marker for social advancement. Indeed, the development of agricultural practices is intimately tied with the initial formation of settlements, then the subsequent development of settlements into villages, villages into towns, towns into cities. Economy and infrastructure go hand in hand. This is not a recent realisation as writers across cultures and throughout history have commented on such developments. At the beginning of Berossus's *Babyloniaca*, a history of Babylon written in the third century B.C., we are told that a fish-man emerged from the Red Sea and presented humankind with the gifts of civilisation, namely: cities, writing, laws and agriculture.⁷⁸ The strange hybrid fish-man is not as important here as the 'gifts' he bestowed to humanity. Writing several centuries later in the fourth century A.D., the historian Ammianus Marcellinus described the customs of the Saracens, including their agricultural practices and means of habitation:

'No man ever grasps a plough-handle or cultivates a tree, none seeks a living by tilling the soil, but they rove continually over wide and extensive tracts without a home, without fixed abodes or laws; they cannot long endure the same sky, nor does the sun of a single district ever content them'.⁷⁹

Thus, the customs of the Saracens are presented as antithetical to Roman living: their lack of a sustainable agricultural practice – specifically arable farming – is tied to their inability to progress beyond nomadism to the security of fixed habitation.⁸⁰

Colonialists have often used agricultural practice as an indicator of an ethnic group's economic development and perceived successes or, indeed, failures as a

⁷⁸ John Dillery, 'Greek historians of the Near East: Clio's "other" sons', in John Marincola (ed.), *A companion to Greek and Roman historiography* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2007), i, p. 222.

⁷⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus. *History, volume i: books 14–19*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (LCL 300, Cambridge, MA, 1950), pp 26–7.

⁸⁰ See T.E.J. Wiedemann, 'Between men and beasts: barbarians in Ammianus Marcellinus', in I.S. Moxon et al. (eds), *Past perspectives: studies in Greek and Roman historical writing* (Cambridge, 1986), pp 189–91.

civilisation, which in turn have justified the necessity for colonisation as a means of reaping the benefits of natural resources, be they manpower and/or plant-, animal- or mining-based raw materials.⁸¹ In modern times Ireland's agricultural produce, including its cheese, butter and beef, is lauded globally for its taste and quality. Such glowing reviews are comparable to the favourable ancient and early medieval reports of Ireland's natural bounty. However, in contrast to the produce it created, Irish agricultural practice was, at times, the butt of scathing critique due to its perceived rudimentary state. As a result, the Irish character was 'often inextricably linked with the island's natural resources' during the classical and medieval periods.⁸²

Turning first to the classical sources, we glean few details related specifically to Irish agricultural practices. However, there are some notable mentions. The earliest occurs in Pomponius Mela's *De situ orbis*, wherein it states that Ireland's climate is not conducive to ripening seeds, but livestock feed, during a small part of the day, on the sweet grass that is abundant on the island and causes livestock to burst if they graze for too long.⁸³ Mela's description is noteworthy as it suggests that it is not the inhabitants' laziness or lack of agricultural knowhow that has led to pastoralism but rather the fault of the local climate. Such remarks are not insignificant. Indeed, the importance of climate and weather patterns and anomalies cannot be understated in terms of their potential effects on agricultural practices and produce in the classical and medieval periods. Writing approximately one hundred and fifty years later, Solinus referred to the abundance of grazing land for livestock, which is suggestive of the presence of pastoral farming in Ireland.⁸⁴ Moreover, if cattle are not removed from fields, they will gorge themselves to a dangerous point. Solinus was an industrious compiler and collected his information from writers such as Pliny and Pomponius Mela. In particular, their influence on the description of Ireland is clear to see, although by the time of writing there were new and more detailed elements added, particularly relating to Ireland's fauna.⁸⁵ Solinus's mention of the presence of few birds and the lack of snakes in Ireland would have been particularly eye-catching for his audience who were no doubt aware of the pros and cons of such creatures' presence, especially those related to agrarian and pastoral

⁸¹ Cf. Gerald's assertion that there were many untapped sources of rich minerals in Ireland. While the Irish were very desirous of gold, they were too lazy to extract the minerals from the land and instead sourced it from overseas, Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 152.

⁸² O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 8.

⁸³ Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*, pp 116–17.

⁸⁴ Solinus, *Collectanea*, p. 100, trans. by Haywood, 'Is Ireland worth bothering about?', p. 470.

⁸⁵ Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, p. 86.

farming in the Mediterranean Basin. For instance, snakes' diets of rats, mice and insects such as slugs were effective means of ridding farms of pests and diseases. The absence of bees in Ireland, as mentioned by Solinus, would have been a notable disadvantage of the climate and landscape of Ireland as honey-making was a highly commodified and organised agricultural practice in ancient times.⁸⁶ More than that, honey was a symbolic foodstuff in the Greco-Roman world.⁸⁷ Although, there may have been no snakes in Ireland at the time, there were certainly birds and bees in Ireland.⁸⁸

In his famous social and political study *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire*, Edward Gibbon relayed the general characteristics of 'pastoral nations' including the Huns and the Germanic tribes.⁸⁹ Here, 'pastoral' was, in effect, synonymous with 'barbarian'. Gibbon described the simple agricultural practises of the Germans and the fact that they had no want or indeed sensibility for the creation of cities, preferring instead 'rude fortifications, constructed in the centre of woods', their scanty garments made of animal skin and fur, and their lack of industriousness and, instead, their utilitarian reliance on 'monstrous herds of cattle'.⁹⁰ For all this detail, Gibbon relied on Tacitus and Caesar to paint a picture of a primitive and barbarian German tribal society far removed from the civility and socio-economic

⁸⁶ See Laurence B. Totelin, 'Tastes in ancient botany, medicine and science: bitter herbs and sweet honey', in Kelli C. Rudolph (ed.), *Taste and the ancient senses* (Abingdon, 2018), pp 60–71.

⁸⁷ See Sarah Hitch, 'Tastes of Greek poetry: from Homer to Aristophanes', in Kelli C. Rudolph (ed.), *Taste and the ancient senses* (Abingdon, 2018), pp 30, 35–40. Honey was also important in ritual practice, see Marco Zecchi, 'On the offering of honey in the Graeco-Roman temples', *Aegyptus*, 77:1/2 (1997), pp 71–83.

⁸⁸ Like in the Graeco-Roman world, beekeeping was an important industry that was highly organised and legislated with the early Irish law tract *Bechbretha* ('bee judgements') dedicated to the legalities of bees and beekeeping, see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (Harlow, 1995), pp 106–7. Gerald of Wales corrected Solinus in stating the absence of bees. However, Gerald acknowledges that bees may have first arrived in Ireland after Solinus's time, noting that some people said that St Dominic of Ossory brought bees into Ireland, see Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 28–9.

⁸⁹ Gibbon's focus on the pastoral farming of the barbarian tribes of Germany reflects the intellectual milieu of the eighteenth century notable for contemporaries such as philosopher-historian Adam Ferguson and philosopher-economist Adam Smith who had, alongside their fellow eighteenth-century social theorists, examined the political, economic and social systems that had existed in Europe throughout history, including feudalism and mercantilism. See, for instance, Adam Ferguson, *Essay on the history of civil society* (Edinburgh, 1767); Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (London, 1776).

⁹⁰ Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire* (12 vols, London, 1807) i, pp 303–4. It is worth noting here that early medieval Ireland had a cattle-based economy, which may have contributed, in part, to how foreigners would perceive the Irish based on Roman perceptions of barbarian peoples and their economic dependence on cattle, see Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, p. 86, 90–3; Aidan O'Sullivan et al., *Early medieval Ireland A.D. 400–1100, the evidence from archaeological excavations* (Dublin, 2021 [reprint]), pp 209–11; Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming: a study based mainly on the law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries A.D.* (Dublin, 1997 [reprinted 2000]), p. 57; de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 76–9; Michael Duignan, 'Irish agriculture in early historic times', *JRSAL*, 74 (1944), pp 124–45.

progress of Rome.⁹¹ For our purposes here, the similarities between Gibbon's description and those of foreign writers on Ireland are easily recognisable.

Like the classical descriptions of Ireland's natural landscape and resources, medieval accounts often depicted Ireland as a land of abundance. This idealised notion of Ireland has manifested itself in various forms throughout the literatures and histories of many cultures throughout the centuries. Interestingly, however, St Patrick, who along with Bede was one of the least scathing and generally favourable writers on Ireland in the pre-invasion period, described a fairly bleak Irish landscape recalling how he dwelled in woods and on mountains, rising before dawn to pray in snow, ice and rain.⁹² Given that Patrick spent many years as a slave in Ireland, he must have experienced more clement weather while he was there. Thus, rather than being a true account of Irish climate, it is perhaps more likely that such weather extremes served as useful environmental challenges against which Patrick could illustrate his firm sense of faith and perseverance. Indeed, as Patrick tells us himself, he overcame these tribulations thanks to the spirit that was burning inside him.⁹³ Patrick's decision to describe the harshest forms of weather in Ireland may also reflect the stereotype of Ireland being an inhospitably cold place located at the northern extremes of the known world as described by Strabo centuries earlier.

It is worth noting that the view of Ireland being located at the edge of the known world seems to be one that was held not only by those who were writing from outside Ireland with little to no experience or indeed knowledge of the place and its people but also by those born and bred there. For instance, the famed sixth-century Irish missionary Columbanus wrote, 'For all we Irish, *inhabitants of the world's edge* [my emphasis], are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul ... and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching'.⁹⁴

Having treated of Ireland's location and size in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede, in contrast to Patrick, described the natural bounty of Ireland and its prospective produce, stating that:

⁹¹ Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory*, pp 136–7, 152–5, 156–7, 168–71; Caesar, *The Gallic war*, pp 344–7.

⁹² Patrick, *Clavis Patricii ii: libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi. Introduction, text and commentary*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1993), p. 65.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ *St Columbanus, selected writings*, compiled by Alexander O'Hara (Dublin, 2015), p. 30.

‘Ireland is broader than Britain, is healthier and has a much milder climate, so that snow rarely lasts there for more than three days. Hay is never cut in summer for winter use nor are stables built for their beasts. No reptile is found there nor could a serpent survive; ... The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish, and birds. It is also noted for the hunting of stags and roedeer’.⁹⁵

Through biblical allusion, Bede presents Ireland as a plentiful place with fauna rife for hunting and abundant fruits. Indeed, Bede’s image of Ireland is an idyllic one.⁹⁶ While this view presents itself as being quite innocuous and moderate, it does present an image of a land wherein any potential invader would find much sustenance and economic opportunity.⁹⁷ In terms of agricultural practices, Bede mentions the lack of hay cutting in summer for winter usage and stables for animals. Bede’s description may be interpreted in a couple of ways: that Ireland’s mild climate meant that such practices were unnecessary or that Irish society used primitive agricultural methods. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín interpreted Bede’s comment about the lack of winter preparations and shelter for animals as the result of Ireland’s mild climate rather than exhibiting the rudimentary agricultural know-how of the Irish.⁹⁸ Moreover, the absence of stables for beasts presents Ireland as nothing short of a natural idyll, wherein humans and animals coexist peacefully without issue.⁹⁹ It is difficult to know for certain what Bede was suggesting when referring to these specific examples. However, given his generally positive outlook on Ireland in the opening chapter of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, one might suggest it was intended to be read in a positive light. Diarmuid Scully has interpreted Bede’s idyllic description as representing not only the fruitfulness of the island’s natural resources but also the fruitfulness of its spirituality.¹⁰⁰ Unlike the classical writers who portray Ireland as a place chockful of

⁹⁵ Bede, *HE*, pp 18–21. Curiously, the descriptions of Wales (‘a land of woods and pasture ... rich in deer, fish, milk and herds’) and Scotland (‘a region of ... fertile woods, abundant with milk and herds’) in the *Gesta Stephani* are quite similar to Bede’s description of Ireland, cf. *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K.R. Potter, new edn with intro and notes by R.H.C Davis (Oxford, 1976), pp 14, 54.

⁹⁶ Although certainly enhanced by biblical allusion, Bede’s description of Ireland may not have been overly exaggerated, see de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 16–18. Although Bede writes favourably of Ireland’s natural products, they pale in comparison with his description of Britain’s fruits of land and sea, see Bede, *HE*, pp 14–15.

⁹⁷ Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 152.

⁹⁸ Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, p. 85.

⁹⁹ The representation of Ireland as a land of milk and honey was encapsulated in the frontispiece to Sir James Ware’s *Equitis aurati de Hibernia & antiquitatibus ejus, disquisitiones* (London, 1654), which depicts the goddess Hibernia holding a spear in one hand with reigns attached to two hounds in the other while an abundance of fauna – including deer and honeybees –, trees and streams surround her.

¹⁰⁰ Diarmuid Scully, ‘Introduction’, in *Bede: on Tobit and on the canticle of Habakkuk*, ed. and trans. Seán Connolly (Dublin, 1997), pp 17–37.

savages at the edge of the known world, Bede's Ireland, in contrast, is a land of plenty and clearly idealised by the Northumbrian monk.

Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1088–c. 1157), the historian and archdeacon, copied Bede's description of Ireland, almost verbatim, into his *Historia Anglorum*, although he added some original details to his description. At the beginning of his description, Huntingdon writes that Ireland is, after Britain, the best of all the islands, and although it is inferior to Britain in terms of wealth, it is wider geographically and is healthier, with a much milder climate.¹⁰¹ Huntingdon was not in the business of undermining Britain for the benefit of Ireland, that much is clear. Indeed, he explicitly states as much: 'because of Britain's pre-eminent wealth, it excites the spite and jealousy of all its neighbours. Therefore it has been frequently conquered, and even more frequently attacked.'¹⁰² Although one might infer from what we are told about the frequency of conquests and attacks that these involved multiple belligerents, Huntingdon presents only one specific example: the Irish attack on settlements in the Pictish area of northern Britain.¹⁰³ There is no doubting that the Irish were one of the spiteful and jealous neighbours mentioned by Huntingdon.

Henry of Huntingdon's coeval, the historian and Benedictine monk William of Malmesbury addressed the supposed primitive practices of the Irish, both in their industry and habitation. Malmesbury tells us that when Muirchertach Ua Briain, the high king of Ireland, angered King Henry I, the English responded in kind by cutting off communications by sea and placing a trade embargo on Ireland.¹⁰⁴ The high king quickly reconciled with the king of England because, in Malmesbury's words, 'For what would Ireland be worth if goods were not brought to her from England?'¹⁰⁵ Malmesbury then answers his own rhetorical question by describing Ireland as an impoverished place with poor soil, mostly caused by the apparent lack of knowledge in cultivating the land, thus producing 'wild and squalid' Irish (*agrestem et squalidam*) outside the cities while the more cultured English and French races

¹⁰¹ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, pp 28–9.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Some of this derives from Bede; however, it is Huntingdon, not Bede, who ties the reasons for the Irish attack on the Picts to their jealousy of British resources.

¹⁰⁴ While Malmesbury never tells us why Muirchertach took a high line against the English, Benjamin Hudson has suggested that it may be tied to the high king's support of his son-in-law Arnulf de Montgomery's failed rebellion in 1102, see Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea studies, 900–1200* (Dublin, 2006), p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 738–9.

dwelled within cities carrying out trade and commerce.¹⁰⁶ Curiously, Malmesbury seems to be making some sort of distinction about the Irish living outside the *urbes* in Ireland rather than painting every person in Ireland as primitive in their living. If this is indeed Malmesbury's intention, then it suggests to us that his view of the Irish is more nuanced than generally thought.

Malmesbury's account of the Irish is an interesting one as it does not regard Irish religiosity as the primary marker for civility; rather, forms of settlement and economic considerations, such as industry and commerce, are the platforms upon which the distinction between the barbarian and the civilised is made. Seemingly, it mattered little to Malmesbury whether the Irish were fellow Christians or not. John Gillingham has examined Malmesbury's language, arguing that imperialist ideals find themselves close to the surface and reflect a 'new' sense of Englishness which emerged post-1066, one that saw the English as inherently superior to the Irish, Welsh and Scots.¹⁰⁷ With reference to examples of Slavs, Scandinavians and Hungarians being described as barbarians because of their perceived lack of industry and rudimentary settlements, Robert Bartlett has argued that these descriptions of Ireland were representative of an increasing awareness that 'the heart of western Europe was more developed economically than its peripheral regions'.¹⁰⁸

The people(s) of Ireland

As seen in the above examples drawn from classical writers, Ireland was known by many names: *Ierne*, *Hibernia*, *Iuerna*, *Iwernia*, and perhaps even *insula sacra*. But what did ancient writers know about the island's inhabitants? Unfortunately, few classical writers actually provide names for the inhabitants. Strabo writes that Ireland is 'the home of men who are savages'.¹⁰⁹ There are, however, some ancient writers who provided intriguing terms to describe the Irish. Rufius Festus Avienus is unique

¹⁰⁶ 'Ita pro penuria, immo pro inscientia cultorum ieiunum omnium bonorum solum agrestem et squalidam multitudinem Hibernensium extra urbes producit; Angli uero et Franci cultiori genere uitae urbes nundinarum commertio inhabitant', William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 738–41. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 149–53. Aileen O'Leary writes about the moniker 'the wild Irish' stating that this 'wildness' was 'eventually expanded into "pan-Celtic" prejudice', 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 46. Strangely, O'Leary notes that such an attitude 'began with Gerald ... and was continued by William of Malmesbury', p. 46 n.296. Malmesbury was, of course, deceased a few years by the time Gerald was born in c. 1146.

¹⁰⁷ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 3–18, 93–109.

¹⁰⁸ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹ Strabo, *Geography*, volume i, pp 442–3.

in mentioning the *Hierni*, although it may be an alternative form of *Iouernoi* (*Iverni*). The most interesting and important evidence for classical knowledge of Ireland's placenames and tribes occurs in Ptolemy's *Geographia*.¹¹⁰ Ptolemy, an Egyptian-born mathematician of the second century A.D, names a number of settlements and river mouths across Ireland, the coordinates of which are included, thus providing what R. Darcy and William Flynn have described as a 'virtual map' of Ireland.¹¹¹ As a source for ancient Ireland, Ptolemy is unique in that he provides the names of sixteen tribes inhabiting Ireland. In his article 'Ireland according to Ptolemy and the other non-Irish authorities', Eoin MacNeill noted the place name used by Ptolemy to refer to Ireland: 'Ireland is called by Ptolemy *Iouernia* (*Ivernia*), from the nation of the *Iouernoi* (*Iverni*), who he [Ptolemy] places in the middle southern region'.¹¹² Utilising Ptolemy's account of the peoples of Ireland, MacNeill asserted the existence of an Irish (*Iverni*) nation in ancient times, which in turn led to their associated land being named after them, thus confirming the longevity of an indigenous people in Ireland. MacNeill and others have convincingly argued that Ptolemy's *Iverni* are the *Érainn* (and later *Érna* and *Érnai*) recorded in the early Irish sources and whose name likely inspired, etymologically speaking, the name of the island, *Ériu*.¹¹³ Ptolemy names other tribes in Ireland, such as the *Magnatae*, *Erdini* and *Vennicnii* in the north-west of the island and the *Velabri* in the south-west.¹¹⁴

In terms of nomenclature, specifically the ethnonyms and demonyms used to describe the inhabitants of Ireland, one is met with a scattered body of sources emanating from the classical and medieval worlds that contain numerous variations and inconsistent usage of ethnonyms, demonyms and place names. In Antiquity, writers were fairly inconsistent in naming Ireland's inhabitants, which is understandable given that contemporary knowledge of the northernmost regions and

¹¹⁰ J.J. Tierney has produced a useful survey of the sources that Ptolemy may have consulted, see J.J. Tierney, 'The Greek geographic tradition and Ptolemy's evidence for Irish geography', *PRIA*, 76C (1976), pp 257–65.

¹¹¹ R. Darcy and William Flynn, 'Ptolemy's map of Ireland: a modern decoding', *Irish Geography*, 41:1 (2008), pp 49–69.

¹¹² MacNeill, 'Ireland according to Ptolemy', p. 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 8–9. See also T.F. O'Rahilly, 'On the origin of the names *Érainn* and *Ériu*', *Ériu*, 14 (1946), p. 7.

¹¹⁴ In his *Otia imperialia* Gervase of Tilbury mentions the *Velabri* and *Lucceni* who were settled in the Shannon estuary, see Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia; recreation for an emperor*, ed. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford, 2002), pp 308–9. Tilbury's knowledge of these tribes was derived from Orosius who had mentioned both the *Lucceni* and *Velabri* while Ptolemy only mentioned the *Velabri*. For Orosius's mention of these tribes, see Goddard Henry Orpen, 'Ptolemy's map of Ireland', *JRSAL*, 24 (1894), p. 119.

peoples of the world was, in general, pretty basic and often stereotypical.¹¹⁵ However, by the early medieval period we see virtually no mention of multiple tribes inhabiting Ireland and instead the prevalence of a single term to refer to the population of Ireland, whether they are living in Ireland or abroad. In the *Nomina provinciarum omnium* (c. 312 A.D.) the divisions and provinces of Roman Britain are listed. More interesting for our purposes here is the work's appended list of forty tribes who were considered threats to the Roman empire, including the Picts, Caledonians, Saxons, Vandals and, interestingly, the *Scoti*, who were first on the list!¹¹⁶ The earliest extant record we have of an association between the Picts and the Irish is to be found in the *Panegyric on Constantius Caesar*; however, it is the '*Hiberni*' not the *Scoti* that are mentioned.¹¹⁷ The association of the Picts with the Irish is one that is repeated regularly throughout the late antique and medieval periods in works such as Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* who treat of the respective origins of the Picts and the Irish together. The first writer to state that Ireland was the homeland of the *Scoti* was Orosius. Isidore of Seville also made this point.¹¹⁸ Going forward, the dominant terms used to describe the Irish would be *Scoti* and *Hiberni*.¹¹⁹ The names used to refer to the inhabitants of Ireland were usually derived from the name given for the island itself. However, this was not always the case. For instance, Bede used the term '*Scotti*' to mean the Irish, whether in Scotland or Ireland, while he used '*Scottia*' and '*Hibernia*' interchangeably and indiscriminately to refer to the island of Ireland. Bede tells us that Ireland is properly the land of the Irish ('*Haec autem proprie patria Scottorum est*').¹²⁰ In comparison, the twelfth-century monk Orderic Vitalis had similarly referred to the Irish as '*Scotti*' or '*Hibernensis*' but, interestingly, referred

¹¹⁵ D.B. Saddington, 'Roman attitudes to the *exterae gentes* of the north', *Acta Classica*, 4 (1961), pp 90–102.

¹¹⁶ *Nomina provinciarum omnium*, in *Geographi Latini minores*, ed. Alexander Riese (Heilbronn, 1878), p. 128. The appended list is entitled '*Gentes barbarae quae pullulaverunt sub imperatoribus*'. MacNeill notes that 'The old Irish form, Scuit, with short vowel, shows that the Latin name was Scotti, Scōti. It seems to be a Latinised form of an Irish word meaning "raiders"', MacNeill, 'Ireland according to Ptolemy', pp 14–15. In the classical and medieval sources, however, the variants *Scoti* and *Scotti* both appear.

¹¹⁷ *Panegyric on Constantius Caesar*, in *XII Panegyrici Latini*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1964), p. 222. See also Freeman, *Ireland and the classical world*, pp 92–3. For Claudian's mentions of Ireland and the Picts, see *ibid.*, pp 103–4.

¹¹⁸ Isidore of Seville, *The etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, with the collaboration of Muriel Hall (Cambridge, 2006), pp 198, 294.

¹¹⁹ *Scoti* is used as the preferred spelling here, except in quoted matter from primary texts where the alternative spelling *Scotti* appears. Such instances are placed within inverted commas.

¹²⁰ Bede, *HE*, pp 16 n.1, 17, 40–49, 426–429.

to the king of Ireland as ‘*rex Irensis*’ and, while sometimes using ‘*Hibernia*’, had also written of ‘*Irlanda*’.¹²¹

While there are plenty of references to Ireland and its inhabitants as a collective group in the early medieval period, it was rare for authors to write about individual Irish people. Indeed for the most part the Irish in Ireland, as a collective group, were the focus and bore the brunt of critique from classical and medieval writers. However, there is evidence that those Irish exiles who left for the continent in the early medieval period – the *peregrini* – were open, at times, to harsh judgement from their peers.¹²² Irish scholars, alongside their Anglo-Saxon, Visigothic and Italian counterparts, played an important role in the Carolingian renaissance, assisting in the revival of classical learning and educating those enrolled at the palace school in Latin grammar, astronomy, calendar reckoning, and geography.¹²³ In particular, Dícuil, a scholar of Irish descent, wrote several important books on grammar and computus; his cosmographical treatise *Liber de mensura orbis terrae* being the best known among them. The *Liber* recounts the voyages of Irish monks to the northernmost parts of Britain as well as some other accounts of remote islands in the north Atlantic. Pliny and Solinus had written about some of the most inhospitable places in existence. Yet Dícuil was quick to bring the ancients into dispute due to his own experiences of voyaging to the northern islands of Britain, stating confidently: ‘I have never found these islands mentioned in the authorities’.¹²⁴ However, it seems that despite their scholastic contributions to the continental courts, Irish scholars were open to harassment emerging from what one might define, in modern terms, as xenophobia. While extolling Charlemagne’s victory over the

¹²¹ An example of this variation, ‘*Nunc mea mens causam et euentus belli enodare satagit, quod Magnus rex in Hibernos arripuit, et multa multis detrimenta et strages intulit. Hic filiam regis Irlandæ uxorem duxerat, sed quia rex Irensis pactiones quas fecerant non tenuerat, Magnus rex stomachatus filiam eius ei remisera*’, Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, v, pp 220–3.

¹²² In the seventh century, the acts of exile and isolation associated with religious figures, including those from Ireland, became not only a badge of honour for ecclesiastics seeking to be closer to God but functioned as key characteristics of individual and collective (including national) identities, see Alexander O’Hara, ‘*Patria, peregrination, and paenitentia: identities of alienation in the seventh century*’, in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), *Post-Roman transitions: Christian and barbarian identities in the early medieval west* (Turnhout, 2013), pp 89–124.

¹²³ Before the Carolingian dynasty was established, ‘the influx of intellectual *peregrini* from Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England’ played a leading role in making monastic sites important cultural centres in the early medieval west, see Yitzhak Hen, *Roman barbarians: the royal court and culture in the early medieval west* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp 179–80.

¹²⁴ *Dicuili Liber de mensura orbis terrae*, VII. 15, ed. J.J. Tierney with contributions from Ludwig Bieler (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 6, Dublin, 1967).

Avars, the Visigothic bishop of Orléans, Theodulf, described the court circle at large, including the Irish scholar-exile Cadac-Andreas who is referred to as a ‘Scot’:

Before the Goth and Scot make peaceful pact;
 For if he wishes peace ‘twill be undone.
 If he be whipped or vanish like the wind,
 Or turn himself to stone, ‘tis still a Scot.
 If you subtract from him the letter three,
 Which happens to be second in his name;
 In ‘sky’ the first, and the second in ‘climb’,
 Third in ‘ascent’, in ‘amicable’ fourth,
 He always mouths it, using you instead,
 Our Saviour’s letter, for your Scot’s a sot.¹²⁵

The origins of Theodulf’s grievances with the Irish exile are unclear. However, it is apparent that Cadac-Andreas, and the Irish in turn, are homogenised through Theodulf’s use of the ethnonym ‘Scot’ throughout, which implies, with no degree of subtlety, that Cadac’s faults in character are intrinsically tied to his perceived Irish identity. Moreover, Theodulf, in a manner precursory to several of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers addressed in the following chapters, showcases the belief that you can take the man out of Ireland but you cannot take Ireland out of the man: ‘If he be whipped or vanish like the wind, or turn himself to stone, ‘tis still a Scot’.¹²⁶ However, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín has reminded us that such anti-Irish views, while existent, were discordant and were the exception, not the rule.¹²⁷ Indeed, Irish scholars such as Dúngal of St Denis, Donatus of Fiesole and Clemens ‘Scottus’ acquired considerable reputations as a result of their intellectual endeavours; their ethnic and/or national affinities did not hinder their reputations or legacies.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Translation from Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, p. 221.

¹²⁶ Keith Sidwell, ‘Theodulf of Orléans, Cadac-Andreas and Old Irish phonology: a conundrum’, *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 2 (1992), pp 55–62.

¹²⁷ Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, p. 222.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Anthony Harvey's recent linguistic analysis of Theodulf's work suggests an alternative reading. Based on Theodulf's critique of the pronunciation of the hard 'k' sound for the letter 'c', which was the practice in Ireland, Harvey posits the creative interpretation that Cadac-Andreas was trying to integrate into continental life by imitating the locals.¹²⁹ Thus, he pronounced all instances of the Latin 'c' with an s-type sound; hence, *scientia* was pronounced *sientia*, for example, and *Scottus* became *Sottus*. Harvey's rather spectacular conclusion is that Cadac-Andreas was recognised as having come from a highly regarded culture that had done much to enrich intellectual life on the continent but rather than flaunt it, he turned his back on his origins and culture, trying to 'impress the authorities in his new adopted country by attempting to assume their mode of speech. Failing spectacularly, he impressed them only with his insincerity'.¹³⁰ Therefore, rather than being a personal attack on Cadac-Andreas for simply being Irish, Theodulf was mocking the overcompensating Irishman for his efforts.

The inhabitants of Ireland: saints or savages?

During the medieval period, digression from the perceived norms and standards of one's ingroup(s) could provide sufficient ammunition to render another social group as uncivilised, barbaric and inhuman. This was indeed true of the complex and composite identities which existed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, where, over the space of eight hundred years, Romans, then Anglo-Saxons, then Danes, then Normans, ruled. One of the most common forms of measuring otherness was that of physical and mental characteristics, which were often tied to a variety of classical and medieval theories including astrological theory, humoral theory and physiognomical theory, all of which related to the relationship between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the human body.¹³¹ Otherness can exist in many forms depending on the contexts. Under the conditions of colonisation and warfare, the supposed subhuman status of the other is often acknowledged as it helps to psychologically justify acts of dehumanisation and subjugation. In the

¹²⁹ Anthony Harvey, *How linguistics can help the historian* (Dublin, 2021), p. 20. See also idem, "'Battling Andrew": and the west-Brit syndrome twelve hundred years ago', *Classics Ireland*, 9 (2002), pp 19–27.

¹³⁰ Harvey, *How linguistics can help the historian*, p. 20.

¹³¹ See David C. Lindberg and Michael H. Shank (eds), *The Cambridge history of science: volume 2, medieval science* (Cambridge, 2013).

classical and medieval worlds, monstrous characteristics and animalistic tendencies were indicative of a people's state of barbarity and inhumanity, and were frequently used when describing foreigners. When one takes the time to examine the various manifestations of monstrous, animalistic or freakish others in the classical and medieval world they become clichéd to a certain extent. When they are encountered, their construction can appear to be deductive and hackneyed. However, despite this, Esterino Adami, Francesca Bellino and Alessandro Mengozzi assert that outlandish creatures, characters and places 'work as means for exploring a variety of discourses by speculating on other wor(l)ds [sic], and to achieve such a goal they often rely on intertextuality and hybridity, two key paradigms that reverberate through various genres'.¹³² The intertextual element is an interesting one. Indeed, when one scours through the classical sources that mention Ireland, the number of similarities in their details and descriptions is striking, indicative of the reliance of writers on antecedent works.

Some of the most damning classical depictions of the Irish may be found in the work of Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Solinus and Prudentius. According to Mela, the inhabitants of *Iuverna* are undisciplined and ignorant of virtue, more so than any other nation, and very much inexperienced in piety.¹³³ Interestingly, F.E. Romer notes that a scribe who later revised the text added the gloss, 'at least they [i.e. the inhabitants of Ireland] know virtue to some degree'.¹³⁴ In his *Geography*, Strabo writes:

'Concerning this island I have nothing certain to tell, except that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, since they are man-eaters as well as heavy eaters, and since, further, they count it an honourable thing, when their fathers die, to devour them, and openly to have intercourse, not only with the other women, but also with their mothers and sisters; but I am saying this only with the understanding that I have no trustworthy witness for it'.¹³⁵

¹³² Adami, Esterino Francesca Bellino and Alessandro Mengozzi, *Other worlds and the narrative construction of otherness* (Milan, 2017), p. 9.

¹³³ Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*, pp 116–17.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 117 n.32. Unfortunately, Romer provides no details of this manuscript, so it is unclear who revised the text or, indeed, when or where it was revised.

¹³⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, volume i, pp 258–61. What exactly is meant by 'heavy eaters' is unclear; however, some editors have translated this as 'herb-eaters', see *ibid.*, p. 259 n.6.

While it seems odd that Strabo would engage in such character assassination before admitting that it was mere hearsay, this fits the classical genre known as ‘paradoxography’: tales of wonders and unexpected or strange phenomena occurring in the world, especially those relating to unknown parts of the world, that were recounted without the possibility for verification.¹³⁶ Klaus Geus and Colin Guthrie King note that paradoxographical descriptions never rely on eyewitness accounts and instead are mined from historiography, poetry and natural science for ‘accounts concerning “wonders” (*thaumata*), “singular” things (*idia*), and those that occur against expectation (*paradoxa*)’.¹³⁷ At the core of paradoxography is a shock value for audiences, especially given that the information was effectively unverifiable for contemporaries. Audiences, thus, were left in limbo: Were descriptions true or false? No one knew. Not even the writers themselves. Although not all of the material related to Ireland in Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hibernica* was drawn from pre-existing sources, given his penchant for classical intellectual culture there is certainly a case to be made for suggesting that his tales of strange and wondrous phenomena in Ireland were partly inspired by classical paradoxography.¹³⁸ Moreover, the volume and variability of Gerald’s accounts of oddities in Ireland may reasonably be described as a ‘wondrous or sensationalist and consumer-oriented type of writing’, the very words used by Alexander Giannini to define ancient paradoxographical texts.¹³⁹ Although the ancients were aware of the remote regions of the known world, most accepted that they knew little about them that was certain. It was, however, this sense of uncertainty that engaged the imaginations of contemporary audiences.

In his description of the inhabitants of Ireland, it is noteworthy that Strabo immediately follows his admonitory assessment of the natives by judiciously acknowledging:

¹³⁶ Emma Dench, ‘Ethnography and history’, p. 497.

¹³⁷ Geus and Guthrie King, ‘Paradoxography’, pp 431, 442.

¹³⁸ For classical quotations identified in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 359–60. However, this list does not include the many allusions littered throughout the work. There are a great many classical quotes, references and allusions in the *Topographia*, see, for instance, Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 5, 28, 90, 98, 122, 166, 197 (Virgil); pp 4, 66, 109, 136, 143, 154, 157, 193, 196 (Ovid); pp 5, 8, 29, 53, 76, 192, 197, 200, 208 (Horace). It has been argued that Gerald of Wales likely relied on *florilegia* for access to classical sources rather than reading them in their originals, see A.A. Goddu and R.H. Rouse, ‘Gerald of Wales and the *Florilegium Angelicum*’, *Speculum*, 52:3 (1977), pp 488–521.

¹³⁹ Alexander Giannini, ‘Studi sulla paradossografia Greca i: da Omero a Callimaco: motivi e forme del meraviglioso’, *Rendiconti*, 97 (1963), p. 248 n.3.

‘But I am saying this only with the understanding that I have no trustworthy witnesses for it; and yet, as for the matter of man-eating, that is said to be a custom of the Scythians also, and, in cases of necessity forced by sieges, the Celti, the Iberians and several other peoples are said to have practised it’.¹⁴⁰

Although Strabo acknowledges the limits of some elements of his account, he follows up this admission with evidence supporting the accusation of cannibalism. We are left with the sense of not knowing what to believe and in some ways, this may have been the intention. It is left to his readers to decide what they believe to be true with regard to Ireland. In comparably bestial terms, the fourth-century poet Prudentius referred to the Irish (*Scotti*) as half-bestial and worse than a dog in their wars, although they were counted among those with ‘man’s nature’ and therefore accepted the ‘might of the supreme governor’, that being God.¹⁴¹ Referring to an individual person or a group of people as half-bestial or hybrid was commonly used in the literary process of characterisation and myth-making in the ancient world, whether it was the human-animal hybrid deities of Egypt (e.g. Horus, the god of the sky, depicted as falcon-headed man; or Anubis, the god of the Underworld, depicted as a canine-headed man) or the Minotaur of Greek mythology who was *semibovemque virum, semivirumque bovem*.¹⁴²

The relationship between monsters or grotesque, mutilated beings and barbarianism is based upon the classical Greek roster of barbarian traits, which included: strange diets; unusual customs; alternative social and/or political structure; paganism; and sexual excess, to name but a few. The Irish have been accused of committing all of these offences if we consider foreign perceptions and depictions from classical Antiquity to the present day. However, the Irish are not unique in terms of their being portrayed as Other. Debra Higgs Strickland has noted that these traits were commonly applied to Celts, Slavs and Scandinavians, as well as Ethiopians, Jews, Muslims, and Mongols.¹⁴³ While these classical writers recounted

¹⁴⁰ Strabo, *Geography*, volume i, pp 258–61.

¹⁴¹ Prudentius, *Preface. Daily round. Divinity of Christ. Origin of sin. Fight for Mansoul. Against Symmachus 1*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. H.J. Thomson (LCL 387, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1949), pp 136–7.

¹⁴² Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, II.24, cited in J.S. Rusten, ‘Ovid, Empedocles and the Minotaur’, *The American Journal of Philology*, 103:3 (1982), p. 332. The bovine-human hybrid is of particular interest given Gerald of Wales’s inclusion of two such creatures in his *Topographia Hibernica*, which will be explored in some detail in the next chapter.

¹⁴³ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons & Jews: making monsters in medieval art* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), p. 42.

unsettling narratives of a barbaric and depraved Irish population, some early medieval writers recalled a people who were far more innocuous. Not only that, the Irish were no longer pagans but Christians.

Ireland's patron saint, Patrick, provides us with evidence of the contemporary Romano-British view of Ireland. Although born and raised on the west coast of Britain, his *Epistola ad milites Corotici* tells us that he left his parents and homeland behind in order to teach the Irish the ways of Christianity and suggests that Patrick cast off the trappings of his Romano-British identity in favour of aligning with the Irish. Patrick uses the self-referential pronoun 'we' and 'us' in announcing his anger to Coroticus and his soldiers, who had captured some of Patrick's Irish converts, killing some and enslaving others. In effect, Patrick acted as spokesperson for the ostracised Irish:

‘The evil of evil people has prevailed over us.’¹⁴⁴ We [italics my emphasis here and elsewhere] have been made as if we were *complete outsiders*. Can it be they do not believe that we have received one and the same Baptism, or that we have one and the same God as father.¹⁴⁵ For them, it is a disgrace that we are from Ireland. Remember what Scripture says: ‘Do you not have the one God? Then why have you each abandoned your neighbour?’¹⁴⁶

It is difficult to discern whether or not Patrick himself identified as Irish at this point in his life, especially given his words ‘*Indignum est illis Hiberionaci sumus*’. It seems far more likely, however, that his usage of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ is in relation to the shared identity of Patrick and the Irish as Christians.¹⁴⁷ In his provocative biography *St Patrick retold*, Roy Flechner described Patrick as an ‘important bridge connecting the late antique culture of the empire, with its sophisticated political, social, and intellectual attributes, to the more rural- and kin-based society of Ireland’ and that the island was ‘sometimes described as “barbarous” by contemporaries writing with a Roman bias, and even Patrick

¹⁴⁴ ‘The words of the wicked have prevailed over us’, Psalms 64:4.

¹⁴⁵ ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all’, Eph. 4:5–6.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick, *Clavis Patricii ii*, p. 99. English translation from Padraig McCarthy https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/epistola_english#02 accessed 30 September 2021.

¹⁴⁷ How the inhabitants of Ireland perceived Patrick as a foreigner is an interesting subject but too much of a digression for inclusion in this thesis. However, Roy Flechner provides a useful overview of native attitudes towards the Briton missionary, see *Saint Patrick retold*, pp 83–93.

himself'.¹⁴⁸ If we turn to the epistle's opening remarks Patrick tells us that he lived as a stranger amongst a barbarian peoples (*Inter barbaras itaque gentes habito proselitus*).¹⁴⁹ However, later in the letter Patrick declares 'I am so bound by the Spirit that I no longer see my own kindred'.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the barbarian is rendered Christian. Patrick's message is clear: that ethnic, national and familial allegiances are unfit means by which to judge a person.

If we consider the comparisons to be made between Patrick's self-identification with the Irish and St Paul's similar act of identifying himself with would-be Christians in his letter to the Corinthians, it suggests to us that Patrick was a man conscious of his mission and forthright in defending his ministry in Ireland.¹⁵¹ Thus, he portrayed himself as an exemplary missionary who could relate to a barbarian people in order to spread the faith, thus offering himself as an inspiration for other missionaries in the same way that Paul had been for Patrick. What is most interesting, perhaps, for the purposes of studying contemporary perceptions of Ireland, is that it seems despite their conversion to Christianity, that the Irish were still perceived to be 'complete outsiders'. Their membership of a common faith did not change how Roman Christians perceived the Irish overseas, it seems; thus, the notion that the concept of the barbarian applied exclusively to pagans in the early medieval period is challenged. What we can say with some certainty about Patrick based on his epistle is that he was strident in defending the Irish as Britain's neighbours and fellow children of God.¹⁵² Patrick's rebuke of the soldiers of Coroticus effectively promises damnation for these 'evildoers' whose 'lot is in the pool of eternal flame'.¹⁵³ Throughout the *Epistola*, its paragraphs are nothing short of being extraordinary in its vociferous defence of Irish Christian. Compared with the other early medieval works that address Ireland and its people, in this respect, it is quite simply without equal.

Given Patrick's legacy and status as Ireland's patron saint, his works often fail to be considered among the sources examined for insights into foreign attitudes towards Ireland in the Middle Ages. Afterall, Patricius was a Briton, which makes his

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Patrick, *Clavis Patricii ii*, p. 91. Ludwig Bieler noted that the term *gens* or *gentes* as opposed to *natio* were used to imply barbarian peoples including the Irish, see *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁵¹ See 2 Cor. 7:1–5.

¹⁵² Patrick, *Clavis Patricii ii*, p. 91.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 100.

Confessio and *Epistola* all the more valuable for what they reveal about early medieval views of Ireland. While Patrick's writings attest to his seemingly resolute vocation to reform the supposedly barbarian Irish, more interesting, however, is his support for the Irish and his Hibernocentric outlook as confessed in these works. Although Patrick expressed these sentiments strongly in his works, to what extent they existed in practice is difficult to discern. Nonetheless, the fact that such sympathies were voiced at all suggests that Patrick felt that outsiders should more readily recognise the Irish as fellow Christians, which tells us something about views of Ireland within the late Roman empire. Although Patrick's support for Irish Christians may not have reflected the rule when it came to foreign attitudes towards the Irish, his pro-Irish views were not unusual in the early medieval period. Indeed, one of Britain's most popular medieval writers, the monk, historian and theologian Bede displayed a generally favourable view of the Irish people. What is more, Bede is unusual in that he mentions and praises specific Irish individuals. More often than not, classical and medieval writers wrote about the Irish as a collective group, with contemporary references to specific Irish people being a rarity. Bede lauded the endeavours of Irishmen such as the bishops Fínán, Ceollach and Diuma, as well as scholars such as Rónán who had been a supporter of the Roman reckoning for Easter.¹⁵⁴

While recounting Ecgrith's invasion of Ireland in 684 A.D., Bede had referred to the Irish as 'a harmless race that had always been most friendly to the English'.¹⁵⁵ Thus, Bede concludes that Ecgrith's death at the hands of the Picts was divine retribution for his hostilities against the Irish. Drawing on Bede's account of Ecgrith's inglorious reign, William of Malmesbury echoed Bede's view stating that the Irish (*Hibernenses*) were 'an innocent race of men who in their native simplicity have no evil designs against any man'.¹⁵⁶ William's description of the Irish, while asserting their simplicity, does enforce the view that they were not evil savages. Although Bede says little else about the Irish people in general, he does specifically highlight Irish religious as being exemplars for religious devotion, especially in their ascetic practices, and conversion tactics.¹⁵⁷ Where the Britons had failed, the Irish succeeded in bringing the Picts and English into the church through their missions.

¹⁵⁴ Bede, *HE*, pp 264–5, 278–81, 282–3, 292–5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 426–7.

¹⁵⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 78–9.

¹⁵⁷ Bede, *HE*, pp 310–11.

Bede tells us that many of the new English converts travelled to monasteries in Ireland to expand their understanding of Christianity.¹⁵⁸ Before becoming king of Northumbria, Aldfrith (r. 685–704) had spent some time learning from Irish scholars, thanks to whom he became ‘most learned in the Scriptures’ (*in scripturis doctissimus*).¹⁵⁹

In his last surviving work, the *Letter to Egbert*, Bede ‘used the virtues of the Celtic saints as propaganda, feeling it a good thing for his readers and hearers to realise the lengths to which these saints were willing to go, to deepen their spiritual experience’.¹⁶⁰ There has been much scholarship published on Bede’s attitude towards the Irish with the earliest studies overly critical of Bede’s assessment of the Easter controversy. Indeed, in 1958 Margaret Pepperdene criticised Bede for emphasising the Roman mission for reform at the expense of Irish influence on the Anglo-Saxon church.¹⁶¹ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín has shown that Bede was, in part, indebted to Irish scholars and their treatises, manuals and grammars, without which his computistic knowledge would have been but half-formed.¹⁶² Both Pepperdene and Ó Cróinín thought Bede underemphasised the importance of Irish influences. Their stance is reasonable. However, akin to Bede’s modest praise for the Irish effort, both fail to appreciate Bede’s inclusive and generally balanced narrative. There was no onus on Bede to even mention the Irish contribution to the Anglo-Saxon church and yet he did so. Jean-Michel Picard has gone to great lengths to show how Bede used multiple Irish sources without explicitly identifying them or their authors, concluding that Bede’s failure to acknowledge the Irish masters was not indicative of any sort of anti-Irish sentiment as he had also failed to mention the names of Ambrose, Isidore and others when quoting them verbatim.¹⁶³ That Bede was merely following the convention of the medieval period by failing to acknowledge the writers of his

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp 237–40.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp 430–1.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. xxiii. See Bede, *Letter to Egbert*, in Judith McClure and Roger Collins (eds), *Bede: the ecclesiastical history of the English people; the greater chronicle; Bede’s letter to Egbert* (Oxford, 1999), pp 343–57. For a discussion of Irish asceticism, see Hughes, *The church in early Irish society*, pp 173–93.

¹⁶¹ Margaret Pepperdene, ‘Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*: a new perspective’, *Celtica*, 4 (1958), pp 253–62.

¹⁶² Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘The Irish provenance of Bede’s computus’, *Peritia*, 2 (1983), pp 229–47.

¹⁶³ Jean-Michel Picard, ‘Bede and Irish scholarship: scientific treatises and grammars’, *Ériu*, 54 (2004), pp 139–47.

sources is unsurprising as verbatim quotation was accepted as a sufficient tribute to one's forebears.¹⁶⁴

Many of the writers who wrote about Ireland in the period between Bede and the Norman invasion of England saw the place and the people as normal human beings and fellow worshippers of Christ. The Welsh priest Asser's *Life of King Alfred* follows Bede's view of Ireland as a place most eminent for spiritual and virtuous men. Through an interesting collection of chapters covering the fiscal and administrative aspects of Alfred's rule, we are told that Alfred shared his secondary riches – accrued from taxation – in four portions, the fourth of which was given to neighbouring monasteries, not only in Saxon lands and Mercia but also, by turns and when circumstances allowed, to those in Wales, Gaul, Brittany, and even Ireland.¹⁶⁵ The migration of resources from Anglo-Saxon England to Ireland in support of spiritual affairs was not only in the form of finances but also in ecclesiastic émigrés seeking to progress their religious studies as well as to adopt a stricter form of religious discipline. The existence of an ecclesiastical fellowship between Irish and English religious is clearly evidenced in early medieval sources and was a practice seemingly supported by secular and ecclesiastical stakeholders alike.¹⁶⁶ Bede provides several noteworthy accounts of the engagements between Irish and English ecclesiastics, portraying the relations between them as generally cordial and mutually beneficial by acknowledging that the Irish had learned the true reckoning of Easter, as well as the form of the tonsure, from Egbert in the same way that the English had earlier received religious instruction and knowledge from the Irish, including Aidan, later bishop of Lindisfarne, and Columba, the founder of Iona.¹⁶⁷ Bede was not unusual in his admiration for Irish monks as they were generally well regarded for their ascetism and their reputation for learning; however, explicit praise for Irish religious would begin to fade away in histories and chronicles of the eleventh century as reformist movements spread westward across Europe.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁶⁵ *Alfred the Great: Asser's life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), i, p. 102.

¹⁶⁶ See Kathleen Hughes, 'Evidence for contacts between the churches of the Irish and the English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking age', in Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (eds), *England before the conquest: studies in primary sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp 49–67.

¹⁶⁷ Bede, *HE*, pp 139 n.1, 145–9, 308–9, 312–3. See Jean-Michel Picard, 'Bede and Irish scholarship' for more on the Irish influence on Bede.

Denis Bethell's useful study of religious connections between England and Ireland and their developments in the eleventh and twelfth centuries provides numerous examples of Irish religious who influenced intellectual culture in early medieval Europe, including Marianus Scotus whose world chronicle was used by influential twelfth-century chroniclers such as Sigebert of Gembloux and 'Florence' of Worcester.¹⁶⁸ However, the growing religious conservatism on the European continent seems to have found little support from Irish monks. In particular, Cluniac reformers and Irish monks clashed in their religious ideals. As Aubrey Gwynn put it, 'It is obvious that men like Fingen and Elias [both Irish monks] were fighting a losing battle against the triumphant forces of Cluniac Benedictinism'.¹⁶⁹ There is an argument to be made that Benedictinism, especially as it evolved under the nascent Cistercians, more than any other religious rule, produced reformers that influenced how the Irish were to be perceived in the twelfth century and beyond.¹⁷⁰

Before writing what was largely a derivative description of Ireland taken from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, Henry of Huntingdon tells us that many of Britain's neighbours attacked and conquered parts of the island out of spite and jealousy, including the Irish. Hence, one might reasonably assume that Huntingdon did not think much of the Irish people given their antagonist actions in Britain. However, whatever Huntingdon's general attitude towards the Irish people as a wider group, he makes an interesting remark about Ireland that is not to be found directly in the *Historia ecclesiastica* but may have been inspired, in part, by Bede's view of Ireland. Huntingdon writes that 'God has enriched the island [i.e. Ireland] with a wonderful gift, and He has established in it a multitude of saints for its protection'.¹⁷¹ Huntingdon, like many other non-Irish writers, writes more nuanced and favourable accounts of Irish individuals compared to the Irish as a people generally speaking. This seems to be a common practice in medieval works that mention individual Irish people. It certainly helped that here and in other sources these individuals are generally religious figures and, more often than not, saints.

¹⁶⁸ Denis Bethell, 'English monks and Irish reform in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *Historical Studies VIII* (Dublin, 1971), pp 111–35, ref. to Marianus Scotus on pp 113–14.

¹⁶⁹ Aubrey Gwynn, 'Irish monks and the Cluniac reform', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 29:115 (1940), p. 428.

¹⁷⁰ For the so-called Mellifont conspiracy, see Barry W. O'Dwyer, *The conspiracy of Mellifont 1216–1231* (Dublin, 1970). For Cistercian reforms in Ireland, see Janet Burton and Julie Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp 47, 57, 93, 97–100.

¹⁷¹ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, pp 28–9.

William of Malmesbury, whose work is regarded by many as being formative in establishing imperialist attitudes against the Irish, Scots and Welsh in the historiography of early Plantagenet England, was, on occasion, seemingly complimentary towards certain Irish individuals. In particular, Malmesbury thought highly of Patrick and his missionary activities. His perception of the Irish at large is more complicated, however. The first mention of the Irish relates to their evangelisation at the hands of Patrick who, William tells us, was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine, quoting entries from the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*.¹⁷² Malmesbury's detailed account regarding the association of Patrick with Glastonbury led Clark Harris Slover to refer to the distinguished twelfth-century author as 'a writer of advertising propaganda for the great publicity campaign at Glastonbury Abbey'.¹⁷³ In addition to Patrick, Malmesbury mentions two eminent native saints of Ireland, namely Indract and Brigid.¹⁷⁴

As has been examined above, the notion of the Irish being an irreligious, uncivilised and licentious people has been bandied about in various forms and to different degrees of severity for centuries, and was intimately tied to Ireland's perceived location at the ends of the earth. That element of distance from the perceived norms of the Greco-Roman world allowed for all sorts of mistruths to be concocted and disseminated near and far. Indeed, it was their marginal geographic position which rendered them *barbarus*, meaning 'foreign' or 'barbarous'. By the mid-twelfth century, however, the term *barbarus*, which had once been used by classical authors to describe the Germanic peoples as well as anyone else seen as foreign or strange, had its connotations changed. No longer was the term specifically tied to paganism, it was now dictated by one's adherence to the Christian faith, which was measured by those twelfth-century ecclesiastical reformers from England and the European continent who seemingly wanted nothing more than for Ireland to keep in line with developments in the continental church. The major turning point in how the term 'barbarian' was used to describe the Irish people and their way of life as Christians is often associated with Bernard of Clairvaux's *vita* of St Malachy, which was written in 1149.¹⁷⁵ Bernard's biography of Malachy, one of medieval Ireland's

¹⁷² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 806–9.

¹⁷³ Clark Harris Slover, 'William of Malmesbury and the Irish', *Speculum*, 2:3 (1927), p. 268.

¹⁷⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 808–9.

¹⁷⁵ Proclaimed a saint in 1190 by Pope Clement III, Malachy, or Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair, was the first Irish person to be formally canonised. Bernard's *vita* was instrumental in securing Malachy's canonisation. For studies of Bernard of Clairvaux's life and works, see G.R. Evans, *The mind of St.*

best known saints, is a particularly revealing source as both men seemed to have been close – Malachy died at Clairvaux with Bernard by his side – resulting in an engaging and personal narrative.¹⁷⁶ In it, Bernard writes scathingly about Malachy's birthplace, offering up many quotable lines. The most remarkable and vitriolic of them all, however, is perhaps the description of the Irish as 'shameless in their customs, uncivilised in their ways, godless in religion, barbarous in their law, obstinate as regards instruction, foul in their lives: Christians in name, pagans in fact'.¹⁷⁷ However, as Donnchadh Ó Corráin has argued, the Irish clergy had, by the mid-twelfth century, made considerable progress in bringing the Irish church into line with the accepted standards of wider Christendom.¹⁷⁸ According to Ó Corráin this was in no small part due to Canterbury's presence in Irish diocesan affairs in the eleventh century which caused Irish bishops to move fast in order to get Canterbury out of their hair.¹⁷⁹

While Malachy was born in a supposedly barbarous land, it did not mean that Malachy himself was barbarous. This point is made plain by Bernard:

'Our Malachy was born in Ireland of a *barbarous* [my emphasis] tribe; there he was brought up and educated. Yet he betrayed not a mite of his rude origin, any more than a fish of the sea preserves a salty savor. How delightful it is that crude *barbarism* [my emphasis] should have given us so worthy a man, a fellow citizen with the saints and true member of the House of God'.¹⁸⁰

As Diarmuid Scully has noted, it was common for medieval sacred biographies to begin with details of the saint's origins, family and homeland.¹⁸¹ Although Malachy was born into an elite family in Armagh – his father being a notable scholar and

Bernard of Clairvaux (Oxford, 1983); Brian Patrick McGuire (ed.), *A companion to Bernard of Clairvaux* (Leiden, 2011).

¹⁷⁶ Aubrey Gwynn, 'St Malachy of Armagh', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 70 (1948), pp 961–78, idem., 71 (1949), pp 134–48, 317–31. Malachy first met Bernard when he stopped at Clairvaux en route to Rome in 1139, *The letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James (Chicago, IL, 1953), p. 455; Bernard of Clairvaux, *The life and death of Saint Malachy the Irishman*, ed. and trans. Robert T. Meyer (Kalamazoo, 1978), pp 4–5.

¹⁷⁷ *St Bernard of Clairvaux's life of St Malachy of Armagh*, trans. and ed. H.J. Lawlor (London, 1920), p. 37.

¹⁷⁸ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *The Irish church, its reform and the English invasion* (Dublin, 2017), pp 65–75, 91–6.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp 58–64.

¹⁸⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The life and death of Saint Malachy*, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Diarmuid Scully, 'Ireland and the Irish in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Life of Malachy*: representation and content', in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006), p. 241.

principal of the schools there – and spent considerable time tending to secular and ecclesiastical affairs in Ireland, Malachy was neither a man wedded to his Irish roots nor the Irish people.¹⁸² For him, Irish monasticism was a thing of the past and should be replaced by the standards of continental orders. Malachy saw himself as a leader of reform who would enforce the new canon law in Armagh, as well as the rules of Benedictinism in Ireland. In analysing and revealing the all-too-human qualities of medieval churchmen, Donnchadh Ó Corráin's assessment of St Malachy is critical and uninhibited:

‘[Malachy] felt he could dismiss the leadership of powerful churches, reject all forms of Irish monasticism, transfer enormous assets from one institution to another, reshape the whole of the Irish church, and if possible society at large. Like nearly all political leaders he was charismatic, political, persuasive, conciliatory, coercive, manipulative, subtle and disingenuous; he was one who could dissimulate, and if necessary, bully. Bernard's image of the shy, withdrawn holy man is a pious fiction’.¹⁸³

Bernard's *vita* of Malachy is noteworthy for its attitude towards Ireland, which although it is forthright in asserting the barbarity of the Irish affirms that they are still welcome in the House of God. That Bernard tells us that Malachy was brought up and educated in Ireland suggests to us that just because one was born in Ireland did not necessarily mean that they could not be in God's good graces. Indeed, Bernard's attitude towards the Irish, while harsh, may reinforce the notion of ‘Christ's promise to remain with the faithful until the end of time’.¹⁸⁴ While Bernard of Clairvaux was undoubtedly one of Ireland's greatest medieval critics, the island and its people were not yet destined for fire and brimstone. Indeed, if anything, Malachy was a shining example of what a barbaric Irishman could become. According to B.W. O'Dwyer ‘His [i.e. Bernard's] paramount purpose was to provide an example, and history without example was inconceivable. He wanted to give to the men of his time a model to follow and he wanted to provide a mirror and example of sanctity at a time

¹⁸² Dorothy C. Africa, ‘St Malachy the Irishman: kinship, clan, and reform’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 5 (1986), pp 103–27.

¹⁸³ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁴ Scully, ‘Ireland and the Irish in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Life of Malachy*’, p. 241.

when holiness was very rare'.¹⁸⁵ While Bernard is often castigated for his portrayal of the barbarian Irish, he is equally denigratory when describing other peoples, including the French.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, O'Dwyer has argued that what might be read as personal attacks on the Irish were in fact designed for rhetorical effect as the normal means of disseminating a saint's life was oral, 'the prose would be heard, not read'.¹⁸⁷ Rhetorical or not, one cannot guarantee that audience members were aware of Bernard's stylistic intentions. While the jury might be out on whether or not Bernard harboured anti-Irish views, that he wrote about 'a barbarous people' was enough to reinforce the perception of the Irish as a people in want of reform.¹⁸⁸ For ardent reformers such as the Cistercians, the reform of Irish secular and ecclesiastical society would have been an achievement of epic proportions.¹⁸⁹

While it is easy to find foreign writers who perceived the Irish to be barbarians, it is harder to find instances of Irish writers describing either themselves or the Irish people as barbarians. You will not find any instances in the Irish annals. However, there may be potential evidence for such a phenomenon to be found in a letter Bernard of Clairvaux sent to Diarmait Mac Muchada 'that does the saint no credit'.¹⁹⁰ In *Epistola confraternitatis ad Dyermetium Hiberniae regem*, Bernard writes to Diarmait 'the sublime and glorious king of Ireland' praising his founding of a Cistercian abbey.¹⁹¹ This was of course Diarmait Mac Murchada, the king of Leinster, who was never fortunate enough to hold the title of high king. No doubt Diarmait was quite pleased with himself when he saw that Bernard of Clairvaux had thought so highly of the Irishman that he presumed he was king of the entire country. Perhaps Bernard had intended to use such flattery to soften the effect of the rest of his letter to Diarmait.¹⁹² For Bernard tells Diarmait that 'we have heard of your glory in our land and have rejoiced ... it is truly a miracle that a king established at the

¹⁸⁵ B.W. O'Dwyer, 'St Bernard as an historian: the 'Life of St Malachy of Armagh'', *The Journal of Religious History*, 10:2 (1978), p. 134. See also Bernard of Clairvaux, *The life and death of Saint Malachy*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ A.J. Luddy, *Life of St Malachy* (Dublin, 1930), pp 33–5.

¹⁸⁷ O'Dwyer, 'St Bernard as an historian', p. 133.

¹⁸⁸ 'De populo barbaro', see Pslams 113:1. The opening sentences of the Life's historical narrative is littered throughout with biblical quotations.

¹⁸⁹ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'From sanctity to depravity: church and society in medieval Ireland', in Niall Ó Ciosáin (ed.), *Explaining change in cultural history: historical studies XXIII* (Dublin, 2005), pp 140–62.

¹⁹⁰ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 64.

¹⁹¹ This letter was written c. 1148. The Cistercian abbey mentioned was the one founded in Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow, in 1148.

¹⁹² Lanfranc wrote a letter to Tairdelbach us Briain addressing him as 'magnificent king of Ireland', which Donnchadh Ó Corráin asserted was a 'diplomatic prelude to advice and criticism', see Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 61.

ends of the earth, placed over a barbarian peoples, should carry out such works of mercy with great generosity'.¹⁹³ Bernard did not mince his words: the Irish were barbarians. What is more, he had no issue telling their supposed king the very same. Why was that? Did Diarmait think that the Irish people were barbarians? If so, perhaps he founded the Cistercian abbey, as a means of reform? Another, and indeed more intriguing, question is: Did Diarmait think that *he* was a barbarian? Or were princes, priests and prelates in a separate class to the Irish people over whom they reigned politically and spiritually? There is certainly enough evidence to suggest that Diarmait gave no preferential treatment to *Gaedhil* over *Gaill*. Indeed, as Gerald of Wales wrote, 'Diarmait Mac Murchada ... raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear'.¹⁹⁴

Bernard's writings attest to the pressures exerted on the Irish church by foreign reformers such as the archbishops of Canterbury, Lanfranc and later Anselm, who had directly addressed the Irish political leadership.¹⁹⁵ With the authority and support of Pope Gregory VII behind him, Lanfranc denounced Irish marriage customs and the ways in which bishops were consecrated in Ireland.¹⁹⁶ Irish marriage customs received particularly unfavourable attention from reformers.¹⁹⁷ The custom of marriage has existed, in some form or other, for millennia.¹⁹⁸ In particular, the social importance of marriages cannot be underestimated. Matrimony has always acted as a potential means for social climbing or simply a way to 'marry' into the status quo. Throughout the Christianisation of medieval Europe, marriage was a vital means to control social groups. The union between man and woman, as it was in medieval times, was an important one for instilling a social cohesion within wider Christendom. With marriage comes sex, which naturally meant that the church's power and authority extended beyond the mere performance of sacramental marriage. In eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland, sexual and marital mores were two of the

¹⁹³ *Epistola DXLVI: Epistola confraternitatis ad dyermetium Hiberniae regem*, in *Epistolae: II. Corpus epistolarum 181–310; II. Epistolarum extra corpus 311–547*, ed. Charles Leclercq and Henri-Marie Rochais (Rome, 1977), viii, pp 513–4, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq, Charles H. Talbot and Henri-Marie Rochais (8 vols, Rome, 1957–1977).

¹⁹⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 24–5.

¹⁹⁵ Hughes, *The church in early Irish society*, pp 257–62; Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, pp 58–64.

¹⁹⁶ Hughes, *The church in early Irish society*, pp 23–8; Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, pp 60–64.

¹⁹⁷ For an overview of Irish early Irish marriage practise, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in early Ireland', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), pp 5–24; Anthony Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy: women and marriage in late pre-Norman Ireland', in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006), pp 106–27.

¹⁹⁸ For an excellent study of medieval marriage, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: women, men, and sexual unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012).

most important aspects of Irish lay society that were in dire need of immediate reform according to contemporary ecclesiastics such as Lanfranc, who had stated that many Irishmen deserted their wives while others sold theirs,¹⁹⁹ and Bernard of Clairvaux, who had suggested that the Irish did not enter into lawful marriage.²⁰⁰

Origin myths

M.I. Finley argued that myths exist not as stories about real men and events but rather as memories that hold some practical relevance for the present.²⁰¹ Origin myths are no different, relying on amalgamated elements of reality and fantasy in order to offer a foundational narrative that affirms a group identity. As classical and medieval writers explored some of the great questions of human existence, especially those of an existential or epistemological nature, myth-making and myth-maintenance became integral for writers trying to make sense of the commonalities and differences between peoples, and for proposing their purported origins.²⁰² Origin stories not only serve the individual but also the ethnic group in times of need.²⁰³ The difficulty with myth-making – and similarly myth-debunking – is that the people, places and happenstances in a myth are likely to be wholly unreal and/or could in no way have possibly happened, divine intervention or not! And yet, origin myths survive the test of time, often outliving even the social groups that they were created to memorialise and legitimise in the first place. By default, myths cannot be subjected to conventional empirical or scientific scrutiny as their patent blend of falsities and realities effectively guards them against anyone categorically refuting them and attempting to banish such myths from both public memory and the historical record. Moreover, even ultra-fanciful myths – such as the founding of Rome on the Palatine Hill by the wolf-suckled twins Romulus and Remus – present

¹⁹⁹ *The letters of Lanfranc archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), pp 64–7 (letter 8),

²⁰⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The life and death of Saint Malachy the Irishman*, pp 33–4.

²⁰¹ M.I. Finley, 'Myth, memory and history', *History and Theory*, 4 (1965), pp 281–302.

²⁰² For instance, Elva Johnston has argued that the fabricated descent of the Irish from Míl became a central component of a shared Irish ancestral identity in the ninth and tenth centuries in the face of the Viking presence in Ireland, see *Literacy and identity in early medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp 86–7.

²⁰³ Patrick J. Geary, 'Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), pp 15–26.

factual elements; for instance, archaeological findings have made a strong case for the existence of villages on the ancient hills of Rome as far back as 1000 B.C.²⁰⁴

Anyone examining the origin myths of the Irish must, at some point, encounter the legend of the Milesians, the sons of Míl Espáine – deriving from the Latin *Miles Hispaniae*, literally ‘Soldier of Spain’ – who were deemed to be the ancestors of the Irish people.²⁰⁵ And while archaeological evidence does not exist to confirm or indeed to even suggest a past migration from Spain to Ireland, the Milesian origin story featured regularly in histories throughout the medieval and early modern periods.²⁰⁶ If there is some factual basis for the Milesian origins of the Irish, then where do we find it in the historical and/or archaeological record? The most persuasive and substantial evidence is literary. Indeed, the tale of the Milesian origins of the Gaels can be found in works on both sides of the Irish Sea. In Ireland, the oldest extant inclusion of the Milesians is to be found in the *Lebor Gabála* (‘Book of Invasions’), a collection of poems and prose concerning the six invasions and subsequent colonial migrations that Ireland supposedly experienced.²⁰⁷ While there are several redactions of the *Lebor*, the story of the sons of Míl is virtually the same. As we are told, the Gaels were supposedly the descendants of a group of Scythian wanderers who found themselves in Egypt and then years later ended up in Spain.²⁰⁸ Having conquered and settled there, a Scythian by the name of Bregon built a great tower in his own name. On one fine, clear winter’s night, Bregon’s son Íth stood atop this tower and, while looking out across the sea, spotted a mysterious island: Ireland. At once he was moved (by some unmentioned and unexplained force) to travel there. Having arrived there, Íth met the Túatha Dé Danann – the old gods of Ireland or a race of wizards as they are depicted in the *Lebor* – but their encounter quickly soured, resulting in Íth being mortally wounded. Having died at sea amongst

²⁰⁴ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford companion to classical civilization* (Oxford, 1998), p. 605.

²⁰⁵ Mark Williams, *Ireland’s immortals: a history of the gods of Irish myth* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2016), pp 138–45; John Carey, *The Irish national origin-legend: synthetic pseudohistory* (Quiggin pamphlets on the sources of mediaeval Gaelic history 1, Cambridge, 1994).

²⁰⁶ See J.P. Mallory, *The origins of the Irish* (London and New York, 2013), esp. chapter 7.

²⁰⁷ For an edition and translation, see *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The book of the taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. R.A. Stewart Macalister (5 vols, London, 1938–1956). See also John Carey, ‘*Lebor Gabála* and the legendary history of Ireland’, in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic literature and society* (Dublin, 2005), pp 32–48.

²⁰⁸ As Conor O’Brien notes, ‘A Scythian genealogy for the Gaels shows the influence of Isidore of Seville on Irish scholars rewriting their people’s origin legend, but also sets the Irish apart from the Hebrews by descent. Written into Old Testament history they clearly were, but they were not themselves God’s people’, see Conor O’Brien, ‘The new Israel motif in early medieval origin legends’, in Lindy Brady and Patrick Wadden (eds), *Origin legends in early medieval western Europe* (Leiden, 2022), p. 247; see also Carey, *The Irish national origin-legend*, pp 12–13.

his kinsmen, his body was repatriated to Spain, where his grief-stricken brethren swore to avenge his death. Revenge was thus settled on the gods of the Irish, with the help of three Irish goddesses, by the sons of Míl who had led an expedition consisting of three score and five ships to Ireland. Upon defeating the Túatha Dé Danann, the sons of Míl settled Ireland.

Interestingly, the oldest extant account of a Spanish settlement in Ireland is to be found across the Irish Sea. The early ninth-century Cambro-Latin compilation *Historia Brittonum*, often attributed to Nennius, contains the earliest account of the supposed Spanish origins of the Irish.²⁰⁹ Thomas Charles-Edwards suggested that the purpose of the *Historia Brittonum* was to relate the history of the Britons as a people and not a history of their country and ‘one in which their relationships with other peoples – with the Romans, the English, and the Irish – occupied the centre of the stage. The effect was that it ranged over the British Isles as a whole and gave the Britons a place in the scheme of world history’.²¹⁰ While its author never refers to Míl directly, or indeed his sons, he does address the arrival of several different cohorts of Spanish settlers to Ireland, including expeditions led by Partholomus, Nimech and, interestingly, three sons of a Spanish soldier. It is more than reasonable to suggest that these three sons are likely to be the sons of Míl mentioned in the *Lebor*. Moreover, the inclusion of a fantastical tower (albeit made of glass) in the *Historia Brittonum* also shares similarities with the tower of Bregon mentioned previously. It is worth noting that the inclusion of a tower in the story of Spanish migration to Ireland has been a focal point for historians refuting the Milesian legend as there is evidence to suggest that the pre-classical Bregon tower is in fact based on a third-century Roman lighthouse that can still be seen in A Coruña, Spain, to this day.

There is also a geographic element to this story. Writing in the early fifth century, the historian and theologian Orosius had mistakenly located Ireland between Britain and Spain, a locational error rehearsed by numerous successors.²¹¹ As a result

²⁰⁹ Lindy Brady, *The origin legends of early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2022), pp 45–58.

²¹⁰ Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), p. 438. Again, the attitude that the peoples of the British Isles and Ireland could live amongst one another in relative peace and mutual understanding is expressed here.

²¹¹ In his *Otia imperialia*, Gervase of Tilbury wrote that ‘Ireland is an island lying between Britain and Spain’, Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 308–9. It seems likely that Gervase derived this view from Orosius, see *ibid.*, n.66–7. Cf. the map of twelfth-century Europe, including Ireland, Britain and Spain, in NLI MS 700, f. 48r [a digitised copy of MS 700 can be accessed here https://www.isos.dias.ie/NLI/NLI_MS_700.html]. See also Thomas O’Loughlin, ‘An early thirteenth-

of Orosius's geographic ideas, John Carey has suggested that the supposition of the Gaels having Spanish ancestors can be placed directly at Orosius's door. Carey, in no uncertain terms, has asserted that Orosius 'exercised a pervasive influence on the evolution of Ireland's legendary history, providing not merely information about distant times and places but also narrative models which could serve as templates for elaborating an artificial past'.²¹²

One of the most important origin myths, which may have factored into how the Irish were perceived abroad, may be their alleged Scythian origins. Scythia was a place vaguely imagined in the Middle Ages, but roughly identified with modern Ukraine and Kazakhstan.²¹³ According to the writers of classical Antiquity, the Scythians were allegedly cannibals. For our purposes, one of the most interesting classical descriptions of the Scythians is to be found in Strabo's *Geographia* when he wrote about the Irish being man-eaters, he also pointed to the Scythians as evidence of the practice of cannibalism by peoples located at the furthest edges of the world: 'as for the matter of man-eating, that is said to be a custom of the Scythians also, and, in cases of necessity forced by sieges, the Celti, the Iberians, and several other peoples are said to have practised it'.²¹⁴ Indeed, an overlooked source that may have potentially added to the perception of the Irish as being barbarians, may be the letters of St Paul. The supposed Scythian origins of the Irish present a number of questions when considered in light of ancient and early medieval attitudes towards the Scythians. The most interesting among them being whether a supposed Scythian origins for the Irish led to them being perceived to be barbarians.

Interestingly, rather than writing about the Scythian origins of the Irish, Bede tells us that it was the Pictish race that originally came from Scythia and travelled to northern Ireland where they asked the native population, the Irish, if they could settle there to which the Irish replied and told them to travel eastward to an island that

century map in Dublin: a window into the world of Giraldus Cambrensis', *Imago Mundi*, 51 (1999), pp 24–39.

²¹² Carey, *The Irish national origin-legend*, p. 4. For a discussion of the 'synthetic' historian, see Eoin MacNeill, 'The Irish synthetic historians', *New Ireland Review*, 26 (1906), pp 193–208.

²¹³ Williams, *Ireland's immortals*, p. 139.

²¹⁴ Strabo, *Geography*, volume ii: books 3–5, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. Horace Leonard Jones (LCL 50, London, 1923), pp 260–1. It is noteworthy that all of the three peoples mentioned in comparison to the Irish – namely the Scythians, the Celti, the Iberians – all factor into various origin stories of the Irish. Perhaps, to some extent, Strabo's work influenced Irish origin-myths? An interesting question, but one for another day.

could often be seen in the distance on a clear day.²¹⁵ Thus, the Picts landed in the north of Britain and settled there. The Scythian Picts did, however, require assistance from the Irish once more as they were in short supply of women. The Irish obliged, so Bede tells us. Regarding the Scythian origins of the Picts, it seems that Bede was confusing Scythia with ‘Scandia’, the Latin form of the Old English term for Skåney, which is located in the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula.²¹⁶ Although he provides details about the origins of the Britons and Picts, Bede does not offer any genesis for the Irish. Henry of Huntingdon acknowledged as much in his *Historia Anglorum*, stating that he relied upon another author to find out when Ireland was first inhabited.²¹⁷ For whatever reason, Huntingdon decided to give the Irish a Scythian origins through their descendants from Spain. Drawing upon the *Historia Brittonum*, Huntingdon writes that the Irish were the descendants of a Scythian nobleman who was exiled following the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea and eventually landed in Spain after an arduous journey that involved traversing the mountainous region of Saharien, travelling through Mauritania to the pillars of Hercules and sailing over the Tyrrhenian Sea.²¹⁸ Having settled in Spain for many years, this Scythian’s descendants multiplied greatly, so we are told.²¹⁹ Over one thousand years after the Scythian’s crossing of Israel over the Red Sea, his descendants settled in Ireland during the fourth age of the world, which according to Bede’s scheme of the seven ages of the world extended from David to the Babylonian captivity.²²⁰ Interestingly, Huntingdon acknowledges that while these details regarding the journey of the Scythian and his descendants to Ireland are not completely certain, one thing certainly is: ‘that the Irish came to Ireland from Spain’.²²¹ Thus, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* is given precedence over Bede.

²¹⁵ Bede, *HE*, pp 16–19. The *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* copies this account directly from Bede, see *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle, a revised translation*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Whitelock with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (London, 1961), p. 5. Whitelock prefers translating ‘*Scotti*’ as ‘Scots’ throughout rather than ‘Irish’, although she does refer to the Irish in footnotes, see, for instance, pp 5 n.4, 15 n.1, 114 n.6. Interestingly, the Old English retains Bede’s Latin distinction between the island of Ireland (‘*Hibernia*’) and the Irish (‘*Scotti*’), which is written as ‘*Ybernian*’ and ‘*Scottas*’, respectively, see *Two of the Saxon chronicles parallel*, ed. Charles Plummer on the basis of an edition by John Earle (2 vols, Oxford, 1892–1899), i, p. 3. Henry of Huntingdon also records this account, see Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, pp 26–7. Regarding the clear visibility of the islands on a fine day, cf. Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 22.

²¹⁶ Bede, *HE*, p. 17 n.3.

²¹⁷ Huntingdon drew upon the *Historia Brittonum*, although he never mentions this explicitly, see Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, pp 28–9 n.51.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 28–31.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 30–1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 30–1 n.53.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 30–1.

A connection between the Scythians and the Picts, as detailed by Bede, is nowhere to be read in the *Historia Anglorum*.

Politico-religious intervention in Ireland

Political and ecclesiastical connections between Ireland and England in the pre-invasion period, while existent, were relatively limited until the Irish church was reformed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Before the English arrived on the shores of Bannow Island in 1169, perhaps the most invasive intervention in Ireland, from an English standpoint, was the influence of Canterbury in the late eleventh- and twelfth-century reform of the Irish church. While the ‘reform’ of the church was of an immediately ecclesiastical nature, its political undercurrents lay close to its surface. Indeed, the intrinsic relationship between religion, law and politics in medieval Ireland – as in most societies – cannot be ignored. The reformation and transformation of the Irish Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, most notably addressed by Aubrey Gwynn, Marie Therese Flanagan and, most recently and adeptly, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, were politico-religious in nature.²²² Indeed, the relationship between religion and political power was so pronounced that, as Anthony Candon reminds us, the separation of church and state would have been alien to the medieval mind.²²³

As we shall see in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, once the military campaigns of Henry II and his son John had taken place, the importance of religion in acting as a smokescreen for colonialism was evidently vital for framing the conquest of Ireland as a *causa justa* in the historical writing of the period. The wider pan-European movement towards ecclesiastical reform led to a turning point in representations of the Irish and their religiosity *or* supposed lack thereof. It is unsurprising that the writers of the period were so interested in ecclesiastical affairs given the fact that the literate class predominantly consisted of religious men. It is no surprise, then, that their works were often framed as ecclesiastical ones. Both Bede’s

²²² For a survey of the of the earlier Irish church see Hughes, *The church in early Irish society*; for the reformation of the Irish church in the eleventh century, see Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, ed. Gerard O’Brien (Dublin, 1992). For the twelfth-century reformation, see Bethell, ‘English Monks and Irish Reform’, pp 111–35; Marie Therese Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church in the twelfth century* (Woodbridge, 2010); also, Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*.

²²³ Anthony Candon, ‘Barefaced effrontery: secular and ecclesiastical politics in early twelfth century Ireland’, *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, 14 (1991), p. 2.

and Orderic Vitalis's *Historia ecclesiastica* readily come to mind here. Thus, these historical works were suffused with didacticisms, explicit and implicit. This was markedly different from the ancient accounts previously mentioned whereby moral and character-defining lessons were based on cultural and geographic norms rather than explicitly religious ones. However, from the early medieval period, it is evident that morality was intimately tied with religious instruction.

For instance, in addressing the 'barbarous' Irish, Orderic Vitalis shows that their want of honesty and loyalty is clearly evident as they resort to treachery and execrable plots in order to first defeat King Magnus of Norway and then, second, in their attempt to kill the lord of Pembroke, Arnulf de Montgomery.²²⁴ It is perhaps unsurprising that both Magnus and Arnulf were Christian, and seemingly *proper* worshipping Christians at that. The religiosity of medieval kings and lords was important for the Christianisation of Europe, as the Latin phrase *cuius regio, eius religio* makes plain.²²⁵ The integrity of Magnus and Arnulf contrasts sharply with the treacherousness of the Irish who, unlike the Norse royal and Norman magnate, are not explicitly referred to as being catholic. When interpreting the medieval sources (or any source for that matter), it is just as important to note what is not being said as what is said. The perception of the Irish as a treacherous people is an intriguing one for a number of reasons not least because it fits the general characteristics of barbarian peoples who are uncivilised and generally untrustworthy. If we are to suppose that writers such as Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury were writing as churchmen who perceived the Irish as being a Christian people but were in need of reform, how then should charges of treachery, for example, be interpreted? Was treachery a naturally ingrained trait of the Irish or was it merely associated with their supposedly unorthodox customs and religious practices? If Irish faith and morals were reformed, would their treacherousness also be a thing of the past? Orderic's decision never to mention the fact that the Irish, too, were Christians is telling here in that it implicitly constructs a binary opposition between the Irish as barbarians and the Norwegian king and Anglo-Norman lord as Christians. The

²²⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, vi, pp 48–51. This account has also been discussed by Edmund Curtis, 'Muchertach O'Brien, high king of Ireland, and his Norman son-in-law, Arnulf de Montgomery, c. 1100', *JRSAL*, 11 (1921), pp 116–24.

²²⁵ The Latin phrase *cuius regio eius religio* was to become an established principle under the Peace of Augsburg signed between Charles V and Schmalkaldic League in September 1555, allowing rulers to choose between Catholicism or Lutheranism. However, long before the Augsburg Settlement and even the founding of the Lutheran church, the Latin phrase reflected the reality of politico-religious dynamics in most ancient and medieval European societies.

barbarity of the Irish effectively nullifies their membership of the same faith. It is a remarkably similar view to that of Coroticus and his soldiers who viewed Patrick's Irish congregation as outsiders despite their shared religion. The Irish had been perceived and depicted as barbarians long before the histories of Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury were written. However, when writers in earlier centuries mentioned the supposed barbarity of the Irish, the threat of invasion and conquest as means to reform Irish morals and customs effectively did not exist. In the early decades of the twelfth century, following the north-westward sweep of the Normans into Britain, an invasion of Ireland lay just beyond the horizon.

Conclusion

For information about pre-Christian Ireland we must rely on contemporary writers who were on the outside looking in as it were, as native Irish texts were either nonexistent or, at the very least, have failed to survive the ravages of time.²²⁶ Ireland never seems to have suffered a large-scale military invasion by the Roman republic and later empire during the four centuries of rule over Britain, Spain and Gaul. While Ireland alone of the western nations did not come under Roman rule, it would gradually absorb Mediterranean culture and yield, in Máire and Liam de Paor's words, 'not to Roman arms, but to Roman letters and religion'.²²⁷ It must be said, however, that the lack of a 'hands-on' Roman engagement with the island of Ireland has no doubt resulted in a dearth of knowledge about the island's pre-Christian past. One may speculate that such Roman imperial intervention may have resulted in the existence of more detailed accounts of ancient Ireland; however, there is no doubting that, much like the *Gallic wars*, any Roman writing about Ireland and its inhabitants would have been suffused with propaganda and racist stereotypes, both of which were expressed by classical writers, including Julius Caesar, towards the indigenous peoples of Britain. Despite such a lacuna, the extant references to Ireland emanating from classical Antiquity, though paltry in number, confirm that people were not only

²²⁶ Although there are no contemporary Irish texts, if they ever even existed, surviving from the pre-Christian era, Ireland has a greater volume of origin myths and sagas set in a supposed pre-Christian past than the rest of Europe combined. Moreover, there is, of course, the possibility that examples of Ireland's pre-Christian past and customs may have survived in these same myths and sagas. See John Carey, 'Introduction: prehistoric and early Ireland', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland i: prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp lvii–lxxxii; Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish myths and sagas* (London, 1981); Williams, *Ireland's immortals*, pp 3–29; J.P. Mallory (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast, 1992); Barry Cunliffe, *The ancient Celts* (Oxford, 1997), pp 25–7, 109–10.

²²⁷ De Paor, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 25.

aware of Ireland's existence but were inspired by the island's position at the supposed northwestern limits of the known world to speculate about its features and inhabitants. It was a place that excited the imagination of contemporaries who knew that the lack of verifiable information about Ireland rendered it a blank canvass upon which historians, geographers, philosophers and ethnographers could express their prejudices, ambitions and fears, and by extension those of the *populus*.

Ireland, much like its close neighbour, Britain, was the recipient of prejudiced and ignorant – but nonetheless colourful, it must be said – views from Greek and Roman writers. References to Ireland in classical Antiquity went so far as to describe Ireland's location, its usually savage inhabitants and its fruitful pastures. The similarities between many of the classical references to Ireland make them seem quite trite. Although many antique descriptions of Ireland and its inhabitants may induce a wry grin on the part of the modern reader due to their blatant bias and fantastical elements, these characteristics should not encourage one to simply conclude that ancient texts lacked any credence and are therefore useless for the study of foreign views of Ireland and indeed the island's place in a Graeco-Roman world. Indeed, such reductive conclusions about the nature of classical texts have been deemed to be based on 'harmful beliefs' by one classicist.²²⁸ On the contrary, these classical accounts provide a sense of the foreign views of Ireland that, for good or for ill, paint a picture of the Graeco-Roman sense of self as manifested in the histories, geographies and ethnographies of their times. For them, Ireland and its people provided comparisons through which Romans and Greeks could affirm their identities at the expense of a people whose lived experience did not affect their own. The aforementioned classical descriptions, despite the obvious need to approach them with a critical eye, ranged from the personal experiences of Romans in Britain to the creative narration inspired by the physical and cultural distance of those dwelling on the shores of the Mediterranean basin. Their credibility aside, these classical descriptions laid the seedbed for medieval attitudes towards Ireland and its people, and provide a sense of the desire of classical and medieval writers to describe the nearest and farthest reaches of – what was for them – the known world.

In the early medieval period, numerous foreign writers mentioned Ireland, its people and/or its affairs in their works. And while like their classical counterparts they were moved to describe Ireland's location, landscape and its inhabitants, these

²²⁸ Frere, *Britannia*, p. xvi.

were now accompanied by new subjects related to Ireland, including origin stories. Moreover, these early medieval authors generally wrote more detailed and developed accounts on Ireland than their ancient forebears. More importantly, however, they wrote with different interests in mind and from a closer proximity, merely from across the Irish Sea. Perhaps most interesting among these early medieval writers on Ireland was Patricius – a Briton missionary who settled in Ireland and was the perhaps the original blow-in to become more Irish than the Irish themselves. Patrick not only identified with his Irish flock but vigorously defended their reputation as Christians in the face of ignorance.

During the early medieval period, numerous writers began constructing creative and often elaborate origin stories at a time when Christian peoples sought to consolidate their ethnic groups' pagan pasts with a Christian present. A medieval person's descent often dictated how they would live their lives even before they were born. Thus, the importance of medieval origin stories – real or imagined – cannot be overestimated. They provided medieval people with a sense of their place in Christendom, especially as none of the peoples of north-western Europe featured amongst the *nationes* mentioned in the Latin Vulgate.

Other than St Patrick, Bede was perhaps the most non-biased commentator on Ireland during the early medieval period. One might go so far as to say that Bede held generally favourable views of Ireland and its people, and was especially impressed by the religious zeal and intellectual prowess of its ecclesiastics, who were lauded for supporting the development of the Anglo-Saxon church, especially through the Columban mission to Northumbria in the 630s.²²⁹ For Bede, the inhabitants of Ireland were more than merely Irish, they were, first and foremost, part of the *gens Christianorum*. It is as Christians that Bede primarily identifies and thus judges the Irish. Indeed, this is true for all the *gentes* that feature in the *Historia ecclesiastica*. Variables such as space, time, status, sex, age and rank meant little to Bede when judging a people as these factors were superseded by a common faith and love.²³⁰ Indeed, as Richard Southern wrote '[Bede's] capacious mind was seldom

²²⁹ Ludwig Bieler, 'Ireland's contribution to the culture of Northumbria', in Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: essays in commemoration of the thirteenth centenary of the birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), pp 210–28.

²³⁰ 'Ut uita fidelium et locis et temporibus et gradu et conditione et sexu et aetate multum secreta ad alterutrum nihilominus una eademque fide ac dilectione sit ad inuicem cuijuncta', Bede, *De Templo*, in *Beda's Venerabilis opera: pars ii: opera exegetica 2A*, ed. David Hurst (CCSL CXIX A, Turnhout, 1969), p. 202.

swayed by prejudice'.²³¹ At the end of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede provides a list to remind his audience of the most important events addressed in the work. Weaved throughout that aide-mémoire are the Irish, thus making 'them an inextricable and essential part of his [i.e. Bede's] story'.²³²

Over three hundred and thirty-five years later and England's experience of invasion at the hands of the Normans led to an increase in nationalistic and ethnic ideology, with prejudicial attitudes being expressed in chronicles and histories of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries as the peoples of Britain sought to reaffirm their group identities in the midst of increased warfare and inter-cultural confrontations. Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury, both men of mixed Norman and English ancestry, wrote their histories in an England that was still coming to terms with the aftereffects of the 1066 invasion on ecclesiastical and secular affairs. They were evidently self-conscious writers who sought to make sense of recent events and to affirm their place in England's past and present.²³³ William of Malmesbury, in particular, has been credited with redirecting the concept of barbarism from pagans to Christians. Thus, *barbarus* was no longer merely a synonym for *paganus*. And being a Christian was no longer a sufficient defence against accusations of primitive and immoral standards of living. While, as we shall soon see in the next chapter of this thesis, primitiveness was effectively a synonym for the word 'barbarousness' in early Plantagenet England, in more recent centuries Ireland's supposed primitiveness was, and in many ways still is, regarded by some to be a positive and charming trait, representing what Joep Leerssen has referred to as 'the romantic chronotype of Ireland as an otherworldly place lost in time'.²³⁴

As has been shown above, the perception of the Irish as being barbarians despite their Christian faith existed long before Malmesbury wrote about a rustic and lazy people dwelling in Ireland. However, William was inspired by Norman imperial ambitions and thus branded the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish as barbarians. Indeed, before the chroniclers and historians of post-invasion England began to write, their

²³¹ Southern, *Medieval humanism*, p. 3.

²³² McCann, 'Plures de Scottorum regione', p. 36.

²³³ Both men shared autobiographical material in their works at a time when writers usually shied away from explicitly mentioning personal details about themselves in their works. However, Orderic Vitalis provides quite an incredible insight into his personal life, particularly his emotions tied to the childhood experience of being sacrificed as an oblate, see Elisabeth van Houts, 'Orderic and his father, Odelerius', in Charles C. Rozier et al. (eds), *Orderic Vitalis: life, works and interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2016), pp 17–36.

²³⁴ Joep Leerssen, 'Memory transfer', in Oona Frawley (ed.), *Memory Ireland, volume 2: diaspora and memory practices* (Syracuse, NY, 2012), p. 139.

predecessors in Anglo-Saxon England never expressed a clearly defined attitude towards the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish.²³⁵ While many writers referred to the Irish as barbarians, ranging from St Patrick to William of Malmesbury, their motivations for using the term were quite different. Patrick desired to spread the Christian faith to a supposedly barbaric people while Malmesbury aimed to affirm the superiority of Englishness over the Celtic peoples in the post-invasion period.

When it comes to Ireland's place in the literary worlds of Antiquity and the early to high Middle Ages, one may ask the baiting question: Is Ireland worth bothering about? Of course it is, as numerous extant references to Ireland and its affairs can be found in the source materials over the period extending from classical Antiquity to the high Middle Ages.²³⁶ Any attempt to make Ireland seem like an irrelevant backwater in the pre-invasion period is easily refutable based on the number of accounts passing mention to Ireland, its people and affairs by authors from as close as Wales and as far as Anatolia. The mere fact that writers took the time to refer to Ireland, regardless of the level of detail, tells us much about the concerns, interests and knowledge of ancient and medieval writers. What's more, outsiders' accounts of subjects such as Ireland's climate, landscape, location, and the political practices and militarisation of its people are all that we have for evidence of the early history of Ireland as Irish works tended to focus on the unusual more so than the everyday, so annal entries on extreme events such as plagues, famines and cosmological phenomena took precedent over the quotidian realities of early Irish life.²³⁷

As foreign peoples came into greater contact with Ireland during the period extending from classical Antiquity up to the latter quarter of the twelfth century, Ireland and its affairs featured more prominently in chronicles, histories and other genres. What is clear is that attitudes towards – and knowledge about – Ireland and its inhabitants in the high medieval period were influenced and inspired by classical and early medieval works that effectively lay the basis for a literary tradition upon which writers across the early Plantagenet world could base their histories and chronicles. And while these sources on Ireland were fairly innocuous in their own times, their influence on Plantagenet expansionism in the latter half of the twelfth

²³⁵ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 9.

²³⁶ With regard to classical Antiquity, this question was asked in a tongue-in-cheek fashion by Eric G. Haywood in his article entitled 'Is Ireland worth bothering about?'.
²³⁷ O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 7.

century and beyond, however implicit, would forever change the social, cultural, political and economic makeup of the Hiberno-British archipelago.

Chapter 2

Anti-Irish views in early Plantagenet England

‘Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts’.

Essays upon epitaphs by William Wordsworth¹

Introduction

The English children’s rhyme ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones / But words shall never hurt me’ is often recited by worried parents and concerned friends to dull the blow of affective rhetoric. However, words matter, as William Wordsworth made plain in his *Essays upon epitaphs*. Indeed, mental anguish brought about by words can be just as painful and debilitating as any physical sensation. Words – written and spoken – have the ability to lead and inspire or to incite and agitate. So it was, and is, that the words of chroniclers and historians of the high Middle Ages have done much by way of creating and perpetuating anti-Irish sentiment in England throughout succeeding centuries. In particular, the ecclesiastic and writer Gerald of Wales, whose works on Ireland are infamous for their ‘colourful’ accounts of Ireland and its people, is generally regarded as the most influential writer on future relations between Ireland and its closest neighbour, Britain, in the high Middle Ages and beyond. Despite Gerald’s often loose regard for the truth, early modern writers, politicians and clergymen, from the scholar and diplomat Richard Stanihurst (1547–1618) to the writer and politician Edmund Spenser (1552?–1599), looked to him in order to add historical credence to their works on Irish history, culture and current

¹ William Wordsworth, *Prose works of William Wordsworth* (3 vols, New York, 1974), ii, p. 84.

affairs.² Gerald's *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* were widely disseminated and translated into both Irish and English in the late medieval and early modern period.³ As the contemporary authority on the conquest of Ireland, Gerald was (and is) much quoted. He was an especially important source for the colonial community in Ireland as well as that of the English administration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ In no uncertain terms did Gerald's Irish works provide the inspiration and impetus for the English colonists in late medieval and early modern Ireland to succeed where their predecessors failed so miserably in subjugating the majority of Ireland under what contemporaries perceived of as the yoke of English rule. Against a surging tide of anti-Irish voices inspired by renewed interest in Gerald's works on Ireland, a number of early modern writers in Ireland vociferously defended the history and integrity of the Irish people.⁵ In *Cambrenis eversus* (1662), the historian and priest John Lynch (c. 1599–1677) asserted that 'The excesses of a foreign soldiery in Ireland, the devastation of her provinces, the plunder and conflagration of her houses, and the massacre of her sons, must be all laid at Giraldus's door'.⁶ While

² See *Great deeds in Ireland: Richard Stanishurst's De Rebus in Hibernia gestis*, ed. John Barry and Hiram Morgan (Cork, 2013), pp 16–24. Nicholas Canny has argued that Spenser was not influenced by Gerald directly but through the antiquarian John Hooker's contribution to the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicle*, which contained material and some direct translations from the writings of Gerald of Wales, as well as Hooker's *History of Ireland 1546–86*, see 'Irish sources for Spenser's View', *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual*, 31/32 (2017/2018), pp 495–510.

³ There are at least sixteen extant manuscripts containing the *Topographia* and/or the *Expugnatio* surviving from the period c. 1188 to 1272, see Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp xi–xx; Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 174–80. For details of the extant manuscripts of the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio*, as well as Gerald's other works, see Catherine Margaret Rooney's invaluable thesis, 'The manuscripts of the works of Gerald of Wales' (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2005), especially chapters 4 ('The later medieval manuscripts') and 5 ('The early modern manuscripts'). Caoimhe Whelan has produced important work on the translation of Gerald's *Expugnatio* into vernacular English in the late medieval period, see 'Translating the *Expugnatio Hibernica*: transmission of a vernacular history for a late medieval English colony', in *Migration and manipulation: texts, transmission and translation in the European Middle Ages, 1000–1500*, ed. Carrie Griffin and Emer Purcell (Turnhout, 2018), pp 165–92. For Gerald's influence on literature written in medieval English, see Elizabeth L. Rambo, *Colonial Ireland in medieval English literature* (London and Toronto, 1994), esp. chapter 2.

⁴ Despite being an indefatigable self-publicist, Gerald's Irish works were more popular in the late medieval and early modern periods than in his own times. Gerald was conscious of disseminating his works as widely as possible. In the dedication to Prince John included in the *Expugnatio*, Gerald recommends that the work be translated into French because of the many princes who lacked the literary skills required to read it: *Expugnatio*, p. 264. For the influence of Gerald on the Tudor conquest of Ireland, see Hiram Morgan, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and the Tudor conquest of Ireland', in *Political ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641*, ed. *idem* (Dublin, 1999), pp 22–44.

⁵ W.R. Jones, 'Giraldus redivivus: English historians, Irish apologists and the works of Gerald of Wales', *Éire-Ireland*, 9:3 (1974), pp 3–20. Sarah E. McKibben has examined how Gerald's Irish works were used to both deride and defend the Irish, see 'In their "owne countre": deriding and defending the early modern Irish nation after Gerald of Wales', *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies*, 8 (2015), pp 39–70.

⁶ John Lynch, *Cambrensis eversus; or, refutation of the authority of Giraldus Cambrensis on the history of Ireland*, ed. and trans. Rev. Matthew Kelly (Dublin, 1848), p. 300. See also Salvador Ryan, "'Holding up a lamp to the sun": Hiberno-papal relations and the construction of Irish orthodoxy in

in more recent times, Clare Carroll, inspired by the rhetoric of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, called Gerald's *Topographia* 'a foundational text for the discourse that constructs the Irish as barbarians'.⁷ Because of his influence on the historiography, Gerald of Wales has the reputation of being a propagandist extraordinaire.

At the same time, to reduce Gerald's Irish works to mere propaganda does an immense disservice to what Robert Bartlett has defined as an 'intellectual achievement' in terms of the coherence, scope and detail of Gerald's works on Ireland and Wales.⁸ Indeed, Gerald is undoubtedly head and shoulders above his contemporaries in these regards. Long before Bartlett published his magisterial biographical study of Gerald in 1982, J.S. Brewer, the Rolls Series editor of Gerald's *opera omnia*, remarked that 'With all that has been done since by modern topographers trained in more scientific habits of observation, the conception of his [Gerald's] task, as it existed in the mind of Giraldus, if not the execution of it, must remain as a monument of bold and original genius'.⁹ Put simply by C.H. Williams, 'He [Gerald] broke new ground'.¹⁰ More than anyone else, Gerald, ever aware of his actions, recognised his literary achievements:

'Modern booklets are not truly genuine, for they are patched together from the earlier original works of others ... We on the other hand took pains in our youth to distil the histories of Ireland and Wales ... from hitherto untouched material and managed to extract the hidden pearls ... the works which cannot please now will truly be unable later to displease really. ... so later they will be praised to the skies as they deserve'.¹¹

John Lynch's *Cambrensis eversus* (1662)', *Studies in Church History*, 49 (2013), pp 168–80. For a general discussion of the influence of Gerald's Irish works on posterity, specifically with regard to the discourse of English colonialism in Ireland, see John Brannigan, "'A particular vice of that people": Giraldus Cambrensis and the discourse of English colonialism', *Irish Studies Review*, 6:2 (1998), pp 121–30. For studies of the reception of Gerald's works and their 'afterlives' in the late medieval and early modern periods, see Caoimhe Whelan, 'New readers, old history: Gerald of Wales and the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland', in *Writing history in the Anglo-Norman world: manuscripts, makers and readers, c. 1066–c. 1250*, ed. Laura Cleaver and Andrea Worm (Woodbridge, 2018), pp 213–32.

⁷ Carroll, *Circe's cup*, p. 14.

⁸ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 130

⁹ *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, i, p. xl.

¹⁰ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 10.

¹¹ Gerald of Wales, *Speculum*, pp 172–5.

Considering what seems like a mountainous volume of studies on Gerald's *opera omnia* today, it is hard to imagine a time when his works were but little known in a public sense, but that was the reality when Henry Owen's *Gerald the Welshman* was published in 1889. Owen remarked in the foreword of that book that 'The Rolls Edition ... is not accessible to all, and seven ponderous volumes of mediaeval Latin are deterrent to many'.¹² Fast forward just over one hundred and thirty years later and the translations of Gerald's *The history and topography of Ireland* (1951) by John J. O'Meara and *Expugnatio Hibernica, the conquest of Ireland* (1978) by A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin and have done much by way of bringing his works to the attention of a modern readership, lay and academic alike.¹³

That Gerald of Wales dominates the history of high medieval Ireland is hardly surprising given his colourful personality and tendency to write about the most provocative and controversial of matters. However, his reputation as a stubborn, fiery and, frankly, arrogant character unfairly precedes him to the extent that the idiosyncrasies and complexities of his thoughts are often brushed over. Moreover, Gerald's unprecedented approach to and focus on Ireland coupled with the unfortunate fact that little contemporary evidence survives to tell the tale of twelfth-century Irish history, especially the happenstances of the English conquest, have meant that the *Topographia* and the *Expugnatio* have been used as the primary sources for not only elucidating this dramatic and divisive period in the shared history of Ireland and Britain, but also as contemporary lenses through which English views of Ireland may be discerned.¹⁴ As a result, when one mentions 'English' views of Ireland in the period, they are usually of an anti-Irish bent due to the critical and vitriolic tone of Gerald's works. Indeed, such an inclination towards – and reliance on – Gerald's words as the exemplary source for medieval English views of Ireland is evidenced, for example, by Kathleen Hughes's introduction to A.J. Otway-

¹² Henry Owen, *Gerald the Welshman* (London, 1889), preface.

¹³ Gerald is surprisingly well known in the public realm, perhaps owing to the fact that three of his works appear in the Penguin Classics series: *The history and topography of Ireland*, *The journey through Wales* and *The description of Wales* (the Welsh works are published together). Of all the medieval writers included in the series, ranging from the abbot and biographer of Colum Cille Adomnán of Iona to the archbishop of Genoa and chronicler Jacobus de Voragine, Gerald of Wales is in the august company of St Augustine and Geoffrey Chaucer in having the most works featured. There is at least one poem written about Gerald in modern times of which I am aware, see W.G. McNeice, 'Giraldus Cambrensis', *Poetry Ireland Review*, 3 (1981), p. 32. James Goldman, the author of the Oscar-winning screenplay *The lion in winter* (1968), has written a novel about the climactic years of King John's reign as told through the eyes of Gerald of Wales, see *Myself as witness* (New York, 1979).

¹⁴ Colin Veach, 'The Geraldines and the conquest of Ireland', in Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy (eds), *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland: the making of a myth* (Dublin, 2016), p. 69.

Ruthven's magnum opus *A history of medieval Ireland* which begins with reference to the Cambro-Norman writer:

'His [Gerald's] writings throw some light on an invader's attitude to the native Irish. Gerald stresses the primitive character of their [the Irish] way of life. They have rich pastures, good fishing and hunting, but poorly developed agriculture and 'little use for the money-making of towns'. They are a lazy people, who think that "the greatest pleasure is not to work and the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty". Their clothes and fashions are odd, their customs barbarous. The Normans had come as conquerors: in their military discipline, their castle-building, their financial organisation and political administration [sic] their superiority to the Irish was immediately recognizable'.¹⁵

Hughes's remark that Gerald's writings 'throw *some* [my emphasis] light on an invader's attitude' is noteworthy. The sheer topical breadth and scope of Gerald's works on the medieval Irish, particularly his *Topographia*, have made them authoritative texts that are, rightly or wrongly, supposedly characteristic of the contemporary English view of Ireland and its inhabitants. However, one must tread carefully with such terms as 'English' given that those men who came to Ireland from 1167 onwards were, in terms of both ethnic makeup and their motivations for travelling to Ireland, representative of a mixed bag (a topic to which we shall return in a later chapter).

While it is undoubtedly true that we would know very little about the English conquest of Ireland if not for Gerald, he cannot be relied upon for an impartial account of the deeds of the invaders in Ireland nor how they perceived the native Irish people and their ways of life. Indeed, as James F. Dimock, one of Gerald's Rolls Series editors, defiantly stated, 'I think I have said enough to justify me in refusing to accept Gerald's history of the Irish and their English invaders as sober, truthful history'.¹⁶ However, anyone with more than a casual knowledge of Gerald's *oeuvre* knows that his ethnographic works are about more than mere 'truth' and objective fact. Indeed, for all his foibles, prejudices and egocentricities, Gerald

¹⁵ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (London, 1968), p. 1.

¹⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. lxix. Dimock edited a number of Gerald's works in *Giraldi Cambrensis opera* (vols v–vii), including the Irish and Welsh works as well as the *vitae* of saints Remigius and Hugh.

remains one of the best known and interesting medieval writers because, unlike many of his medieval coevals, we can get to know him more intimately than most and explore the fickleness, vainglory and conservatism that made him human.¹⁷

As a source for perceptions and depictions of Ireland written in early Plantagenet England, Gerald is the one writer whom most scholars would comfortably think they had already figured out. Aisling Byrne has written that, ‘From the first modern editions of Gerald’s works to recent post-colonial explorations, scholars have almost universally proceeded from the (not unreasonable) assumption that the *Topographia Hibernica* and the *Expugnatio Hibernica* are inherently divisive in their treatment of Irish topics’.¹⁸ Indeed, at first sight, Gerald ‘appears unequivocally hostile to the Irish’.¹⁹ However, during the last two decades or so, a number of studies on Gerald’s ethnographic works have highlighted new considerations that affect how one might interpret and understand his intentions and the information being conveyed to his audiences.²⁰ Although Gerald was certainly a believer in the maxim, ‘Never let the truth get in the way of a good story’, he should not be cast aside as an entirely untrustworthy source.²¹ Gerald of Wales was a complex man, so why shouldn’t his works on and views of Ireland and its people be the same?

If we consider the various stakeholders involved in the invasion and conquest of Ireland, not to mention the many contemporary chroniclers and historians who wrote about the island in the period, just how representative of his contemporaries were Gerald’s views? Having surveyed the myriad of perceptions and depictions of Ireland, its people, and its affairs, broadly speaking, in the pre-invasion period in the previous chapter, it is proposed in what follows to treat of historians’ and

¹⁷ Gerald’s *De rebus*, *De iure et statu Menuensis ecclesiae* and *Speculum* offer the most personal and intimate material, covering aspects of his family and ancestry as well as some reflections upon his career and life.

¹⁸ Aisling Byrne, ‘Family, locality, and nationality: vernacular adaptations of the *Expugnatio Hibernica* in late medieval Ireland’, *Medium Ævum*, 82:1 (2013), p. 102.

¹⁹ Scully, ‘Pagans, Christians and barbarians’, p. 45.

²⁰ See, for instance, Ad Putter, ‘Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin’, in C.P. Lewis (ed.), *ANS XXXI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2008* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp 90–103; Georgia Henley, ‘Quotation, revision, and narrative structure in Giraldus Cambrensis’s *Itinerarium Kambriae*’, *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 24 (2014), pp 1–52; Panxhi, ‘Rewriting the werewolf’, pp 21–40; Brewer, ‘Talking wolves, golden fish, and lion sex’, pp 27–53. For new approaches to Gerald’s *oeuvre* in general, see Georgia Henley and A. Joseph McMullen (eds), *Gerald of Wales: new perspectives on a medieval writer and critic* (Cardiff, 2018).

²¹ While his *Topographia* and *Descriptio* may contain many wonders, miracles and oddities that require a belief strong enough to be considered an example of pure faith, Gerald is considered to be a vital source on the natural history of Ireland and Wales respectively. See Antonia Gransden, ‘Realistic observation in twelfth century England’, *Speculum*, 47:1 (1972), pp 42–4, 48–51.

chroniclers' anti-Irish material in this chapter before dealing with more positive, ambiguous or indeed indifferent views in the next chapter. As the present chapter shows, anti-Irish attitudes and critical judgements of the Irish way of life expressed in contemporary sources were often more nuanced than many scholars have traditionally allowed. Based on the evidence at hand, even Gerald of Wales, from whose pen the most striking anti-Irish invective was arguably written in the period, was at times fickle in his opinions on Ireland. Indeed, Gerald's attitude towards certain topics related to Ireland, including the timing of the Lord John's 1185 campaign therein, changed by the time Gerald died old and embittered in c. 1223, having spent the last two decades of his life engaged in writing polemical and querulous treatises, settling old scores and revising his earlier works.²²

During the first century or so of English Ireland, writers ranging from the dean of St Paul's, Ralph of Diceto to the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris wrote about Ireland and its people. However, what they cared to write about Ireland has often taken a back seat in favour of Gerald of Wales's more 'creative' and provocative content. Granted Gerald wrote an incomparable amount of material on Ireland that was original for his times, yet these writers, too, provide original material on Ireland that offers intriguing insights on the subject of contemporary attitudes towards Ireland. Thus, if we hope to gain a more accurate sense of the perceptions and depictions of Ireland that existed in early Plantagenet England and, crucially, how such views may have qualitatively developed over time, then these writers must be brought into the fold. Like Gerald, some of these writers describe Irish customs, characteristics and events in some detail, while others merely offer passing mentions. Much of the material may not be as entertaining as Gerald's accounts of wonders and oddities in the *Topographia* but, and this is crucial, they portray the realities of medieval life and indeed Anglo-Irish relations in the post-invasion period, no matter how good, bad, ugly or seemingly banal they may have been. What is more, they occasionally attest to the cooperation and integration that occurred between the various peoples of Britain and Ireland during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. What follows is an analysis of the perceptions and depictions of Ireland, its affairs and its people that may be described as being negative in their features and outlooks.

²² See Gerald of Wales, *Speculum*, pp xxi–xxxix; Gerald of Wales, *De iure et statu Menuensus ecclesiae*, in *De rebus*, pp 326–60; Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 44–53, 79–86.

Ireland's place in the world

Medieval writers who dedicated ink to writing about the various peoples of the world, near and far, could choose from a smorgasbord of aspects such as customs, religious practices, sexual mores, and the environment from which a people originated in order to define and, thus, to perceive medieval peoples. In particular, place was an important indicator of identity in the classical and medieval worlds. This is readily evidenced by the fact that the geographic location of a people was often the primary piece of information relayed by writers when addressing foreigners. When first writing about Ireland, Gerald of Wales addressed the location of the island, and so, too, did Ralph of Diceto.²³ In the preface to his *Topographia*, Gerald muses about nature's many unusual creations remarking, with reference to the Irish, that nature often indulges herself in creative expressions in remote and distant places.²⁴ However, *distant* in this case does not necessarily indicate that which is geographically distant, rather culturally distant. Indeed, as Robert Bartlett points out, it is only 122 nautical miles from the mouth of the river Liffey to the mouth of the river Mersey, while the sea crossing to or from Ireland via Wales is merely half that distance.²⁵ Ireland and Britain were not on the opposite ends of the earth. It is noteworthy that Gerald decided to deal first with Ireland's geographic location, and, perhaps most importantly, in relation to Wales. According to Gerald, Ireland 'is situated in the western ocean about one short day's sailing from Wales, but between Ulster and Galloway in Scotland the sea narrows to half that distance. Nevertheless from either side the promontories of the other can be fairly well seen and distinguished on a fine day'.²⁶

Describing Ireland as a distant place is not a mere oversight when one also considers that Gerald follows up by stating its close geographic proximity. One might suggest that he may be highlighting the cultural 'distance' between Ireland and England here rather than a necessarily physical one. Gerald achieves two things by addressing Ireland's geographic location right from the start of his *Topographia*: first, he, rather obviously, places Ireland geographically so that his audience can

²³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 22; Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10, ii, pp 34–5.

²⁴ 'Quoties quippe, tanquam seriis et veris fatigata negotiis, paululum secedit et excedit, remotis in partibus, quasi verecundis et occultis natura ludit excessibus', Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 21.

²⁵ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings, 1075–1225* (Oxford, 2002), p. 85.

²⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 22. Cf. Bede, *HE*, pp 18–19: 'We know of another island [i.e. Britain] not far from our own, in an easterly direction, which we often see in the distance on clear days.' (*Nouimus insulam esse aliam non procul a nostra contra ortum solis, quam saepe lucidioribus diebus de longe aspicere solemus.*).

recognise its location relative to Britain; and second, asserting Ireland's proximity to Wales and also the access point between Ulster and Galloway in the north implies that barbarian peoples were right at England's door. In the contexts of the latter quarter or so of the twelfth century, Gerald's mention of Galloway is noteworthy as the English had engaged in warfare with the Scots in the early 1170s. Moreover, throughout the twelfth century, several writers addressed the supposed barbarity of the Scots as they had witnessed, or at least heard about, the men from the north who had engaged in warfare with England, displaying a savagery in battle that was supposedly unmatched. Orderic Vitalis recorded that 'a ferocious army of Scots invaded England with the utmost brutality and gave full rein to their barbarity, treating the people of the borders with bestial cruelty. They spared no one, killing young and old alike, and even butchered pregnant women by savagely disembowelling them with their swords'.²⁷ Echoes of Orderic's claims of Scottish savagery can also be found in Roger of Howden and Ralph of Diceto.²⁸ By mentioning the proximity of Galloway in Scotland to Ulster, Gerald is suggesting the closeness between the Scots and the Irish, which may be suggestive of their common ancestry as well as the extent of barbarian peoples that lay in the not-so-distant northern parts of Britain.

In addition, it is important, here, to note that contemporary concerns about military threats posed by the Welsh and Scots may have implicitly found their way into Gerald's description of Ireland's location in relation to Britain. That the Plantagenet kings of England spent long periods of their reign in France cannot have done much good for the confidence of vassals in England who had to deal with the realities of such threats in the king's absence. Thus, it may be suggested that Gerald's description highlights the closeness of England's enemies in order to keep interested parties on their toes for Gerald knew all too well about the tetchy relations between Henry II and the Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd, ruler of Deheubarth, in south Wales, and a distant relative of Gerald.²⁹ Indeed, Gerald proudly acknowledges his role as an advisor to Henry during a hostile period in Anglo-Welsh relations, confidently

²⁷ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, vi, pp 518–19.

²⁸ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 64; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ii, p. 57; Ralph of Diceto, ii, p. 8.

²⁹ For Anglo-Welsh relations during the reigns of the early Plantagenet kings, see A.D. Carr, 'Anglo-Welsh relations, 1066–1282', in Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale (eds), *England and her neighbours 1066–1453: essays in honour of Pierre Chaplais* (London, 1989), pp 121–38; Paul Latimer, 'Henry II's campaign against the Welsh in 1165', *Welsh Historical Review*, 14 (1989), pp 523–52; John Gillingham, 'Henry II, Richard I and the Lord Rhys', *Peritia*, 10 (1996), pp 225–36.

asserting that he ‘single-handedly . . . turned aside not a few of Rhys’s great armies from the king’s land, which the prince was preparing to invade’.³⁰

The perception of Ireland as being a distant land where nature has chosen a different course is an oft-found *topos* in classical and medieval works, whereby the Irish Other is defined as being distant from the norm and, by extension, the Self. Gerald constructs a sort of paradox whereby Ireland is simultaneously near but far way. Such a liminal construct allowed Gerald to create marvels and oddities that aptly reflected a sense of the unpredictability of nature. As Aishling Byrne notes, ‘inaccessibility was no precondition for the fantastic, as Gerald of Wales had to go no further than Ireland to encounter a world he thought fantastical. His repeated references to Ireland as an *orbis alter* in the *Topographia Hibernica* are very firmly linked to the island’s supposedly marvellous attributes’.³¹

The topography and geography of Ireland are used to create an image of a land which is as bleak as it is fecund. Gerald describes the land as being fruitful, rich in fertile soil and plentiful in harvest; however, the climate hinders the spring produce through ‘unceasing rain’.³² According to Gerald, Ireland suffers more storms of wind or rain than any other; in fact, the frequent and violent winds of a north-west prevalence cause almost all the trees in the west to be bent in the opposite direction, which is, interestingly, towards Britain.³³ Once again there is a sense that the barbarian Irish are perhaps naturally inclined towards Wales and England. Gerald’s descriptions of Ireland’s location emphasise the liminal position of Ireland and are suggestive of the effects of classical thinking regarding climatic determinism upon nature in Ireland.³⁴ Although Gerald provides some criticisms of Irish weather at this early stage of the *Topographia*, he later asserts that Ireland has a salubrious air and serenity.³⁵ William of Newburgh said the same about Ireland, although he explicitly mentions his reliance on Bede for his description.³⁶

Ralph of Diceto, in his *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, remarked that after Britain, Ireland was the best of all the islands, and that despite Britain having more

³⁰ Gillingham, ‘Henry II, Richard I and the Lord Rhys’, p. 231.

³¹ Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: fantasy and history in medieval literature* (Oxford, 2016), p. 15 n.39.

³² Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 27.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For Gerald’s understanding of natural science and its relevance to his ethnographic works, see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 104–27.

³⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 25.

³⁶ William of Newburgh, i, p. 165.

wealth, Ireland was wider geographically and was healthier, with a much milder climate.³⁷ Ralph's description of Ireland's location and its general features indicates that it was a place of some import for him and perhaps also for his potential readers. Indeed, following on from outlining the countries of the world, their provinces and cities at the beginning of his work, Diceto starts his *Abbreviationes* proper, with its first account being on Ireland and its early inhabitants. Certainly, this is a curious starting point for his work.³⁸ What is perhaps most noteworthy about Ralph's description of Ireland is that it seems to be copied, almost verbatim, from Henry of Huntingdon who in turn seems to have copied it from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.³⁹ Gerald, too, seems to have borrowed wording from Bede with the words *salubritate* and *serenitate* occurring in the work of Henry of Huntingdon, Ralph of Diceto and Gerald of Wales in their respective descriptions of Ireland.⁴⁰ This example of medieval writers utilizing the works of their predecessors without any sort of indication to the reader highlights the practice of contemporaries not only effectively copying and pasting – to use a modern analogy – existing content but also the fact that these authors relied on such material for the creation of their 'own' descriptions of places, people and things. As a result, we must tread carefully when approaching descriptions of foreign peoples and places in contemporary accounts as they may originate from, or at the very least be inspired to some degree by, an earlier writer. While Diceto does not offer original material, as such, when describing Ireland, he does effectively create an original amalgamate description of Ireland based on Bede with the added elements of the Scythian origin story of the Irish and reference to the Navarrese, both of which were likely derived from Henry of Huntingdon.⁴¹ Interestingly, however, Diceto adds etymologies for the words *Hiberniensis* and *Scotia*:

³⁷ 'Hibernia post Britanniam omnium insularum est optima; quae quamvis Britanniae divitiis cedat, latitudine, salubritate, serenitate praestat', Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10.

³⁸ This opening chapter on Ireland, entitled 'De origine Scotorum et Hybernensium' is omitted in MSS B. and C., while MS R. has the title 'De situ Hiberniae', see Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10 n.1.

³⁹ Cf. Bede, *HE*, pp 18–21; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, pp 28–31.

⁴⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 25; Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 28–9.

⁴¹ Although Diceto copied the Scythian origin material from Huntingdon, he erroneously, or perhaps purposefully, changed the wording of the material from the *Historia Anglorum* so that it stated that the Navarrese lived in Ireland, not Spain: 'Hec cum non certissima sint, hoc tamen certum est quod ad Hispania Hiberniam uenerunt, et inde pars eorum egressa, terciam in Britannia Britonibus et Pictis gentem addiderunt. Nam et pars eorum que ibi remansit adhuc eadem utitur lingua, et Nauarri uocantur', Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, p. 30; 'Inde uenerunt [i.e. the Spain-dwelling descendants of a noble Scythian] Hiberniam post annos mille duobus additis a transitu filiorum Israel per mare rubrum, et inde pars eorum egressa terciam in Britannia Britonibus et Pictis gentem addiderunt', Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10. It must be said that Huntingdon's syntax does make it confusing for readers

‘Hyberus. Hibernia. Hiberniensis.

Getia. Geta. Geticus. Gothicus. Gotus. Ostrogotus. Witsigotus.

Scitia. Scita. Sciticus. Scoticus. Scotus. Scotia’.⁴²

These etymologies are not repeated in the description of Ireland included in Diceto’s *Ymagines Historiarum*. In their absence, however, Diceto does include a more elaborate etymology for the term *Hiberniensis* in which he states that it derived from a river in Spain called the *Hyberus*. Interestingly, Gerald remarks in the *Topographia* how some people say that the *Hiberniensis* take their name from Heberus, the alleged first king of the Irish people, while others say that they took it from the name of a river in Spain from whence the Irish came.⁴³ Gerald also writes about the Scythian origin story of the Irish. While, Bede, Henry of Huntingdon, Gerald of Wales and Ralph of Diceto all write about the Scythian origin story of the Irish, or in Bede’s case the Scots, it is worth mentioning that of Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote an account that amalgamated various elements of the origin stories of the Picts, Scots and Irish concluding that the Scots were descended from the Picts and the Irish, too.⁴⁴ If we return to Ralph of Diceto, what is perhaps most interesting about his etymologies is the inclusion of the Germanic peoples, the Ostrogoths and Visigoths. These were of course counted among the barbarian tribes who sacked Rome in 410, causing, in part, the demise of the western part of the Roman empire, one the most powerful political entities in existence until then. It is difficult to discern why Diceto chose to include this etymology between those of the Irish and Scots. Perhaps he was lumping them together because they reflected words used to describe peoples and places perceived to be barbarous? While it seems plausible, Diceto never explicitly referred to the Irish as barbarians in any of his works, although he did refer to the Scots and Welsh as such.⁴⁵ There is the possibility that Diceto was influenced by the etymologies of Isidore of Seville, whom Diceto included in the list of influential writers at the beginning of his chronicle.⁴⁶ In his etymologies, Isidore stated that ‘people’ reckoned that the Scythians and Goths took their origins from Magog, the

to discern to what exactly *ibi* refers in the sentence ‘*Nam et pars eorum que ibi remansit adhuc eadem utitur lingua, et Nauarri uocantur*’.

⁴² Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10. Cf. Isidore of Seville, *The etymologies*, p. 294.

⁴³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *HRB*, pp 123–4.

⁴⁵ In reference to Henry II’s kingdom, Diceto writes that it was inhabited by barbarous nations such as the Welsh and Scots: ‘*a tam barbaris nationibus Scotis videlicet et Walensibus inhabitatum*’, Ralph of Diceto, ii, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 23.

son of Japheth.⁴⁷ Thus, they shared a common origin. Furthermore, Isidore writes that *Hibernia* is derived from *Hiberia* (Iberia), which was the first name for *Hispania* and derived from the river *Hiberus*.⁴⁸ However, we are told that Ireland is called *Scotia* because it was colonised by the *Scoti*.⁴⁹ Based on these etymologies, it seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that Isidore's work certainly influenced Diceto but it was Diceto himself who brought these together for the first time, including the etymology of the term 'Visigoths' (*Witsigotus*) alongside those of the words *Hiberniensis* and *Scotia*.

Intimately tied to geographic location was the notion that the furthest extremities of the known world were places where nature took a different course. By constructing ethnic groups as barbarians based on their location in the known world, we can see the potential for contradiction in contemporary writers' perceptions of the world and the geographic locations of people and places in it. Gerald of Wales, for instance, compares Ireland, located at the farthest known extremity of the West, with the countries of the East, assumed to be the Far East. He favourably describes the climate of Ireland and refers to it as the most temperate of all countries and sets the island firmly within the western set in the West-East dichotomy that he perpetuates.⁵⁰ Gerald acknowledges this explicitly in the preface to his *Topographia* in which he is forthright in positing the West-East antithesis.⁵¹ He develops this further in the final chapters of the first *distinctio* of his *Topographia* addressing the pestiferous and poisonous air that pervades in the East.⁵² The occasional contradictions in Gerald's

⁴⁷ Isidore of Seville, *The etymologies*, p. 193. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 143–4.

⁴⁸ Isidore of Seville, *The etymologies*, p. 294.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From due east to true north: orientalism and orientation', in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *The postcolonial Middle Ages*, (New York, 2000), pp 19–34.

⁵¹ For Gerald, his world view was dominated by the remit of Christendom. It is important to note here that the early twelfth-century map of Europe included in MS 700 (Plate 1) gives us some sense, perhaps, of Gerald's Eurocentric world view framed by the reach of Christendom, if indeed it was Gerald who directed its production. The layout of this crudely drawn map is problematic as it is condensed and erratically orientated, to say the least. Moreover, it seems to have been composed primarily as a map of Britain and Ireland in relation to the Holy See of Rome, which is the largest icon (a crenellated structure) present on the map. Several places are plotted in a linear fashion from left to right. The furthest place east located on the map is Theodosia (Feodosia in the Crimea), which is plotted on the map in the top-left corner incorrectly in line with Rome (Roma) which is prominently centred at the top of the map. Despite the confused layout, the map tells us much about the mentality of its creator and his perception of the core-periphery dynamic, whether that was Gerald or an illuminator or indeed an illuminator instructed by Gerald himself. As Thomas O'Loughlin points out 'it [the map] demonstrates the way that power and authority flow directly from Rome to the British Isles, as to every other part of the map. ... For whoever created the map, to live in the British Isles was to live in the environs of Rome itself', see 'An early thirteenth-century map in Dublin: a window into the world of Giraldus Cambrensis', *Imago Mundi*, 51 (1999), p. 33.

⁵² Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 27–32.

descriptions and views of Ireland's location, climate, flora and fauna in the first part of the *Topographia* reveal not only the great novelty and indeed nuance of Gerald's first Irish work, but also the fickleness of his views and his multifaceted construction of the Irish Other. While Ireland is a place of 'unceasing rain', Gerald is quite complimentary towards the climate therein, but this belies the colonialist motivations of Gerald and his kinsmen. This point will be further developed in the next chapter when exploring the more favourable views of Ireland that were expressed by contemporary chroniclers and historians.

For all the words dedicated by contemporary commentators to present Ireland as a distant and alien land, a degree of skepticism is warranted. Did these writers really think Ireland was such a strange and treacherous place located a mere stone's throw across the Irish sea? There is much evidence to the contrary, including the long-standing tradition of Irish missionaries travelling to Britain and elsewhere in Europe, the trade links between Ireland and Britain, especially between Dublin and Bristol, and the fact that Ireland was a place of shelter for political exiles in the pre-invasion period ranging from the Dublin-born king of Gwynedd Gruffydd ap Cynan ab Iago to the future Anglo-Saxon king of England Harold Godwinson.⁵³ It is hard to know with any degree of certainty the extent to which Ireland was perceived to be a truly alien land beyond the threshold of civility. However, what is certainly true is that commercial contact between Ireland and Britain had existed for centuries. Indeed the Irish Sea was a bustling area for commercial, political and military activities involving many groups: Irish, Norse, English, Scots, Welsh and Manx, to name just the main players. In the period before the English invasion, trade between Ireland and England was diverse in goods and frequent in occurrence.⁵⁴ While we know relatively little about what was exported from Ireland, we know more about what was

⁵³ William of Malmesbury, for instance, records Irish pilgrims travelling to Glastonbury to visit St Patrick's shrine there, see William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, pp 808–9.

⁵⁴ For studies of the medieval mercantile relationship and the type of goods traded between Ireland and Britain, see, for example, Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and trade in early medieval Ireland', *JRSAI*, 10 (1980), pp 67–89; Patrick F. Wallace, 'Anglo-Norman Dublin: continuity and change', in Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish Antiquity: essays and studies presented to M.J. O'Kelly* (Dublin, 1994), pp 247–67; Patrick F. Wallace, 'The economy and commerce of Viking Age Dublin', in Klaus Düwel et al. (eds), *Untersuchungen zu handel und verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen zeit in mittel – und Nordeuropa IV* (Göttingen, 1987), pp 200–45; Michelle Comber, 'Trade and communication networks in early historic Ireland', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 10 (2001), pp 73–92; Clare Downham's brief survey in *Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 48–55. For the later medieval period, Timothy O'Neill's monograph is still unsurpassed, *Merchants and mariners in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1987).

imported from England and further afield.⁵⁵ Henry II issued charters to confirm the rights of the men of, respectively, Chester, Bristol and Rouen to trade directly with the Irish, which had been granted to them by his grandfather Henry I.⁵⁶ William of Malmesbury described the flourishing trade between Ireland and Bristol⁵⁷, confidently but exaggeratedly positing the rhetorical question ‘For what would Ireland be worth if goods were not brought to her from England?’⁵⁸ In his *vita* of St Wulfstan, William wrote about the trade of slaves – men and even pregnant women – from England to Ireland while also providing insight into the realities of everyday commerce as people from both islands seemingly travelled together according to his account:

‘There is a maritime town, called Bristol, which is on the direct route to Ireland, and so suitable for trade with that barbarian land. The inhabitants of this place with other Englishmen often sail to Ireland for the sake of trade. Wulfstan banished from among them a very old custom ... For men whom they had purchased from all over England they carried off to Ireland; but first they got the women with child and sent them pregnant to market’.⁵⁹

It worth pointing out that while slaves existed in early medieval Ireland, usually in the form of prisoners of war or as victims obliged to repaying their debts by bondage, there is no evidence of actual slave trading in Ireland in the pre-Viking period.⁶⁰ On the contrary, slaves were an ‘integral and numerically important part of English

⁵⁵ A. Bowman, ‘Post-Roman imports in Britain and Ireland: a maritime perspective’, in K.R. Dark (ed.), *External contacts and the economy of late Roman and post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp 97–108; Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea studies, 900–1200* (Dublin, 2006), pp 24–35; O’Sullivan *et al.*, *Early medieval Ireland*, pp 276–7.

⁵⁶ Hudson, *Irish Sea studies*, p. 121 n.58.

⁵⁷ William of Malmesbury, *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury, to which are added the extant abridgments of this work and the miracles and translation of St. Wulfstan*, ed. R.R. Darlington (London, 1928), pp 42–3, 90–1. Wulfstan was a patron of the sailors trading between Bristol and Ireland. Gerald of Wales attests to Irish trade ships berthing at Bristol port at the end of the twelfth century. He also recounts that Diarmait Mac Murchada, having met with Henry II, travelled to Bristol in expectation of the chance visit of Irish ships from which he might hear news of affairs back home in Ireland, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 28–9.

⁵⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, pp 738–9.

⁵⁹ William of Malmesbury, *The Vita Wulfstani*, pp 43–4, 90–1. The importance of the mercantile relationship between Dublin and Bristol, especially, is highlighted in the Life of Wulfstan and in other accounts. Moreover, Henry II’s decision to issue a charter granting Dublin to the men of Bristol further confirms the importance of Bristol and its men as loyal supporters of the English king. For discussion on trade between the two, see Aubrey Gwynn, ‘Medieval Bristol and Dublin’, *IHS*, 5:20 (1947), pp 275–86.

⁶⁰ Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, p. 269. See also David R. Wyatt, *Slaves and warriors in medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200* (Leiden, 2009).

society in the Anglo-Saxon period'.⁶¹ Some contemporary writers used the practice of slavery as a stick to beat the 'Celtic' peoples with as it was perceived to be anti-chivalrous. However, while slavery ran contrary to the civilised code of values associated with the aristocracy in contemporary England, the military endeavours of the English often resulted in the capture of combatants who had to be dealt with.

The usual options were to either kill them or take them as hostages for ransom or political effect. The decision to kill or keep these combatants was influenced by many factors, not least the fear that releasing prisoners would result in later reprisals or indeed the potential moralistic and/or psychological implications of killing another human being, especially a fellow Christian. Gerald of Wales's account of Raymond le Gros and Hervey de Montmorency debating whether or not they should kill some 70 prisoners following an engagement at the creek of Baginbun is incredibly interesting, not least because it provides insight into the conquerors' mindsets in relation to the Irish conquest and the native combatants. If we are to believe Gerald's account, Raymond le Gros felt strongly that the prisoners should have been ransomed because it would have added to their soldiers' pay and act as an example of virtue.⁶² Despite Raymond's call for clemency in the matter, the soldiers present sided with Hervey, who had argued for the killing of the prisoners on the grounds that the natives would have killed them if the shoe was on the other foot.⁶³ Indeed, Hervey does not entertain the possibility that the Irish would ever consider ransoming their prisoners. The ransoming of prisoners was a particularly useful means of acquiring resources in payment or ensuring one's interests were protected. Orderic Vitalis provides an example that affirms the practice of hostage-taking as a means of not only limiting the brutality of warfare but also as a means of mitigating against potential cases of aggression. Orderic writes that William the Conqueror brought Archbishop Stigand, Edgar Ætheling (Edgar II), a cousin of King Edward, earls Edwin, Morcar and Waltheof, Æthelnoth of Canterbury and other men *altae nobilitatis et mirae pulchritudinis* with him to Normandy so that, bereft of their leaders, the English would be powerless to rebel despite William's absence.⁶⁴ According to Orderic, these men were kept as hostages (*obsides*).⁶⁵ John Gillingham

⁶¹ David Pelteret, 'Slave raiding and slave trading in early England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 9 (1981), p. 99.

⁶² Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 60–1.

⁶³ According to Gerald, Hervey asked the soldiers present the rhetorical questions '*Numquid victis vitam venderent? Numquid captos ulla redemptione liberarent?*', *ibid.*, pp 62–5.

⁶⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 196–7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

has argued that Orderic's accounts of William Rufus and Henry I holding prisoners shows that there was a body of law or a custom that regulated matters of taking and keeping prisoners.⁶⁶ Yet, as Raymond and Hervey's tête-à-tête illustrates, chivalrous ideals did not necessarily supersede circumstances on the ground. While slavery was taboo subject for the military aristocracy in England, keeping prisoners was a regular practice. And although the fear of reprisal was an understandable factor influencing the decision to capture or release military captives, using captured combatants as human capital to leverage the English colonial project in Ireland, while sparing the lives of others, was still reprehensible.

Returning to Ireland's alleged dependence on Britain, Gerald of Wales expressed a strikingly similar view to William of Malmesbury. So much so, in fact, that one might suggest Gerald derived his opinion straight from the manuscript pages of the *Gesta regum Anglorum*: 'Ireland ... cannot survive without the goods and trade which come to it from Britain'.⁶⁷ While such commercial and economic dependence was more than likely exaggerated, Rees Davies astutely pointed out that such views of the dynamics of trade between Ireland and Britain served to direct attention away from the narrowly political and military aspects of domination and towards a narrative of dependency.⁶⁸ For Gerald, shifting focus from the colonial endeavours of his kinsmen and others in Ireland towards a narrative of Irish dependency on English goods conveniently provided justification for the conquest of Ireland and its retention based on a clearly spurious sense of Christian charity coupled with Gerald's claim that Ireland was the lawful possession of the kings of Britain.⁶⁹ In the late twelfth century, contemporaries – who were 'envious and thoughtless' according to Gerald – had questioned Henry II's military endeavours in Ireland and his right to rule that country.⁷⁰ Gerald, knowing all too well which side of his bread was buttered, was adept at pandering to his patron of the moment, and so it

⁶⁶ John Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 52–4.

⁶⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 252–3.

⁶⁸ Davies, *Domination and conquest*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 149. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 148–9.

⁷⁰ Gerald outlined the five-fold rights – two ancient and three of more recent origins – of the English king over Ireland in his *Expugnatio*, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 148–9. He had also made a similar case for the claims of the kings of Britain over Ireland in the *Topographia* based on an account, derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth, of how Gurguntius, king of the Britons, had allegedly granted land in Ireland to a Spanish tribe called the Basclenses, see Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 148; cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *HRB*, pp 100–1. In terms of contemporary criticisms of the invasion of Ireland, William of Newburgh questioned Henry's military endeavours therein, especially on the grounds that the Irish were fellow Christians, while William of Canterbury similarly judged military action in Ireland. These contemporary criticisms of English conquest in Ireland will be examined further in the next chapter.

was natural for him, then, to effectively conclude his *Expugnatio* by asserting the English monarch's right to rule Ireland.

Although Ireland's location on the fringes of Europe was for some medieval writers an inhibitor to social, cultural and ecclesiastical developments, it may be argued that it was this very peripherality that ultimately freed it from both the imperialism of Rome as well as the feudalism experienced elsewhere in medieval Europe thus preventing either system from establishing firm roots therein. However, it must also be acknowledged that while Ireland was located at the edge of Europe, it could hardly be said that it was free of continental influences or indeed that mainland Europe was free of an Irish touch.⁷¹ It is this paradox of Ireland's location being simultaneously peripheral *and* proximal that enabled classical and medieval writers to write about a place and a people that were, at the same time, familiar and otherworldly. This paradox can be seen explicitly in Gerald's *Topographia*. By the time Gerald of Wales was gathering his materials and writing his Irish works in the late 1180s, many cities in Ireland were firmly part of the Plantagenet world. In the chronicles and histories that treat of English Ireland, descriptions of English-controlled towns and cities are never critical.

⁷¹ For some relevant studies, see Michael Richter, 'The European dimension of Irish history in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *Peritia*, 4 (1985) pp 328–45; Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'The origins of the Irish monastic tradition at Ratisbon (Regensburg)', *Celtica*, 13 (1980), 58–77. Many studies on the influence of the Irish on German ecclesiastical history have been undertaken by German scholars, see, for example, Helmut Flachenecker, *Schottenklöster. Irische Benediktinerkonvente im hochmittelalterlichen Deutschland* (Paderborn, 1995); Stefan Weber, *Iren auf dem Kontinent: das Leben des Marianus Scottus von Regensburg und die Anfänge der Irischen 'Schottenklöster'* (Heidelberg, 2010).

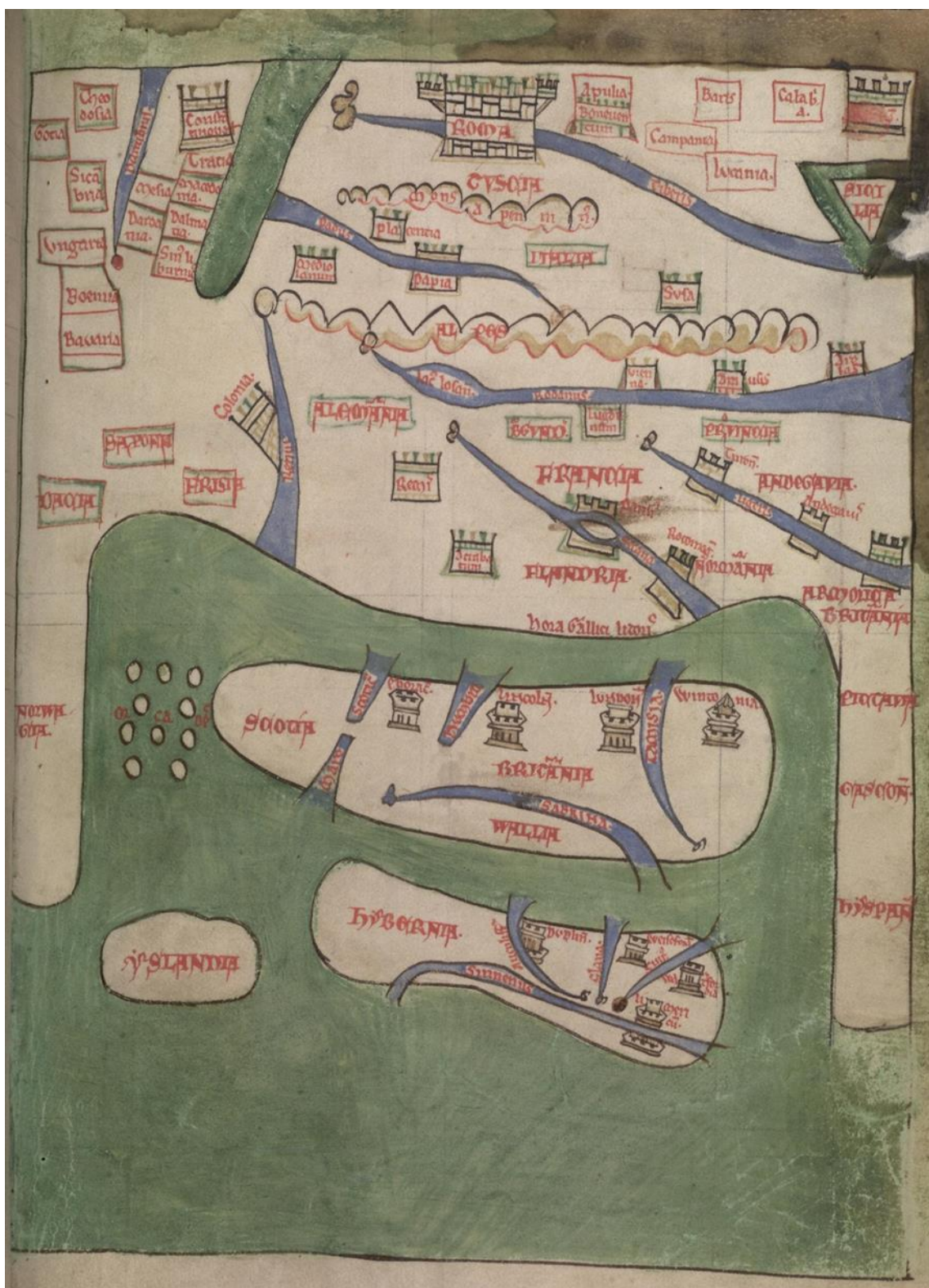


Plate 1: Map of Europe (c. 1200), located between the texts of the *Topographia Hibernica* and the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 48r.

The Irish body: hybridity, gender and disability

During the medieval period, digressions – real or imagined – from the perceived norms and standards of one's ingroup(s) could provide sufficient ammunition to depict individuals and social group as uncivilised, barbaric and inhuman.⁷² This was indeed true of the complex and composite identities which existed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, where, over the space of eight hundred years, Romans, then Anglo-Saxons, then Danes, then Normans, ruled. Otherness can exist in many forms and is usually constructed and perceived differently based on context. Under the conditions of colonialisation and warfare, the supposed subhuman status of the Other is often acknowledged and used as a justification for action and, often times, violence. In the medieval world, allegedly monstrous and animalistic tendencies attributed to national and ethnic groups were indicative of a people's inhumanity and reflected wider intellectual concerns about the nature of humanity and the relationship between humans and beasts.⁷³ The various manifestations of monstrous, animalistic, or freakish Others in the medieval world become clichéd to a certain extent: malevolent manticores, devilish dragons and shape-shifting cynocephali are but some of the well-recognised fantastical creatures associated with medieval culture. However, monsters could come in many shapes and forms, from terrifying physical features to monstrous, inhuman personalities. The proliferation of monstrous and freakish creatures did not reflect that medieval peoples were credulous, simple-minded folk, rather they provided a creative yardstick by which humans could reflect and, potentially, reaffirm their sense of self. As Dana M. Oswald so aptly put it:

‘Monsters do more than provide a delicious terror for their viewers. They assure viewers that their humanity is more complete than that possessed by the monster, but they also notify viewers that variations are possible, and that humanity is available on a kind of sliding scale. Thus, they demand that viewers appraise the status of their own humanity, and the integrity of their bodies and identities’.⁷⁴

⁷² See Hans-Werner Goetz and Ian N. Wood (eds), *Otherness in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2022).

⁷³ See, for instance, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, identity, and monstrosity in medieval Britain: on difficult middles* (New York, 2006); Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, gender and sexuality in medieval English literature* (Woodbridge, 2010); Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman (eds), *Monstrosity, disability, and the posthuman in the medieval and early modern world* (Cham, 2019).

⁷⁴ Oswald, *Monsters, gender and sexuality*, p. 3.

Writing in the fourth-century, the poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens referred to the Irish as *semifer Scotus* or the half-bestial Irishman who is worse than a war-dog.⁷⁵ Writing in a similar vein over eight hundred years later, Gerald of Wales wrote about the hybridisation of the Irish with reference to several examples, including a man who was half an ox and an ox that was half a man, the result of bestial intercourse between man and bovine which Gerald asserted was ‘a particular vice of that people [i.e. the Irish]’.⁷⁶ The notion of Irish hybridity reflects a common literary motif used in the classical and medieval worlds, which serves to denigrate the Other and remove their human status. The presence of a hybrid character or characters holds a specific literary function that is often didactic. In his *Topographia* Gerald gives an account of an Irish abbot, namely Natalis, who had cursed a man and a woman, turning them into wolves.⁷⁷ Unlike most werewolves, they had retained their rationality and mind, rather taking the physical form of a wolf.⁷⁸ Out of all of the *Topographia*’s chapters, this one experienced the most revisions, with the encounter changing dramatically, depending on the recension, from a wolf couple to a sole she-wolf.⁷⁹ It is reasonable to suggest that such a major change in cast highlights Gerald’s well-known misogynistic views of the female sex, it was woman, after all, who had caused the fall of man. However, despite the changing shape and number of the wolf characters in the *Topographia*, the idea of hybridity always implicitly suggests the retention of some human aspect(s) – human speech and human form beneath the wolves’ fur in this case – and, therefore, justifies attempts to re-humanise the hybrid. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that the invasion by the civilised English was the intervention which would save the Irish from their scrofulous barbarity. It is fanciful, however, to take the wolf story in isolation as being indicative of such shrewd dehumanisation and as argumentation for justifying English colonialism, but read alongside the rest of the *Topographia*’s chapters it

⁷⁵ Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, 395, cited in Diarmuid Scully, ‘At world’s end: Scotland and Ireland in the Graeco-Roman imagination’, in E. Longley *et al.* (eds), *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: concepts, contexts, comparisons* (Belfast, 2003), pp 167–8.

⁷⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 108–9. See Matthew Xavier Vernon, ‘Gerald in the middle: hybridity and historical narratives in *History and topography of Ireland* and *The conquest of Ireland*’, *Postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, 8:4 (2017), pp 404–24.

⁷⁷ Here the process of lycanthropy is the result of divine retribution; in comparison, Gervase of Tilbury wrote about werewolves in England and France who were turned into wolves according to cycles of the moon, see *Otia imperialia*, pp 86–9, 812–15.

⁷⁸ For a study of metamorphosis as a theme in medieval writing and as it appears in the *Topographia*, see Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the werewolf’, *Speculum*, 73 (1998), pp 987–1013.

⁷⁹ Zachary Panxhi, ‘Rewriting the werewolf’, pp 21–40.

paints a prejudicial picture of the Irish.⁸⁰ It is worth noting, however, that, despite their hybrid state, these Irish werewolves were in fact practising Christians. Indeed, Gerald does not chastise them for any sort of irreligious practices.

However, this tale does not simply function to dehumanise the Irish, it may also be read didactically as an extolling of the dutifulness of the priest in his administering of the *viaticum* to the dying she-wolf as well the praiseworthy perseverance of the Irish wolves' faith in testing times given their forced exile. Such a positive reading of the Irish wolves complicates the general tendency to view Gerald as an utterly hostile commentator on Ireland and its affairs. Moreover, the additions and edits made by Gerald across a twenty-two-year period reflect his ability to revise his texts in order to fit his ever-changing moods as well as the views of his audiences. Gerald tells us that a synod was convened to deal with the matter of this exchange between the abbot and the Irish wolves – although somewhat belatedly two years later – and that the Irish abbots and bishops informed him of the encounter between the priest and the wolves adding that he had already heard of the account previously from others. This point is noteworthy given the various recensions of the text and the changing details, especially when it comes to him reducing the number of wolf characters from two to one in the later versions. This very point is made plain by Lindsey Zachary Panxhi's excellent study of this encounter which surveys its development over the course of Gerald's editing process and the four subsequent recensions that emerged. Building upon Amelia Borrego Sargent's invaluable research on Gerald's now confirmed five recensions of the *Topographia*, Panxhi offers a 'corrective' reading that goes beyond the conventional post-colonial interpretations of this lycanthropic account, which is in fact the longest, single chapter in Gerald's first work on Ireland.⁸¹ Based on evidence from the five recensions, Panxhi offers five distinct intentions behind each of the modified accounts, arguing that Gerald did not use the Irish as an example of 'inferiority and inhumanity' but rather as 'a spiritual admonition applicable for both the colonizers

⁸⁰ Depictions of monstrous Irish hybrids (the ox-man hybrid) can be seen in MS 700, NLI, f. 25r; and Royal MS 13 B VIII, BL, f. 19r. In later centuries, the Irish continued to be depicted with animalistic and monstrous qualities, see, for example, the many propagandist cartoons emanating from Britain in the nineteenth century, including English illustrator and political cartoonist John Tenniel's illustration 'The Irish Frankenstein', *Punch*, 20 May 1882.

⁸¹ Borrego Sargent, 'Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*', pp 241–61. See also the doctoral dissertation from which Sargent's article emerged, Borrego Sargent, 'Visions and revisions'.

and the colonized’ and Gerald ‘considered his message to be one that applied to all ethnicities’.⁸²

In his prosopographical descriptions, Gerald describes the Irish as both bestial and human i.e. half-breeds, but more specifically, cultural half-breeds. The following description from the third *distinctio* of the *Topographia* illustrates this: ‘They are a wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only, and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of pastoral living’.⁸³ Here, Gerald is referring to the development of human societies and how primitive habits abide in certain peoples and their associated lands. Moreover, Gerald utilises a ‘colonialist’s’ comparison in order to assert the primitiveness of the Irish people as well as to demarcate one of the main differences between man and beast: a capacity for techno-economic development. The implication here is that the Irish are beast-like due to their reliance on pastoral farming thus indicating their lack of techno-economic development. Robert Bartlett has commented that ‘The concepts behind this passage ... would not be out of place in nineteenth-century anthropological thought. Nor are they complete strangers in the twentieth century’.⁸⁴ Moreover, one can also see a comparison with the supposed primitive traits of the Irish Other in the descriptions of the ‘new’ peoples of the New World. Following the 1622 Jamestown massacre of English settlers by Native Americans a swift and forthright anti-native policy was adopted by the English, which was typified by the travel writer Samuel Purchas when he described the Native Americans as ‘so bad [a] people, having little of humanity but shape, ignorant of civility, of arts, of religion, more brutish than the beasts they hunt, more wild and unmanly than that unmanned wild country which they range rather than inhabit’.⁸⁵ The parallels between the descriptions of Purchas and Gerald of Wales, in particular, are striking in terms of the similarities of their subject matter when describing the Native American and Irish Others respectively: a patent lack of civility, culture, and religiosity; wild and animalistic in appearance and behaviour; and primitive in habitation.⁸⁶

⁸² Panxhi, ‘Rewriting the werewolf’, pp 39–40.

⁸³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 151.

⁸⁴ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 145.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Keith Thomas, *In pursuit of civility: manners and civilization in early modern England* (Waltham, MA, 2018), p. 161.

⁸⁶ Such comparisons have been made by a number of other scholars, not least Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 145–6. See also John Brannigan, “‘A particular vice of that people’”, p. 129.

In the third part of the *Topographia*, Gerald speaks of the mutilated Irish, stating that just as there are Irish who are ‘kindly fashioned by nature’, there are equally those who ‘turn out in a horrible way’.⁸⁷ He continues by asserting that it is not surprising that they turn out this way considering their adultery, incestuousness and horrible practices, and concludes that it seems a just punishment from God.⁸⁸ Gerald’s use of the Irish hybrid serves to provide a figure that is simultaneously human and unhuman. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that in the medieval occidental imaginary, that ‘the category admixture that hybridity represents is almost always conjoined with monstrosity, where *monstrum* has the doubled sense of “that which warns” (*monere*) and “that which reveals” (*demonstrare*)’.⁸⁹ The use of the hybrid and disabled figures allows Gerald to engage his didacticism through teaching the nature of orthodoxy and the potential divine retribution which will be enacted upon those who refuse to assimilate. Moreover, these monstrous and disabled Irish figures fall within wider medieval attitudes towards and concerns about differently abled bodies, whereby such external digressions from the ‘normate’ – the neologism used by Garland Thomson to describe the idealised image of the body – were seen as representative of internal departures from perceived moral standards.⁹⁰ The discourses of disability and monstrosity are often entangled, which can be seen in the *Topographia*, whereby the Irish are supposedly superlative in having great numbers of disabled people produced ‘contrary to her [nature’s] ordinary laws’, which ‘is not surprising ... when dealing with a people that is adulterous, incestuous, unlawfully conceived and born, outside the law, and shamefully abusing nature herself in spiteful and horrible practices’.⁹¹ Taking the *Topographia* as a whole, Gerald’s disabled Irish are, effectively, monstrous in their appearance *and* in their deeds; thus,

⁸⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 181.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Hybrids, monsters, borderlands: the bodies of Gerald of Wales’, in *The postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (London, 2000), p. 85.

⁹⁰ In many ways, the English colonists and kin that Gerald lauded in his Irish works were ‘normate’ if we consider Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s definition: ‘The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure with which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them’, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary bodies: figuring physical disability in American culture and literature* (New York, 2017), p. 8.

⁹¹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 181–2. In the manuscripts, this chapter is accompanied by an image of a crippled Irishman with his feet contorted.

‘syncretizing narratives of “otherness” and difference’, as Derek Newman-Stille put it.⁹²

In comparison to his contemporaries, Gerald provides the most numerous examples of Irish people allegedly engaging in bestiality in his *Topographia*, including bovine-human hybrids – the man who was half an ox and the ox that was half a man (*de semibove viro*) – as well as the king of Connacht’s tame white goat who, we are told, had intercourse with an Irish woman who was entrusted as his keeper, and the abhorrent inauguration rite of the king of Kenelcunill (Tír Conaill).⁹³ Interestingly, the accompanying illuminations found in numerous manuscript copies of the *Topographia* provide us, perhaps, with a glimpse into Gerald’s, or at the very least the illuminator’s, *naïveté* when it came to carnal affairs and the practicalities of sexual intercourse. In depicting the sexual nature of King Rothericus’s goat and the woman’s relationship, the animal is rather oddly presented as a biped, with his forelegs seemingly grasping the arms of the Irish woman.⁹⁴

There is a complex interplay here in how the fantastical and the potentially plausible are brought to us in terms of content sequence in the *Topographia*. We are fed the shock of a hybrid creature in the first instance – an otherworldly creature – and then encouraged to come back down to earth in a way with the case of bestiality – an unfortunately more plausible happenstance than the actual existence of such a man-beast – which is of course the implied genesis of the ox-man hybrid. Hybridity was a topic that elicited fascination from medieval commentators just as it did for the great poets, philosophers, historians and geographers of Antiquity.⁹⁵ In his *Ars Amatoria*, *Metamorphoses* and *Tristia*, the Roman poet Ovid described many hybrid creatures, ranging from harpies to chimeras. What is most interesting for those examining the *Topographia* is the fact that amongst these hybrids are a half-bull man and half-man bull (*semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem*).⁹⁶ Scholars have

⁹² Derek Newman-Stille, ‘Morality and monstrous disability in *Topographia Hibernia*’, in Wendy Turner and Tory V. Pearman (eds), *The treatment of disabled persons in medieval Europe: examining disability in the historical, legal, literary, medical, and religious discourses of the Middle Ages* (Lewiston, NY, 2010), pp 231–57.

⁹³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 108–9, 110, 169.

⁹⁴ For illuminations of the woman and goat embracing, see MS 700, NLI, f. 25r; Royal MS 13 B VIII, BL, f. 19v.

⁹⁵ Human monsters who inhabited the ends of the earth were the products of the over-active imaginations of ancient writers, such as Solinus, who inspired medieval authors to create similar surrealist characters in their works, see Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval civilisation, 400–1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford, 1990), Plate 11, cf. the depictions of the various humanoid creatures in BL, Harleian MS 2799, f.243, which evoke comparisons with Gerald’s ox-man hybrids.

⁹⁶ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, II.24, cited in Rusten, ‘Ovid, Empedocles and the Minotaur’, p. 332.

recognised these abominable crosses between man and beast as an allusion to Empedocles' double-formed creatures, specifically the hybrids of humans and oxen that emerged.⁹⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued that Gerald's fascination with hybridity is the result of his 'enduring struggle to articulate his hopelessly compound identity'.⁹⁸ However, while one can go down the psychological route to understand Gerald's fascination with hybrids, there is a simpler explanation for their inclusion: that Gerald was simply fascinated with the natural limits and distinctions between men and beasts broadly speaking.⁹⁹ To this end, civil and canon laws provided guidance in such things. Referencing alleged examples of bestiality in Ireland serves to reinforce the argument that the Irish were misguided in sexual mores and political organisation. Moreover, we know that Gerald had read Ovid thanks to the many quotes and allusions to be found in both of his Irish works, as well as the direct quote in the account of the hybrid creatures.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Gerald's descriptions of Irish ox-man hybrids owe their creation to Ovid's ox-man hybrids, they were not Gerald's creation.

Gerald of Wales's accounts of the weird and wonderful reach their most fantastical in his *Topographia*. However, running parallel with the fantastical elements of Ireland's landscape and Irish culture is the sense of an inherent primitiveness that places the Irish on par with animals dwelling in forested plains and swamps. This perception of the Irish is constructed by a man well-schooled in the natural world, so much so, in fact, that Robert Bartlett uses the word 'naturalist' to describe Gerald.¹⁰¹ Gerald bestowed the title of *naturalis historiae diligens perscrutator* on himself.¹⁰² While the sexual mores of the Irish were depicted in the most shockingly detailed manner imaginable for the period, it is impossible to utterly refute Gerald's claims. Indeed, while his account of the supposedly bestial king of Kenelcunill has often been cast aside and balked at due to its outrageous nature, we do not have the evidence required to disprove it. Rather than erring on the side of

⁹⁷ Peter Kelly, 'Compounding compound creatures: the catalogue of hybrids in *Tristia* 4.7 and Empedocles', *Mnemosyne*, 71 (2018), p. 677.

⁹⁸ Cohen, *Hybridity, identity, and monstrosity*, p. 77.

⁹⁹ James Cain, 'Unnatural history: gender and genealogy in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 19 (2002), pp 29–43; Jason Harris, 'Giraldus as natural historian: transformation and reception', in Kathy Cawsey and Jason Harris (eds), *Transmission and transformation in the Middle Ages: texts and contents* (Dublin, 2007), pp 77–97.

¹⁰⁰ O'Meara notes that Gerald's account of the ox-men was directly drawn from Ovid's description of the Cretan bull, see *The history and topography of Ireland*, p. 133 n.34.

¹⁰¹ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 14.

¹⁰² Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 228–9.

refutation, Katharine Simms has, on the contrary, asserted that ‘so many parallels to this [Gerald’s] account can be found in the ritual of other Indo-European peoples that it is out of the question to accuse Giraldus of fabrication’.¹⁰³ Other than Gerald’s account of kingly bestiality in Kenelcunill, there is no contemporary evidence from Ireland or elsewhere attesting to such ritual practices in Ireland. That Gerald records this ritual as happening only in Ulster may reflect his perceived differences between the northern Irish who were warlike and southern Irish who were treacherous as described in the *Expugnatio*.¹⁰⁴ What’s more, such distinctions linking location with characteristics hark back to classical and scriptural *topoi* that portray the northern parts of Ireland as savage.¹⁰⁵ As Diarmuid Scully has pointed out, many writers associated the northern parts of Ireland and Britain with evil when referring to their supposedly barbarous inhabitants.¹⁰⁶

On more than one occasion, Gerald intended to portray the Irish as being closer to beast than man. He proclaims that ‘These people, though, belong to a wild race, a savage race, a race that lives exclusively off beasts and even lives like beasts, a race that has never given up the earliest forms of pastoral living’.¹⁰⁷ There is evidence, however, that Gerald dehumanised the Irish to the extent that some of his contemporaries found them to be quite literally unbelievable. In particular, certain audience members found the fantastical accounts to be particularly hard to accept.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Keagan Brewer has convincingly argued that many textual revisions found in the *Topographia* were in fact ‘reactive revisions’ likely in response to contemporary criticisms of his works.¹⁰⁹ Brewer suggests that the unnamed critic that Gerald attacks in the *Expugnatio* may have raised his criticisms of the *Topographia* during its public recitation at Oxford in 1188/9. If this was indeed the case, it raises a

¹⁰³ Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), p. 22. With regard to Indo-European equine sacrificial ritual, see Franz Rolf Schröder, ‘Ein altirischer Krönungsritus und das indogermanische Rossopfer’, *Zeitschrift für Keltische Philologie*, 16 (1927), pp 310–12. See also Janet L. Nelson, ‘Symbols in context: inauguration rituals in Byzantium and the West in the early Middle Ages’, *Studies in Church History*, 13 (1976), pp 97–111; eadem, ‘Inauguration rituals’, in Peter Hayes Sawyer and Ian N. Wood (eds), *Early medieval kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp 50–71.

¹⁰⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 174–5, 186–7.

¹⁰⁵ See Robert, Rix, *The barbarian north in the medieval imagination: ethnicity, legend, and literature* (New York, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Jeremiah D. Scully, ‘The Atlantic archipelago from Antiquity to Bede: the transformation of an image’, PhD diss. (University College Cork, National University of Ireland, 2000), pp 167–75.

¹⁰⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 3 below, pp 199–200.

¹⁰⁹ Brewer, ‘Talking wolves, golden fish, and lion sex’, pp 39–43.

number of questions regarding the extent to which those present at the public recitation actually believed what they were hearing.

Gerald was not the only writer to assert the primitive almost beast-like state of Ireland's inhabitants. Other writers who described the Irish in an animalistic manner usually commented upon the Irish being either totally naked or scantily clad. The author of *La geste* provides an intriguing account of Strongbow's massacre of 150 Irishmen. The scene is quite filmic: hot in pursuit of the Irish, Earl Richard gallops upon his charger and catches up with the poor natives – who we are told are naked – from the rear, he sets upon them immediately at speed and, presumably panicked by the mere sight of the earl, they scatter into groups.¹¹⁰ Rather incredibly, the earl killed 150 of these Irish men, single handedly, presumably.¹¹¹ Satisfied with his work – and no doubt his kill count – the earl 'turned back very joyfully to Dublin'.¹¹² In some ways, aspects of the account read like the earl was involved in a hunt rather than a battle, with the Irish depicted as pathetic animals that are but easy targets for the hunter. What is interesting about the attitudes expressed towards the Irish in *La geste* is that we see more nuanced descriptions of individual Irish noblemen, of which there are a great many mentioned in the verse chronicle, compared to those regarding the Irish as a group. For instance, at the beginning of the chronicle we read about 'brave old Ua Máel Sechlainn. He was descended from the line of the fierce-hearted Ua Máel Sechlainn son of Colmán, the great king who was so well bred and courtly'.¹¹³ Other Irishmen are not described so favourably: Murchad Ua Briain is described as a 'wicked rebel', while Fáelán Mac Fáeláin, king of Uí Fáeláin, and Ascall Mac Torcaill, king of Dublin, were both described as traitors.¹¹⁴ In fact, there are a lot of Irish traitors mentioned throughout *La geste*. What these depictions show, at the very least, is that attitudes towards individual Irish people were more nuanced than those expressed towards the Irish as a social group.

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of the historian is to decide upon the extent to which contemporary authors believed that what they were saying was true

¹¹⁰ *La geste*, p. 138, ll 3321–31. Interestingly, Gerald of Wales also commented on the Irish custom of fighting while naked, see Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 150.

¹¹¹ *La geste*, p. 138, ll 3332–3: '*E li quens ad dunc occis | De cele gent set vint e dis*'.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, l. 3335.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 53, ll 33–7. One hundred or so lines later, Ua Máel Sechlainn is referred to as a traitor (*traïtur*), *ibid.*, p. 56 l. 136.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74, ll 840–43.

and accurate. More than the economic and political systems of a people, the physical, social and cultural characteristics of foreigners were of much interest to writers in early Plantagenet England. Examining medieval descriptions and representations of foreign peoples and places is a difficult task, and one which is accentuated by the issue of accuracy. Just how realistic were twelfth- and thirteenth-century depictions of Ireland and its people? Antonia Gransden has addressed this issue, in part, in her article 'Realistic observation in twelfth-century England', arguing that twelfth-century writers' accurate descriptions of architecture, as well as flora and fauna, are evidence of realistic observation; however, she does not address what *realistic* means in such cases. With regard to Gerald's observations on the Irish and Welsh, Gransden suggests that his views on both peoples as barbarians 'probably owed something to classical literature'; however, she does not develop this point any further.¹¹⁵ She continues, 'Much of what he [Gerald] says about the Irish is based on folk-lore, not fact, but he records some vivid details which are *surely* [my emphasis] authentic. Most of his information about the Welsh seems to be based on *objective* [my emphasis] observation'.¹¹⁶ While Gransden brings some pertinent questions to light, she ultimately fails to clarify why Gerald's observations are 'surely authentic' and based on 'objective observation'. Without becoming overly burdened by philosophical ruminations about the nature of reality and the subjective experience, one might suggest that above all, and regardless of veracity, the details and representations of Ireland and the Irish disclosed in these writers' works are, in some way, representative of the socio-cultural 'realities' and intellectual milieus of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries while also being coloured, in part, by the individual writer's mindset and world view.¹¹⁷

Indeed, world view is important here. It goes without saying that writers write more 'truthfully' about a given place when they have a personal connection to an environment, for they are more likely to write with the sights, sounds and smells of a place in mind, no matter whether they manifest themselves positively or negatively. Afterall, perception is in the eye of beholder and whether they fit our world view or not, one should have the capacity to step back and evaluate the subjective experience with as much balance as possible. When we compare, for example, Gerald's Irish

¹¹⁵ Antonia Gransden, 'Realistic observation in twelfth-century England', *Speculum*, 47:1 (1972), p. 48.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ For a study of the nexus between fiction and historical writing, see Laura Ashe, *Fiction and history in England 1066–1200* (Cambridge, 2007).

works with his Welsh ones their similarities and differences provide much food for thought.

The cases of animalistic, monstrous Irish men and women present us with a sense of how Gerald and perhaps, to some degree, his contemporaries sexed and engendered bodies. Indeed, the boundaries of human identity are implied by Gerald when he describes the bearded woman in the court of the king of Limerick as having a crest of hair that extended from her neck to her lower back much like a one-year-old foal, whereby the delineation of what makes a person human rests upon their contrasting characteristics with animals. However, what is interesting is that Gerald is explicit in stating that such an anomaly was neither representative of nature nor her fatherland, Ireland, more generally speaking.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Gerald does not attempt to use this case to paint Irish women as an unusually hairy bunch and, on the contrary, he acknowledges that the bearded woman was sufficiently feminine in other respects. Although he does not specify what these feminine characteristics were in writing, the accompanying illuminations of the bearded woman found in the extant manuscript copies of the *Topographia* in the British Library (Royal MS 13.b.VIII), Cambridge's University Library (MS Ff.1.27), the Bodleian Library (MS Laud. Misc. 720), and the National Library of Ireland (MS 700) show her carrying a distaff, which is perhaps a subtle nod to her social roles as a woman¹¹⁹. Gerald does, however, explicitly assert that her beard was in fact representative of her fatherland and not of her nature, which provides us with some insight into the cultural status quo when it came to male grooming, certainly in an Irish context.

While these examples of Othering via denigration and dehumanisation are on the extreme end of the scale, othering can be a far more subtle process. When one approaches the works of medieval writers, the author's mindset, perceptions and biases must be questioned in terms of how they affect the information that is relayed to the reader. Here, one may not be necessarily concerned with the veracity or the truth in what is written, rather the insights provided about the cultural, political and intellectual milieus of early Plantagenet England. Trying to understand the relationship between the writer and their social environments has always been one of the most elusive and difficult tasks of the historian. Depending on the genre, pinning

¹¹⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 107.

¹¹⁹ There are numerous examples of medieval manuscripts depicting women carrying a distaff, see, for instance, the twelfth-century Hunterian Psalter (or York Psalter), which depicts Eve spinning while Adam is delving, MS Hunter 229 (U.3.2), GUL, f. 8r.

down the author's individual impressions can complicate things. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries are remarkable in that they witnessed the growth of written histories where the individuality of the authorial voice reclaims focus and represents the author's own mind, experiences and idiosyncrasies, which is in contrast to much of the anonymously written annals of previous centuries.¹²⁰ However, this emergent individuality existed simultaneously alongside the literary traditions that guided the pen of medieval writers and framed their mentalities and how they approached their subjects of interest. Writing about the human body and its place in the wider natural world was a common practice in the twelfth and thirteenth century, whereby authors jostled with religion, morality and science in order to make sense of the phenomena in their world. For medieval writers, ethnic deviance could extend beyond physical appearance and had the potential to touch on a multitude of aspects pertaining to the lived experience of a people, including diet.

Insolitus and incognitus: Irish diet and agricultural practices

When it came to medieval Irish food, several writers found it worthy enough to mention in their works. Bede had referred to the natural bounty of Ireland and its prospective produce, stating that 'The island [Ireland] abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish, or fowl; and it is remarkable for deer and goats'.¹²¹ Through Biblical allusion, Bede asserts that Ireland is a plentiful place with fauna rife for hunting. This view presents itself as being quite innocuous; however, it does present an image of a place wherein any potential invader would find much sustenance and be in no need of want should it be interpreted that way. However, accounts of foreign food can satisfy more propagandist and, indeed, insidious agendas. A familiarity with the food of another person or group, especially foods that are commonly eaten, instigates a sense of commensality or "breaking of bread" and mutuality. On the other hand, foods that present themselves as being unknown and alien can serve to vilify those who sustain themselves on what might be viewed as Otherly and repugnant ingredients. As Caroline Walker Bynum's work on medieval foods and diets has shown, victuals held a much more important place in medieval

¹²⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the twelfth century discover the individual?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31:1 (1980), pp 1–17.

¹²¹ Bede, *HE*, pp 20–1.

society and culture than they do in modern times. After all, the potential for the dearth of food was a lingering concern in medieval times:

‘In our industrialized corner of the globe, where food supplies do not fail, we scarcely notice grain or milk, ever-present supports of life, and yearn rather after money or sexual favors as signs of power and success. ... [W]e should not really be surprised to find that food was, in medieval Europe, a fundamental economic – and religious – concern’.¹²²

However, while people have used food and diet to construct a narrative of alterity about an individual or a group, attempting to elucidate implicit intention and psychological insight on behalf of a writer can be difficult task. For instance, in an entry for the year 1172, Ralph of Diceto noted in his *Ymagines* that a sickness befell the king’s army while in Ireland: ‘*Recentium esus carniū et haustus aquae, tam insolitus quam incognitus, plures de regis exercitu panis inedia laborantes fluxu ventris afflixit in Hybernia*’.¹²³ Ralph presents a rather unsavoury account of the flowing of the stomach caused by the eating and drinking of unknown and unusual meat and water. Amongst the criteria of Otherness, diet is often used to construct antithetical identities. When encountered, foreign food becomes representative of exoticness – a novelty of sorts. Including details of the sickness that befell the king’s army is interesting as it suggests that Irish food and drink is tainted in some way. Bouts of flux were common on both sides of the Irish sea, but the emphasis here is not on the commonality of pestilence, rather the unusual and unknown (*insolitus* and *incognitus*) nature of the meat and water in Ireland. It is impossible to state with any great degree of certainty whether that is what Ralph is attempting, consciously or unconsciously, to achieve here. However, given Ralph’s generally balanced views, it would not be a stretch to suggest that his description of Irish diet lacks insidious motivations.

Interestingly, the account of a terrible illness affecting Henry’s army is also recalled in the Welsh-language chronicles *Brut y Tywysogion*:

1172 The ensuing year, there was a dreadful mortality among the army that was with the king in Ireland, on account of the newness and unfermented state of wines and because of the miseries of famine; the ships with

¹²² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy feast and holy fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley, 1987), pp 1–2.

¹²³ Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 350–1.

merchandise not being able to sail to them during the winter, owing to the tempestuous violence of the Irish sea.¹²⁴

There are notable differences between these accounts: Ralph asserts that meat and water were the men's undoing, while the *Brut* states new and unfermented wine and famine. It is interesting that both the Welsh chronicles and Diceto recounted the same events, albeit in different detail. Whether or not the *Brut* used Diceto as a source is difficult to ascertain. However, it is likely that both accounts were independent of each other as Henry's endeavours were widely known in political and courtly circles in England and Wales.

Writing about how food and diet factored into an individual's conception of identity in the classical world, T.E.J. Wiedemann noted that,

'Dietary practices are among the more obvious ways in which one group of people can differentiate itself from another. What I eat and drink is normal and natural. A person who does not eat or drink what I do is peculiar: in structuralist jargon, I am central and he is marginal'.¹²⁵

Moreover, Ken Albala has asserted that,

'Food preferences, being so central to identity, are perhaps even more revealing than taste in other media. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then what of the dish that savors of the homeland, or displays wealth and elegance, or smacks of simple frugality? Each of these tells a complete story about the person who eats it'.¹²⁶

T.E.J. Wiedemann explored how Ammianus Marcellinus used the idea of the cannibal to construct antithetical identities which were used to create an ideal Roman identity.¹²⁷ The differences in diets between people was a common cause for concern for the civilised, as the Other supposedly dined on human flesh. Gerald describes the Irish in bestial terms and as such, when the Irish dine on beast, they are by extension eating of the same flesh: they are 'people' yet 'live on beasts and live like beasts'. Therefore, there is an implication that the Irish are cannibals. Strabo spoke of the Irish as cannibals in a far more explicit way asserting that they were 'man-eaters'

¹²⁴ *Brut y tywysogion: or, the chronicle of the princes / red book of Hergest version*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1955), s.a. 1172.

¹²⁵ Wiedemann, 'Between men and beasts', p. 189.

¹²⁶ Ken Albala, *Eating right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 4.

¹²⁷ Wiedemann, 'Between men and beasts', pp 189–92.

who ate their dead fathers. While no contemporary writer went so far as to assert that the Irish actually ate human flesh, Gervase of Tilbury portrayed the Irish as what can only be described as animalistic in his *Otia imperialia*. Tilbury describes the native Irish as having, since ancient times, lived on cows' milk and raw meat.¹²⁸ However, thanks to the endeavours of King Henry II, Otto IV's grandfather, the obscene Irish nations were expelled and the land taken as an English possession, which led to the proliferation of the true religion.¹²⁹ Tilbury never mentions if the coming of the English eradicated the eating of raw meat. Nevertheless, there was a clear theory of social evolution developed around food and diet by contemporary writers. Indeed, 'the dichotomy between bread and milk or meat assumed immense symbolic importance'.¹³⁰

In the *Expugnatio*, Gerald's account of Henry II's Christmas feast in Dublin provides insight into the power dynamics of intercultural encounters at the dining table.¹³¹ Many people have had this experience: you sit down, tired from travel and ravenous, distracted by the conversation around you, you pull in your chair so that you are comfortably close to the table, preparing yourself for the meal that is soon to be placed in front of you. It arrives. What lies before you, however, is wholly alien to your palate and has already upset your appetite before a morsel has reached your mouth. One might imagine that this was the sort of experience that the princes of Ireland had when they joined the English king to celebrate Christ's birth in his post-and-wattle palace outside Dublin's town walls in 1171. Gerald of Wales tells us that the princes 'greatly admired the sumptuous and plentiful fare of the English table'.¹³² However, their great admiration was soon to be challenged when faced with nothing short of a gastronomic dilemma: Henry II wished for all those present to eat the flesh of the crane (*carne gruina*), which Gerald noted the Irish had hitherto abhorred.¹³³

¹²⁸ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 308–9. We cannot ignore the possibility that some people did eat raw meat in Ireland, but this was likely rare. Moreover, as dental records show, the Irish diet was rich in carbohydrates with sporadic use of meat, see Mario Novak, 'Dental health and diet in early medieval Ireland', *Archives of Oral Biology*, 60:9 (2015), pp 1299–309.

¹²⁹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 308–9.

¹³⁰ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 133.

¹³¹ For discussion of Henry's time in Dublin, see Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, chapter 6; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The submissions of Irish kings in fact and fiction: Henry II, Bendigeidfran, and the dating of *The four branches of the Mabinogi*', *CMCS*, 22 (1991), pp 31–61; and Seán Duffy, 'Ireland's Hastings: the Anglo-Norman conquest of Dublin', in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *ANS XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1997* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp 69–85.

¹³² Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, 96–7.

¹³³ *Ibid.* There is some debate as to whether the bird described by Gerald as a crane is in fact a heron. O'Meara notes that P.G. Kennedy informed him that Irish usage tends to confuse the two birds, see *The history and topography of Ireland*, p. 129 n.8. It is certain that Gerald did not confuse the two.

The Irish had not abhorred the bird but rather the eating of its flesh. The crane had long held a position of cultural and spiritual significance in Ireland, with evidence suggesting that a pre-European crane cult may have existed in Ireland at one point.¹³⁴ Despite this, Gerald tells us that in obeisance, all present ate the meat.

Archaeological and documentary evidence attests to the primacy of the crane in aristocratic culture in the medieval period. Brunsdon Yapp has noted that the crane is ‘almost certainly the commonest of all birds in English manuscripts’ thus signifying the bird’s high status in medieval English society.¹³⁵ The remains of cranes have more than occasionally been found during excavations in medieval England, but generally at high-status sites such as castles.¹³⁶ C.M. Woolgar has noted that crane was served at great feasts in late medieval England.¹³⁷ What is more, the crane, as well as other wildfowl, were commonly hunted by means of falconry, which was a favoured pastime of Henry II.¹³⁸ For royals such as Henry, ‘the importance of wild birds in the medieval diet is not to be found in their contribution to subsistence and economy, but rather in the meaning that the consumption of wild birds implied. Some of the birds consumed were unlikely to have been particularly tasty, but, being expensive and difficult to obtain, they played an important role as a symbol of status and wealth’.¹³⁹

It is difficult to discern the true motivations for serving crane at Henry’s Christmas feast at Dublin. However, the very fact that Gerald highlights the eating of crane in particular instead of the other delicacies that were likely present suggests the presence of a power play on the king’s part, especially given that Henry wished for all those present to consume the meat.¹⁴⁰ This account, which is unique to Gerald, reads as an example of Henry exerting his power over the native nobility by

Indeed, he describes the fact that the crane dwelled in flocks, so it is therefore unlikely that he confused them with a heron, which is usually to be found solitary or in pairs. Flocks of herons – or heronries as they are correctly known – are only to be seen during mating season.

¹³⁴ Lorcán O’Toole, ‘The Eurasian crane (*Grus grus*) in Ireland – another extinct bird or a key species for an ancient belief system?’, *The Irish Naturalists’ Journal*, 33 (2014), pp 53–65.

¹³⁵ Brunsdon Yapp, *Birds in medieval manuscripts* (London, 1981).

¹³⁶ Umberto Albarella and Richard Thomas, ‘They dined on crane: bird consumption, wild fowling and status in medieval England’, *Acta Zoologica Cracoviensia*, 45 (2002), pp 24–9.

¹³⁷ C.M. Woolgar, *The great household in late medieval England* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1999), p. 114.

¹³⁸ Gerald of Wales, who was himself evidently an avian aficionado, provides an account of Henry’s acquisition of falcons in south Wales, see *Expugnatio*, pp 90–1.

¹³⁹ Albarella and Thomas, ‘They dined on crane’, pp 26–7.

¹⁴⁰ The eating of crane’s flesh may have been somewhat galling to Gerald as well given his ornithological interests and his appreciation of the crane’s virtues as noted in the *Topographia*, pp 46–7.

challenging Irish customs and attitudes. However, more than merely being a case of Henry interfering with Irish culture and/or acting out for his own amusement, the fact that Henry wished for all those present to consume crane meat, which was a high-status food, indicates that the Irish nobles were, at the very least, deemed worthy of a luxury food associated with aristocratic culture in England. What is more, the practice of dividing animal carcasses into different cuts and qualities of meat based on hierarchical social structure and status was a practice common in both Ireland and England, yet there is no indication that such a division was made at the feast.¹⁴¹ This may have been simply an omission on Gerald's part or due to the fact that there was relatively limited meat to be extracted from a crane's carcass, so divvying it up based on the social status of those present at the Christmas feast was not a practical option. Neither Gerald of Wales nor Roger of Howden – the two writers who provide accounts of Henry's Christmas feast in Dublin – provide details regarding the number of attendees at the feast. However, Howden does inform us that Henry held the royal feast *with* rather than *for* the kings and richer men of Ireland (*regale festum in Natale Domini tenuit cum regibus et ditioribus Hyberniae*).¹⁴² Thus, Gerald's choice of language suggests that the burden of organization and hospitality was shared between the local Irish contingent present and the king and his vassals. Furthermore, as Thomas Charles-Edwards has argued, political Irish customs of submission seem to have changed in the mid-eleventh century whereby the custom of a king taking hostages from a submitted king's territory was not entirely replaced but rather accompanied with a new and popular means of submission: *táinic ina thech*, 'he came into his house'.¹⁴³ In practice, this meant that a submitting king was obliged to go to the house of his over-king as a sign of his submission.¹⁴⁴ However, as Patrick Sims-Williams has pointed out, Irish clients, including kings, were expected to build houses for their overlords, as was the practice in other parts of Europe; however, it is

¹⁴¹ See Cherie N. Peters, "“He is not entitled to butter”: the diet of peasants and commoners in early medieval Ireland", in Elizabeth FitzPatrick and James Kelly (eds), *Food and drink in Ireland* (Dublin, 2016), pp 79–109; William Sayers, 'A cut above: ration and station in an Irish king's hall', *Food and Foodways*, 4:2 (1990), pp 15–35; Finbar McCormick, 'The distribution of meat in a hierarchical society: the Irish evidence', in Preston Miracle and Nicky Milner (eds), *Consuming passions and patterns of consumption* (Cambridge, 2002), pp 25–31.

¹⁴² Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, pp 28–9.

¹⁴³ Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The date of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1970–1972 (1971), pp 296–7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

uncommon to see houses built for the specific purpose of submitting by entering them.¹⁴⁵

Diet, of course, is directly tied to agriculture and production, all of which reflect perceived notions of cultural and often technological development and advancement. At the time of the invasion of Ireland, Irish agricultural practice paled in comparison to the well-organised and technologically superior methods of English agrarian society. William of Malmesbury asserted this fact rather harshly when he described the Irish as a simple-minded and lazy people who dwelled in rustic squalor, not understanding the socio-economic advances that arable farming could afford them. The perception of Ireland as a place of economic opportunity is made plain in the *Topographia*, where we find an echo of Bede's depiction of Ireland as a land of milk and honey in the *Topographia*'s *introitus*: '*Sed ab Hibernia potestne aliquid boni esse? Numquid montes illi stillabunt dulcedinem, et valles fluent mel et lac?*'¹⁴⁶ In the *Topographia*'s accounts of Irish fauna, Gerald of Wales writes that native stags are not able to escape due to their fatness, while there is an incomparable supply of boars and wild pigs, however they are small, badly formed and inclined to run away.¹⁴⁷ There is a sense here that one would not go hungry in Ireland given such opportunities for hunting. Gerald puts Ireland on the stage for his audiences to judge for themselves whether the island is a place of opportunity. Certainly, from the accounts Gerald presents, Ireland would be a long-term investment for interested parties in early Plantagenet England. Like an old house in need of renovation, Ireland had promising foundations upon which immigrant magnates from England and Wales could build a society in their image. While the proposition was attractive, for the soldiers and settlers that arrived in Ireland from the latter quarter or so of the twelfth century onwards, Ireland was like a never-ending snag list.

The attention paid to Irish agricultural practice increased in the high medieval period as the Plantagenets expanded their land holdings in Britain and elsewhere. This should come as no surprise as colonisation and scathing critiques of native habits and methods frequently go hand-in-hand. While the denigration of native ways feeds into the justification of colonial acts as being part of a civilising mission, critiques of agricultural practices can be valid and reflect the spectrum of societal and

¹⁴⁵ Sims-Williams, 'The submissions of Irish kings in fact and fiction', pp 31–61.

¹⁴⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

economic developments across different national and ethnic groups in the Middle Ages and indeed throughout other historical periods as well. Inspired by prevailing notions of the barbarian, William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales described Irish agricultural practices not merely to give their audiences a sense of local Irish approaches but rather as a means to reinforce a sense of English socio-economic supremacy over their ‘Celtic’ neighbours. Newburgh describes the natural bounty of Ireland, including the abundance of fodder and fish, as well as the island’s rich soil. However, Newburgh makes sure to note that the bounties of the land are dependent on the industry of good cultivators.¹⁴⁸ While Ireland proffered economic opportunities, the island was populated by an uncivilised and barbaric people (*incultos et barbarus*) who were idle in their agricultural practices and therefore lived more on milk than bread.¹⁴⁹ A similar portrayal of primitive Irish agriculture was presented in the *Topographia Hibernica*. According to Gerald of Wales, the Irish had not progressed from pastoral living.¹⁵⁰ He was certainly incorrect in asserting that agriculture had not progressed beyond pastoralism; indeed, arable farming was a prominent feature of socio-economic practices in Ireland, evidenced by the carbohydrate-heavy Irish diet. However, compared to the agricultural practices of contemporary England, pastoralism was certainly more prominent in Ireland, which is probably what motivated Gerald to make such a comment.

For, Gerald of Wales, and no doubt William of Newburgh, too, the predominance of pastoral farming was indicative of Irish laziness. As far as Gerald was concerned, the Irish people despised working on the land – little was cultivated and even less was sown.¹⁵¹ Ireland was rich in minerals but there was little mining taking place because of the lack of industry. This was in spite of the fact that the Irish were very desirous of gold, so Gerald tells us. Rather than availing of the mineral veins right on their doorsteps, the inhabitants of Ireland settled for the gold brought to the island by traders. Gold was of course a highly sought commodity, which cost a pretty penny. If the Irish were really that lazy, how did they have the means to buy gold from traders who searched ‘the ocean for gain’?¹⁵² The Irish must have been doing something right. Perhaps their perceived laziness was simply – to borrow from popular industry speak – a case of the Irish working smarter, not harder? Gerald

¹⁴⁸ William of Newburgh, *History*, ii, pp 110–111.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 151.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

finishes his diatribe by saying that the Irish thought that the greatest pleasure was not to work, and the greatest wealth was to enjoy liberty. Directly following this he asserts ‘This people is, *therefore* [my emphasis], a barbarous people, and truly barbarous’.¹⁵³ For Gerald the lack of industry was a defining characteristic of a person, separating the barbarian from the civilised. As a shining example of civility, Gerald was the polar opposite of the Irish. Indeed, he was evidently industrious. That he wrote so many works during his lifetime as well as travelled frequently around medieval Europe and juggled other duties attests to this. Gerald writes: ‘I am unwilling to lead my life in idleness and sloth, as if it were not given me for the common good, but to be spend uselessly in utter selfishness without motives for action – a mere animal existence’.¹⁵⁴ Clearly, Gerald felt strongly about putting one’s energies to use. As an ardent reformer, there was not enough hours in the day to preach his ideals and enact reforms. No doubt seeing someone enjoy a moment of leisure deeply pained Gerald. For an entire people to be so work-shy must have been nothing short of infuriating.

The image of the Irish

How does one relate physical descriptions, which are supposedly characteristic of foreign peoples, in a way which is generally representative? Can this be achieved? And, perhaps more importantly, what is the motive for relaying this information in the first place? Ethnographic writing has existed for millennia, being traceable back to the ancient world. Ancient ethnography was not a simple comparative study between, on the one hand, Greeks or Romans and, on the other, the barbarian; rather, it was ‘a sophisticated play of ideas and values encapsulated within text and image’.¹⁵⁵ This is an important point as it highlights that ethnographic works were not simply conveyed through text but also through imagery found in art, manuscripts and iconography.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, for contemporary images of the Irish we must rely on the works of one writer only: Gerald of Wales. In the case of Gerald’s Irish works, contrasting images of the civilised Cambro-Normans and the ‘barbaric’ Irish in multiple manuscripts of the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* provide interesting

¹⁵³ ‘*Gens igitur haec gens barbara, et vere barbara*’, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138–9.

¹⁵⁵ Almagor and Skinner, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ For an excellent study of illuminated histories written in early Plantagenet England, see Laura Cleaver, *Illuminated history books in the Anglo-Norman world, 1066–1272* (Oxford, 2018).

insights into the idealised symbols of civility embedded in these sources.¹⁵⁷ Gerald's construction of the Irish as Other employs more than mere words to make ends meet. While words have the power to evoke mental images in the minds of readers and audiences, physical images – specifically manuscript illustrations – invite a greater impact. The illuminated MS 700 of the National Library of Ireland contains both the *Topographia* and the *Expugnatio*, as noted above, both of which are accompanied by numerous interesting illustrations which depict many of Gerald's descriptions of Ireland and its inhabitants. These illustrations provide intriguing opportunities for examining the construction of the Irish in Gerald's Irish works. Laura Cleaver has asserted that these texts and their accompanying images 'provide a rich and complex body of information about Gerald's attitudes towards and relationship with the English monarchy and about the potential audiences for his ideas'.¹⁵⁸ However, it must be noted that Gerald's role in the production of these marginal images is unclear. He may not have composed them himself, rather leaving them to be drawn by a scribe, although he may have been heavily involved in the artistic direction they took.

Comparing the images of the Irish with those of the Cambro-Normans affords telling insights into the decisions made to reinforce the textual material by offering accompanying illustrations. The image of the barbarian Irish accompanied by axes in MS 700 illustrates their contemptible nature (Plate 3). The relevant text states that 'Wherever they [the Irish] go they drag this [axe] along with them. When they see the opportunity, and the occasion presents itself, this weapon has not to be unsheathed as a sword, or bent as a bow, or poised as a spear'.¹⁵⁹ Gerald uses weapons and dress as criteria for comparing the barbarity of the Irish with the civility of his kinsmen. The weapons of the Irish, as described by Gerald, included spears and javelins, which is corroborated by the author of *La geste*.¹⁶⁰ While these weapons were primitive, they were nonetheless effective, as evidenced by *La geste*'s account of the Irish destroying a dwelling and garrison.¹⁶¹ The success of this Irish offensive

¹⁵⁷ Michelle P. Brown, 'Gerald of Wales and the *Topography of Ireland*: authorial agendas in word and image', *Journal of Irish Studies*, 20 (2005), pp 52–63.

¹⁵⁸ Laura Cleaver, 'Kings behaving badly: images of rulers in Gerald of Wales' works on Ireland (c. 1200)', *IKON*, 5 (2012), p. 152.

¹⁵⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 165–6.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151. Cf. *La geste*, p. 135 l. 3194. Interestingly, there is a bearded man carrying a javelin depicted in the Book of Kells, TCD MS 58 f. 200r.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 3196–7.

surprised the foreign soldiers, so we are told, which led to them planting the country with castles and fortified towns in order to stave off further attacks.¹⁶²

The physical appearance of the Irish in the illumination reflects that of the barbarian: long hair and beard which suggest that the Irish are unkempt and unruly. Moreover, Cassiodorus in his etymologies stated that the word *barbarus* originated from *barba* (beard) and *rus* (flat land). The bearded Irish depicted within the text and the illuminations are certainly representative of Cassiodorus's etymology. As characteristics of Irish alterity go, facial hair is perhaps one of the most overlooked ones. Indeed, contemporary depictions of the various peoples inhabiting Ireland and Britain at this time are something of a rarity, especially when it comes to depictions of 'normal' medieval people. There are several exemplary depictions of contemporary Irish people to be found in the *Topographia*. In every depiction of Irish men in the *Topographia* they are bearded. It is, however, important to note that Gerald was not suggesting that facial hair in general was indicative of barbarianism, rather it was the *style* of the facial hair that mattered. Indeed, Gerald was not the only writer who dedicated ink to depicting bearded men. Matthew Paris's *Historia* contains unique contemporary depictions of the Norman and Plantagenet kings of England.¹⁶³ The eight monarchs depicted, from William the Conqueror to Henry III, are all seated on a throne, dressed in long robes, and holding a miniature representation of a building, which are mostly monastic, of which each respective monarch was a patron.¹⁶⁴ What is noteworthy about these depictions is that all of the earlier kings of England that are depicted are, in the main, clean shaven. In contrast, Henry II, Richard I, John and Henry III are depicted with short beards in Paris's *Abbreviatio chronicorum*.¹⁶⁵

It seems, therefore, that facial hair in general was not the issue, rather it was the length and style that was indicative of a sense of civility and status. While perhaps trivial to us, the length of one's facial hair was clearly of some socio-cultural import in early Plantagenet England. Gerald provides us with an insight into the accepted customs of external appearance, including male grooming at the time, when

¹⁶² *La geste*, p. 135 ll. 3200–5.

¹⁶³ See Royal MS 14 C VII, f. 9r.

¹⁶⁴ The seated English monarchs in long garments – which were an iconographic symbol of authority – are reminiscent of the Bayeux Tapestry's depictions of authority figures seated on raised benches and wearing a long robe and a cloak, see Gale R. Owen-Crocker, 'Dress and authority in the Bayeux tapestry', in Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek (eds), *Aspects of power and authority in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007), pp 54–5.

¹⁶⁵ See Cotton MS Claudius D VI, f. 9v.

he remarked that ‘Judged according to *modern* [my emphasis] ideas, they are uncultivated, not only in the external appearance of their dress, but also in their flowing hair or beards’.¹⁶⁶ It is worth returning, here, to the bearded woman of Duvenald’s court whose long beard was, so Gerald tells us, in the style of her fatherland, Ireland. His accounts of the lengthy and unruly beards of the Irish reached new comedic heights following King John’s infamous visit to Ireland in 1185, which Seán Duffy wryly described as a ‘public-relations disaster’.¹⁶⁷ Having landed at Waterford, an eighteen-year-old Lord John was met by a peaceful cohort of notable Irishmen who greeted him with the kiss of peace; however, what can only be described as John’s youthful exuberance and folly led him to commit a major faux pas: he decided to pull some of the Irishmen about by their large and flowing beards.¹⁶⁸ What might have seemed to be a source of banter for the adolescent John and his equally youthful entourage turned out to be a political disaster, which, in the immediate aftermath, led to the princes of Cork, Limerick and Connacht retracting their intended submission to their visiting English lord. This encounter set the tone for a disastrous eight months spent in Ireland – a stint which proved to be a serious blow to John’s own reputation and ultimately diminished the credibility of royal government in Ireland.¹⁶⁹

The nuances of male grooming, specifically the styling of beards, are further reflected in later depictions of the English kings, from Henry II to Edward III, in the four-metre-long Waterford Charter Roll dated to 1373. However, unlike the manuscripts produced by the writers and illuminators of early Plantagenet England, the Waterford charter was created by artists commissioned by city officials keen to impress upon Edward III the royal port city’s historic and continued loyalty to the

¹⁶⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 150.

¹⁶⁷ Seán Duffy, ‘John and Ireland: the origins of England’s Irish problem’, in S.D. Church (ed.), *King John: new interpretations* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 222.

¹⁶⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 236–7. Gerald is the only contemporary source that recounts this incident. However, Roger of Howden also expressed the view that John’s first expedition to Ireland was a disaster but rather due to his unwillingness to pay the mercenaries among his soldiery, which in turn had led to losses against the Irish and resulted in John leaving more capable justices and soldiers as custodians in Ireland while he returned to England, ‘*Et quia ipse onia pro proprio suo inclusit marsupio, nolens solidariis suis stipendia sua solvere, maximam exercitus sui partem in conflictibus pluribus contra Hibernenses factis amisit; et tandem ad inopiam redactus, constituit tamen justitiis et militibus suis per loca, ad terram illam custodiendam, rediit in Angliam*’, see Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ii, p. 305.

¹⁶⁹ W.L. Warren, ‘King John and Ireland’, in James Lydon (ed.), *England and Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Blackrock, 1981), p. 26.

Plantagenet kings. As such, one can reasonably suggest that the charter's portraits of the kings of England reflect as idealised and flattering depictions as possible.

The illuminations accompanying the text of the *Expugnatio* in MS 700 exemplify the difference between the civility of the English – exemplified with the depiction of Gerald's uncle Maurice fitz Gerald (Plate 2) – and the barbarity of the Irish. The image of an Irishman with one foot atop a grounded man while holding an axe which is embedded into the said man's skull illustrates the treachery of the Irish as one may infer that the grounded individual is kin, or at the very least, a fellow Irishman due to the similar appearance of both men. The illumination of 'Mauricivs' shows him wearing a tunic-like garment while he unsheathes his sword. He is well-groomed with a shaven face and short, tidy hair. This is in stark contrast to the long-haired and bearded barbarian Irishman dressed in a cloak which could aptly hide an axe, the weapon of choice for the Irish. As Gerald states above: axes do not need to be sheathed and therefore no prior warning is given to those who are about to be attacked. As such, the illustrations suggest two polar-opposite concepts of militaristic demeanours: one of treachery, cowardice and secrecy; the other of decency, composure and honour.

Gerald speaks of Irish garments with the same disdain which he holds through most of his prosopographical descriptions in the *Topographia*: 'They use very little wool in their dress and that itself nearly always black – because the sheep of that country are black – and made up in a barbarous fashion'.¹⁷⁰ Cherie N. Peters briefly discusses Gerald's description of Irish dress, suggesting that if the garments were in fact black it was not as a result of being comprised of black wool as black sheep were a rare occurrence at the time, rather they were likely darkened with a natural colouring which originated from bogs; vegetables darkened with urine which was a commonly used mordant at the time; or the bark of trees e.g. elder and oak.¹⁷¹ Given the rarity of black sheep, Gerald's reference to black sheep might be a subtle nod to the sinister nature of the Irish. The Old Irish law texts stress the greater value of white sheep compared to dun-coloured or black sheep.¹⁷² Hence, one would imagine that Gerald would have seen more white sheep in Ireland than black ones. The colour black was often perceived as the colour symbolic of the devil and hell.

¹⁷⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 150.

¹⁷¹ Cherie N. Peters, 'The farmer's tale', in Sparky Booker and Cherie N. Peters (eds), *Tales of medieval Dublin*, (Dublin, 2014), p. 69.

¹⁷² Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, p. 70.

Indeed, the importance of garment colour, certainly in a clerical sense, in the twelfth century may be exemplified by the war of words between Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny and Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, over the appropriate colour of a monk's habit. While Peter asserted the humility of black dress, Bernard of Clairvaux contended that white symbolised virtue and innocence while black was the colour of 'death and sin'. While it is impossible to be certain of Gerald's intentions here, it is noteworthy that he states that Irish dress is nearly always black, yet the depictions of the Irish in the extant manuscripts do not portray a people in predominantly dark-coloured garments.¹⁷³

The image of two docile Irishmen (Plate 3), with one giving the other a jockey back, presents the Irish as puerile folk. Two observations can be made about this illumination: first, the readiness of the axe-wielding Irishman getting a jaunt on the back of his kinsman typifies the supposed hostile nature of the Irish and their willingness for confrontation and armed conflict, no matter the situation; second, there is an element of innocence in the imagery that reflects a savage people who perhaps knew little better than that of the society in which they were moulded. Viewed today, these images seem fairly innocuous and may be perceived with a certain degree of novelty; however, text and image combine here to present the Irish as a primitive and warlike people who were, in general, in dire need of technological, cultural, political, economic and spiritual advancement. Indeed, Gervase of Canterbury made this point plain when he stated that the spacious land, which lacked cultivation, led to the plunder and depopulation of the simple and semi-naked men of Ireland.¹⁷⁴ Gervase's comment provides insight into not only the primitiveness of the Irish as contemporary commentators perceived it but also a sense, perhaps, of lamentation for the hostilities that befell the inhabitants of Ireland simply due to their techno-economic ignorance. This point will be further examined in the next chapter.

¹⁷³ See, for example, depictions of the Irish in MS 700, NLI, f. 39r; Royal MS 13 B VIII, BL, ff. 27v–28r.

¹⁷⁴ Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical works*, i, pp 234–6.



Plate 2: Maurice fitz Gerald, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 39r



Plate 3: Two Irish barbarians, Dublin, NLI, MS 700, f. 71r

Sodom and begorrah! The sexual mores of the Irish

The sexual practices and habits of the Irish have been described since ancient times. Indeed, it was Prudentius who made no mistake in describing the bestial Irish whose sexual practices matched their inhuman, animalistic nature which led to Irishmen killing their fathers and marrying and having intercourse with their mothers and sisters. The early church had a complicated relationship with sexual matters to say the least. Throughout the centuries some church figures sought to censure and coverup the realities of sexual desire and practices while others tolerated them as an inevitable part of the human condition. In Ireland, in particular, the provocative feminine statuettes known as Sheela-na-gigs serve not only as a reminder of pre-Christian Ireland's liberal attitude and open cultural climate to fertility and human reproduction but also of the gradual and cannibalistic nature of the Christianisation of Ireland whereby paganistic idols and rituals were subsumed by the early church in Ireland as they were elsewhere in early medieval Europe. Barbara Freitag has suggested that the Sheela-na-gig 'represented some powerful idol or deity that had to be tolerated by the early Church because it was too popular among the people to extinguish'.¹⁷⁵ It must be said, here, that the enduring popularity of pre-Christian practices 'among the people' may have also been representative of members of the clergy. Indeed, it would be foolish to assume that clerics as an entire social group uniformly and utterly shed the pre-Christian customs of ancient Ireland. However, following the conquest of England in 1066, church leaders moulded by the customs of the French church had sought to instate their own orthodoxies and approaches to English social life.

'Sex sells', as people say. Indeed, we are hardwired to take notice of sexual matters for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, a desire for procreation or as a response to culturally ingrained notions of appropriate sexual relations as well as inappropriate taboos. So, it is unsurprising, then, that it was high on the priority list of church reformers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Depicting the Irish, especially women, as lascivious and wanton in their sexuality was a call-to-arms for church reformers seeking to stamp out unwanted sexual practices in a Christian world.¹⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that of all the charges against the medieval Irish, it was the

¹⁷⁵ Barbara Freitag, 'A new light on the Sheela-na-gig', *Éire-Ireland*, 33/34:3–4 (1998/1999), p. 68.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and the sexual agenda of the twelfth-century reformers', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, 8 (2000), pp 1–15.

supposedly frivolous Irish marital laws and the flippant Irish attitude towards marriage that were the most frequently mentioned in the sources.

Gerald of Wales accused the Irish of debaucherous sexual acts, specifically related to marriage customs and the sexual practice of Irish men who supposedly slept with their dead brothers' wives. Such accusations did not originate from Gerald, Pope Alexander III having laid the same accusations at the door of the Irish in 1172. However, since the reforming synod of Cashel in 1101, ecclesiastics were forthright and strident in their stance against marriage within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity and affinity.¹⁷⁷ The synodal decrees of Cashel addressed issues affecting the Irish Church including simony, dues, and sexual continence. Yet, it is the decree dealing with marital prohibition that is the most telling here:

*Gan ben a athar ná a senathar, nó a siúr nó a [h-]inghean, do beith
'na mnaoi ag fear i nÉirinn, nó bean a dhearbhráthar, nó bean ar bith
chomh fogus sin i ngaol do.*

'that no man in Ireland shall have to wife his father's wife or his grandfather's wife, or her sister or her daughter, or his brother's wife, or any other woman so near related'.¹⁷⁸

However, while incestuous practice was in and of itself taboo in Ireland as it was on the European continent, the emphasis lay primarily with the issue of affinity as it related to marriage arrangements.¹⁷⁹ The act of sexual intercourse with a brother's wife was, despite Gerald's protestations, one that was used by church writers to explain the ancestry of Jesus Christ in the early medieval period. *Yebum* or *yibbum*, the Jewish practice of a man marrying his deceased brother's widow – a form of levirate marriage – is attested in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸⁰ Still, ecclesiastics, Irish bishops and prelates included, were conscious of affecting changes in Irish marriage customs. Perhaps the best way for the Irish to learn about proper marriage was for

¹⁷⁷ The medieval church had adopted the same prohibition towards affinity and marriage as they had done with consanguinity, namely to the seventh degree.

¹⁷⁸ Decree and translation from T. Ó Donnchadha, *Leabhar Muimhneach* (Dublin, 1940), p. 341, cited in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The synod of Cashel, 1101: conservative or innovative?', in David Edwards, 'Ideology and experience: Spenser's *View* and martial law in Ireland', in Hiram Morgan (ed.), *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641* (Dublin, 1999), p. 17. Ó Corráin emended Ó Donnchadha's *shiúr* to *siúr*.

¹⁷⁹ Ó Corráin, 'The synod of Cashel, 1101', pp 17–18.

¹⁸⁰ See Deut. 25:5–10; Gen. 38; and Ruth 3–4.

them to marry members of the invading forces? And that is exactly what some of them did.

It was not simply for the want of social cohesion or peace through symbolic union nor indeed remuneration for a job done that Diarmait Mac Murchada's ally Strongbow wedded Diarmait's daughter, Aoife. On the contrary, one might suggest that there was an element of symbolic colonial sexual subjugation imbued in their union. Throughout history, colonial enterprises have relied on repressive acts that affect the colonised population psychologically, politically, economically, socio-culturally and, often, sexually. The term 'trophy wife' takes on specific meaning in the contexts of medieval warfare whereby women were often seen as a prized possession of a man, symbolic of their status and power, and therefore an object for the taking if the occasion arose. This is attested perhaps most memorably in two cases in the history of pre-invasion Ireland: Brian Boru's marriage to Gormflaith perhaps after her erstwhile husband Amlaib Cuarán of Dublin was defeated at the battle of Tara in 980; and Diarmait Mac Murchada's kidnap and detention of Derbforgaill, the wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc in 1152.¹⁸¹ While there were no doubt happy unions between Irish and English in Ireland arising from genuine affection there, too, were members of invading forces engaging in sexual relations with native women motivated by a desire not only for political conquest but a sexual one too.

Related but distinct from political 'winners' claiming the wives, mothers and/or daughters of political 'losers', was an obvious desire to control woman who was, as Gerald tells us through an allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid*, a fickle and inconstant creature.¹⁸² Afterall, it was the sensuality and pleasure-seeking of Eve that corrupted man, thus leading to the Fall. In a similar vein, it was, in Gerald's eyes, Derbforgaill's antics that rang the death knell in relations between the kings of Connacht and Leinster, ultimately leading to the coming of the English.¹⁸³ When retelling the tale of Ua Ruairc and Mac Murchada's long-standing rivalry, Gerald

¹⁸¹ Lahney Preston-Matto provides a good survey of female political hostages in pre-invasion Ireland, see Preston-Matto, 'Queens as political hostages in pre-Norman Ireland: Derbforgaill and the three Gormlaiths', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 109:2 (2010), pp 141–61. See also Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Women in early Irish society', in Margaret Mac Curtain and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, (eds), *Women in Irish society: the historical dimension* (Dublin, 1978), pp 1–13.

¹⁸² 'Varium et mutabile semper femina', Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 24–5. From Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV. 569.

¹⁸³ According to the Annals of the Four Masters, Inisfallen, Tigernach and Ulster, Derbforgaill's 'abduction' ultimately caused the invasion of Ireland.

recounts the abduction – or rape, as it is sometimes known¹⁸⁴ – of Ua Ruairc’s wife, Derbforgaill, who is nameless in the *Expugnatio* and simply referred to as ‘Ua Máelechlainn’s daughter’ (*Omachlachelini filia*).¹⁸⁵ The verse chronicle *La geste*, in which Derbforgaill is also nameless and identified by affiliation to her father ‘King Ua Máel Sechlainn’ (*La fille al rei Mal Athlin*) as well as her beauty, provides an alternative account of Derbforgaill’s abduction whereby she is portrayed as having not only been a willing participant in the abduction but as having in fact assisted in organising what was depicted more a rescue mission led by Diarmait than a forceful abduction.¹⁸⁶ It would be surprising if Gerald did not know her name given his experiences in Ireland. Derbforgaill’s sexuality and the rumour that she had willingly been taken by Diarmait was no doubt seen as a challenge to the subservient position of woman idealised by clerics such as Gerald. Indeed, Ruth Mazo Karras makes the point that medieval women’s sexuality was a threat for medieval men as ‘they might be temptresses and lure men into fornication or worse sins, they might behave in masculine ways with each other and so usurp male gender privilege, or they might use sexuality in other ways to control men’.¹⁸⁷ Or, worse still, woman had the ability to bring about an invasion of her own country.

There is not much good to say about Irish women in contemporary histories and chronicles. Moreover, there is, in fact, not much to say at all for Irish women in the sources. Mentions of Irish women as a gendered group and in individual cases occur most often in Gerald’s *Topographia* and *Expugnatio*. Still, they are only few in number. Based on what Gerald has to say about the opposite sex, to say that he was likely a misogynist would be a gross understatement. He writes, for instance, of an island in a lake in Munster where no female creature, whether human or beast, may enter as it will cause their instant demise.¹⁸⁸ Gerald also writes about a mill in Meath that no woman can enter.¹⁸⁹ As if the adverse environmental responses affecting womankind were not enough to reinforce their problematic nature, Gerald tells us that female birds of prey are larger and stronger than the males.¹⁹⁰ According to

¹⁸⁴ Seán Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp 27, 57; Preston-Matto, ‘Queens as political hostages in pre-Norman Ireland’, p. 143.

¹⁸⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 24–7 Cf. *La geste*, pp 53–9, ll. 22–237.

¹⁸⁶ *La geste*, pp 54–5, ll. 40–111.

¹⁸⁷ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe: doing unto others*, 3rd ed. (London and New York, 2017), p. 161.

¹⁸⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 80–1. For intertextual examples, see Byrne, *Otherworlds*, pp 54–5.

¹⁸⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 134.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Henry Owen, Gerald's avian analogy shows us 'the superior capability for mischief in female kind'.¹⁹¹

While Gerald spares no details in describing the promiscuity and animalistic sexuality of the Irish, he was not solely focused on the Irish case as he also took the Welsh to task – including clerics – for their sexual encounters.¹⁹² While many writers in early Plantagenet England criticised Irish marriage customs, Gerald was the only one to write, in explicit detail, about sexual practices in Ireland. The wanton sexual mores of the Irish as depicted by Gerald of Wales reflects a departure not only from the accepted norms of the church but also of civilised human society. There are Irish people having sex with animals, the byproduct of such debaucherous acts being the hybrid ox-men of whom Gerald writes about. If we consider the bestial king of Kenilcunnil, we see that even Irish royals were allegedly committing depraved sexual acts. The reasons for Gerald's obsession with sexual mores – viewed as acceptable or otherwise – are many, but the process of becoming a cleric and the implicit misogyny within much of the church's culture resulted in the formation of ecclesiastics who were often innocent and ignorant of the realities of sexual matters. That being said, it is clear that many of the medieval religious turned a blind eye to chastity. Even the English and Welsh clergy succumbed to temptation if we are to believe Gerald's account of immigrant clerics accusing one another of keeping concubines.¹⁹³ Gerald was one of those reformers who sought to construct an image of Ireland as a place of animalistic savages in desperate need of salvation through reform. David Rollo asserts that 'By indulging in his deliberate occlusion of truth, Gerald in effect laid the foundations for the historical fiction of Irish inferiority, creating a very specific discourse on sex and gender which, however mediated in form and however unconscious in redeployment, continues to be enlisted to the cause of misrepresentation'.¹⁹⁴

Crozier in the crucible: criticisms of Irish bishops and prelates

With high office comes high expectations. For the bishops and archbishops of Ireland, the expectations of their fellow ecclesiastics in early Plantagenet England

¹⁹¹ Owen, *Gerald the Welshman*, p. 33.

¹⁹² See O'Loughlin, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and the sexual agenda of the twelfth-century reformers', pp 1–15.

¹⁹³ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁴ David Rollo, 'Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica: sex and the Irish nation*, *Romanic Review*, 86:2 (1995), pp 169–90.

were largely impossible to meet. While he praised the Irish clergy on a number of counts, Gerald of Wales was particularly critical of the bishops and prelates of Ireland. For Gerald, they were neglectful in their administering of pastoral care and shied away from reproving the laity for their misdeeds. The bishops and prelates' lack of preaching, instructing, chastising and correcting directly led to the proliferation of abominable Irish practices, according to Gerald.¹⁹⁵ As far as Gerald was concerned, no Irish bishop, past or present, had fought in the name of Christ's church; they had never shed their blood for Christ in the same way that he had done for them.¹⁹⁶ The prelates of Ireland kept the customs of their land and stayed within the enclosures of their churches contemplating alone.¹⁹⁷ Gerald acknowledged that Irish prelates made for good monks but bad pastors, which was due to the fact that many were taken from monasteries into the ranks of the clergy.¹⁹⁸ Gerald uses the case of Irish prelates as a segue to contrast the duties of clerics and monks. Effectively, Gerald's overarching purpose here is to undermine and patronise monks. Quoting Jerome, Gerald asserts: '*Alia sit causa monachi, alia clerici; et clerici oves pascant, monachi pascantur*'.¹⁹⁹

At a council of the suffragans of the province of Dublin held in the middle of Lent, Gerald made his feelings about Irish bishops and prelates publicly known in a sermon that he delivered during the third day of proceedings. Many of Gerald's remarks were in response to the Cistercian abbot of Baltinglass, Ailbe Ua Maeltuige, or Albinus as he was known to Gerald, who preached a sermon on the second day of the council accusing the English and Welsh clergy of having brought the abuses and dereliction of duties that existed with them to Ireland.²⁰⁰ In support of the abbot's assertions, members of the immigrant clergy of Wexford accused each other of publicly keeping concubines in their homes.²⁰¹ Amidst the unfolding drama, Gerald recommended to the archbishop of Dublin, John Comyn, that witnesses be summoned and heard against the accused. After hearing the evidence, the Irish clergy convicted them with 'much mockery and insult', according to Gerald.²⁰² Gerald,

¹⁹⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 172–3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 175–6.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁰⁰ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, pp 92–7; Gerald of Wales, *The history and topography of Ireland*, p. 135 n.68.

²⁰¹ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

however, would return the serve of the Irish clergy during his own sermon on the third day of the council. Having begun by commending the Irish clergy in respect of their religious practice, in particular their chastity – which was nothing short of pre-eminent and outstanding – Gerald laid into his Irish counterparts, censuring them for their drunkenness, while the Irish prelates were singled out for their carelessness and negligence in their pastoral duties.²⁰³

Although Gerald impressed upon his Irish colleagues, as well as the readers of the *Topographia*, that he was a reformer through and through, when it came to putting his money where his mouth was, Gerald shirked from the opportunity to directly influence reforms in Ireland when, according to himself, he refused the bishoprics of Ferns and Leighlin.²⁰⁴ Gerald conveniently blamed Prince John's lack of interest in the exaltation and upraising of the church in Ireland as the reason behind his refusal to take on the Irish sees. That Gerald turned down such an opportunity is particularly interesting given his criticisms of Irish bishops, especially their perceived lack of moral discipline and failure to carry out their pastoral duties.²⁰⁵ In truth, Gerald enjoyed his personal freedoms as a cleric who could move in high circles as he pleased. Even if he had taken on the Irish bishoprics that he was purportedly offered, Gerald's self-righteousness and stubbornness would never have served him well as a bishop in Ireland. There is no doubting that both the Irish and immigrant clergy in late-twelfth-century Ireland would have struggled to carry out their duties with a personality such as Gerald's in their midst.

In his *Mappa mundi*, Gervase of Canterbury presents a not-so-subtle dig at ecclesiastical high office in Ireland. In the introduction of that work, Gervase tells us that he will relate the details – effectively little more than the names – of the bishoprics and archbishoprics of the world from the top, which is the pontiff, who was at that time Clement III, and descend to the lowest sees in rank as God has given. The four archbishops and the thirty suffragan bishops of Ireland received the wooden spoon, being ranked lower than even the three sees of Greenland (*Grenlandia*)!²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁰⁴ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 90.

²⁰⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 173–7; idem, *De rebus*, pp 90–3.

²⁰⁶ While the sees of Ireland are the last amongst the bishoprics listed as per country, there is a brief and unfinished list that follows Gervase's entry on Ireland. However, this final list merely repeats aforementioned sees such as Ravenna and Cologne, which are already mentioned earlier and thus are ranked higher than Ireland, see Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical works*, ii, p. 448.

However, for all their concerns and criticisms, writers such as Gerald of Wales and Gervase of Canterbury seemed to find little royal support if we are to consider the decrees of the council of Cashel in the early 1170s as alternative evidence of the misdeeds of the Irish clergy. Indeed, it was at that very council that the bishops of Ireland, including Gilla Críst Ó Con Áirge, bishop of Lismore and papal legate, Donnchad Ó hUallacháin, archbishop of Cashel, and Lorcán Ó Tuathail, archbishop of Dublin, were joined by the king of England himself, Henry II, at Cashel in the winter of 1171/2.²⁰⁷ We know very little about the background contexts of the meeting or indeed the response of Irish bishops to the hasty organisation of the council at Henry's request or the fact that the English king was under personal interdict for his role in the murder of Thomas Becket.²⁰⁸ However, thanks to Gerald, we do have a fairly detailed account of its proceedings and the decrees of the council, which Gerald claims to have written verbatim.²⁰⁹ We are told that 'the enormities and filth of that land and people' were examined, recounted in a public hearing and recorded by the bishop of Lismore, Ó Con Áirge, who presided over the inquiry.²¹⁰ However, the decrees of the council reflect no findings of appalling vices being committed by the Irish clergy. Indeed, according to Ó Corráin, the synod's legislation 'is so pedestrian that it must be genuine'.²¹¹ Other than the issues of consanguinity and affinity, there is no evidence of major uncanonical deeds being committed in Ireland by the clergy or the laity for that matter.²¹²

However banal the synod seemed it would have far-reaching consequences that would forever change the Irish church. Indeed, John Watt described the council at Cashel to be 'the most important event in the history of the Irish church between the fifth and sixteenth centuries'.²¹³ On the back of the council, a report regarding military and political events in Ireland, specifically related to Henry's intervention therein, was sent to Pope Alexander III from the bishop of Lismore and the king of England. According to Gerald of Wales, the letters sent to the papal curia from the Irish bishops outlined Irish abuses of canon law.²¹⁴ Marie Therese Flanagan has

²⁰⁷ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, pp 26–7.

²⁰⁸ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 104. For analysis of the council, see Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Henry II, the council of Cashel and the Irish bishops', *Peritia*, 10 (1996), pp 184–211.

²⁰⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 96–9.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²¹¹ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 105.

²¹² Ó Corráin provides good analysis of the decrees, see *The Irish church*, p. 105.

²¹³ J.A. Watt, *The church and the two nations in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 40.

²¹⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 99–101, 142–5.

suggested that the Irish bishops ‘appear to have taken the initiative in suggesting the letters be sent to Pope Alexander III ... and the possibilities it might afford for the furtherance of reform of the Irish church’.²¹⁵ In response, the pope commanded that the Irish bishops support the endeavours of Henry II ‘the illustrious king of England’ and ‘diligently and manfully and as far as you are able ... help the king, a great man and a devout son of the church, to maintain and preserve that land [i.e. Ireland as the land of Henry II] and to wipe out the filth of such an abomination’.²¹⁶ These words are to be found in the so-called “September letters”, which were issued by Pope Alexander III from Tusculum (Frascati) on 20 September 1172. Thereafter, it was in the interests of the Irish clergy to uphold Henry II’s *dominium*. Indeed, there was added pressure on Irish religious to not only endeavour to reform Irish society but also to support the lordship in Ireland as a vehicle through which such reforms could be achieved. What is more, as Flanagan has pointed out, Henry likely realised the ‘propaganda value of papal support’.²¹⁷

While the September letters confirmed papal support for the conquest of Ireland, they also memorialised stereotypical attitudes towards the Irish. The inhabitants of Ireland, according to Alexander III, were a barbarous people uncivilised and ignorant of the divine law (*gentem illiam barbaram, incultam et divinae legis ignaram*).²¹⁸ Moreover, the pope lists the ‘monstrous abuses’ of the Irish, which included them living in concubinage with two sisters, marrying their stepmothers and having children by them, eating meat at lent, not paying tithes, and having no respect for the churches and clergy. However, thanks to divine inspiration – as the pope saw it – Henry II caused virtue to flourish in Ireland.²¹⁹ Thus, peace and Christian discipline was brought to Ireland. The notion that Ireland required a civilising conqueror to act as a catalyst for reform was echoed and popularised in the late 1180s by Gerald of Wales.²²⁰ The September letters are an important source for not only legitimising the invasion and conquest of Ireland but also the continued

²¹⁵ Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, p. 278.

²¹⁶ *Pontificia Hibernica. Medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640–1261*, ed. Maurice P. Sheehy (Dublin, 1962), i, pp 19–20.

²¹⁷ Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, p. 278.

²¹⁸ *Pontificia Hibernica*, i, pp 19–20.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, i, pp 21–2. Cf. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 308–9: ‘[Ireland] is growing strong in the new faith brought by its settlers ... it is now surpassing all other nations in its sacred worship and religious fervour’.

²²⁰ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 347.

stereotyping of the Irish people – as a *gentem incultam et indisciplinatam* – and their depiction as barbarians.

Later, under Pope Innocent III, Ireland was granted to King John and his successors as a vassal kingdom at an annual fee of 300 marks.²²¹ Ireland was, in effect, a papal fief that was held by the kings of England. Moreover, Innocent III changed the course of Hiberno-papal relations going forward.²²² Thus, the Irish clergy, in particular bishops, became less powerful and influential in their own right, especially when more and more non-native ecclesiastics, such as Luke, archbishop of Dublin, and Albert Suerbeer, archbishop of Armagh, were being elected to high office. Nonetheless, the bishops of Ireland were important king's men who, thanks to feudalist social structures, held special positions as tenants-in-chief of the English crown.²²³ More important, however, for the perception of the Irish abroad, was that some Irish religious were clearly actively involved in perpetuating and supporting the view that the Irish laity were barbarians.

Ruling rightly

During the Middle Ages, the Hiberno-British archipelago was a region fraught with political tension, conquest and warfare. The right to rule led to much bloodshed in the period, as well as frequent political, social and economic changes. Such developments were often seen as the result of a 'natural' progression in societal development, which is often detailed in contemporary chronicles and histories in a list or narrative format that recounts the changing rulers governing or peoples inhabiting a given place. For instance, both Gerald of Wales and Ralph of Diceto recalled the various peoples that had populated Ireland and those individuals who had ruled therein.²²⁴ In Gerald's case, providing accounts of the different peoples who settled in Ireland as well as their rulers showed audiences that the English king and his people were but another case of foreigners settling in Ireland. Acts of conquest and domination were as much part of medieval life as agricultural practice, cultural and intellectual production or even economic activity. That said, warfare, economy,

²²¹ Watt, *The church and the two nations*, p. 40.

²²² P.J. Dunning, 'Pope Innocent III and the Irish kings', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 8:1 (1957), pp 17–32.

²²³ For a study of the relationships between the kings of England and their bishops following the English invasion see Everett Uberto Crosby, *The king's bishops: the politics of patronage in England and Normandy, 1066–1216* (New York, 2013).

²²⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 84–92, 110–20; Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 10, ii, pp 34–5.

culture and politics were intimately connected in the medieval world much as they are today. There were and are no boundaries separating them, rather a constant ebb and flow.

The rule of kings – and royals more generally speaking – was a topic that frequently featured in medieval texts. Indeed, an entire literary genre *Speculum principis* (often translated as ‘mirror for princes’ or ‘mirror of princes’) was dedicated to the nature and application of kingship or royal rule broadly interpreted. Texts emanating from this genre of advice literature provided instruction and advice on the basic principles informing how governance, administration and law were to be exercised. The exercise of royal power relied on both secular and ecclesiastical stakeholders for support and approval. Gerald of Wales was a man with a preoccupation for the attainment and exercise of power, so it was important that monarchs were depicted favourably in his commentaries, certainly when they were his patron of the hour. How monarchs were represented did not only affect their reputation while in power, but also influenced how their heirs would be perceived. The kings of England were frequent patrons of contemporary writers. However, even when they were not drawn to their quills by the purse strings of the king or notable lords, the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England often had their arms twisted into service, which might be said of Matthew Paris’s close relationship with Henry III, who had not only visited St Alban’s on at least nine occasions but also had dined with Paris on more than one occasion and even discussed current affairs with him in the king’s private chamber.

While he was never a great critic of the Irish, Ralph of Diceto did use them as an example to extol Henry II’s rulership, asserting the king’s exertion of power to be one based on the public good or *publica potestas*, which did not exist in Ireland according to Diceto. He emphasises this point when discussing the submission of the Irish princes to Henry in 1171, stating that the princes in Ireland regretted the internecine wars and sought peace and stability.²²⁵ The submission of the Irish princes reflected that they were publicly acknowledging the superiority of the English monarch over existing royal rulers in Ireland. By transferring their authority and power to Henry, the princes were, in effect, suggesting that peace in Ireland could only be achieved through English political interference in Ireland. Diceto was not necessarily justifying what was a brutal and haphazard conquest of Ireland in the

²²⁵ Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 350–1.

late twelfth century. For contemporaries, however, the structure of government that prevailed in Ireland, which was, in effect, a number of kingdoms that formed a confederation of sorts presided over by a high-king, was primitive and tribal in comparison to the monarchy of England. Although the princes of Ireland had recognised Henry II as their overlord, he was an absent one who had not the time or interest to involve himself personally in Irish political affairs in the early years of conquest. Having reminded the immigrant magnates in Ireland of their place in the feudal hierarchy following his military expedition to Ireland in 1171/2, Henry II realised that he could not trust his men in Ireland. Knowing that his exercise of power would be relatively limited in his absence, Henry, rather cleverly, conciliated the native rulers and in doing so ensured that his own men's power and influence would be limited.²²⁶

Motivations and intentions

Recounting what was said about Ireland and its people during the first century of English Ireland is a relatively easy task; proposing, however, the motivations and impetus behind writing about Ireland is an altogether different and more challenging one. However, it is a necessary endeavour if we are to gain some sense of the Anglo-Irish relationship and the extent to which the supposed Otherness of the Irish was used to justify the invasion and subsequent colonisation of Ireland based on the colonisers' sense of ethnic superiority over the Irish or perhaps a saviour complex or even a hybrid rationalisation based on elements of the two. It must also be said at this point that the process of Othering is one that manifests itself in thoughts and actions of varying degrees, ranging from insidious and heinous acts of violence instigated by false beliefs of ethnocentricity to more positive but often reductive perceptions of outgroups based on ignorance and stereotyping. Hegelian philosophy suggests that the Other is a constituent part of self-consciousness and therefore a necessary construct for the establishment of a sense of self. Theoretical discourses, including post-colonialism, Orientalism and Occidentalism, often paint Othering as a taboo process unfit in a civilised world. However, as psychological processes go, Othering is an inevitable part of self-definition, a lifelong process in which every human being participates.

²²⁶ Dunning, 'Pope Innocent III and the Irish kings', p. 18.

It is wishful and reductive to assume that all those men at arms who came to Ireland as part of the aristocratic knightly class or as mercenaries under the English crown held conscious notions of Ireland and its people being inherently inferior when travelling there during the initial period of invasion or indeed in the more lengthy, piecemeal conquest and settlement from the last quarter of the twelfth century until the Tudor reconquest of the sixteenth century. After all, it is reasonable to assume that many of them were simply following an opportunity for gaining income and not invested in a grand civilising mission in any sense. This should not be read as an apologist's view; rather, it is allowing for more mundane reasons for participating in the invasion of Ireland. In addition, understanding the potential rational behind Othering Ireland and the native Irish ways of life may also proffer insight into the redevelopment of notions of Englishness within the early Plantagenet world. The fact that contemporary writers did not always write quite so vitriolic and denigratory accounts of the Irish as Gerald of Wales and others did suggests that colonial aspirations, or indeed a desire to reaffirm a positive sense of self, were not necessarily a motivating factor for a writer's decision to include content related to Ireland in their works.

In her book *Serious entertainments*, Nancy Partner rendered the difficulty of studying the individuality and motivations of the twelfth-century writer thus:

‘These minds and emotions in the act of observing, registering, sifting impressions make the really irresistible object for our minds; these were, after all, the men who would in later centuries, be academics. They were educated and reasonably articulate, and they were writing in a genre that encouraged digression and quiet idiosyncrasy. They have unexpected things to tell about themselves and their part of their world’.²²⁷

While the writers concerned here certainly have much to tell us about their social, political and spiritual worlds, ultimately, they were a mixed bag of ecclesiastics, ranging from deans and deacons to canons and monks. Some were well travelled, studying abroad and honing their rhetorical and scholarly skills in intellectual hotbeds such as Paris, while others never left their priory. Yet, despite Mark Twain's oft-quoted claim that ‘travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrowmindedness’, it seems that travel did not necessarily influence, for the better, how these writers

²²⁷ Nancy F. Partner, *Serious entertainments: the writing of history in twelfth-century England* (Chicago, IL, and New York, 1977), p. 6.

perceived or indeed depicted foreigners in their works. On the contrary, Gerald of Wales's four separate trips to Ireland did little to create a more sympathetic view of the Irish people, while those medieval authors who failed to leave the cloisters, Bede and William of Newburgh for example, expressed, at times, more positive and indifferent views of Ireland and its people.²²⁸

The twelfth century saw a major shift in terms of the focus of writers. That the past was still of much concern is undoubted, but supplementing this was a growing interest in contemporary events, both at home and abroad. This interest, no doubt, was instigated by the fact that by the end of the twelfth century Plantagenet endeavours extended from Ireland to France, and from Flanders to the Holy Land. In terms of wider socio-cultural and indeed intellectual movements, it is reasonable to suggest that the 'renaissance' of historical writing in twelfth-century England and beyond directed contemporary writers to the past for inspiration, not only in terms of methodology but also in terms of how to view the world and the people in it. The influence of Antiquity can be seen both implicitly – through allusions to classical works – and explicitly – through references to classical authors.²²⁹ For instance, Orderic Vitalis noted that William of Poitiers described the deeds of William the Conqueror in imitation of the style of Sallust.²³⁰ Ralph of Diceto was clear in acknowledging the materials upon which he drew for inspiration and information. In his *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, he includes a list of forty-seven important writers some of whose works he consulted.²³¹ This list, and the fact that he acknowledged his sources, reflects the academic fervour that Ralph possessed as well as the importance of grounding his own work within the literary traditions of the classical and early medieval pasts. His use of antecedent works not only provides him with supporting evidence for what he recounts but also provides an intellectual framework that affords us with some insight into how he perceived events as they occurred in England and further afield based on the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries. Moreover, the list proves the impressive extent of Diceto's reading, which included Gregory of Tours, Isidore and Eusebius, as well as classical writers

²²⁸ It is worth noting that in Gerald's case his experiences in Ireland were confined to the English-controlled parts of south-east Ireland.

²²⁹ Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia* contains an impressive array of allusions to the Bible as well as classical, medieval and Patristic sources, ranging from Ammianus Marcellinus, Bede and Ambrose to Ralph of Coggeshall, William of Newburgh and Walter Map, see Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 928–54.

²³⁰ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 258–9.

²³¹ Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 20–3.

such as Solinus, Virgil and Claudian.²³² The fact that Diceto was so conscious of his enterprise in terms of not simply recounting historical events – and indeed including a list of sources – but supplementing them with supporting documentary evidence challenges Vivian Hunter Galbraith’s statement that ‘It would be a brave man who sought to widen the list of medieval achievements by the inclusion of historical research’.²³³ Writing just over two decades after Galbraith, a brave Richard Southern – accepting his former Balliol College tutor’s challenge – asserted that one of the distinctive characteristics of English historical writing in the period was ‘a tradition of research’.²³⁴ While Diceto’s methodologies perhaps reflect little in comparison to the modern historian, his approach might be regarded as being indicative of the early instances of historical research and scholarly citation.

The practice of historical writing in early Plantagenet England was complex in its web of networks and modes of production, not to mention the makeup of its readership, across the vast territorial expanse of the English kings in the period.²³⁵ Historical writing practice is an especially interesting area of study for the modern historian who is presented with, in effect, a mirror to cast back at his- or herself and his or her own historical working methods. When one reads the contemporary authors, it is difficult not to relate to and appreciate their ambition to disseminate knowledge, critique historical and contemporary events, and re-evaluate orthodox ideas, interpretations and explanations. These achievements aside, one of the main issues associated with examining why contemporary writers were motivated to not only put quill to parchment but to focus on specific events and things is the force of patronage and the influence of the social *élite*. Many medieval chroniclers and

²³² Patristic works were a common feature in monastic libraries. Orderic Vitalis tells us that the library at St Évrout contained the treatises of Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Isidore, Eusebius and Orosius, as well as other church fathers, and that these acted as an inspiration for younger monks engaged in the same endeavours, see Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 50–1.

²³³ V.H. Galbraith, *Historical research in medieval England* (London, 1951), p. 7.

²³⁴ R.W. Southern, ‘Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing: 4. The sense of the past’, *TRHS*, 5th ser., 23, (1973), p. 263. Southern’s research interests were immensely inspired by his former tutor, Galbraith, whom he succeeded at Balliol as fellow and tutor in medieval history in 1937.

²³⁵ For a rich survey of historical writing across the Anglo-Norman world, see Laura Cleaver and Andrea Worm (eds), *Writing history in the Anglo-Norman World: manuscripts, makers and readers, c. 1066–1250* (Suffolk, 2018). Michael Staunton’s wide-ranging and insightful monograph on the historians of Angevin England is a *sine qua non*, see *The historians of Angevin England*. Of course, the classic studies of historical writing in the period are Antonia Gransden, *Historical writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974); Partner, *Serious entertainments*. For chronicle writing in medieval England, see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: the writing of history in medieval England* (London, 2004). Michael Clanchy has written the seminal work on the subject of literacy development in medieval England, see Michael T. Clanchy, *From memory to written record: England 1066–1307*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2012).

historians dedicated their works to patrons, which in the contexts of early Plantagenet England were often royals but they could also be religious who headhunted potential authors. In a letter to Robert, earl of Gloucester, William of Malmesbury explicitly acknowledged that writers are incited to make princes live forever in writing in return for securing their tranquillity.²³⁶ If we are to take the example of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln who commissioned Henry of Huntingdon to write the *Historia Anglorum*, we find that the bishop provided suggestions on how Henry's work might be carried out.²³⁷ William of Newburgh was personally invited to write both the *Historia* and his Marian commentary on the *Song of Songs* by Yorkshire-based Cistercians, namely Abbot Ernald of Rievaulx and Abbot Roger of Byland respectively.²³⁸ It is worth considering, therefore, that the content of contemporary chronicles and histories must, in part, be influenced by the interests and/or instructions of the patron and/or dedicatee. A ready example of the meddling influence of patrons is Henry II's commissioning of Wace's metrical history *Roman de Rou* – written in the vernacular – which was intended to celebrate the Norman past (and present) and justify the Norman rule of England.²³⁹

While histories were written to entertain and enthrall, often at their core were moral didacticisms that encouraged readers to live a good life. Writing in 1135, the great English historian and poet Henry of Huntingdon chose to address and petition posterity, specifically those living around the 135th year of the second millennium, to ignore the allure of earthly fame and, instead, dedicate their focus to God:

‘For if we are famed now in Him, we shall still be famed in your time
... I, who will already be dust by your time, have made mention of
you in this book so long before you are to be born, so that if – as my
soul strongly desires – it shall come about that this book comes into
your hands, I beg you, in the incomprehensible mercy of God, to pray
for me, poor wretch. In the same way, may those who will walk with

²³⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, pp 10–13.

²³⁷ William of Newburgh, *the history of English affairs, book i*, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy (Oxford, 2015), p. 5. See also John Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon and the twelfth century revival of the English nation’, in Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray (eds), *Concepts of national identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995), pp 75–101.

²³⁸ Neither letter of invitation survives. For a study of William of Newburgh and his approach to historical writing see Gillingham, ‘The historian as judge: William of Newburgh and Hubert Walter’, *EHR*, 119:484 (2004), pp 1275–87.

²³⁹ Charles H. Haskins, ‘Henry II as a patron of literature’, in Andrew G. Little and Frederik M. Powicke (eds), *Essays in medieval history presented to Thomas Frederick Tout* (Manchester, 1925), pp 71–7.

God in the fourth and fifth millennia pray and petition for you, if indeed mortal man survives so long'.²⁴⁰

Henry, no doubt, would be glad to know that mortal man has survived this long and in hope that he heeded his words of advice. What is more interesting than Henry's words of moral advice is his foretelling of his own successes and afterlife as he instructs the modern reader to 'Consider us, who at this moment seem to be renowned, because, miserable creatures, we think highly of ourselves. Reflect, I say, on what has become of us'.²⁴¹ Contemporary authors were well aware of the potentially long and illustrious lifespan of the written word. Indeed, they themselves consulted works that were sometimes many centuries old. Henry of Huntingdon was not the only twelfth-century writers conscious of his legacy and reputation. Writing in the latter quarter of the century, Gerald of Wales's works reflected what was in essence a classical sense of the writer's eternal reward of reputation (*fama*). Gerald Harriss, in his delightful dedication in Karl Leyser's *festschrift*, noted that twelfth-century humanists were not solely motivated by intellectual pursuits and free of vanity, rather, in Leyser's words, these writers 'with their large and sumptuous book collections, their furs and fat incomes, they were not exactly hermits or ascetics: they started at the bottom and liked what they got'.²⁴² Certainly, such a description seems ironic with Gerald of Wales in mind given his own reformist deeds as a cleric and writer and the fact that he was quick to belittle the ecclesiastical roles and removed lifestyles of monks who were akin to 'a grain of wheat remaining alone', while clerics were like 'a grain that germinates and brings a big yield into the granary of the Lord'.²⁴³ The 'shrewdness of the serpent' that clerics exhibited naturally superseded the 'dove-like simplicity' of the monk.²⁴⁴

When it comes to Gerald of Wales's work on Ireland, one can argue for a number of potential intentions behind writing about Ireland's natural, socio-cultural, economic and political feats and flaws, especially in the *Topographia*. but it is best to start with his intentions as he himself describes them in the preface dedicated to Henry II:

²⁴⁰ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia*, p. 497.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Gerald Harriss, 'Karl Leyser as a teacher', in Timothy Reuter (ed.) *Warriors and churchmen in the high Middle Ages: essays presented to Karl Leyser* (London, 1992), p. xi.

²⁴³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 176–7.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

‘I [i.e. Gerald] have, therefore, collected everything, and have chosen out some of them. Those which I have thought worthy of being *remembered* [my emphasis] I have, I hope usefully, put together and propose them for your attention. ... I decided to send to your Highness [Henry II] those things rather which cannot be lost. By them I shall, through you, instruct posterity. For no age can destroy them’.²⁴⁵

Gerald’s intentions here are striking, not least for what they tell us about the selective nature of his working method and the propagandist intentions underpinning his first work on Ireland. Moreover, such purposeful appropriation of the history and culture of the Irish by Gerald reflects the agency of the coloniser and his role in simultaneously ‘recording and destroying what they describe’, as Clare Carroll put it.²⁴⁶ Gerald was acutely aware of the longevity of the written word and its potential for instructing posterity. However, while some contemporaries, no doubt, had intended their works to stay within the confines of their cloisters, others were more outward looking. Gerald was evidently one of these more ambitious writers:

‘And when in process of time the work was finished and corrected, not wishing to place the candle which he had lit under a bushel, but to lift it aloft on a candlestick that it might shine, he determined to read it before a great audience at Oxford, where of all places in England the clergy were most strong and pre-eminent in learning’.²⁴⁷

It is clear that the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England were astute and self-conscious practitioners of their craft and the scholarly pursuit of knowledge more generally speaking. Many undertook their projects not just out of a desire to recount the past but also to contribute to a longstanding tradition of intellectual culture by making an indelible mark.²⁴⁸ In addition, contemporary writers were also keen to showcase their erudition. In particular, prologues proffer insight into the rationales for writing the histories and chronicles of the period.²⁴⁹ With reference to

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴⁶ Carroll, *Circe’s cup*, p. 13.

²⁴⁷ Gerald, *De rebus*, p. 97. For biblical allusion, see Matthew 5:15.

²⁴⁸ Nancy F. Partner, ‘Making up lost time: writing on the writing of history’, *Speculum*, 61 (1986), pp 90–117.

²⁴⁹ For a comparative study of the prologues of the twelfth century, see Antonia Gransden, ‘Prologues in the historiography of twelfth-century England’, in Daniel Williams (ed.), *England in the twelfth century, proceedings of 1988 Harlaxton symposium* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp 55–82.

Henry of Huntingdon, John Gillingham notes that Henry's prologue makes 'high claims for an interest in history as the mark of the intellectually aware'. In his *Gesta regum Anglorum*, William of Malmesbury provides an insight into his understanding of history's role in instructing civil society, '[history] adds flavour to moral instruction by imparting a pleasurable knowledge of past events, spurring the reader by the accumulation of examples to follow the good and shun the bad'.²⁵⁰

It is important to note, too, the pursuit of church expansionism and reform that so many ecclesiastics engaged in across Ireland and Britain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as motivation for constructing the Irish as Other. This desire for reform can be seen explicitly when Gerald ends the first chapter of *De rebus a se gestis*: 'For he [Gerald] desired naught so much on earth as the great glory of Christ's Church and its advancement and honour in all things, in every age and circumstance of his life'.²⁵¹ While agendas of reform often go hand in hand with conquest, it might reasonably be suggested that Gerald was, first and foremost, motivated and excited by his reformist mentality rather than by notions of racial conquest and domination. Unfortunately for the native Irish way of life, Gerald saw it as primitive and underdeveloped, which in many ways it was when compared with the ideals of law, government and administration in early Plantagenet England, and requiring reform that could be affected through his kinsmen's conquest of Ireland and the subjugation of its people. However, while clearly confident of his superiority over the Irish, nowhere do we find Gerald of Wales state with utter conviction that the Irish should be extirpated.

Being born in Ireland was not the reason for the barbarity, *per se*, of the inhabitants of Ireland, rather it was their culture that corrupted them and turned them into a people driven by impulse and vice. This is an important point as it complicates the often-reductive dichotomous relationship between the Irish and English that pervades the historiography of the period. Moreover, Gerald, as well as other contemporary writers, seemed to have more positive things to say about *certain* Irish individuals than the Irish as a collective people. However, this should in no way be seen as the rationalisation of an apologist for English colonialism in Ireland. On the contrary, it is clear that the English colonisers in Ireland, as well as their king and supporters at home, were still, in the main, assured of their cultural and techno-

²⁵⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 150–1, 424–5.

²⁵¹ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 36.

economic superiority over their insular neighbours. It must be said that those men who found themselves part of the English soldiery in Ireland and subsequently part of the colonial community therein were, first and foremost, driven by their own self-interests and not by a grand ambition to reform Irish society. The internal conflicts of interests and personalities that arose between the invaders themselves are highlighted in the *Expugnatio*.

When chroniclers and historians wrote about foreigners, especially those with whom writers and their audiences would have had little contact, the result was often biased accounts that homogenised social groups as opposed to accounting for the possibility that all individuals within a group may behave, think and appear similarly or dissimilarly in a given situation.²⁵² The perception of the Irish in contemporary works can tell us much about how ethnic groups were perceived and understood in more functional ways. Joshua M. Ackerman *et al* suggest that ‘Whether explained in psychological terms (e.g., needs and goals), economic terms (e.g., costs and benefits), or evolutionary terms (e.g., reproductive fitness), perceptual and cognitive resources are selectively allocated toward individuals who appear to have the most profound functional implications for perceivers’.²⁵³ Illustrating this is the fact that Ireland, its people and its affairs featured relatively rarely in histories and chronicles preceding the 1169 invasion. However, once Ireland was subsumed into the landholdings of the early Plantagenet kings, the increase in mentions and accounts of Ireland is easy to discern.

If the trappings of race and nationhood were removed from the study of identity and the related topics of inter-group relations, then it would be an altogether different affair. But as it stands it is one’s identity against another’s. Thus, we have a far more tribal and indeed personal phenomenon on our hands. An example of such personal and indeed tribal motivations may be discerned in the Irish works of Gerald

²⁵² Such reductive perceptions of outgroups are unsurprising. Indeed, the psychological literature shows that familiarity is a key determinant for how individuals and groups perceive other groups. The seminal study is Alfred Schuetz, ‘The stranger: an essay in social psychology’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 49:6 (1944), pp 499–507. See also Charles M. Judd and Bernadette Park, ‘Out-group homogeneity: judgments of variability at the individual and group levels’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54:5 (1988), pp 778–88; Penelope J. Oakes *et al.*, ‘Becoming an in-group: reexamining the impact of familiarity on perceptions of group homogeneity’, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58:1 (1995), pp 52–60; Alberto Voci *et al.*, ‘Majority, minority, and parity: effects of gender and group size on perceived group variability’, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 71:2 (2008), pp 114–42.

²⁵³ Joshua M. Ackerman *et al.*, ‘They all look the same to me (unless they’re angry): from out-group homogeneity to out-group heterogeneity’, *Psychological Science*, 17:10 (2006), p. 836.

of Wales. The *Topographia Hibernica*, Gerald's first work on Ireland, is a work moulded by many genres, with elements of history, ethnography, geography, natural science and hagiography present throughout. Although the presence of a multiplicity of genres may be readily recognised, that Gerald had multiple, and sometimes conflicting, intentions in his works is less so. Scholars too often reduce the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* to being merely the propaganda of a royalist apologist. Certainly, there are elements of pro-Plantagenet propaganda in his Irish works, for example Gerald's spurious concoction of five reasons justifying the English right to rule Ireland.²⁵⁴ But these texts had other functions too. As Bartlett has noted, Gerald of Wales was the 'eulogist and the apologist' of the Marcher lords to whom he was related.²⁵⁵ The *Expugnatio* may be read as a 'family epic' with the 'heroes of the narrative' being the descendants of Nest, Gerald's own kinsmen.²⁵⁶ Gerald's extended family members – including his uncle Maurice fitz Gerald and cousins Meiler fitz Henry and Raymond fitz William – found themselves amongst the leaders of the conquest of Ireland.²⁵⁷ Moreover, members of Gerald's immediate family, namely his brothers Philip and Robert, as well as Philip's son Robert, were also heavily involved in the action on the ground.²⁵⁸ Gerald had first travelled to Ireland in 1183 as a companion of his elder brother Philip who was on his way there to take possession of the lands granted to him by their uncle Robert fitz Stephen. The granting of lands in Ireland to the de Barris was a financial boon for the family. Gerald knew this well and undoubtedly saw to it that his kinsmen's role in the invasion was duly recognised in the *Expugnatio*.²⁵⁹

While he undoubtedly sought to buttress the reputation and socio-political status of his kinsmen in Ireland, one must not forget that Gerald was ever conscious of his own reputation as a man of letters and an ardent reformer lay and ecclesiastical society alike. To say that he was authoritarian in his religious views is an understatement. As Robert Bartlett noted, it is hard to believe that Gerald died only a few years before St Francis of Assisi, whose 'spirituality, with its emphasis upon

²⁵⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 148–9.

²⁵⁵ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 24

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 24–5.

²⁵⁷ See Veach, 'The Geraldines and the conquest of Ireland', pp 69–92.

²⁵⁸ Robert fitz Philip, Gerald's nephew, seems to have died in Lismore, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 234–5.

²⁵⁹ Gerald's generally laudatory descriptions of the physical attributes and virtues of his relations are worth reading, see *Expugnatio*, pp 86–7 (Robert fitz Stephen), 118–21 (Maurice fitz Gerald), 152–5 (Raymond le Gros), 154–7 (Meiler fitz Henry). For Gerald's praise of his family, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 156–9.

feeling, its interiority, and its sense of pathos, stands worlds apart from Gerald's hard and formal religion'.²⁶⁰ For Gerald, God was a judge of character, morals and actions with little time for geniality – a view which can be seen across Gerald's *oeuvre*. For instance, the many disabilities and afflictions affecting the Irish, as Gerald describes them in his *Topographia*, were a just punishment from God for their adulterous, incestuous and bestial practices, or so he tells us. One of the great problems, however, associated with the contemporary evidence is that it originates from ecclesiastics. While many were, no doubt, truly motivated by reformist ideals, a more pragmatic view might be that the words and actions of clerics such as Gerald of Wales and Roger of Howden were also dictated by the interests and agendas of religious and secular leaders at home and abroad, for example the English monarch or indeed the pope.

When it came to writing about the history of Anglo-Saxon England – or Britain generally for that matter – Bede was the *sine qua non* for many twelfth- and early thirteenth-century writers in England. Indeed, M.L.W. Laistner and H.H. King's *Handlist of Bede manuscripts* shows that of the 160 or so surviving manuscripts of the *Historia ecclesiastica* that they considered, 31 percent were copied in the twelfth century, which was substantially more than the second highest figure of 17 percent in fourteenth century, while 10 percent were copied in the intervening thirteenth century.²⁶¹ We know that Gerald of Wales had read Bede's work, so too had Ralph of Diceto and William of Newburgh. In particular, Newburgh acknowledged the stellar precedent set by Bede, declaring that his 'wisdom and integrity it is sacrilegious to doubt'.²⁶² If that was not sufficient enough, Newburgh went further by commending those writers who took up their quills following Bede with the caveat that although their works were praiseworthy they were in no way comparable to Bede.²⁶³ However, despite its status as an authoritative text on the Anglo-Saxon past and the indebtedness of writers such as William of Newburgh to the monk of Jarrow, Bede's generally moderate and sometimes favourable views of Ireland certainly did not rub-off on many of the historians and chroniclers in post-

²⁶⁰ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 172.

²⁶¹ M.L.W. Laistner and H.H. King, *A Hand-List of Bede Manuscripts* (New York 1943), p. 7. The list is problematic in that it was compiled from catalogues and printed material rather than the extant manuscripts themselves. Nonetheless, it provides a sense of the popularity of the text in medieval England, especially in the twelfth century. See also Antonia Gransden, 'Bede's reputation as an historian in medieval England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32:4 (1981), pp 397–425.

²⁶² William of Newburgh, *History*, pp 36–7.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

invasion England. This, of course, makes perfect sense when one considers and compares international relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain and how they changed – and quite dramatically so it must be said – following 1066. What is more, the much-debated topic of Bede's attitude towards Ireland and the Irish shows just how different interpretations of the same evidence can be. While his generally favourable outlook on Ireland is not replicated in the chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England, we can see some general similarities between Bede and his successors. For one thing, Bede's praise and admiration of Irish saints find comparisons in the works of William of Malmesbury, Gerald of Wales and others.²⁶⁴

Conclusion

Many of the various charges put forward by contemporary chroniclers and historians against the Irish were effectively summed up by Gervase of Tilbury (*b.* 1150s, *d.* in or after 1222), who had spent time in the service of Henry II and his son Henry. Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, which was written in the early thirteenth century as a source of entertainment for the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV, who happened to be Henry II's grandson, contains this rather stinging description of the Irish:

‘This island too used to be inhabited by Scottish tribes, until the time of the renowned King Henry of England, your grandfather, most worshipful Prince. He was the first to drive out the pestilential tribes of Irishmen and turn the land into an English possession, dividing it into fiefs for his vassals; it was paid for, however, by the shedding of much English and British blood. And so it has come about that a land which from the earliest times was contemptuous of religion, living on cows' milk and ignoring the Lenten fast, eating raw flesh and given over to filthy practices.’²⁶⁵

Tilbury certainly summed up the anti-Irish stance well. He was clearly not an ecclesiastic moved by a sense of Christian unity as Bede was, for instance. Neither was Tilbury like the writers in the late twelfth century who lamented the shedding of Christian blood in Ireland; indeed, only the losses of English and Britons were of concern to him. However, it is worth considering what Tilbury says next:

²⁶⁴ See ‘Irish saints and English sinners’ in chapter 3.

²⁶⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, pp 308–9.

‘[Ireland] is growing strong in the new faith brought by its settlers; while it was the last country to adopt the true religion, and then only under compulsion, it is now surpassing all other nations in its sacred worship and religious fervour. It rejoices in its own episcopal sees, and in monasteries of dedicated observance, richly endowed with substantial estates and providing generous hospitality’.²⁶⁶

Tilbury was preaching to the converted. In the early thirteenth century, reformers were not doubt contented with the developments in Irish secular and ecclesiastical affairs. Although the conquest of Ireland resulted in much bloodshed, it was a sacrifice worth taking according to Tilbury. Gervase of Tilbury’s account of Ireland touches on a number of different perspectives related to contemporary events in Ireland, not least the popular notion that Ireland needed the touch of the civilised English to enact reforms and that the Irish were not beyond saving.

Although the arrival of the English at Bannow Island, in Co. Wexford, in May 1169 is regarded as the genesis of an eight-hundred-year period of strife, struggle and drama in Anglo-Irish relations, contact – cultural, political and economic – between the two largest islands in the Hiberno-British archipelagic region began much earlier.²⁶⁷ Yet, despite such longevity, as well as the increased contact between the islands, it had little impact on the tone of negative attitudes expressed towards and the depictions of the Irish in chronicles and histories during this period. But why was that? Such negative views of Ireland featured in cultural outputs that were primarily accessible for a literate *élite* and not the unrecorded and largely uneducated majority of early Plantagenet England. Although there were certainly occasions when contemporary works were read aloud for a public audience, these were not common.

Conveniently and fortunately for the early Plantagenet kings, the activities and ideals of industrious church reformers in England provided some justification for the invasion of Ireland under the pretence that it was a place full of backward savages wallowing in vice and lacking in the rudiments of the faith. As a result, English interference in Irish political affairs inevitably opened the door for hard-line reformers who fancied making a name for themselves by reforming Irish lay society.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ O’Sullivan *et al.*, *Early medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2021 [reprint]), pp 247–81.

Moreover, as this chapter has shown, the increased interest in Ireland, its people and its affairs – representative of a broader trend in historical and chronicle writing in England during the period – led to novel and more detailed accounts emerging. The multi-ethnic makeup of contemporary English society, which consisted of multiple ethnic groups including Norman, English and Welsh, sowed seeds of intrigue in contemporary writers – many of whom, including Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury and Gerald of Wales, were of mixed parentage – who sought to learn about the peoples that inhabited the world and recount their histories, affairs and ethno-idiosyncrasies. More than that, they were attempting to reinforce a new past and present for English lay and ecclesiastical society. It is reasonable to suggest that the interest of historians and chroniclers in what might be reduced to the question of identity reflects not only an intrigue about the Other but also an intrinsic interest in the self and the things that made a person who they were in reality and by invention. The fact that England was part of a much larger composite monarchy dotted across parts of England, Ireland, Wales and France that was ruled by the Plantagenet kings meant that the view of Ireland was not one informed solely by the intellectual culture of England, rather it was an amalgam of both native English and wider Norman world views. However, more than ethnic or national allegiances, regional, local and even familial interests influenced writers and the works they produced. This point will be explored further in the final chapter of the thesis.

The increased presence of the English on Irish soil subsequently led to more anti-Irish content in contemporary histories and chronicles. While the works of writers such as William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales constructed dichotomous ethnic divisions between the Irish and the English, it is impossible for us to know with any degree of certainty how ethnic differences manifested themselves in daily life in Ireland and Britain where intercultural and interethnic interfaces also existed between Irish, English, Welsh, Scots, Flemish and Norman people.

However, while Gerald of Wales's Irish works are some of the most important sources for what we know of medieval Ireland and remain the go-to texts for contemporary views on Ireland, Gerald was, in many ways, an exception in terms of his contempt for the Irish and unbridled desire for church and spiritual reform in Ireland. Gerald was a conservative churchman whose opinions and views often contrasted sharply with those of his contemporaries as well as his predecessors and successors. By all accounts it is perhaps unsurprising that Gerald would write more

critical and detailed accounts of the Irish given that many of his kinsmen were involved in the leadership directing what was to become a fairly haphazard conquest of Ireland in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While he was not involved directly in armed conquest or the occupation of Irish land or indeed the physical and political disenfranchisement of the Irish, Gerald had a clear stake in the colonisation of Ireland, unlike many of the historians and chroniclers in early Plantagenet England. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, Gerald could express favourable views of certain aspects of Irish life when comparing them to other ethnic groups, which challenges, to some degree, the popular view of him being a downright ‘Irophobe’, to borrow nomenclature from Johannes Duft.²⁶⁸ When it comes to providing a final remark about Gerald’s anti-Irish views, it is perhaps fitting to return to F.X. Martin’s avian simile and conclude that when it came to writing about Ireland, its people and its affairs, Gerald was more than a peacock but certainly less than a friend.

However, for all the anti-Irish material that existed in the Latin chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England, there were also more positive, ambiguous, and indeed indifferent perceptions and depictions that existed in these same works. These other – and often more problematic – accounts and mentions of Ireland are the subject of the following chapter.

²⁶⁸ Johannes Duft, ‘Iromanie – Irophobie: fragen um die frühmittelalterliche Irenmission exemplifiziert an Sankt Gallen und Alemannien’, *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Kirchengeschichte*, 50 (1956), pp 241–62.

Chapter 3

Positive, ambiguous and indifferent: other views of Ireland

‘If a stranger dwell in your land, and abide among you, do not upbraid him: But let him be among you as one of the same country: and you shall love him as yourselves: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ... Do not any unjust thing in judgment, in rule, in weight, or in measure’.

Lev. 19:33–5

‘Did not he that made me in the womb make him also:
and did not one and the same form me in the womb?’

Job 31:15

‘The first commandment of all is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord thy God is one God. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the first commandment.

And the second is like to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these’.

Mk. 12:29–31

Introduction

The books of the Bible have much to offer in terms of moral principles, exemplified, to an extent, in the above excerpts from both the Old and New Testaments. All of these examples encapsulate what is often called the ‘second greatest commandment’ or the ‘Golden Rule’: that is to treat others as you would like to be treated yourself – a core moral maxim and, put more crudely, socialising mechanism of the Christian

faith.¹ They have been reproduced here to highlight that such altruistic, empathetic and egalitarian perspectives, as written in the Bible, were familiar to writers in early Plantagenet England given their ecclesiastical backgrounds. Moreover, the historians and chroniclers of the age were particularly well-versed in the scriptures, which is evidenced by the explicit references and more subtle allusions to biblical content that can be found throughout contemporary works.² Despite the ideals presented in the prescriptive teachings of the church, the realities of daily medieval life often meant that churchmen and laypersons alike failed to adopt the idealistic interpersonal outlooks proffered in the Bible. The point being made here is that the ecclesiastics who wrote the chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England had the intellectual and philosophical means to perceive the world and the various people in it in more ways than one and that, ultimately, the ideals of religious teachings did not always manifest themselves in the practices of daily life. As psychologist Gordon W. Allport put it with regard to religion's paradoxical role in daily life: 'It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice'.³ Allport's assessment of religious expression and meaning is especially relevant for those seeking to understand medieval religious as writers:

'Religion is a highly personal matter; it has quite different meanings in different lives. Its functional significance may range from its crutch-like ability to bolster infantile and magical forms of thinking to its support for a guiding and comprehensive view of life that turns the individual from his self-centeredness towards genuine love for his neighbor.'⁴

Taking the writers concerned here into account, it is easy to relate to how highly personal religion was for contemporary writers, hence the many different approaches to writing the past. The 'magical forms of thinking' that Allport mentions can be

¹ It is worth noting that the so-called 'Golden Rule' is a foundational principle or ethic of reciprocity found in all major religions, including Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

² The presence of allegories and more subtle allusions to the Bible, as well as classical and Patristic authors, was common in medieval works. Tied to such literary devices was the theoretical and practical form of intellectual enquiry known as hermeneutics, which was so popular that 'perhaps no other era has been as "hermeneutic" as the Middle Ages', see Mauricio Beuchot and Juan Tubert-Oklander, 'Hermeneutics in medieval thought', in Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (eds), *The Routledge companion to hermeneutics* (New York, 2014), p. 23. For a study of referentiality in twelfth-century England, see Monika Otter, *Inventiones: fiction and referentiality in twelfth-century English historical writing* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996).

³ Gordon W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice* (Cambridge, MA, 1954), p. 444.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 451–2.

seen in the works of many authors, not least William of Newburgh, Walter Map and Gerald of Wales.⁵

While the heights of medieval intellectual culture would lead one to believe that religious men were pouring over Boethius and Aristotle and debating the nature of free will, in reality their lives were often very different. There were those who championed the eremitical way of life such as the Benedictine monk and reformer Peter Damian (1007–72) whose treatise *On giving priority to holy simplicity over vainglorious learning* criticised the value placed on literary and philosophical culture asserting that God had no need for orators or philosophers given that Christ's apostles were simple fishermen.⁶ Then there were others who cared more about earthly pleasures at the expense of administering the pastoral care expected of an ecclesiastic. The archdeacon of Brecon, Jordan, who kept a concubine and was ousted and replaced by Gerald of Wales, springs to mind here.⁷ So, too, does Gerald's old rival Bishop Peter de Leia (d. 1198) who was allegedly 'as unknown in name as in face'.⁸ Others, however, lived more mundane lives and simply got on with what was expected of them, namely prayers, chores and fasts in penance or on feast days, and administering pastoral care. In truth, both for lay and religious alike, medieval life was marked by a sense of material and moral insecurity for the most part as 'the yield of the moral life seemed as small to medieval mankind as the yield from agriculture'.⁹ The ideal of loving one's neighbour as divine instruction would have it could not have been further from the minds of so many of the church reformers. Indeed, as G.K. Chesterton put it: 'The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people'.¹⁰ Having examined contemporary content and attitudes that were

⁵ Tony Davenport, 'Sex, ghosts, and dreams: Walter Map (1135?–1210?) and Gerald of Wales (1146–1223)', in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (eds), *Writers of the reign of Henry II: twelve essays* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp 133–50; William of Newburgh, *History*, i, pp 114–21.

⁶ David Luscombe, *Medieval thought* (Oxford, 1997), pp 40–1.

⁷ Clerics leading comfortable and uncanonical lives was a common occurrence. In particular, Gerald's accounts of his own reformist activities shed much light on such uncouth churchmen in Wales, see, for instance, Gerald's assessment of 'the old archdeacon' who had publicly kept his concubine in his house and later used foul and insulting words against the archbishop, see Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, pp 42–8. For discussion of Gerald's activities as a reformer in Wales, see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 31–8.

⁸ Gerald's view of de Leia as incompetent was no doubt stoked by the personal animus that both men shared for one another. According to Gerald, de Leia had double played both sides against him, so that to the French (*Francis*) de Leia made Gerald out to be a Welshman, while to the Welsh he was declared to be French, see Gerald of Wales, *Symbolum electorum*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, i, p. 332.

⁹ Le Goff, *Medieval civilisation*, p. 325.

¹⁰ G.K. Chesterton, *The uses of diversity* (London, 1930), p. 35.

critical of the Irish way of life in the previous chapter, the following explores more positive, ambiguous and indifferent attitudes expressed by writers in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, thus problematising the notion that contemporary views of Ireland and its people were, inevitably, negative in outlook. As a result, it argues for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach when examining contemporary Latin chronicles and histories for insights into attitudes towards Ireland, its people and affairs.

It is easy to write about anti-Irish views in early Plantagenet England, primarily because the historiography of the shared history of Ireland and Britain in the high Middle Ages has tended to place greater emphasis on the negative attitudes towards Ireland and its inhabitants as they were representative of a colonised people. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gerald of Wales's works on Ireland have dictated how scholars have understood the view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England. The sheer breadth of his works presents highly detailed and carefully constructed narratives of the Irish way of life that have resulted in the perception of contemporary English views as being generally negative and representative of a colonist's mentality. Such a view of the colonised Irish has perpetuated a reductive dichotomy in the historiography of the coloniser and the colonised: the English and the Irish. This should in no way be interpreted as an attitude that accepts the acts of the colonists as inevitable or indeed agreeable. On the contrary, reducing contemporary events to two antithetical camps ultimately ignores the complex relationships between natives and newcomers and how they went about their professional and personal business on a day-to-day basis, potentially in states of conflict or cooperation or even cycles of both. Take for instance John Brannigan's reductive assessment of why writers in early Plantagenet England wrote about Ireland: 'Ireland was not of itself an interesting subject for Anglo-Norman readers. What was interesting was a land peopled with fierce, violent savages, who engaged in barbaric customs, rituals and acts, and who shunned, or revelled in ignorance of, the laws, doctrines and manners of Western European politics, religion and society'.¹¹ One might believe Brannigan's assured assessment of things if not for the fact that he focused solely on Gerald of Wales for insights into contemporary colonial attitudes towards Ireland. If he had looked to Ralph of Diceto or Roger of Howden, Brannigan would have found, in contrast to Gerald's savage and ignorant

¹¹ Brannigan, "'A particular vice of that people'", p. 129.

Irish, more mundane depictions of Ireland and its people. Moreover, there is no attempt to compare Gerald's depictions of the Irish with the realities of integration and cooperation between the peoples of Ireland and Britain on the ground. Such consideration paints a far more nuanced picture of inter-group perceptions and relations.

In reality, the permutations of the medieval lived experience are impossible to fully comprehend. However, one can justifiably assume that the interactions between Ireland's inhabitants and the new lords and settlers on the ground were complex, varied, and likely entailed 'Repeated spasms of violence, repression and exploitation alternated with periods of attempted reconciliation, reform and development – each interrupted by longer spells of indifference, irresponsibility and neglect', as Ciaran Brady put it when retrospectively describing England's historical relations with Ireland.¹² Through comparative examination we can see that historians' and chroniclers' views of Ireland were not always as derisive as those examined in the preceding chapter. Writers in early Plantagenet England attempted to incorporate as much information as possible about contemporary affairs at home and abroad that had arrived to them through colleagues, collaborators, newsletters, and courtly communiqués while often blending that information with the *topoi* expected of their genres. Thus, although writers such as William of Malmesbury, Gerald of Wales and William of Newburgh wrote about a simple and rustic people who were supposedly of barbarian stock, contemporary views of Ireland were far more wide ranging, with some being positive and others being altogether ambiguous and, often times, indifferent.

Contemporary views of the conquest of Ireland

The conquest of Ireland was a messy business. Was it a papal-sanctioned invasion? Or an invitation to govern by Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster? Or simply a dreaded case of a visitor overstaying his welcome? Maybe it entailed a chain of events including elements of all the above? Perhaps the conquest is best seen not from the point of view of instigation but rather from that of opportunity.¹³ Colin

¹² Ciaran Brady, 'In the shadow of the fond abuser', in Peter Furtado(ed.), *The histories of nations, how their identities were forged* (London, 2017), p. 56.

¹³ The blame game for the arrival of the English has raged for centuries in the historiography. In attempting to prove his point that the coming of the English in 1169 represented 'an auxiliary force ... to restore a displaced local king' rather than an invading army seeking to conquer a land and subjugate

Veach has challenged the notion that it was mere opportunism on the part of the magnates who came to Ireland in the period. Countering Nicholas Vincent's suggestion that 'this "invasion" of 1171 was a reaction to circumstances rather than a spontaneous bid for empire',¹⁴ Veach argues that 'the problem with this interpretation is that it sets up a false dichotomy between empire-building and opportunism. Empires ... often expanded as chance allowed, relying upon pre-existing ideologies or creating *ex post facto* justifications as needed'.¹⁵ The arrival of a foreign, multinational soldiery to Ireland may not have been a concerted invasion at first but it can certainly be argued that their arrival brought about an intentional conquest only a few years later. These well-worn questions of intention and motivation aside, the responses of commentators in England to Henry II's conquest of his insular neighbours offer particularly revealing insights for the study of contemporary attitudes towards Ireland and its people.

So, how did contemporary commentators view the conquest of Ireland? Was it deemed to be indicative of a natural progression in the development of mankind under the banner of church-led social, spiritual and administrative reforms of which Gerald of Wales and other clerics were such vocal proponents? Or was it merely opportunism seized upon by the king of England and his self-interested vassals? While the notion of reform can be well-intentioned in terms of improving what might be deemed malpractice in some given aspect of social organisation, the motivations for engaging in reformative action can, ultimately, be detrimental to political, economic and social stability. This, however, is not to say that reforms should not be sought in order to improve society for the better, but rather the point is to acknowledge that reformation, whether it is planned for the social, political, cultural or economic spheres, can often be the brainchild of ulterior motives that may prove

its people, F.X. Martin referred to the Annals of Tigernach's mere sentence dedicated to the so-called "invasion": 'A strong force of knights [*ritiri*] came to Mac Murchada', see 'Introduction: medieval Ireland', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, volume II: medieval Ireland, 1169–1534* (Oxford, 2008), p. 1. It must be noted, however, that the annal's factual and rather dull account of the coming of the English should not be blindly accepted as indicative of the general Irish view of events. While the initial intentions of the multinational forces that arrived in support of Mac Murchada were to assist his reinstatement as king of Leinster, what followed was certainly a conscious yet chaotic effort to invade and conquer Ireland. Indeed, such a view is supported by the fact that contemporary commentators explicitly referred to the heavy-handed nature of the taking of Ireland. This is perhaps most obvious in the title of Gerald's second Irish work, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, with '*expugno*' meaning to take by assault, storm, capture, reduce or subdue. All of which suggest that Ireland was taken by force. William of Newburgh had seen events in Ireland in the same way. His chapter on the conquest of Ireland is entitled '*De expugnatione Hiberniensium ab Anglis*', William of Newburgh, *Historia*, ii, p. 108.

¹⁴ Vincent, 'Angevin Ireland', p. 213.

¹⁵ Veach, 'Henry II and the ideological foundations of Angevin rule in Ireland', p. 2.

to be detrimental – and at times fatal – to the lives of others. As Donnchadh Ó Corráin has pointed out, contemporary church reformers should not be viewed as a homogeneous group who were ‘on the side of angels’¹⁶; rather, a more pragmatic and cautious approach is required when examining the motivations behind the contemporary movement for church reform. Moreover, it was not just religious reforms that moved the conquistadores in Ireland to act but often their ambitions for their own socio-economic advancement. Indeed, for the ordinary foot soldier or archer who had braved the journey to Ireland, it was far from church-led social-cultural reforms that moved them to action.

Chroniclers’ and historians’ assessment of magnates’ endeavours in Ireland can tell us much about how contemporaries viewed the conquest of Ireland. Hugh de Lacy,¹⁷ chief governor of Ireland from 1177 to 1181 – a man of ‘good sense’ who had ‘pacified’ Ireland according to Gerald of Wales – had won the support of the Irish by returning ‘those who had been conquered by others and forcibly ejected from their lands, and thus he [de Lacy] restored the countryside and brought back cattle to pastures which had formerly been deserted’ and by ‘generous treatment and flattering them with his [de Lacy’s] friendship, he made the more important of them his allies’.¹⁸ The generally positive tone here is curious given Gerald’s forthright criticisms of Irish pastoralism in the *Topographia*. That Irish pastures and fields were described as ‘deserted’ (*olim deserta tam armentis pascua quam ruricolis rura restituit*) may be suggestive of the failure of magnates and settlers to utilise the Irish landscape. Had Gerald experienced a turnabout in his view of Irish agricultural practices? It is hard to say. However, the so-called ‘generous treatment’ and flattery that the Irish received supposedly belies the alleged tactical cunning of de Lacy as Gerald discloses to us that it was only by such means, when ‘hemmed in by castles and gradually subdued’, that the Irish ‘problem’ could be reduced to an ordered condition thus turning a troublesome situation into a profitable one.¹⁹

Gerald all-too predictably asserts the drive for socio-economic exploitation and advancement that lay at the heart of many of the magnates’ endeavours in Ireland. W.L. Warren agreed with Gerald’s assessment and thought de Lacy had

¹⁶ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 1.

¹⁷ The author wishes to thank Dr Colin Veach for his very helpful and insightful views on Hugh de Lacy’s governance of Ireland and his relationship with the Gaelic Irish.

¹⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 190–1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

grand ambitions that were ‘betrayed by his second marriage ... to the daughter of the High King’.²⁰ In contrast, Goddard Orpen felt that de Lacy’s alleged intentions to usurp the English crown could not be reconciled with his character and actions.²¹ In a similar vein, Robin Frame thought that de Lacy’s cosmopolitan background would have made it difficult for him to cut himself ‘adrift from the outside world and sacrificing his English and French interests’.²² It should go without saying that Gerald’s assured assessment of de Lacy’s intentions should not be accepted without some degree of scepticism. Indeed, it is *Gerald’s* assessment of de Lacy’s actions and motivations that we are reading and not de Lacy’s recalled verbatim. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Gerald records in the title of this chapter in book two of the *Expugnatio* that suspicions arose over what was perceived to be de Lacy’s excessive friendliness with the Irish (*suspicione de ipso ex nimia cum Hibernicis familiaritate contracta*).²³ It is said that de Lacy was suspected of wanting to throw off his allegiance to the king and take Ireland for himself. According to Gerald ‘The net result [of his conciliations with the Irish] was that he was strongly suspected of wanting to throw off his allegiance and usurp the government of the kingdom, and with it the crown and sceptre’.²⁴ Such suspicion is unsurprising given that de Lacy amassed swathes of lands and, with that, significant political sway. Out of romance or perhaps a desire to settle political instability and solidify his assets in Ireland (or maybe even a mixture of both), he managed to insert himself into native dynastic politics by marrying a daughter of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, the high-king of Ireland, in 1180, which did little to assuage the concerns of his fellow magnates and, especially, his king.²⁵

The *Gesta Henrici* notes that de Lacy’s marriage was ‘unlicensed’ and ‘in accordance with the custom of that country [i.e. Ireland]’ (*secundum morem patriae illius*).²⁶ Roger of Howden does not elaborate upon this remark, which is characteristic of his matter-of-fact approach to recounting contemporary events.

²⁰ W.L. Warren, ‘John in Ireland, 1185’, in John Bossy and Peter Jupp (eds), *Essays presented to Michael Roberts, sometime professor of modern history in the Queen’s University of Belfast* (Belfast, 1976), pp 11–23.

²¹ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 172.

²² Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 19.

²³ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 16–17 [see ‘Introitus in recitacionem’].

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 190–1.

²⁵ Colin Veach, *Lordship in four realms: the Lacy family, 1166–1241* (Manchester, 2015), pp 47–74.

²⁶ ‘*Noluit enim dominus rex quod ipse eam diutis custodiret, eo quod ipse sine ipsius licentia ceperat sibi in conjugem filiam regis Connactre, secundum morem patriae illius*’, Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 270. De lacy had two children, a son and a daughter, with his Irish princess. The son, William (p.1180–1233), was declared illegitimate by Henry II due to his parents’ ‘unlicensed’ marriage.

Hence, one is left to ponder, in particular, the meaning of *morem* here.²⁷ With regard to the use of *mores* in the ethnographic accounts in the *Topographia*, Bartlett has noted that while the word often referred to the behaviour of an individual or group, it could also be used in reference to the interior, mental characteristics of people.²⁸ Thus, for instance, when Gerald describes the Irish as ‘*Hi mores: “Nec in bello fortes, nec in pace fideles”*’, one can hardly interpret these words as commentary on Irish ‘customs’ but rather on their disposition.²⁹ For comparative purposes, it is worthwhile to consider other examples of the term’s usage as it appears in Gerald’s *Topographia*. For instance, in Gerald’s account of the cursed Irish wolves, we are told that the male wolf pleaded with the Irish priest to give the dying she-wolf the viaticum. Although the priest initially insisted that he had none with him, the male wolf pointed out that the priest carried a little wallet around his neck which contained a manual and some consecrated host, which was according to the custom of his country (*quae more patriae*).³⁰ Another example may be found in Gerald’s description of two primitive Connacht men who had long, flowing hair that reflected Irish fashion or customs: ‘*Habebant etiam Hibernico more comas perlongas et flavas*’.³¹ Thus, Howden’s comment on the nature of de Lacy’s marriage must refer to either Irish customs or disposition.

Roger of Howden may have been in Ireland in the early 1170s when Henry II led his military expedition there.³² Therefore, Howden would have been in Ireland at the time of the synod of Cashel; however, Gillingham reckons that he was not in attendance at the council. In spite of his absence, he provides an account of the synod, likely assisted by a list of the Irish episcopal sees and information he received from Nicholas the Chaplain.³³ Howden describes the synod’s resulting decrees, including those related to marriage customs, in particular the issue of consanguinity and affinity, with the example given that ‘Many of them [i.e. Irish men] had as many wives as they wished and even married their wives’ sisters’.³⁴ It was not, therefore, as if de Lacy’s marriage was uncanonical per se, rather it seems that permission was not

²⁷ Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 153, where Gerald writes ‘*cum a convictu mores formentur*’.

²⁸ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 155–6.

²⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 166. The quote is from Gildas’s *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, see *ibid.*; Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 229 n.65.

³⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 102.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³² Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 84–6, 89–91.

³³ Flanagan, ‘Henry II, the council of Cashel and the Irish bishops’, pp 204–5.

³⁴ Roger of Howden *Gesta*, i, p. 28.

granted to de Lacy to marry Ua Conchobair's daughter. Therefore, Howden may be suggesting that the lack of permission or license to marry was indicative of Irish custom rather than mentality. Although there are many ways of interpreting what Howden meant when he said that de Lacy married according to Irish custom, one can confidently state that this detail at least suggests that de Lacy was the type of lord adaptable enough to conform to the Irish conditions into which he intruded, or at the very least that is how Howden wanted to portray him. Either way, it supports the account of cooperation between de Lacy and the Irish provided by Gerald of Wales in the *Expugnatio*.

When examined alongside accounts of de Lacy and his endeavours written in early Plantagenet England, the Irish annals reveal potential insights into contemporaries' awareness of events happening in Ireland. Despite de Lacy's alleged friendliness with the natives, the Annals of Ulster show that he clearly had Irish enemies for he was brutally beheaded by one, namely 'Ua Miadhaigh of Bregbmuna' on the direction of the 'Fox' Ua Catharnaigh, while de Lacy was inspecting his castle in Durrow in 1186.³⁵ In comparison, the Annals of Loch Cé state that one 'Gilla-gan-inathair O'Miadhaigh, the foster son of the Sinnach himself [i.e. Ua Catharnaigh], and he gave him [i.e. de Lacy] one blow, so that he cut off his head, and he fell, both head and body, into the ditch of the castle'.³⁶ De Lacy's decapitation was one of several details that the Irish annals and English histories and chronicles share in their accounts of the murder. William of Newburgh tells us that de Lacy was struck with a hatchet by an Irish youth while examining a road.³⁷ Either it was a battle-axe in hatchet's clothing, or de Lacy had the smallest of necks, because it is hard to believe that he was decapitated in such a manner. Smaller axes had a shorter haft, which meant that it would be wielded single-handed and thus be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to strike a blow sufficient to decapitate a person. If it was a larger axe, it may be possible to cleave through flesh more effectively than a single-handed axe; however, it is hard to believe that Ua Miadhaigh concealed such a weapon as he

³⁵ *AU*, s.a. 1186. Ua Miadhaigh and Ua Catharnaigh were not the only Irishmen seeking justice as Howden writes that some Irishmen (*Hibernenses*) – presumably Irish princes – had travelled to Windsor in early 1179 to complain of their unjust and violent treatment at the hands of Hugh de Lacy, William fitz Aldhelm and others, see Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 221. Cf. Miracles of St Wulfstan in William of Malmesbury, *The Vita Wulfstani*, pp 141–2. Note that it is unclear if this passage is referring to Hugh de Lacy, lord of Meath, who was killed in 1186, or his son Hugh (c. 1176–1242), earl of Ulster.

³⁶ *ALC*, s.a. 1186.

³⁷ William of Newburgh, *Historia*, i, pp 239–40.

approached de Lacy and his three companions. (But why should truth interfere with a good story?) Furthermore, Newburgh recounts de Lacy's supposed ambition to rule Ireland himself and noted that Henry was elated when he heard the news of his murder.³⁸ Thereafter, Ireland was settled more cautiously, according to Newburgh.³⁹ The evidence makes it clear that some contemporaries were critical of de Lacy's integrative approach to governing Ireland. Gerald, in particular, explicitly used de Lacy's murder as a warning for the conquistadores in Ireland who had engaged with the Irish and cooperated with them in bringing Ireland and its institutions under the yoke of the early Plantagenet kings.⁴⁰

Another noteworthy contemporary account of the murder is the one found in the *Ymagines* of Ralph of Diceto. More than merely noting that the murderer was an Irishman, as Newburgh and Gerald did, Diceto records for us the name of de Lacy's murderer: *Malua Miadaich*.⁴¹ If we parse the name given to us, one could reasonably propose that *Malua* could be a contraction of the Irish male's name *Mael* and the patronymic *Ua*.⁴² If this is indeed the case, the fact that Diceto offers up a name for the murderer is really quite extraordinary given that even the Irish annals do not provide such detail. Diceto should also be commended for providing a spelling so close to the Irish, especially when the usual practice for Latin writers would be to Latinise such names. Later descriptions of de Lacy's murder were included in the work of Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris (derived from Wendover's description). However, unlike the accounts of Ralph of Diceto, Gerald of Wales and the Irish annals, Wendover's and Paris's entries merely note his death.⁴³

While Gerald went to great lengths to defend Henry II's and his kinsmen's endeavours in Ireland, some of his contemporaries were not as supportive of what was seen by some to be the heavy-handed subjugation of their insular neighbours. Roger of Howden, although he never referred to the Irish as 'barbarians', was critical of a number of aspects of Irish life, including marriage customs and their practice of kin-slaying.⁴⁴ Yet, despite his criticisms, Howden felt it necessary to condemn the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 250–1.

⁴¹ Ralph of Diceto, ii, p. 34.

⁴² I would like to thank Professor Duffy for spotting this while we discussed Diceto's interesting account of de Lacy's murder.

⁴³ 'Anno quoque sub eodem Hugo de Lascio, dominus provinciae quae Midia in Hybernia dicitur, interfectus est, viii^o. kalendas Augusti', Roger of Wendover, *Flores*, ii, p. 418; Matthew Paris, *Historia*, i, p. 434.

⁴⁴ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, pp 25–30, 173, 270.

actions of the invading forces and give voice to Irish concerns. He notes in an entry for 1177 that the Irish felt that they were being treated cruelly, an allegation repeated in an entry for 1179.⁴⁵ Following the death of ‘Monoculus’, the king of Limerick, an unnamed relative seized the throne and refused to pay homage to Henry II and to deal with foreigners in Ireland because ‘he had seen the misfortunes of his nation, and the savagery (*saevitias*) that the foreigners (*advenae*) had carried out against him and other Irish’.⁴⁶ Although these words come to us from the perspective of an Irishman, they nonetheless convey a sense of what seems to have been viewed by commentators in early Plantagenet England as the unnecessary brutality of the invaders in Ireland. Moreover, it is intriguing that Howden used the word *saevitias* to describe the actions of the foreign forces in Ireland, given the connotations of such words with the perceived incivility and barbarism of the Irish in contemporary works. Michael Staunton has drawn attention to Howden’s allusion to Judas Maccabeus in this account.⁴⁷ Judas had urged the Israelites to fight against the Gentiles, asserting that ‘It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary’.⁴⁸ Howden, while certainly far from being an admirer of the Irish, could at least recognise their plight and the reasons for their resistance.⁴⁹ Although Howden’s *Chronica* does not contain the allusion to the Maccabees and the reference to the invaders’ *saevitias*, it does tell us that Monoculus’s son did not obey the king’s men because of their infidelity and the evils they brought upon the Irish without merit (*sine merito*).⁵⁰ Roger of Howden was not alone in criticising the unreasonable brutality committed against the Irish people.

In 1173/4, William, a monk of Canterbury,⁵¹ writing in his biography of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in his cathedral in

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁷ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 354.

⁴⁸ Macc. 3:59.

⁴⁹ There seems to have been a number of non-Irish religious who supported Irish self-defence against their invaders. William of Newburgh noted in his history that Cardinal Vivian had urged the Irish to resist and fight for their country, see William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, i, p. 238.

⁵⁰ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ii, p. 136: ‘*nee suis obedire voluit propter infidelitatem eorum, et mala quae faciebant populo Hyberniae sine merito*’.

⁵¹ Little is known about William of Canterbury’s background. We know, however, that he became a monk while Becket was in exile and was ordained a deacon by Becket himself not long before his murder in December 1170. William, who was a man clearly in awe of Becket, had the unfortunate experience of witnessing his murder in Canterbury cathedral. Interestingly, William was one of five eyewitnesses who reported on the murder alongside Edward Grim, John of Salisbury, William fitz Stephen and Benedict of Peterborough. For details of William and his background, see Michael Staunton (ed.), *The lives of Thomas Becket* (Manchester, 2001), pp 4, 8; idem, *Thomas Becket and his*

1170 by vassals of Henry II, critically weighed in on Henry II's conquest of Ireland and the involvement of several soldiers who were wounded or killed as a result of their participation.⁵² William tells us that 'without cause they had disturbed their defenceless neighbours [i.e. the Irish], a nation, however uncultured and barbarous, which was nevertheless a practitioner of the faith and observer of the Christian religion'.⁵³ William's critical assessment of Henry's actions in Ireland offers up a multifaceted yet ultimately sympathetic view of the Irish plight. It is interesting that the supposed barbarism of the Irish is acknowledged as undesirable, yet it is not used to reduce the sense of sympathy for the situation in Ireland. Hence, William's account suggests that a certain degree of tolerance existed for the supposed barbarian Irish. Another, and perhaps more noteworthy, detail is William's assertion that Henry's endeavours were 'without cause' (*sine causa*), a major contrast to Gerald's five-old justification for English rule over Ireland, which he proposed over a decade later.⁵⁴ While taking the king to task, William offers up a seemingly sarcastic remark: '*Cum rex Anglorum magnificus Hyberniam infestaret*' ('When the magnificent king of the English was attacking Ireland').⁵⁵ An interesting reading of this remark has proposed that it may be an allusion to the papal bull *Laudabiliter*, which refers to Henry II as *tua magnificentia*.⁵⁶ If this is indeed the case, it has further repercussions for the much-contested papal bull given that William was writing fifteen years or so before Gerald of Wales and Ralph of Diceto included the text of *Laudabiliter* in their works. As a final rebuke, William asserts that Henry's actions against fellow Christians, represented 'a notorious and memorable crime'.⁵⁷

In William of Canterbury's *miracula*, one can find numerous miracles related to those who fought in Ireland. In one such miracle account, a soldier who left his native soil and presumed to disturb the Irish experienced an old wound flaring up.

biographers (Woodbridge, 2006), pp 51–2; Eiríkr Magnússon (ed.), *Thómas saga Erkibyskups* (London, 1883), ii, pp lxxxv–vii.

⁵² For Edward Grim's eyewitness recollection of Becket's murder on 29 December 1170 and Benedict of Peterborough's account of the immediate aftermath, see Staunton, *The lives of Thomas Becket*, 51–2, pp 195–205. For commentary on the Becket and Henry affair, see *ibid.*, pp 28–34; Edwin A. Abbott, *St Thomas of Canterbury, his death and miracles* (London, 1898), i, pp 1–7; William Urry, *Thomas Becket: his last days* (Stroud, 2001).

⁵³ *MTB*, i, pp 364–5. Staunton notes that this is an allusion to Bede's comments on Egfrid's invasion of Ireland in 684, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 356.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180. Cf. *Ioannis Saresberiensis. Metalogicon*, ed. J.B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (CCCM 98, Turnhout, 1991), p. 183.

⁵⁶ Ó Clabaigh and Staunton, 'Thomas Becket and Ireland', p. 90. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 144–5; Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 300; Roger of Wendover, *Flores*, i, pp 11–13; Matthew Paris, *Chronica*, ii, pp 210–11; Matthew Paris, *Historia*, i, pp 304–5.

⁵⁷ '*Facinus praeclarum et memoria dignum*', *MTB*, i, p. 365.

The soldier decided that he would have nothing to do with barbarians (*nil mihi cum barbarie*) and felt that St Thomas Becket was drawing him away from the war in Ireland in order to turn him to good deeds.⁵⁸ The soldier abandoned the campaign in Ireland and vowed to travel to Canterbury on pilgrimage where he was healed of his ailment.⁵⁹

As a monk of Canterbury, William's criticism of Henry may be unsurprising, especially given the general ecclesiastical backlash, not least from Pope Innocent III, that Henry II received at the time for his role in Becket's murder.⁶⁰ However, what is perhaps most noteworthy about William's seemingly tolerant view of the Irish is that he was writing this from within the remit of the very archbishopric that had pained the Irish church with its claims of authority over Dublin and primacy over Ireland in the eleventh century.⁶¹ Given William's moderate approach to Ireland, it may reflect the view that attitudes towards the Ireland had become more tolerable at Canterbury since the days of Lanfranc and Anselm. Moreover, it is interesting that William's accounts of the English presence in Ireland are the most politically charged content in his Becket miracles. His concerns for the Irish, which have been described as representing 'a feeling full of patriotic ardour', were used by Eiríkr Magnússon, the Rolls Series editor and translator of the *Thómas saga Erkibyskups*, to suggest that William was in fact an Irishman.⁶² According to Magnússon, William's condemnation of Henry II was expressed in a manner that seems to be 'eminently Irish'.⁶³ In contrast, Didier Lett asserted that William was of Norman extraction.⁶⁴ Irish or not, William's origins are but a side note to his position as an author from the Canterbury scriptorium. Indeed, it is this fact that adds weight to his accounts and the attitudes expressed therein, not a supposed Irish origin. Marcus Bull has suggested that William's criticism of Henry II's expedition to Ireland was 'a subtle but

⁵⁸ Ibid., i., p. 182. Regarding a possible allusion here to Ovid, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 355 n.79.

⁵⁹ *MTB.*, i, pp 181–2.

⁶⁰ Anne J. Duggan, 'Diplomacy, status and conscience: Henry II's penance for Becket's murder', in Karl Borchardt and Enno Bünz (eds), *Forschungen zur reichs-, papst- und landesgeschichte: Peter Herde zum 65. Geburtstag von freunden, schülern und kollegen dargebracht* (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1998), i, pp 265–90.

⁶¹ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, pp 58–60.

⁶² *Thómas saga Erkibyskups*, ii, p. lxxxvi.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Didier Lett, 'Deux hagiographes, un saint et un roi: conformisme et créativité dans les deux recueils de miracula de Thomas Becket', in Michel Zimmermann (ed.), *Auctor et auctoritas: invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale: actes du colloque de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (14–16 Juin 1999)* (Paris, 2001), p. 203.

powerful displacement' for the murder of Becket and its fallout.⁶⁵ While William of Canterbury may indeed have been using Henry's Irish campaign as a circuitous means to critique the king's 'flight' from England and his role in the archbishop's murder, it should not undermine the fact that William's is still a critical account of English endeavours in Ireland that is on the Canterbury record for posterity.

When it comes to writing about Anglo-Irish relations in the post-invasion period, William of Canterbury is an incredibly under-utilised source, especially given that William's work is among the most contemporaneous to the dramatic and eventful early years of conquest in Ireland and was written during a period which Marcus Bull aptly referred to as a 'historiographical lull'.⁶⁶ What is more, the *Lives* antedate the writers who dominate the historiography of the late twelfth century by more than ten years, thus offering us a flavour of the ecclesiastical attitudes towards Henry's conquest of Ireland in its immediate years. However, his absence from the historiography on Anglo-Irish relations in the period can be explained by the genre in which his work is placed. Unlike the chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England, saints' *Lives* are characterised, and unfairly so, as being highly formulaic and lacking individuality. On the contrary, much like contemporary history- and chronicle-writing, while overarching themes were commonplace depending on the literary genre at hand, *vitae* were certainly far from static in their forms and features.

Although certain contemporaries were critical of the heavy-handed approach of the colonists in Ireland and their subjugation of a people who were fellow Christians, it did not necessarily mean that those same seemingly sympathetic writers objected outright to the conquest of Ireland. Indeed, while some writers in early Plantagenet England were sympathetic to the Irish experience, they were still cognisant of the fact that their worlds were some distance apart and that theirs was, seemingly, on the right side of civilisation.⁶⁷ Yet there were still moral lines that could be crossed. William of Newburgh opens his *Historia rerum Anglicarum* with a chapter devoted to William the Bastard, the first Norman king of England. Having recounted the king's relations with the archbishops of York and Canterbury and

⁶⁵ Marcus Bull, 'Criticism of Henry II's expedition to Ireland in William of Canterbury's miracles of St Thomas Becket', *Journal of Medieval History* 33:2 (2007), p. 128.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Integral to the notion of English superiority over their 'Celtic' neighbours was their generally anti-slavery stance, restraint in warfare and honourable treatment of prisoners, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 41–58, 209–229; Matthew Strickland, *War and chivalry: the conduct and perception of war in England and Normandy, 1066–1217* (Cambridge, 1996), especially pp 153–68, 183–203.

lauded his deeds, Newburgh, interestingly, concludes his chapter by taking the conqueror to task for assailing ‘innocent Christians as an enemy, and gained his kingdom at the price of much Christian blood, and for this reason he doubtless incurred in God’s eyes as much guilt as he acquired glory before men’.⁶⁸ Newburgh reminds his audience of the clear distinction between fickle earthly glory and eternal divine glory here.⁶⁹ Later, however, Newburgh seemingly accepts the atrocities committed against fellow Christians due to the conquerors’ decision to build the abbey of St Martin of Battle *pro effusione tanti sanguinis Christiani*.⁷⁰ And while it seems that such an *ex post facto* act of penance was sufficient as a public display of repentance for the greater good of the church, it did not make such violent actions ‘by the hands of brothers’ morally acceptable. Indeed, the desired outcomes of God are often achieved through the acts of sinners in the *Historia* as Newburgh rationalises events and actions and ‘often distinguishes a good outcome, decreed by God, from the sinful actions of his agent or agents’.⁷¹

Similarly, while Gerald supported the civilising mission of the English in Ireland, he recognised that there were limits to how such a mission was to be carried out when Christian morals were considered. In his *Topographia* Gerald had no qualms in asserting the spiritual ignorance of the Irish; however, he expressed a turnabout of sorts in his *Expugnatio* when addressing the ambitions of magnates such as Raymond ‘le Gros’ fitz William (c. 1140–c. 1190) and Meiler fitz Henry (a. 1157–1220), both of whom were related to Gerald.⁷² Their actions resulted in great bloodshed and the slaughter of a ‘Christian people’ (*Christiane gentis*) and yet, more importantly for Gerald, no portion of their new and bloodstained acquisition of land was bestowed to the church.⁷³ This was in contrast to the abbey-founding Normans at

⁶⁸ Newburgh, *Historia*, pp 40–1.

⁶⁹ For Newburgh’s views of divine justice and ‘the causal role played by the goodness or otherwise of people and nations and their actions’, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 88–92.

⁷⁰ Newburgh, *Historia*, p. 22. Although Orderic Vitalis opens the fourth book of his ecclesiastical history by situating events in the time of Pope Alexander II, Orderic’s account of the founding of Battle abbey makes no reference to its construction as an act of penance. In fact, Orderic actually lauds King William’s building of churches and monasteries, asserting that such deeds reflected ‘his piety and generosity in the service of God’, see Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 190–3.

⁷¹ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 340.

⁷² Meiler was the son of Henry fitz Henry, who was the bastard son of Henry I, king of England, and Nest, Gerald’s maternal grandmother. Meiler was, therefore, a half cousin of Gerald, although, interestingly, he never mentions this in his *Expugnatio*. For Meiler’s parentage, see Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 31. Raymond le Gros was the son of William fitz Gerald (eldest son of Gerald of Windsor and Nest, and therefore brother of Gerald’s mother, Angharad), making him Gerald’s cousin. Raymond is portrayed as one of the most admirable and heroic conquistadores in Ireland by Gerald, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 152–5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp 156–7.

Battle. Gerald, and Newburgh before him, could justify such unchristian actions if the church were ultimately a beneficiary when the blood-shedding had settled. Clearly, contemporaries were unsettled by such moral conundrums.

Gerald's account of the execution of some seventy prisoners captured after the English victory at Baginbun in 1170 provides one of the most fruitful examples for analysing contemporary attitudes towards warfare, especially against 'barbarian' Christians. Utilising the opposing views of his cousin Raymond 'le Gros' and Hervey de Montmorency, Gerald relates how the victors saw the losers.⁷⁴ Raymond, who had worked to release the Irish prisoners, saw them not as barbarian belligerents *sed homines; non rebelles, sed debellati, sed victi, sed, fatis urgentibus ob patrie tutelam superati*.⁷⁵ More remarkable, however, is that Raymond asserts that killing these Irish prisoners would bring shame and confusion upon the invaders (*ad ignominiam nobis vegert et confusionem*).⁷⁶ In contrast, Hervey argued that clemency would get them nowhere.⁷⁷ The manner in which Gerald relates both sides of the argument presents unprecedented insight into the nuances of conquest, domination and settlement in the period. Indeed, that Gerald supported his kinsman's side of the argument shows that contemporaries were not interested in extirpating the native Irish population. Whether or not Raymond and Hervey delivered such words verbatim is not a concern here.⁷⁸ What is undoubtedly more interesting and remarkable is that contemporary attitudes towards warfare in Ireland were more nuanced than is often credited. What is more, Raymond humanises his Irish opponents and encourages his comrades to recognise their defence of their country as 'an honest occupation indeed' (*Honesta quidem occupacio*).⁷⁹ This view challenges the process of dehumanisation which is often central in warfare, helping combatants to deal with the trauma associated with killing another human being.⁸⁰ When it came to the subjugation of the Irish, there is a

⁷⁴ The speeches of Raymond and Hervey, as recounted by Gerald, offer the reader an insight into the characters of both men. It is obvious who Gerald saw as being the more virtuous. However, if in doubt, see Gerald's description of Hervey, *ibid.*, pp. 158–61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 58–9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 60–1.

⁷⁷ This would not be the last time that Raymond and Hervey would clash. According to Gerald, Hervey had accused Raymond of treason, specifically plotting to seize control of not only Limerick but the entire island of Ireland, see *ibid.*, pp 158–9.

⁷⁸ Michael Staunton has shown how the disputation between Raymond and Hervey was modelled on the debate between Caesar and Cato in Sallust's *Catiline*, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 98–9. Although the words that Gerald put into the mouths of both Raymond and Hervey are likely to have been embellished, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that both men had opposed one another's approach to dealing with their captives.

⁷⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 58–9.

⁸⁰ David Livingstone Smith, *Less than human: why we demean, enslave, and exterminate others* (New York, 2011); *idem*, *Making monsters: the uncanny power of dehumanization* (Cambridge, 2021).

level of nuance to Gerald's views of the conquest of Ireland that is often underappreciated. This, however, should not in the least be surprising given Gerald's deep-seated commitment to moral reform. Moreover, that Gerald offered two conflicting approaches towards dealing with the Irish affirms that the foreign soldiers in Ireland had the choice to extend mercy and feel empathy towards the native inhabitants of Ireland. Chivalry was not dead in warfare.⁸¹

Despite the many contemporary detractors of Henry II that emerged as a result of the murder of Becket as well as his militaristic endeavours in Ireland, Gerald of Wales remained a steadfast supporter of the king of England on paper, going so far as to refer to his critics as 'envious and thoughtless'.⁸² Gerald mentions the 'vociferous complaints that the kings of England hold Ireland unlawfully'.⁸³ However, he was quick to refute such complaints, asserting that Robert fitz Stephen and Richard de Clare were entitled to their lands as they had helped to restore Diarmait Mac Murchada to the throne of Leinster, which was their *raison d'être* in Ireland in the first place. In addition, Gerald tells us that the princes of Ireland submitted voluntarily to Henry II, although one would imagine, as political decision-making sometimes goes, that some measure of duress and/or sense of realpolitik was involved when the Irish princes paid homage and/or did fealty to the English monarch.⁸⁴ According to Gerald, the English were not guilty of committing an injustice against the Irish given the supposed five-fold rights of the English king to rule Ireland. For Gerald, English rule over Ireland was prophesied, hence the *Expugnatio's* original but less-used title *Vaticinalis historia (Prophetic history)*.⁸⁵ Ad Putter has suggested that the original title *Prophetic history* fell out of use because it was 'something of an embarrassment to historians, for it betrays the fact that the

⁸¹ Strickland, *War and chivalry*, pp 291–329, 337–40; Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 41–58.

⁸² Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 148–9.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ It is worth noting the mixed reportage of the Irish princes' acceptance of their new English overlord vis-à-vis an oath of homage or fealty. Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Howden and Gerald of Wales mention fealty, while Ralph of Diceto explicitly refers to homage. Warren questioned the assumption of Edmund Curtis and others that the native rulers did homage to Henry II given that it would have made them his feudal vassals thus rendering their lands feudal fiefs, see W.L. Warren, 'The interpretation of twelfth-century Irish history', in *Historical Studies VII*, ed. J.C. Beckett (New York, 1969), p. 13, also n.4; Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, pp 210–15. It is worth mentioning here the fact that the Treaty of Windsor (1175) twice refers to the *ard rí* Roderic's (Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair) fealty (*fidelitate*), see Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, 'Appendix 3', pp 312–13. Cf. Henry's earlier treaty with William, king of Scots, and its usage of terms fealty and homage, see Treaty 'of Falaise' (1174) in *Anglo-Scottish relations 1174–1328: some selected documents*, ed. and trans. E.L.G. Stones (Oxford, 1965), pp 2–11.

⁸⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp xlv–xlvii.

basic premise of Gerald's work is not what we would call 'historical' at all'.⁸⁶ This is hard to believe. Firstly, it would take a brave scholar to suggest that historical writing in the twelfth century was rigorously defined and fixed in terms of scope, structure and detail. Secondly, it is more likely that historians' use of the title *Expugnatio Hibernica* is simply the result of both the classic editions – namely Dimock's (1867) and Martin and Scott's (1978) – preferring that title.⁸⁷ In contrast, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis* (1863) edited by Thomas Wright with translations by Thomas Forester and Richard Colt Hoare refer to Gerald's second major work on Ireland as 'The Vaticinal History of the Conquest of Ireland' – an amalgam of both titles.⁸⁸ Thirdly, scholars have long acknowledged that Gerald's Irish works should be approached with a healthy and judicious degree of scepticism given what might be deemed to be his credulity or his desire to embellish dull facts for the entertainment of his audience.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is hard to believe Putter's assertion that historians are clinging desperately to the *Expugnatio*'s classification as a historical work.

However, Putter is correct to scrutinise and draw attention to the *Expugnatio*'s original title. As Victoria Flood argues, 'British prophecy allegedly derived from Welsh sources came to be understood as an acceptable mode of address, even petition, to English kings'.⁹⁰ Indeed, the *Expugnatio* is a prophetic account disguised, not all that subtly, as a history. The unfinished third and final book of the *Prophetic History* is entirely concerned with Merlin's prophecies. It exposes Gerald's deep-seated desire to please his king for he tells us that Henry II 'had urgently requested an exposition of the prophecies of that Merlin [i.e. of Celidon], it seemed to me that I should labour at this task all the more willingly, in the sure knowledge that my work would give pleasure to a prince and benefit posterity'.⁹¹ Gerald was attentive to Henry's intellectual interests and wanted him to

⁸⁶ Putter, 'Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin', p. 95.

⁸⁷ In the preface to his 1978 edition of the *Expugnatio*, Brian Scott stated 'Giraldus referred to his book indifferently as *Vaticinalis Historia* or *Expugnatio Hibernica*. I have retained the latter title because it is the traditional one', see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, p. x.

⁸⁸ *The historical works of Giraldus Cambrensis, containing The Topography of Ireland, and The history of the conquest of Ireland; The itinerary through Wales, and The description of Wales*, ed. Thomas Wright and trans. Thomas Forester and Richard Colt Hoare (London, 1863), p. 165.

⁸⁹ *The historical works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. v; Martin, 'Gerald of Wales, Norman reporter on Ireland', p. 289.

⁹⁰ Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, politics and place in medieval England: from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 43. Ralph of Coggeshall references Merlin directly in his *Chronicon*, describing King Philip of France's successes against King John, specifically the separation of the duchy of Normandy from the kingdom of England, as reflecting Merlin's prophesy, '*Gladius a sceptro separatus est*', see Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon*, p. 146.

⁹¹ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 254–5.

know it. No doubt for fear of the allusions to Merlin's prophecies going over Henry's head, Gerald went so far as to refer to himself as 'Silvester' in the preface dedicated to Henry II in the *Topographia*.⁹² Moreover, it was an arrogant attempt at asserting his own credentials as a prophet for posterity in the same way that Merlin had been for him. Gerald's allusions to Merlin's prophecies function retrospectively and 'show that Ireland was always meant to be conquered by Henry II'.⁹³ In order to assert the veracity of his claims, Gerald stressed the rarity and antiquity of Merlin of Celidon's prophecies, which were in 'the rustic garb of the British language' and required translation, and the fact that he arduously searched the remotest parts of Wales for Merlin's book. Knowing that Merlin's prophecies could be perceived as tall tales, Gerald was quick to defend them, asserting 'For everything which gives the impression of being fictitious is not mythical, just as everything which bears the likeness of truth cannot immediately be accepted as true fact'.⁹⁴ In the *Expugnatio*, Gerald was forthright in asserting a fabricated – and highly creative it must be said – justification for Henry's right to rule his Christian neighbour. Given that Henry was no more entitled to rule Ireland than the man on the moon, it was vital that his supporters not only endorsed his military escapades in Ireland but also actively engaged in justifying them. At the time of writing his Irish works, Gerald of Wales was an ardent supporter of Henry II, although this would change in Gerald's later years when he became an equally ardent critic of his former patron.

The papal bull *Laudabiliter*, one the most controversial documents related to the shared history of medieval Ireland and Britain, has been used by historians to argue that the conquest of Ireland was not only endorsed by the Holy See but that there was a long-held ambition for Ireland to be added to the realms under Plantagenet rule. The study and use of medieval documents sometimes results in exposure to sources of debated authenticity. In the context of Irish historiography, the papal letter of Adrian IV, *Laudabiliter*, is the exemplar par excellence. The text of the infamous papal bull comes to us only in copies, with the earliest coming from

⁹² See *The history and topography of Ireland*, p. 29. *Silvester* meaning 'prophet' or 'man of the woods'; a sort of mage or magician. This association between Gerald and Merlin continued on into the early modern period. In *De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis* (1584), Richard Stanihurst (1547–1618) refers to Gerald as 'Silvester Giraldus Cambrensis' (*Silvestro Giraldo Cambrensi*), see *Great deeds in Ireland: Richard Stanihurst's De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis*, pp 74–5, 144, 356–7, 459 n.5. See also Barbara Lynne McCauley, 'Giraldus "Silvester" of Wales and his *Prophetic history of Ireland: Merlin's role in the Expugnatio Hibernica*', *Quondam et Futurus*, 3:4 (1993), pp 41–62.

⁹³ Putter, 'Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin', p. 95.

⁹⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 254–5.

two contemporary sources: Gerald of Wales's *Expugnatio Hibernica* and Ralph of Diceto's *Ymagines historiarum*.⁹⁵ The consensus of scholars has placed the oldest extant evidence for the papal bull's existence in Gerald's work; however, while we are more certain in dating the *Expugnatio* (c. 1189/90) than the *Ymagines* (c. 1190/2), it perhaps makes more sense that Gerald was the one who copied the supposed text of the bull from Diceto, rather than the other way around. Given Diceto's close connections to the administration of government and the royal court at large in his positions as a civil servant of sorts and as dean of St Paul's, in London, this seems to be a plausible line of argumentation. Moreover, if indeed it was Diceto who copied *Laudabiliter* from Gerald's *Expugnatio*, it would seem odd that Ralph of Diceto would only take the text of the bull from Gerald's work and nothing else. However, Diceto was a careful character who was immensely successfully at avoiding political disputes. This is perhaps best illustrated by his balanced assessment of the Becket controversy, whereby he successfully managed to indicate his support for Becket in the matter without castigating his king, Henry II, or indeed drawing the ire from his bishop, Gilbert Foliot, who had been a determined opponent of the archbishop. More than Diceto's personality, however, there is more evidence to be considered if we are to draw a more definitive conclusion regarding the veracity of the bull *Laudabiliter*.

The copies of the bull have become one of the great challenges for diplomatic analysis and, in turn, for medievalists examining the genesis of the alleged English plan to invade Ireland in the mid-twelfth century. Moreover, concluding whether or not the invasion of Ireland was of papal or royal instigation relies on the existence of the bull. Although diplomatic analysis is a vital auxiliary discipline of historical studies, the central issue of the bull's authenticity, which has dominated much of the related scholarship, is perhaps not the most important argumentative point for studies examining the early stages of a planned Irish invasion. Indeed, even if the document which is known to us is a fake, it provides key insights into not only early support for an English conquest of Ireland but also the need to justify the invasion some decades after the invasion began. That Gerald constructed such a creative forgery in order to justify the invasion speaks, perhaps, to contemporary criticisms of the invasion of Ireland, whether that was its necessity in the first place or the violent and haphazard nature of the ongoing conquest. Putting aside these issues of diplomatic and historical context, one can find evidence in the work of John of Salisbury and the

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp 142–7; Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 300–1.

correspondence of Nicholas Breakspear, better known as the only English pope, Adrian IV, of the existence of a papal letter of some sort being sent to Henry II from Adrian IV.

In his *Metalogicon*, the ecclesiastical diplomat and scholar John of Salisbury recounted his involvement in a diplomatic mission to Adrian IV in 1155/6. It was on this mission that Salisbury supposedly acquired a letter that confirmed papal approval to take Ireland as Henry's hereditary fee. Indeed, at the end of the *Metalogicon*, Salisbury writes that the late pope Adrian IV had 'granted and given Ireland to the illustrious Henry II king of the English to be held by hereditary right, as his letters testify to this day'.⁹⁶ The historiography of *Laudabiliter* has interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, been dictated along national lines, with the Irish historiography relying on Maurice Sheehy's diplomatic and historical examination of the bull, while the English historiography has settled on Anne Duggan's diplomatic analyses albeit it that Duggan herself is Irish.⁹⁷ Despite extensive scrutiny of the diplomatic and historical contexts and concerns, medievalists are still divided into several different camps: those who flatly reject the existence of a bull; those who reject the bull as it has come to us in later copies but acknowledge that a bull did exist; and those who believe that any papal authorisation to invade Ireland was the result of either obreption or Adrian's anti-Irish prejudices as an Englishman. The latter, if in some part true, was more likely the result of socio-religious attitudes towards those members of the church who were thought to be straying from its doctrines and canon rather than from ethnic or nationalistic lines. Moreover, as Sheehy reminds us, *Laudabiliter* cannot necessarily be accepted as the only expression of papal approval for the invasion, so we must explore auxiliary evidence. Whatever the truth of *Laudabiliter*, one thing is clear: whether one decides to either accept or reject the existence of the papal letter leads to the formation of very different narratives of the genesis of the English invasion of Ireland as either a papal or royal or combined initiative of the two or indeed that no ambition to invade Ireland existed at all.

⁹⁶ Ioannis Saresberiensis. *Metalogicon*, p. 183. Translation from Anne J. Duggan, 'The power of documents: The curious case of *Laudabiliter*', in Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek (eds), *Aspects of power and authority in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 261.

⁹⁷ Maurice P. Sheehy, 'The bull "*Laudabiliter*": a problem in medieval diplomatie and history', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 29:3/4 (1961), pp 45–70; Anne J. Duggan, 'The making of a myth: Giraldus Cambrensis, *Laudabiliter*, and Henry II's lordship of Ireland', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 4 (2007) (Old Series, XXIX; New Series, XIX), pp 249–312; eadem, 'The power of documents', pp 251–75.

In many ways, the conquest of Ireland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries reflects a greater philosophical and psychological battle between moral principles (i.e. Christian moral principles distinguishing between intentions and actions that are good or bad), judgement (i.e. how do we judge other people's actions?), and response (i.e. following aforementioned judgment, what is the most appropriate response in a given situation?). Of course, the order in which these functions occur in the processes of cognition and perception is unclear. However, it might be reasonable to suggest that the colonialist endeavours of church and kingdom encouraged many people to ostracize and sometimes even kill those perceived to be Other and less than human – or in other words less civilised – than them. Despite church teachings extolling the importance of human charity and non-violent action, it was left to individual actors to shirk Christian moral principles and the demands of conscience in favour of self-interest. It is clear to us when Gerald of Wales, for instance, dehumanises the Irish in his accounts of Irish bovine hybrids or shape-shifting lycanthropes; however, what is less clear is the extent to which such views were entrenched in the popular consciousness in early Plantagenet England. However, it must be stated that while contemporary commentators could view the Irish as backward and lacking the civilised social, political, economic and cultural makeup of England, they were perceived as such due, largely, to an admixture of factors, including but not limited to contemporary notions of biology – or what it meant to be human as opposed to beast –, intellectual culture and the influence of the classical renaissance of the twelfth century, not to mention the individual designs of the human mind.

In one of the final chapters of the *Expugnatio*, Gerald writes about the obstacles that prevented the completion of the conquest of Ireland. At first, he blamed the invasion and subsequent conquest on the Irish themselves as a sinful people whose actions warranted divine punishment. However, they had not yet 'implacably offended the Supreme Judge' and had therefore 'not deserved to be completely crushed or wiped out'.⁹⁸ Gerald's view of the situation highlights how ecclesiastics understood the cause-and-effect fabric of the world as being firmly within the hands of God. That those of Christian faith are always a child in Christ and a member of the house of God is confirmed in Gerald's final word on the matter: 'Although both races [i.e., English and Irish] have long been engaged in warfare with

⁹⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 232–3.

each other – perhaps this is God’s way of punishing *them* [my emphasis] – neither side seems completely to have deserved God’s favour or completely to have lost it’.⁹⁹ Gerald introduces a level of nuance to his assessment of the conquest of Ireland that reinforces the view expressed in the *Topographia*: that the Irish were not intrinsically barbaric, rather it was their society that corrupted them.¹⁰⁰ The English conquest was, thus, but a vehicle for Irish reform. Gerald concluded by acknowledging that ‘The result is that up to the present the English have not triumphantly scaled the citadel of Pallas, assured of complete and final victory, nor have the Irish been completely vanquished and entirely bowed their necks beneath the yoke of slavery’.¹⁰¹ Although Gerald was a writer who could foresee the popularity that his works would achieve in the future, he was not to know that the English conquest was destined for failure and that the Irish would never accept an English yoke around their necks.

Royal relations and princely problems

The kings who had ruled the territories and peoples of the Hiberno-British archipelago before the installation of the Plantagenets in the mid-twelfth century frequently engaged with each other as a result of political developments both in their own lands and elsewhere. This fact undermines the once popular notion that the landing of French-, Welsh- and Flemish-speaking soldiers on a sandy island beach in Co. Wexford marked ‘the starting point of Anglo-Irish relations’.¹⁰² Certainly, international relations were important channels of communication for rulers seeking to appease allies or quell tensions with enemies. The annals and chronicles of medieval Britain provide numerous examples that attest not only to the existence of diplomatic missions to other lands but also the great distances such embassies travelled in order to achieve their objectives. If we are to believe, for instance, the Welsh priest Asser’s much-debated *Life of King Alfred*, written in Old English at the end of the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxon monarch seems to have regularly engaged with embassies from across the Christian world from Jerusalem to, interestingly, the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 149–53

¹⁰¹ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 232–3.

¹⁰² Michael Richter, ‘The first century of Anglo-Irish relations’, *History*, 59:196 (1974), pp 195–210. Almost fifty years on from the publication of Richter’s article, it can safely be said that such a notion is now outdated. In particular, the work of Ben Hudson and Seán Duffy – referenced elsewhere in this thesis – has cast much light on the political connections between the peoples of the Irish Sea region in the pre-invasion period.

farthest reaches of Ireland.¹⁰³ Indeed, the kings of Wessex were contented to live alongside their insular neighbours as both ‘shared a common cultural world in which Ireland could still be regarded as a source of learning and virtue’.¹⁰⁴

Over the centuries, the kings of England and their families looked west, to Ireland, aware not only that Irish monastic sites were exemplary in the religious education they offered and the admirable zeal of their clerics, but that it was a potentially hospitable place wherein alliances could be made, and safe movement and shelter could be sought when the political circumstances required such necessities. Indeed, such necessities were sought by many clerics and mercenaries from Britain who had travelled to Ireland in the pre-invasion period. Added to these, too, were a smattering of Welsh and Anglo-Saxon aristocrats who had made the journey to Ireland in times of strife seeking safer pastures. Following the death of King Harold Godwinsson – another ruler associated with Wessex – at the battle of Hastings in 1066, some members of the king’s family thought it best to leave England, with some fleeing to Scotland and Denmark, some to the continent, and others to Ireland.¹⁰⁵ It is worth noting here Orderic Vitalis’s mention of Harold’s mother, Gytha, fleeing to Exeter in the immediate aftermath of her son’s death at Hastings due to the presence of Irish ships there.¹⁰⁶ While at first this mention of Ireland seems unremarkable, it is suggestive of Harold’s close ties to Ireland. Following his demise, Harold’s sons Godwin and Edwin travelled to Dublin seeking refuge under the familiar wing of Diarmait mac Máel na mbó, the Uí Cheinselaig king of Leinster, who had previously hosted their father and uncle Leofwine in Dublin in 1051 and even supplied men to aid their invasion of England and Harold’s reinstatement.¹⁰⁷ Diarmait was one of the most powerful men in the Irish Sea province and given these intergenerational associations there seems to have been a long-standing alliance between the men of Dublin and Wessex by the mid-eleventh century.¹⁰⁸ The relationship between the Haroldsson brothers and the king of Leinster provided a blueprint for political relations between future Irish and English rulers. Following the death of Diarmait

¹⁰³ *Alfred the Great*, i, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ For an excellent recent study of the fates of leading Anglo-Saxon families following the invasion, see Eleanor Parker, *Conquered: the last children of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2022), for the family of Godwinsson in Ireland see pp 112–5.

¹⁰⁶ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, II. 225.

¹⁰⁷ See *The gesta Normannorum ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth M.C. Van Houts (Oxford, 1995), ii, pp 181–2.

¹⁰⁸ Ben Hudson, ‘The family of Harold Godwinsson and the Irish Sea province’, *JRSAI*, 109 (1979), p. 94.

mac Máel na mbó in 1072 at the battle of Odba, his protégé Tairdelbach ua Briain rose to the lordship of Dublin and developed good relations with William the Conqueror. However, as Ben Hudson has pointed out, there is every reason to believe that the relations between the king of Munster (and then claimant to the high-kingship of Ireland for that matter) and the king of England were the result of political strategy given the historical raids on Britain from Ireland and the track record of Irish mercenary fleets providing aid to Welsh, Norwegian and English aristocrats. Hence, the Norman king would have wanted to mitigate against a repeat of such Irish military support for political opponents in the future.¹⁰⁹ The many rulers inhabiting both medieval Ireland and Britain engaged with each other in all manner of ways in the pre-invasion period depending on the whether their respective interests necessitated the light touch of diplomacy or the hard touch of warfare.

Over the course of the first century of English colonial endeavours in Ireland and the intensification of the English presence therein, the interests of contemporary historians and chroniclers developed qualitatively from an interest in ethnographic material to more political content. It is no mere coincidence that such developments in the ways writers depicted Irish affairs occurred amidst unprecedented military campaigning in Ireland led by three consecutive English kings as well as the great swell of political instability experienced by the Plantagenets, at home and abroad, in the thirteenth century. The consolidation of royal interests in Ireland was an area of particular concern as the settler lords in Ireland increased their local influence and power, which resulted in them jostling not only with the native Irish princes over land and resources but also their fellow magnates. Matthew Paris provides an interesting account of an Irish prince travelling to London in order to attend the court of Henry III. Paris tells us that the Irish prince informed the king of the terrible injustices and destruction wrought by ‘Johanne de Burgo’ in his lands and beseeched Henry to act with royal authority owing to the fact that he had been a loyal subject of the kings of England and had paid a yearly tribute for his lands. The Irish prince mentioned by Paris was in fact Feidlim Ua Conchobair, the king of Connacht. He was likely the first Irish king to visit an English monarch overseas since Diarmait Mac Murchada’s roundabout search for Henry II following the king of Leinster’s exile. It would appear that the similarities between Feidlim and Diarmait do not end

¹⁰⁹ Ben Hudson, ‘William the Conqueror and Ireland’, *IHS*, 29:114 (1994), pp 145–9 (republished in Ben Hudson, *Irish Sea studies, 900–1200* (Dublin, 2006), pp 109–124).

there. Indeed, Feidlim soon visited English soil for a second time, in the winter of 1245, when he joined Maurice fitz Gerald in bringing an Irish army to Wales to fight for Henry III.¹¹⁰ In his own times, Diarmait, too, had brought an army into Wales to support the military endeavours of a precursor King Henry. Feidlim's and Diarmait's military support is evidence again of the cooperation that existed between rulers in Ireland and England. While Paris's account is critical of de Burgh's actions, King John had speculatively granted Connacht to William de Burgh as, in the words of David Carpenter, 'an incentive to conquer it [i.e. Connacht] from its native Irish rulers'.¹¹¹ This grant was seen by William's younger brother Hubert, the earl of Kent and the justiciar of England, as a hereditary right of his nephew Richard de Burgh, the son of William. As Paris's account and the relevant political contexts make plain, changing allegiances were par for the course for English nobles who were motivated perhaps most by gaining and/or solidifying their rights to lands in both Ireland and England given the precarious landholding situation in which many found themselves. What is more, Paris remarked that the king had ordered Maurice fitz Gerald, the justiciar of Ireland, to 'pluck up that plantation of unfruitful sycamores which Hubert, earl of Kent, in the ravings of his power, had planted in those provinces, and not to permit them to shoot up any further'.¹¹²

These examples, then, may counter the notion that the breaking of the Treaty of Windsor was indicative of an English drive for an all-out conquest of Ireland or, at the very least, that the colonists' approach towards the native Irish rulers was, at that point in time, one of pragmatic cooperation befitting of the term 'realpolitik'. Moreover, it also suggests to us that the church-promoted notion of the Irish being a barbarian people in need of major social reforms did not drive the colonists to undertake an immediate campaign to conquer the Irish and reform their way of life. Indeed, from the time of Henry II, it is clear that a programme for social reform was far from the minds, let alone the hearts, of the English kings and lords during the first century of 'English' Ireland.

The piecemeal conquest of Ireland resulted in large areas of the island remaining Gaelic in terms of the cultural practices and political governance exercised

¹¹⁰ Freya Verstraten, 'Both king and vassal: Feidlim Ua Conchobair of Connacht, 1230–65', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 55 (2003), pp 13–37.

¹¹¹ David Carpenter, *Henry III: the rise to power and personal rule, 1207–1258* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2020), p. 37.

¹¹² J.A. Giles (trans.), *Matthew Paris's English history. From the year 1235 to 1273* (London, 1852), i, p. 297.

on the ground. In effect, in early colonial Ireland, ‘the intensity of settlement, the social complexion, and the modes of magnate control varied from area to area’, as Robin Frame has succinctly put it.¹¹³ It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that relations between natives and newcomers were mixed and not necessarily representative of a reductive dichotomy between colonial subject and coloniser.

The early decades of the thirteenth century were a period of immense socio-political instability arising from the tense relations between the barons of England and their Plantagenet kings. The tetchy situation between the king and his vassals not only affected events in Britain but also in Ireland. To some degree, early Plantagenet England can be characterised as a place wherein it was every man for himself. Self-preservation necessitated a culture of self-interest whereby feudalism, to a certain extent, offered magnates a greater guarantee of retaining their assets. Aside from the royal and aristocratic families born into landholdings, members of the cloth were frequently part of hereditary ecclesiastical families that inherited both positions of high office and often church lands.¹¹⁴ The prevalence of influential ecclesiastical families was not only an Irish concern but an English one too, with notable examples, including Roger bishop of Salisbury (*d.* 1139) whose son, Roger Pauper (Roger le Poer) (*fl.* 1135–9), was made King Stephen’s first chancellor in late 1135, and two nephews, Alexander (*d.* 1148) and Nigel (*d.* 1169), were made bishops of Lincoln and Ely respectively thanks to their uncle’s political leverage, while another nephew, Adelelm, was treasurer. While the ecclesiastical dynasty founded by Roger would prove influential politically speaking, there are innumerable other examples of inherited church benefices, albethey less significant. For example, Roger of Howden succeeded his father, Robert, in or before 1174, as parson of Howden, with their biological connection no doubt influencing the transfer of office. However, during John’s reign as king, hereditary landholdings were no longer assured, which no doubt added to the insecurities and anxieties of magnates in Plantagenet-ruled lands.

The contemporary accounts that provide us with an insight into the diplomatic and political relations between Irish and English kings and princes remind us of one of the most important realities of the shared history between Ireland and Britain: that those in power were driven, more often than not, by a self-interest that included a desire to ensure the security of one’s family *vis-à-vis* landholding assets.

¹¹³ Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 100.

¹¹⁴ Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, pp 117–20.

Indeed, Diarmait Mac Murchada had sought foreign aid in order to recover the kingdom of Leinster, not thinking of the potential ramifications for the state of Irish politics going forward once the foreign lords had set foot on Irish soil. While the bull *Laudabiliter* may tell us one story about Plantagenet intentions to conquer Ireland, the day-to-day realities of feudalism and the resulting power struggles on the ground between over-ambitious magnates and their monarch proves that the king of England was happy to ally himself with Irish princes at the expense of his lords when interests were at stake. Henry II, for example, rather than being an enemy of the Irish princes was supposedly, according to F.X. Martin, ‘if anything, an ally of the native Irish rulers’.¹¹⁵ It goes without saying that Professor Martin’s assessment is, without doubt, debatable.¹¹⁶ The rose-tinted perception of Henry II as a ‘peace-loving, stay-at-home’ king could not be further from reality, according to John Gillingham.¹¹⁷ As Seán Duffy has pointed out with reference to Gerald of Wales, ‘power such as that attained by Henry II had never previously been wielded by any king of England’.¹¹⁸ Indeed, Henry’s territorial reach extended, at one point, from the North Sea to the Pyrenees, which was ‘a feat unmatched by any of his predecessors’.¹¹⁹ However, despite being a warring monarch, what we can say of Henry II at the very least is that he was a man willing to lend an ear to his vassals’ problems, including the concerns of Irish princes.

Irish kings seem to have had confidence enough that Henry would act with their interests in mind. According to Gervase of Canterbury’s account of the reasons why Henry went to Ireland in 1171, one was that the Irish kings sent an embassy to Henry requesting his protection from Strongbow’s forces who had continued to attack them and their people after they took the city of Dublin.¹²⁰ As well as the appeals of the Irish embassy and of Strongbow, Gervase cites Henry II’s desire to avoid the threatened interdict on his continental lands as the primary reason for his ‘flight’ to Ireland. While Gervase is the only contemporary commentator to write

¹¹⁵ F.X. Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada and the coming of the Anglo-Normans’, in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, volume II: medieval Ireland, 1169–1534* (Oxford, 2008), p. 45.

¹¹⁶ In particular, see Duffy’s reassessment of Henry II’s relationship with Ireland, ‘Henry II and England’s insular neighbours’, in Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (eds), *Henry II: new interpretations* (Suffolk, 2007) p. 129.

¹¹⁷ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 158 n.65. See also John Gillingham, ‘Conquering kings: some twelfth-century reflections on Henry II and Richard I’, in Timothy Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and churchmen in the high Middle Ages: essays presented to Karl Leyser* (London, 1992), pp 163–78.

¹¹⁸ Duffy, ‘Henry II and England’s insular neighbours’, p. 129.

¹¹⁹ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 338.

¹²⁰ Gervase of Canterbury, i, 234–5.

about a contingent of Irish messengers being sent to Henry, his account should be given 'serious consideration' given his ties to Canterbury and the fact that Strongbow's uncle Hervey de Montmorency was a fellow monk and was, therefore, a likely source for this information.¹²¹ Even if the account of Irish calls for intervention are true, the more pragmatic among us might argue that it was far from a sovereign's duty to his people in Ireland that moved Henry to travel to there. On the contrary, it was a subsidiary objective for Henry to travel to Ireland as his main goal was to quell the flames of Strongbow's burning political ambitions in Ireland.¹²² Indeed, the fear that Strongbow would progress from the throne of Leinster to that of all of Ireland was all too real for Henry II.

Having landed at Waterford in 1171, Roger of Howden tells us that Henry II travelled to Dublin wherein he received the submission of the Irish kings during a Christmas feast at a temporary palace near the church of St Andrew the Apostle outside the city. What is more, the palace was constructed 'according to the custom of the country'¹²³ (*ad morem patriae illius* [Ireland]) supposedly at the request of Henry himself, which Orpen interpreted as a king 'trying to please his vassals ... and living freely in their midst'.¹²⁴ However, something altogether different is more likely to have been at play here. Marie Therese Flanagan has suggested that attendance during royal feasts at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun in pre-invasion Ireland may have been expected of subordinate rulers as an act of homage to their superior.¹²⁵ Although it may be a mere coincidence, it is worth acknowledging that William the Conqueror was crowned in Westminster Abbey by Archbishop Ealdred of York on Christmas Day, 1066. Not only that, beforehand he had received the submission of the princes of England at Berkhamsted, much in the same way that Henry II had received the submission of the Irish princes of Déise and Osraige en route to Dublin while the kings of north Leinster and other parts of Ireland made

¹²¹ Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, pp 169–70. This was the same Hervey de Montmorency who had persuaded his fellow soldiers to kill their Irish hostages following a skirmish at Baginbun. He was not only related to one of the foremost leaders of the conquest in Strongbow but had also been directly involved himself. Thus, he was a well-informed of affairs on the ground.

¹²² Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Strongbow, Henry II and Anglo-Norman intervention in Ireland', in John Gillingham and J.C. Holt (eds), *War and government in the Middle Ages: essays in honour of J.O. Prestwich* (Cambridge, 1984), pp 62–77.

¹²³ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 29. Bede mentions that Bishop Aidan constructed a church on Lindisfarne after 'the manner of the Irish' (*more Scottorum*) not out of stone but of hewn oak, thatched with reeds, see Bede, *HE*, pp 294–5.

¹²⁴ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 98.

¹²⁵ Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, pp 193–4.

ceremonial submission while the king held court in Dublin. These Nativity gatherings could also reasonably be interpreted as symbolic of Henry's divine right to rule. The most important royal assemblies were held at Christmas by Anglo-Saxon kings, which was a custom adopted by their Angevin successors.¹²⁶ Henry II, in particular, used these feasts as an occasion for his itinerant court to maintain the appearance of his rule, influence and connections with vassals across his domains.¹²⁷ Henry's Christmas feast at Dublin may be perceived as a case of Henry flexing his muscles with his underlings present. Indeed, this point may be confirmed by the fact that the structure, which we are told was built wonderfully (*mirifice*) out of 'twigs' (*de virgis*), was constructed by the kings and rich men (*reges et ditiores*) of Ireland on Henry's orders.¹²⁸ These were the very same men who joined Henry in the Christmas festivities (*in quo ipse regale festum in Natale Domini tenuit cum regibus et ditioribus Hyberniae*).¹²⁹ The fact that it was the men of Ireland building the structure on Henry's orders is suggestive of a power dynamic that posits Henry as the figure of authority.

Gerald of Wales, like Howden but in less detail, recounted the Christmas feast in Dublin, noting that the princes of Ireland came to Dublin in great numbers to view the court (*ad curiam videndam*).¹³⁰ Gerald's phrasing is interesting: 'to view/see the court'. According to Gerald they did not go there to see the king, as one might expect to be written, but rather the court. Could this be alluding to the spectacle of the court itself given its Irish design and manufacture? Ultimately, it is impossible to tell. Based on descriptive differences between versions of this event recounted in Howden's *Gesta* and the condensed *Chronica*, Marie Therese Flanagan was of the impression that the temporary palace described *ad morem patriae illius* and *ad modum patriae illius constructum* in those works respectively, that the phrase referred to 'the political significance of the act of construction rather than the building techniques employed'.¹³¹ However, if this was the case, why, then, does Howden use the term '*mirifice*' to describe the construction in the *Gesta*?

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

¹²⁷ Over the course of Henry's reign, he celebrated Christmas in at least twenty-four different places, see W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (London, 1973), p. 302.

¹²⁸ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 29.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 96–7.

¹³¹ Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, p. 203.

It is worth noting Howden's account and its rather unusual level of detail when describing the location of Henry's temporary palace. Up to the point of its inclusion in the *Gesta*, Howden's knowledge of Ireland seemed quite paltry. Given the level of specific detail supplied by Howden, Seán Duffy has suggested that it may indicate that there was some significance attached to the site of the post-and-wattle palace.¹³² According to Duffy, it may in fact have been the same area in which the Ostmen of Dublin held court, the so-called medieval suburb of *Thingmote*.¹³³ If this was indeed the case, the location of Henry's wattle palace was consciously constructed in a symbolic location that showcased Henry as the city's new ruler. Thus, on several accounts, Howden's description suggests to us that the colonists were familiar with native Irish customs, especially those related to expressions of political control and power. However, power dynamics aside, what does this account tell us about Roger of Howden and his view of Anglo-Irish relations and the Irish more broadly speaking?

What is most obvious about Howden's account is that it is free of vitriol and prejudicial verbiage. Nowhere do we see the use of the term 'barbarian' and all the semantic baggage that accompanies it. He writes specifically about those in power rather than the native Irish generally speaking. Howden describes the wattle palace as having been constructed 'wonderfully' for the king's use. While it is unclear, it seems that Howden was commenting upon the appealing visual style and/or the craftsmanship of the structure rather than providing an assessment of the practical usefulness of the building for royal endeavours. Howden's account reads like a twentieth-century anthropological study: it is written in a clear and direct style with a clear interest in the quirks of Irish customs. Furthermore, he is clearly cognisant of his reportage and how he treats of the subject at hand. Howden tells us that Henry II held the royal feast at Christmas *with (cum)* the kings and rich men of Ireland. It was not held *for* the local Irish elite but there was at the very least a sense of cooperation between the king and his Irish vassals, if we are to accept Howden's description of the event.

Roger of Howden's account of Henry's Christmas feast in Dublin is an ideal example of the contemporary notion of chronicle writing as 'a faithful narration of

¹³² Duffy, 'Ireland's Hastings', p. 82. John Gillingham has argued that Howden's topographical precision may be down to the fact that Howden was in Ireland at the time, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 84.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

acts' without the narration of cause and consequences, which is more common in the genre of contemporary historical writing.¹³⁴ In many ways it fits William Stubbs' assessment of Howden's other work, the *Chronica*, which was according to him a 'passionless, colourless narrative'.¹³⁵ Given the genre form, it might be less surprising, perhaps, that Ralph of Diceto, another chronicler, understood the primary purpose of chronicles to be the provision of an *outline* of the past. Diceto explicitly tells us so by way of quoting Cassiodorus: '*Chronica sunt imagines historiarum, brevissimaeque commemorationes temporum*'.¹³⁶ Howden and Diceto were both chroniclers who sought to retell the events of the past, and not necessarily judge them. According to Gillingham, the trustworthiness which historians attach to Howden as a source for early Plantagenet England, has left him 'looking worthy but dull'.¹³⁷ In terms of Howden's views of the Irish, one can reasonably argue that they, too, were rather dull; however, Howden's view is absolutely vital for gaining a sense of the spectrum of attitudes towards Ireland in early Plantagenet England, especially given the likelihood that he accompanied Henry there in 1171/2. Thus, he would have been one of very few contemporary writers who had actually set foot on Irish soil. Howden's matter of fact approach proves that not every contemporary writer was concerned with brandishing the 'b-word' and thus bringing the medieval Irish down several rungs on the ladder of human progression.

Ireland as a land of milk and honey

In describing the landscape and climate of Ireland Gerald of Wales remarked that it was a place with a generally clement but wet climate with an air that was so healthy that there was little need for doctors in Ireland.¹³⁸ Positive descriptions of the Irish landscape and climate in comparison with the east were important for not only the west-east dichotomy but also the nuanced construction of fellow Christians who were constructed as Other. Views might be positive, but they belie the colonialist and reformer motivations of Gerald and his kinsmen. Much like a tourist information brochure, the content must, to some extent, be attractive in order to entice would-be

¹³⁴ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. xi.

¹³⁵ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, i, p. lxix.

¹³⁶ Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 34.

¹³⁷ John Gillingham, 'The travels of Roger of Howden and his views of the Irish, Scots and Welsh', in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *ANS XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1997* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 153.

¹³⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 66–7.

visitors or, in the case of contemporary chronicles and histories, reformers and settlers from England and Wales. It is no moot point to suggest that descriptions of climates and environments were more than mere content of general interest, on the contrary, they had the potential to strike a personal chord with medieval audiences. Indeed, as Johan Huizinga asserted in his magisterial *The waning of the Middle Ages*, ‘Calamities and indigence were more afflicting than at present; it was more difficult to guard against them, and to find solace. Illness and health presented a more striking contrast; the cold and darkness of winter were more real evils’.¹³⁹ Thus, descriptions of Ireland as a place synonymous with the words ‘salubrious’ and ‘serenity’ no doubt made the island an attractive proposition for those medieval men and women in England who, displeased with the hand that was dealt to them, considered that the grass might be greener in Ireland. In the early modern period, especially during the Tudor reconquest of Ireland, English men and women would act upon similar considerations, upping sticks, journeying to Ireland and settling there.

U.T. Holmes wrote that ‘The information on Irish fauna alone contained in the *Topographia Hibernica* is indicative of his superior talents as an observer ... he shows exceptional curiosity and fondness for observation ... equal to Albert the Great at his best’.¹⁴⁰ Antonia Gransden has argued that Gerald is a ‘realistic observer’ of the twelfth century. Indeed, Gerald did have quite a remarkable skill for writing vivid descriptions. He was conscious of living in the moment and assessing the minutiae of the world around him. Gerald often makes the point in his works that other people look without seeing and hear without understanding.¹⁴¹ However, despite Holmes’ and Gransden’s assessments of Gerald skills of observation, there is a degree of skepticism that is missing from their studies.

If one were to be asked the question, ‘What distinguishes one group of people from another?’, no doubt language would not be very far from the top of the list of possible answers. However, despite language being an inherent part of every human being’s life, it factored little in the propagandist literature in both post-invasion England and Ireland. Interestingly, no writer in early Plantagenet England focused on the Irish language as an indicator of the otherness of the Irish. Rather it was customs, governance, economic development and religiosity that factored most in assessing

¹³⁹ Johan Huizinga, *The waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. Frederik Hopman (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ U.T. Holmes, ‘Gerald the naturalist’, *Speculum*, 11 (1936), pp 111, 120.

¹⁴¹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 154; idem, *Expugnatio*, pp 4–5.

the Irish people in contemporary sources. This is particularly interesting given the fact that medieval societies relied so much on oral culture. Moreover, the interactions between natives and newcomers in post-invasion Ireland required some means of shared communication. Rees Davies suggested several reasons why language figured rarely as a point of contention between peoples in medieval Britain and Ireland, positing that:

‘Differences in language were divinely ordained and so much part of social life, at different levels, that they were hardly worthy of comment, let alone the focus of loyalty or hostility. So it is, for example, that scholars still find it difficult to determine the degree of bilingualism in Anglo-Norman England and the extent to which Anglo-Norman was spoken’.¹⁴²

Linguistic differences were simply a reality of medieval life. Indeed, Bede had acknowledged as much when he proposed that the five languages of Britain – English, British, Irish, Pictish and Latin – ‘following the number of the books in which the Divine law was written’ were ‘all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimit’.¹⁴³ Thus, as Máire Ní Mhaonaigh points out, ‘In Bede’s world ... such disparate peoples were brought together by their common Christianity’.¹⁴⁴ It seems the language used by the respective nations of Britain did not matter so long as these people were practicing Christians. The peoples of the British Isles and Ireland engaged their Christian faith in their own way, which seems to have been embraced by Bede. However, it might be argued that the prevalence of Latin as a shared *lingua franca* amongst ecclesiastics meant that language did not concern contemporary writers as they were writing for a Latinate audience, no matter their national affiliations. Indeed, Bede makes this point clear: *quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis*.¹⁴⁵

As discussed in chapter 2 above, a number of historians and chroniclers described Ireland’s location in the world. Gervase of Canterbury tells us that in

¹⁴² R.R. Davies, ‘Presidential address: the peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400. IV. Language and historical mythology’, *TRHS*, 7 (1997), p. 3.

¹⁴³ Bede, *HE*, pp 16–17.

¹⁴⁴ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Of Bede’s “five languages and four nations”: the earliest writing from Ireland, Scotland and Wales’, in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge history of early medieval English literature* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 100.

¹⁴⁵ Bede, *HE*, pp 16–7.

relation to Britain ‘*Ab occidente habet Hiberniam*’.¹⁴⁶ However, Gerald of Wales was the first writer to reinforce Ireland’s western position in contrast to the lands of the supposedly pestiferous east. Over the course of several chapters in the *Topographia*, Gerald paints a fairly idyllic picture of Ireland.¹⁴⁷ It is the most temperate of all the lands (*Terra terrarum haec omnium temperatissima*) with no extremes of heat or cold; indeed, snow seldom falls there, and when it does it only last a sort time.¹⁴⁸ Grass grows green all year round, which means that there is no necessity to cut meadows for fodder nor to hold livestock in stalls. Ireland enjoyed a freshness and mildness all year round, according to Gerald. Much of what Gerald writes here is derived from Bede. Yet unlike Newburgh, who lauded the Northumbrian monk to the high heavens, Gerald fails to praise Bede’s contribution to the historical record, but he does take the time to inform his reader that Bede was incorrect in stating that there were some vineyards in Ireland when in fact there were none.¹⁴⁹ Gerald does say, however, that there is still plenty of wine in Ireland in spite of the absence of vineyards.

Musical matters

For all his criticisms of the Irish way of life, Gerald of Wales was uncharacteristically complimentary about what he perceived to be the incomparable musical skills and industry of the Irish people. Using the example of their musical talents, he described the Irish style as lively and sweet to the ear with harmonious and sonorous qualities.¹⁵⁰ While it is a pleasant change to read something Irish-related that is without a negative bent from Gerald, one should not take this chapter for granted, especially given its anomalous nature. So, what then does this ‘curiously civilised characteristic of an otherwise barbarous other’, as Martin Dowling put it, tell us about Gerald’s view of Irish culture and his potential motivations for including this chapter in the *Topographia*?

¹⁴⁶ Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical works*, ii, p. 415.

¹⁴⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 66–74.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 66. Cf. Bede, *HE*, pp 18–19.

¹⁴⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Dowling, ‘The difference of Irish music’, in Tom Inglis (ed.), *Are the Irish different?* (Manchester, 2014), p. 189.

Gerald describes the dexterity of Irish musicians and attests to the practice and use of only two instruments in Ireland, namely the harp and the timpanum.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, Gerald also acknowledges Ireland's 'Celtic' cousins, Scotland and Wales, as both having harps amongst their musical instruments; however, he makes sure to note that both Scotland and Wales 'try to imitate Ireland in music and strive in emulation'.¹⁵² Interestingly, however, English musical practises go unremarked. It is noteworthy that Gerald hints at the existence of not only an intercultural awareness of foreign musical styles but also of changing attitudes towards the perceived musical skills of nations: 'In the opinion, however, of many, Scotland has by now not only caught up on Ireland, her instructor, but already far outdistances and excels her in musical skill'.¹⁵³ We cannot be certain who the 'many' are but can reasonably infer reference to a social grouping extending beyond just the English. Yet, despite the opinions of the many, it seems, based on his own words, that Gerald was of the opinion that Irish music was in a league of its own and appreciated by 'the minds of those who have a fine perception and can penetrate carefully to the secrets of the art' rather than those 'who have no such perception – who look without seeing, and hear without being able to understand'.¹⁵⁴

Gerald's favourable view of Irish musical practice reads as being fairly innocuous with no ulterior when including it. The harp's significance lies in the fact that it is a rare example of an Irish custom being more commendable in practice than those of the peoples in Britain. Indeed, Gerald acknowledged as much, writing that it was only in music that the Irish were commendable in their diligence (*In musicis solum instrumentis commendabilem invenio gentis istius diligentiam*).¹⁵⁵ Gerald's account of the Irish harp, no matter how inoffensive it was, set in ink for posterity an undoubtably civilised and indeed most admirable quality of Irish culture, and one which required an anglicised touch in late centuries.¹⁵⁶ Gerald had a deep

¹⁵¹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 153–5. The timpanum was played with the fingers or a plectrum, see *The history and topography of Ireland*, p. 134 n.61.

¹⁵² Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 153–5. The three oldest identified surviving harps all originated from the "Celtic" fringes: the Trinity College harp (also known as 'Brian Boru's harp' and thought to have been crafted in the fourteenth century, held in Trinity College Dublin), the Queen Mary and the Lamont harps (both of which are thought to date to the fifteenth century and are be found in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh).

¹⁵³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 154.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 153.

¹⁵⁶ During the Tudor period, a novel Irish armorial was assumed by Henry VIII that featured a crowned harp. When the decision was made to strike a separate and distinct coinage for Ireland, the coins, which were first struck in 1534, included the badge of a crowned harp on their reverse, see

appreciation of music, which is evidenced by the five chapters dedicated to various aspects of the subject in the *Topographia*.¹⁵⁷ Music was a delight of the soul, according to Gerald. Gerald's *Itinerarium* and *Descriptio* also contain passages on music, including English organ music.¹⁵⁸ From reading the chapters from the *Topographia*, one gets the sense that Gerald fancied himself to be an expert. With such a passion for music, he could not help but appreciate the skills of Irish musicians, which makes his chapter '*De gentis istius in musicis instrumentis peritia incomparabili*' all the more remarkable.

When one reads Gerald's account of Irish music it reads as being quite the outlier given its favourable tone, which is all the more pronounced given that this chapter is included in the third part of the *Topographia* wherein Gerald does nothing short of castigate the Irish as a people based on their alleged animalistic behaviour, deplorable vices and primitiveness. Through his praise for Irish musical practise, Gerald inadvertently admits that the Irish have culture, despite arguing that they lacked culture entirely elsewhere in the *Topographia*. Not only that, but Gerald also went to the trouble of defending this part of Irish culture by asserting that those who thought that the Scots had superseded their Irish counterparts were simply wrong their views. The Irish, thus, had at least one cultural aspect that was not only praiseworthy but worthy of emulation. In the other chapters on music in the *Topographia*, Gerald writes about the inventors of music, describes its healing properties and effects on animals, and even mentions Irish musical wailings for the dead representative of the Gaelic tradition known as 'keening'.¹⁵⁹ In the context of Gerald's keen interest in music, his laudatory account of Irish music is all the more important for our understanding of Gerald's perception of the Irish. This makes it all the more disappointing that John O'Meara's popular edition and translation of the *Topographia* does not include these additional chapters. Thus, so many readers of Gerald's first work on Ireland have hitherto now failed to fully realise the significance of Gerald's favourable account of Irish music.

Michael Dolley, 'The Irish coinage, 1534–1691', in T.W. Moody *et al.* (eds), *A new history of Ireland: early modern Ireland 1534–1691* (Oxford, 2009), pp 408–19.

¹⁵⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 153–61

¹⁵⁸ See Lloyd Hibberd, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and English "Organ" Music', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 8:3 (1955), pp 208–12.

¹⁵⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 157.

Irish saints and English sinners

Religious men and women inspired and delighted the medieval intelligentsia, so much so, in fact, that saints' lives or *vitae* were the most popular literary genre of the Middle Ages. The corpus of extant *vitae* from the period is enormous and reflects, as Robert Bartlett has noted, amalgams of centuries-old didacticisms, conventions and *topoi* with, at times, products of the individual circumstances and environments of individual authors.¹⁶⁰ Exemplifying the immense popularity enjoyed by the genre, many of the writers examined herein wrote a biography, in some form or other, of a saint.¹⁶¹ Early Plantagenet England was an especially fertile place for hagiographical writing given the socio-cultural transformations that it experienced following the Norman conquest of the eleventh century. In the immediate decades following the conquest, the saints of Norman England underwent an audit of sorts whereby decisions had to be made about which Anglo-Saxon saints would continue to enjoy the celebration of their respective feast day.¹⁶² Archbishops Lanfranc and Anselm are two of the most well-known auditors of contemporary feast days.¹⁶³ Such was the influx of conflicting Norman ideals and interests for the continuity of English saints that Antonia Gransden remarked that the 'Anglo-Saxon saints and their relics were on trial' during the period.¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, however, chroniclers and historians in post-invasion England still saw Irish saints as worthy of praise.

Several twelfth-century writers dedicated ink to Irish saints. For instance, William of Malmesbury produced a *vita* of Patrick, which exists now in only fragmentary form. Jocelyn of Furness, too, wrote a life of Ireland's patron saint. Roger of Wendover wrote about St Patrick's Purgatory, affirming continued interest

¹⁶⁰ Robert Bartlett, 'Rewriting saints' lives: the case of Gerald of Wales', *Speculum*, 58:3 (1983), p. 598.

¹⁶¹ William of Malmesbury wrote Lives of saints Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract; Gerald of Wales wrote lives of five saints and eight bishops, including saints David, Ethelbert, Caradoc (non-extant), Hugo and Remigius; Matthew Paris wrote biographies of saints Alban and Amphibalus, as well as of the archbishops of Canterbury Thomas and Edmund.

¹⁶² S.J. Ridyard, 'Condigna veneratio: post-conquest attitudes to the saints of the Anglo-Saxons', in R. Allen Brown (ed.), *ANS IX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1986* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp 179–208; David Townsend, 'Anglo-Latin hagiography and the Norman transition', *Exemplaria*, 3 (1991), pp 385–433.

¹⁶³ See, for instance, Jay Rubenstein, 'Liturgy against history: the competing visions of Eadmer and Lanfranc of Canterbury', *Speculum*, 47:2 (1999), pp 279–309; Richard Pfaff, 'Lanfranc's supposed purge of the Anglo-Saxon calendar', in Timothy Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and churchmen in the high middle ages: essays presented to Karl Leyser* (London, 2002), pp 95–108; T.A. Heslop, 'The Canterbury calendars and the Norman Conquest', in Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (eds), *Canterbury and the Norman conquest* (London, 1995), pp 53–86.

¹⁶⁴ Gransden, *Historical writing in England*, p. 105. See also the rest of Gransden's chapter 'Anglo-Norman sacred biography and local history' in same.

in not only the saint but also the popular notion of an otherworld.¹⁶⁵ Ralph of Coggeshall thought St Malachy of Armagh was worthy enough to include an obit in his *Chronicon*.¹⁶⁶ In numerous chapters in the second *distinctio* of the *Topographia* Gerald relates a great many weird and wonderous miracles and marvels that supposedly occurred in Ireland. Brewer was critical of this part of the *Topographia*, remarking that in it ‘full scope is given to the credulity of his [Gerald’s] age; it is fooled to the top of its bent’.¹⁶⁷ Brewer’s assessment is, perhaps, overly harsh and reductive when it comes to the interests of medieval people in the weird and wonderful. Most of the miracles and marvels that Gerald recounts occurred in the name of a specific Irish saint.

In the second *distinctio* of the *Topographia*, Gerald dedicates the final chapters to Irish saints, including saints Kevin, Yvor, Colman and Brigid. It is interesting that Gerald speaks quite favourably about these saints, describing accounts of the thaumaturgic capabilities of their relics and even referring to Brigid as ‘the glorious Brigid’ (*gloriosa Brigida*).¹⁶⁸ Although Gerald’s final remark in the second *distinctio* about Irish saints somewhat annuls his positive descriptions: ‘Just as the men of this country are during this mortal life more prone to anger and revenge than any other race, so in eternal death the saints of this land that have been elevated by their merits are more vindictive than the saints of any other region’.¹⁶⁹ Gerald once again harks back to the idea that while the Irish may have some admirable qualities, they are still flawed to a certain degree, including Irish saints despite their ‘merits’.

Despite his generally misogynistic attitude towards women, Gerald made some exceptions when it came to particularly praiseworthy women, most notably, yet unsurprisingly, his grandmother Nest for instance. However, based on his depictions of the bearded Irishwoman and the bestial Irishwoman in the *Topographia* and Derbforgaill in the *Expugnatio*, one would be forgiven for assuming that Gerald never wrote anything positive about Irish women. Interestingly, however, there was

¹⁶⁵ J.E., ‘St. Patrick’s Purgatory’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 10:1 (1984), pp. 7–40; Carol G. Zaleski, ‘St. Patrick’s Purgatory: pilgrimage motifs in a medieval otherworld vision’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46:4 (1985), pp. 467–85; Robert Easting, ‘Purgatory and the earthly paradise in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*’, *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 37 (1986), pp. 23–48; Byrne, *Otherworlds*, pp 7–10, 74–87.

¹⁶⁶ Coggeshall wrote that Malachy was ‘taken up by the angels and asleep in the Lord’, *Chronicon*, p. 181.

¹⁶⁷ *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, i, p. xliii.

¹⁶⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 120.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

one Irish woman for whom Gerald seemingly had much respect and admiration: Saint Brigid. Indeed, out of the many chapters dedicated to Irish saints in the *Topographia*, the most numerous are related to Brigid. In an account of the rape of an Irishwoman in St Fechin's mill at Fore in Meath, Gerald castigates the English archer who committed the heinous act. Gerald tells us that women could not enter the mill and that this poor woman was dragged in by the Englishman and 'lustfully violated'.¹⁷⁰ However, the rapist got his comeuppance when he was stricken in his private parts with hellfire in vengeance and immediately the rest of him caught fire and he died that same night. In another cautionary tale, a young man in the household of the FitzMaurices pillaged the church of St Maidoc in Ferns. He immediately went mad and prophesied the killing of his companions by the Irish, which eventually came true.¹⁷¹

While there is no doubting that Gerald of Wales supported the English invasion of Ireland, he was certainly not one of those supporters who would turn a blind eye to what he saw as being the indiscretions of the invading soldiers and lords in Ireland. Indeed, Gerald's account confirms to us that these men were not beyond reproach. Moreover, Gerald affirms that the sanctity of sites associated with saints, even those in Ireland, was not to be challenged. As Michael Staunton has argued, the presence of such stories depicting the invaders' excessive brutality and imprudence may be indicative of Gerald's doubts about the invasion, or, at the very least, about the immoderate actions of certain individuals involved in the conquest of Ireland.¹⁷²

Ireland, a presage for early Plantagenet England

Ireland was at once a place wherein seemingly dichotomous elements existed harmoniously. It was a land full of traitorous, incestuous and disorderly savages who murdered foreigners and kinfolk alike but who were made so not by nature but rather by a supposedly backward society that had corrupted the beautiful bodies and handsome faces with which nature's good graces had endowed them. Unceasing rain was par for the climatic course, yet Ireland was abounding with fish, birds and deer – a land of 'milk and honey' that would sustain the appetites of any settlers or indeed would-be colonialist forces. In many ways, the paradoxical and seemingly

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp 130–1.

¹⁷² Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 356.

dichotomous elements of Irish land and life tell us more about the people who wrote them than about Ireland, its people or indeed its affairs. Ireland and its people were, in effect, malleable constructs, as colonial subjects often are, that offered a dichotomy of traits that served the colonists in formulating their own identities and senses of self in an ever diverse and changing early Plantagenet world.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers were moved by altogether different socio-cultural, political and economic forces compared with their learned counterparts of earlier centuries. We see little mention of the Irish intellectual and spiritual environment that drew religious men westwards across the Irish Sea for religious study and guidance on the monastic life in renowned places such as Bangor abbey, while Irish *peregrini* set sail for the European continent to broaden and challenge their understandings of theology and spirituality, and sometimes found religious communities such as those of Luxeuil and St Gall. Bede clearly respected Irish scholarship and wrote at length about these religious exiles using several examples including, most notably, the Anglo-Saxon *peregrinus* St Ecgberht who spent most of his life in self-imposed exile in Ireland praying and fasting.¹⁷³ Bede's ecclesiastical history provides an insight into the extent of Anglo-Irish ecclesiastical engagement and cooperation with an example of an Englishman being consecrated bishop by an Irishman during the reign of Wulfhere (*d.* 675), king of the Mercians,¹⁷⁴ and the local hospitality that met the English travelling in Ireland for their studies.¹⁷⁵ Yet, Bede's more positive depiction of the Irish – a race who had always been friendly to the English, so he tells us – held little sway in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century when the consolidation of English rule at home and abroad was the dish of the day. After all, this was a period of great political upheaval instigated by the ambitions of the early Plantagenet kings and their vassals. Thus, as the territory of the English monarchs expanded so too did an interest in the wider reaches of the world and the people found therein. With great flattery and total abandon, Gerald of Wales lauded Henry II's unprecedented conquest of Ireland and the reach of the Plantagenet realm in the dedication to his *Topographia* stating:

‘Your victories challenge the boundaries of the world. You, our Alexander of the West, have extended your hand from the Pyrenees to

¹⁷³ Bede, *HE*, pp 344–5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 380–1.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 312–13.

the westernmost limits of the Ocean. Even Ireland, for long untouched by the incursions of foreign nations, has now at last been subjugated by you, most invincible king, and by your intrepid courage. The terror of your name and the threats of your attacks have sent your renown blazing through the world'.¹⁷⁶

Gerald's contemporary William of Newburgh had, too, asserted Henry's greatness as a king based on his rule over an area of such magnitude that was unprecedented by his predecessors.¹⁷⁷

As examined in chapter 1, the Irish were used and abused to varying degrees in the pre-Invasion period to excite the imaginations of foreign audiences as close as Northumbria and as far away as modern-day Turkey and Greece. Ireland was painted as a distant place of wondrous and weird phenomena at the edge of the known world. This was, to some degree, a perception that still existed when Gerald wrote that Ireland was at the edge of world.¹⁷⁸ Ireland offered ambitious magnates as well as those seeking to step up on the aristocratic ladder an opportunity to acquire land assets that were effectively free for the taking. However, the acquisition of land and other resources by magnates in Ireland was far from straightforward. Indeed, they sorely underestimated the capabilities and resiliency of native Irish forces to not only withstand military pressures but also to retake territory that was lost.

That the consolidation of English colonial interests in the thirteenth century, in particular, was far from assured is presented to us through contemporary works. While the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England did not shy away from expressing their criticisms of English political affairs at home and abroad, they could also embed their views more implicitly by use of omens, prodigies and portents. Such phenomena featured in many twelfth- and thirteenth-century works, from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* to Matthew Paris's *Historia Anglorum*. In an entry for the year 1236, Paris records the unusual appearance of bands of paranormal knights on horseback kitted out with their military fineries, including helmets, mail, shields and standards.¹⁷⁹ These knights appeared out of the ground near an abbacy called Roche in northern England and

¹⁷⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 201–2

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Ralph of Diceto, ii, p. 65.

¹⁷⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 21, 153.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Paris, *Chronica*, iii, p. 367.

apparently fascinated locals who witnessed the vision.¹⁸⁰ The knights, who were presumably English, rode in arrayed troops, indicative of their organisation, discipline and readiness for battle. What is most interesting about this account is that Paris goes on to describe comparable visions in Ireland, which he tells us occurred more often there. However, unlike their counterparts in England, the knights in Ireland were badly wounded and bloodied, while their horses, too, were injured and sometimes riderless. While the people who witnessed the visions in England were fascinated by what they saw, those in Ireland were, on the contrary, terrified and fled to nearby churches and castles thinking that a real battle was taking place before their eyes. It would seem that Paris was keen to convey the tumultuous state of affairs in Ireland via these prodigious visions. For those in England, knights appeared as they were: well-oiled, well-armed, and ready for battle. They were the picture of militaristic pomp and circumstance. In stark contrast, those in Ireland seemingly were ill-prepared for what they were to experience in Ireland. Could this prodigy, as Matthew Paris called it, tell us something about the ill-fated efforts of the English in Ireland in the early decades of the thirteenth century? Perhaps the prodigy functions as a subtle warning to those involved in military endeavours against fellow Christians in Ireland? Perhaps the contrast between the manifestations of portents in England and Ireland is suggestive of the supposed barbarity of the Irish? It is difficult to know for certain. However, as Paris explicitly outlines himself at the beginning of the *Chronica*:

‘The virtuous habits and lives of those who came before us are set down as an example to posterity, while the examples of the wicked are related not so that they might be imitated, but so that they might be avoided. As for earlier prodigies and portents whose appearance presaged famine, death or the other scourges of heavenly vengeance to the faithful, these things are entrusted to memory in writing, therefore, so that if similar events ever come to pass, the faithful will hasten quickly to the remedy of penitence so that they might appease God thereby’.¹⁸¹

Thus, it may reasonably be argued that Paris’s portents in England and Ireland offers posterity a warning regarding the ideals of warfare versus the reality on the ground:

¹⁸⁰ Likely the abbey of the White Monks founded in south Yorkshire in the twelfth century.

¹⁸¹ Mathew Paris, *Chronica*, i, p. 1.

what was a proud parade of soldiers in England had been rendered beaten and bloodied in Ireland.

The Irish barbarian, nothing more than a clerical cliché?

While there are numerous instances of medieval writers describing the Irish as barbarian, Denis Bethell described these as an example of mere ‘cliché’.¹⁸² This was more than a throwaway remark from Bethell, for he was tapping into something fundamental about contemporary representations of the Irish as barbarian. The usage of the adjective ‘barbarian’ (*barbarus*) was, it seems, the prerogative of ecclesiastics writing in Latin. In the prologue to his *Historia*, which was more a diatribe against Geoffrey of Monmouth than anything else, William of Newburgh argues against the achievements of king Arthur as outlined in the *Historia regum Britanniae*. One element of his argument against the reliability of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s work, is that he states that Arthur celebrated his triumphs in Gaul by holding an immense feast with conquered kings and princes present as well as the archbishops of London, Caerleon and York. Newburgh insists that this alleged feast occurred at a time when the Britons did not have a single archbishop as it was before the arrival of Augustine, who was the first to receive the pallium to become an archbishop in Britain. Therefore, what Geoffrey tells us must be a fabrication. However, Newburgh was not finished there.

In order to strengthen his point of argumentation, Newburgh asserts that the barbarian nations of Europe (*barbarae ... nationes Europae*) – namely the Irish, the Norwegians, Danes and Swedes – while having been Christians long ago were content with having bishops, and only had archbishops since ‘our times’ (*nostris temporibus*).¹⁸³ The implication here being that the Britons were in the same boat as the Irish, Norwegians, Danes and Swedes – the barbarian nations of Europe. At this point in his *Historia*, Newburgh provides no explanation for why these peoples were classified as barbarians; rather the usage of the term was sufficient enough to inform audiences of the barbarism of these people. Alternatively, Newburgh may have assumed that his audiences were already aware of their barbarity. For those readers new to such a world view based on perceived civility or barbarity, referring to these

¹⁸² Bethell, ‘English monks and Irish reform’, pp 125–6.

¹⁸³ William of Newburgh, *History*, i, pp 32–4.

peoples as the barbarian nations of Europe was sufficient to plant a seed of ideological association in the minds of readers: Irish equalled barbarian. There was no explanation required.

William of Malmesbury writes about a similar collection of allegedly barbarian peoples, however there are variations in its composition. While writing about Pope Urban's call to crusade, Malmesbury noted that the good news of crusade filled the hearts of Christians, including those in the remotest of islands and *in nationibus barbaris*.¹⁸⁴ According to Malmesbury's colourful descriptions of barbarian life, in answering the call of Christ, the Welshman gave up hunting in forests, the Scot forsook his fleas, the Norwegian left his diet of raw fish behind, while the Dane put down his drink.¹⁸⁵ As a result of the absence of Christians, the fields were deserted with no one to till them, houses had no one to live in them, and whole cities were emptied.¹⁸⁶ More noteworthy, however, is that William of Malmesbury asserts that there was no love for kindred and country as men had only God before their eyes.¹⁸⁷ While there was a clear sense of superiority over these allegedly barbarian peoples, William of Malmesbury could see past their barbarity in the name of serving God. The sense of Christian community, which Bede, for instance, preached, is more problematic here. While Malmesbury seemingly acknowledges Urban's request that Christians let no devotion to kinship or native soil restrain them from their tasks in the Holy Land, he cannot accept that he and the Welshman, Scotsman, Dane and Norwegian are one and the same, that much is clear. Indeed, there was really no need to ridicule these people when making his point. Yet, Malmesbury felt moved to do just that. In many ways, however, deriding his fellow Christians tells us more about William of Malmesbury's personality and world view than it does about a homogenous English or Anglo-Norman view of the so-called 'Celtic' peoples. In post-invasion England, outside of the scriptoria and schools, were those illiterate soldiers and settlers on the ground engaging with foreign peoples to an unprecedented extent. As Michael Staunton has noted, 'English encounters with foreigners were various in nature. They encompassed not just their more proximate neighbours in France and on the island of Britain but increasingly the Irish, and also

¹⁸⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 606–7.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 606–9. There is the implication here that the barbarous nations of which Malmesbury writes were engaged in arable farming.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 608–9.

more distant foreigners in the Mediterranean and Palestine'.¹⁸⁸ To what extent, then, can we reasonably expect contemporary writers, some of whom never left their monasteries or their locals, to relate the experience of English encounters with foreigners, Irish or indeed otherwise? Although Malmesbury decided to denigrate the Irish as well as other nations, it did not mean that other writers in the period had to do the same.

If, for comparative purposes, we take into consideration vernacular sources such as *La geste des Engleis en Yrlande* or *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, other views of Ireland and its people emerge. The identity of the author of *La geste* remains speculative; however, we are certain that he was of Anglo-Norman extraction given his command of the Anglo-Norman dialect of medieval French.¹⁸⁹ It is sensible, therefore, to examine how the Irish are presented by *La geste*'s author given his subject and intimate connection to the endeavours of the English in Ireland. What is particularly noteworthy about this verse chronicle is that its date of composition may be approximately placed in 1189, the same year that Gerald of Wales likely finished the *Expugnatio*. Given their likely contemporaneity, it is reasonable to compare the respective works' authors. The Anglo-Norman writer who penned *La geste* was likely of a clerical background, while Gerald wrote with all the baggage of an ardent ecclesiastical reformer. As Keith Busby has pointed out, one might expect that a contemporary vernacular text would 'stray far into the realms of the *merveilleux*, while the Latin prose of the *Expugnatio* ought to provide a more accurate and sober version of the arrival of the English in Ireland'.¹⁹⁰ In reality, the opposite is true. Unlike Gerald and other contemporaries such as William of Newburgh, the author of *La geste* refrains from explicitly levelling the charge of barbarism against the Irish *in toto*. In fact, the author opens the verse chronicle by lauding Diarmait Mac Murchada as a king who was without a worthy match in Ireland and was 'very rich and magnificent'.¹⁹¹ Throughout the verse chronicle the king of Leinster receives such high praise that it becomes trite. Such glowing descriptions of the Irish king are to be expected given that *La geste* was written by someone who was relatively close to him – the author was either Diarmait's *latimer*

¹⁸⁸ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 338.

¹⁸⁹ Evelyn Mullally provides a summary of the main arguments proposed by scholars, ranging from Orpen to Long, for identifying the author of this unique verse chronicle, see *La geste*, pp 27–37. See also Keith Busby's recent analysis of the text as well as its author's background, *French in medieval Ireland*, pp 77–107.

¹⁹⁰ Busby, *French in medieval Ireland*, pp 77–8.

¹⁹¹ *La geste*, ll 12–15, p. 53. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 40–3.

(interpreter) Maurice Regan or was an unknown chronicler who had gotten information from Regan.

If we turn to *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, another example of a vernacular text, we gain valuable insight into the attitudes and perceptions of the time, not least from one of the most prominent contemporary families in the Hiberno-British archipelago. This primary source is one of the earliest surviving biographies in verse of a medieval knight and of a layman in the vernacular in European history.¹⁹² It was composed in the 1220s by a poet named John, sometimes identified as Marshal's close follower John of Earley (c. 1173–1229), although this attribution is unlikely.¹⁹³ The poet was commissioned by the Marshal's son to produce the biography, which employs all the adulation associated with the *chanson de geste*. The Marshal did not live to see it come to fruition; however, the vivid accounts recalled were likely based on the words of the earl himself and those closest to him. Therefore, it presents itself as a potentially fruitful source from which we can glean a sense of the Marshal's impression of Ireland and its people. However, rather incredibly, *L'Histoire* contains not a single mention of the Irish people let alone any negative judgements of their character or indeed way of life. This omission is noteworthy given that his fellow magnates in Ireland and in Britain are described in such detail, especially their disloyalty, treachery and infighting – words that were used by some contemporary writers to characterise the Irish. In particular, the royal justiciar Meiler fitz Henry is presented as base, treacherous and untrustworthy in his plot to bring the Marshal's ability to govern his extensive lands in Ireland into disrepute. *L'Histoire* aptly illustrates the changing tide in the attitudes of contemporary magnates towards each other, which can be traced, in part, to the power-hungry offspring of the first generation of English colonists who experienced a squeeze in economic resources as a result of insufficient land offering at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Seán Duffy notes that these attitudinal changes can be exemplified to a large extent by Hugh de Lacy II's defeat of John de Courcy in 1204.¹⁹⁴ The increasingly tetchy relations between magnates in Ireland as well as John and his barons in England intensified the desire of lords to protect their assets,

¹⁹² Nigel Bryant, 'Introduction', in *The history of William Marshal*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge, 2018), p. 1.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp 22–3.

¹⁹⁴ Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 114–15.

resulting in the king's last great challenge: the baron's revolt, which ultimately led to his death in October 1216 and the collapse of the Angevin empire.

Other vernacular sources paint a contrasting picture of Ireland and the Irish when compared to the Latin sources. The outlaw romance *Fouke le fitz Waryn*, which was written in Old French prose in the late thirteenth century, recounts how Fouke travelled to Ireland with the earl of Chester, who was eager to defend his rights there in the face of attack. No sooner had they reached Ireland when a large group of enemies, presumably Irish, greeted them. From out of the group emerged a hideous, well-armed giant, who was at least twelve feet taller than any of his group. Of course, it was left to the outlaw hero, Fouke, to vanquish him. And vanquish him he did by cutting off his head, but not before the giant had cleaved Fouke's war-horse in two.¹⁹⁵ Keith Busby writes that *Fouke le fitz Waryn* carries out 'a precarious balancing-act by reflecting an Ireland integrated into English politics and holding simultaneously to its image as the land of marvels'.¹⁹⁶ In his wide-ranging study of French literature produced in Ireland and the view of Ireland in French literature more generally speaking, Keith Busby has shown how Ireland simultaneously held characteristics associated with both the known and unknown parts of the world. The much-understudied area of French sources that treat of Ireland reminds us that the inclination towards examining views of Ireland from a primarily English and Latinate perspective supports the binary opposition and narrative which has dominated the historiography of the Anglo-Irish relationship. Through his close textual analysis of what is nothing short of an enormous amount of sources, Busby shows how Ireland was a paradoxical place that could be moulded and remoulded to suit the needs of romance authors: 'the presentation in romance of Ireland and the Irish as central or peripheral, ally or enemy, courtly or savage, reflects the colonists' struggle with their new domains and their ongoing attempts to expand their lordship of the island in the face of varying degrees of opposition'.¹⁹⁷

There is no comparable term to *barbarus* to be found in the vernacular sources mentioned above. This is despite the fact that the Anglo-French '*barbarin*', meaning 'foreign' or 'pagan', was used by writers in works such as *Horn* and *Le*

¹⁹⁵ *Gesta Fulconis filii Waini*, ed. and trans. Joseph Stevenson, in *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon anglicanum: De expugnatione Terrae Sanctae libellus, Thomas Agnellus De morte et sepultura Henrici regis Angliae junioris, Gesta Fulconis filii Warini, Excerpta ex Otiis imperialibus Gervasii Tileburiensis. Ex conicibus manuscriptis edidit Josephus Stevenson* (London, 1875), pp 408–9.

¹⁹⁶ Busby, *French in medieval Ireland*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

Roman de Toute Chevalerie. There are, however, terms that are frequently used in relation to the Irish. In the case of *La geste*, the Irish are frequently described as *fel* or *felun*, which is translated as ‘rebel’ by both Goddard Henry Orpen and Evelyn Mullally.¹⁹⁸ This is true for both individual Irish people as well as in the case of references to the Irish as a collective group. Interestingly, the term is also used to refer to an ‘evil-doer’ or ‘wicked person’ in medieval vernacular sources.

Further supporting the argument that contemporaries knew well that the inhabitants of Ireland were, in reality, far from the monstrous, incestuous barbarians depicted in the *Topographia*, is the evidence contained within both the *Expugnatio* and the *Speculum* of incredulous contemporaries who refused to accept Gerald’s salacious and fantastical accounts.¹⁹⁹ In a scathing letter to his former friend William de Montibus (d. 1213), the chancellor of Lincoln, Gerald recalls the condemnation that greeted, interestingly, *both* of his books on Ireland. According to Gerald, Master William’s criticism was based on the purported vices of the Irish, specifically their supposed practice of intercourse with animals.²⁰⁰ With reference to the Bible, Gerald rebuffed William stating that the topic was handled with strict historical accuracy (*historia veritate simul et severitate*) and questioned whether William’s view of the Bible was also condemnatory given its indelicate accounts of the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah,²⁰¹ the coupling of women and beasts as detailed in Leviticus, and St Paul’s castigation of homosexuality in his letter to the Romans.²⁰²

Following the completion of the *Topographia*, it seems that Gerald had detractors from the very beginning as later in his letter to William, Gerald notes that he had to defend his work from the spiteful minds and attacks of rivals, something which he also mentioned in the first preface to his *Expugnatio* (or *Vaticinalis*

¹⁹⁸ For some examples, see *La geste* and Goddard Henry Orpen, *The song of Dermot and the Earl: an old French poem from the Carew manuscript no. 596 in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth Palace* (Oxford, 1892), ll. 141, 152, 159, 184, 589.

¹⁹⁹ Walter Map is a useful comparison here as he strongly defended his own writing as he felt that contemporary writers such as himself were underappreciated and ignored compared to the ancients: ‘Our times have grown cheap in our eyes, like an age of iron, while ancient times please us as if they shone like gold’, Walter Map, *De nugis curialium: courtiers’ trifles*, ed. Montague R. James and rev. Christopher N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), pp 126–7. For a discussion of Map’s and Gerald of Wales’s responses to contemporary attitudes towards ‘modern’ writers, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 43–9.

²⁰⁰ *Speculum*, pp 168–9.

²⁰¹ The incestuous intercourse between Lot and his two daughters, while not directly mentioned, may be implied here.

²⁰² Ibid. See, respectively, Gen. 8:13, 19:13, 19:5, 19:24–5; Lev. 18:23; Rom. 1:27–32. Cf. Lev. 18:22 and 1 Tim. 1:10.

Historie as it appears in the letter to William).²⁰³ What is most interesting about the *Expugnatio*'s first preface, is that, unlike the single, specific mention of bestiality as the source of condemnation in the letter to William de Montibus, Gerald mentions several examples from the second *distinctio* of the *Topographia* that attracted criticism from contemporaries: 'He [i.e. Gerald] brings into his book a wolf talking with a priest; he describes a human body which has the extremities of an ox, a bearded woman, and a goat and lion copulating with women'.²⁰⁴ In his defence, Gerald draws his critics' attention to several biblical examples of animals speaking to humans, including Balaam's ass talking and rebuking the prophet in the book of numbers and a faun talking to St Anthony in the *Vita Pauli*.²⁰⁵ From the wording of Gerald's rebuttals, it seems that his detractors objectified out of sensitivity arising from content that was perceived to be too indelicate rather than from a desire to defend the Irish and their way of life. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that Gerald's critics may have been moved, in part, by a sense that the Irish were being unjustifiably disparaged.

While Gerald does not provide any sort of explicit evidence to suggest that his critics were particularly defensive of the Irish themselves, the fact that his most outlandish material related to the supposed customs and characteristics of the Irish people naturally means that contemporaries' criticism would have absolved, to a degree, the Irish of such detestable vices. Of course, it would be sensible to steer clear of unequivocally equating such implications with an outright defence of the Irish people. However, it is reasonable to suggest that some of Gerald's contemporaries were, at the very least, sceptical of Gerald's fantastical accounts and thus likely more conscious about how their insular neighbours were being portrayed in Gerald works on Ireland.

Such moderate perceptions of the Irish can also be traced elsewhere. For instance, while there is more than ample evidence to suggest that the practice of calling the Irish 'barbarian' was an ecclesiastic-led practice, not all historians and chroniclers subscribed to such name-calling. Interestingly, not once does Ralph of Diceto use the term 'barbarian' to describe the Irish, while he does level the term at

²⁰³ *Speculum*, pp 172–3.

²⁰⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 4–5. It is noteworthy that Gerald put these criticisms into quotation marks. However, with no specific attribution, it seems that Gerald was simply putting words in the mouths of his critics.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the Scots and the Welsh. His contemporary, Roger of Howden, a man with close connections to the royal court, also refrained from using the term.²⁰⁶ Interestingly, John Gillingham has drawn attention to the fact that Howden only uses the term ‘barbarian’ twice in the *Gesta*, and on both occasions they seem to be following the language of a source text rather than reflecting his assessment of things.²⁰⁷ In addition to never using the b-word to describe the Irish, neither Ralph of Diceto nor Roger of Howden provide the ‘colourful’ representations of the Irish found in the works of their coevals Gerald of Wales and William of Newburgh. It is particularly noteworthy that both Howden and Diceto take their Scottish neighbours to task for their atrocious acts during the Scottish invasion of 1173–4, including disembowelling the English forces and abducting women. Diceto goes so far to refer to the Scots as a ‘barbarous nation’. It is important to note that rendering the Scots as barbarians in this case is a response to real violence inflicted on the English, and therefore not the result of potentially unwarranted contempt for contempt’s sake.²⁰⁸ Here, the Scots’ deplorable actions in war are supposedly indicative of their customs and, in turn, their ethnicity. Diceto never addresses Irish actions in times of war. This is a particularly interesting omission given that we know Diceto had read Solinus’s *Polyhistor* wherein the Irish are described as an inhospitable and ferocious people who having proved victorious in battle, would first drink the blood of those they killed and then paint their faces with it.²⁰⁹

With regard to the labels attributed to social groups, Gordon W. Allport, one of the early practitioners and researchers of personality psychology, noted:

‘In the ethnic sphere even plain labels such as Negro, Italian, Jew, Catholic, Irish-American, French-Canadian may have emotional tone ... But they all have their higher key equivalents: nigger, wop, kike, papist, harp, cannuck. When these labels are employed we can be almost certain that the speaker intends not only to characterize the person’s membership but also to disparage and reject him’.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Although Howden does not refer to the Scots as barbarians, he was still vocal about the ‘great horror and savagery’ of their actions, see Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, pp. 64, 66; idem, *Chronica*, iii, pp 57, 60.

²⁰⁷ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 69; Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 129, ii, p. 200.

²⁰⁸ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 342–6.

²⁰⁹ Ralph of Diceto, i, p. 24.

²¹⁰ Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, p. 181.

The frequency with which the term ‘barbarian’ occurs in contemporary works when describing the Irish, suggests, in itself, the existence of an expectation that writers would describe the Irish using this specific adjective. Indeed, the frequency with which Gerald of Wales uses the term in the third *distinctio* of the *Topographia* is nothing short of excessive, to the extent that it almost loses all meaning. Chroniclers and historians were not short of words; they could have used a great many others when addressing the Irish and their way of life. Yet, often times, they did not, and merely settled for well-worn rhetoric. Although the use of the term ‘barbarian’ to describe the Irish by non-Irish writers is well known, a less-discussed point in the historiography is the practice of Irishmen using the term ‘barbarian’ to describe their own people.

If we are to believe Gerald of Wales, the bishop of Cashel, Tatheus, ‘a learned and discreet man’, recognised the barbarity of his own people. Gerald tells us that Gerard, a Roman cleric who was on some mission in Ireland, complained that the vices of the country was the fault of the Irish prelates, arguing that no one in Ireland had won the crown of martyrdom in in defence of God’s church. In response, Tatheus is alleged to have said ‘It is true that although our people are very barbarous (*gens nostra barbara nimis*), uncivilised, and savage, nevertheless they have always paid a great honour and reverence to churchmen, and they have never put out their hands against God’s saints. But now a people has come to the kingdom which knows how, and is accustomed, to make martyrs. From now on Ireland will have its martyrs’.²¹¹ Gerald does not offer an assessment of the archbishop’s retort other than to say that he cleverly made his point. It is unclear whether this account happened or not. However, it seems realistic enough to believe. It seems likely that the bishop was being ironic when he refers to them as being barbaric, for he does not just call them ‘barbarous’ but also ‘uncivilised’ (*inculta*) and ‘savage’ (*crudelis*) – an exercise in the usage of synonyms. Thus, Tatheus seems to be mocking both Gerald and Gerard here. The archbishop, taking umbrage at Gerald’s remarks, saw the opportunity to allude to the invasive and heavy-handed approach of the invaders. Indeed, even Gerald himself had recounted in the *Topographia* that the English committed deplorable deeds against native saints such as trespassing in the hallowed grounds

²¹¹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 178–9.

associated with Irish saints, plundering their churches, and even raping women at their holy sites.²¹²

The emergence and indeed proliferation of the barbarian trope in twelfth-century works owed much to the intellectual return to classical texts. The Greek/Roman and barbarian dichotomy provided a template from which writers in early Plantagenet England could construct various ethnic bogeymen who challenged the social, political and economic status quo that seemingly ‘proper’ Christian civility had bestowed upon the territories of the early Plantagenet kings. Although not every writer resorted to using the term ‘barbarian’ to characterise the Irish, it is generally accepted that the English perception of Ireland irreparably changed in the twelfth century. So much so, in fact, that John Gillingham has referred to it as ‘one of the most fundamental ideological shifts in the history of the British Isles’.²¹³

However, the attitude of religious men towards Ireland was complicated and there is sufficient evidence to support the argument that there was, on the contrary to Gillingham’s argument, a long-standing presence of anti-Irish views, certainly towards the Irish laity. If we turn to Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, we find the text of a letter from Laurentius, the archbishop of Canterbury, addressed to ‘our most beloved brethren, the bishops and abbots throughout the whole realm of Ireland’.²¹⁴ This letter, which was sent c. 605, attests to the contemporary perception of the Irish as a heathenistic people. Indeed, following his cordial salutation to his Irish colleagues, Laurentius writes that ‘The Apostolic See, in accordance with its custom in all parts of the world, directed us to preach to the heathen [*gentibus paganis*] in these western regions’.²¹⁵ Laurentius goes on to say that the holiness of both the Britons and Irish was held in great esteem until those preachers learned from Bishop Dagan and Abbot Columbanus that these people were undeserving of such high regard.²¹⁶ This letter has two implications for our concerns here. Firstly, that ecclesiastics perceived the Irish to be paganistic despite the fact that they were Christians in the early seventh century. And secondly, that an Irishman – and none other than Columbanus – allegedly thought the same.

²¹² Ibid., pp 131, 130–1, 134 respectively.

²¹³ John Gillingham, ‘The English invasion of Ireland’, in Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds), *Representing Ireland: literature and the origins of conflict, 1534–1660* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 24.

²¹⁴ Bede, *HE*, pp 146–7.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

It is intriguing and, to my eyes, certainly more than mere coincidence, that most contemporary anti-Irish invective was produced by ecclesiastics who were either Cistercians or who were closely connected to the order. Take Gerald of Wales, for instance, who was a well-known admirer of that great zealot and reformer of the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux. If, as John Lynch asserted, the excesses and destruction wrought by the English presence in Ireland could be blamed on Gerald's writings, then Bernard of Clairvaux must be at fault for sowing the seeds of anti-Irish prejudice that germinated in Gerald's mind. Gerald's friendship with Archbishop Baldwin, who became a Cistercian at Forde Abbey in 1170 and later became abbot there, is well documented thanks to Gerald's account of their journey through Wales from early March to the middle of April 1188 preaching the crusade.²¹⁷

William of Newburgh had close connections to the Yorkshire Cistercians, including the abbots Ernald of Rievaulx and Roger of Byland. Ann Lawrence-Mathers makes the important point that 'William knew that the monks of Rievaulx were interested in history, even if they were prevented by the rigours of Cistercian observance from writing it'.²¹⁸ Thus, the Cistercians penchant for strict rule and observance, and desire for widespread church reforms may have sowed seeds in the mind of Newburgh, who displays a conservative, and at times militantly so, outlook on spiritual affairs. He was, in Gillingham's opinion, 'by far the most religious-minded of later twelfth-century English historians'.²¹⁹ His critical views of the Irish, then, make all the more sense given the influence of Cistercian reformist thinking on those perceived to be uncivilised and ignorant of proper Christian faith and morals. We might also look to the Order of St Benedict, from which the Cistercians emerged in the late eleventh century. It is noteworthy that so many Benedictines had the reform of Irish religious practices on their agenda, not least the Italian archbishops of Canterbury, Lanfranc and Anselm. Moreover, if we consider the writers examined herein, a great many were connected to the order directly as monks or by their social networks.

²¹⁷ Gerald and Baldwin knew one another years before they preached the cross together in 1188. Gerald had known Baldwin since 1180 at the earliest and no later than 1183. He tells us that 'I was known to him and he [i.e. Baldwin] loved me well', see Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, p. 77. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, iv, p. 104.

²¹⁸ Anne Lawrence-Mathers, 'William of Newburgh and the Northumbrian construction of English history', *Journal of Medieval History*, 33:4 (2007), p. 343.

²¹⁹ John Gillingham, 'The historian as judge: William of Newburgh and Hubert Walter', *EHR*, 119:484 (2004), p. 1275.

Scholarly translations have also added to the proliferation of the barbarian Irish trope. One such example, from the text of the infamous papal bull *Laudabiliter* no less, highlights how the concept of barbarism is often at the forefront of scholars' minds when dealing with contemporary sources that write about the medieval Irish. The bull's first clause (the *captatio benevolentiae*) lauded King Henry as a Christian prince and promised him eternal bliss for striving to expand the church's boundaries and influence over the lives of Christians, in particular: '*ad declarandam indoctis et rudibus populis Christianae fidei veritatem*'.²²⁰ While this does not refer specifically to the Irish, it is implied given the wider context of the papal letter. Indeed, it is specifically stated further on, in clause four, that Henry should enter Ireland in order to enlarge the boundaries of the church, check the descent into wickedness, correct their morals and implant virtues, and encourage the growth of the faith.²²¹ While the accusations against the Irish are clear, the term 'barbarian' is not explicitly used in the bull's wording. Yet, it is noteworthy that scholars have chosen to find the b-word where it does not explicitly exist.

In the standard translation of the *Expugnatio*, which was completed by Brian Scott, the word *rudibus* is rather curiously translated as 'barbarous'.²²² The word's literal meaning, 'rude', does sound inappropriate to a degree, so one can understand Scott's decision in terms of using some license when interpreting the meaning intended and thus providing a text and translation that are kind to the eyes and ears while remaining faithful to the original source material.²²³ However, in this instance, *rudibus* may have been better translated as 'uncultivated' or 'ignorant' given its pairing with the word *indoctis*. Thus, it would fit the general sentiment here of the Irish being ignorant of the rudiments of the faith and therefore in want of cultivation. The word *barbarus*, rather than being translated literally, can be translated in a great many ways whether it is related, for instance, to customs – foreign or strange – to the mind – uncultivated or ignorant – or to character – savage, wild or cruel. Thus, for instance, Scott translated *nacio barbara* to 'uncivilised people'.²²⁴ Perhaps Gerald's frequent usage of the term barbarian to describe the Irish, which was used to describe their mind, character and customs, rubbed off on Scott.²²⁵ One should not be too

²²⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 144–5.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 146–7.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp 144–5. Scott's translation is reprinted in Duggan, 'The power of documents', pp 271–75.

²²³ Thomas Forester translated the phrase literally as 'a rude and unlettered people', *The historical works of Giraldus Cambrensis* (London, 1905), p. 261.

²²⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 238–9.

²²⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 150, 152–3, 167, 169, 178; *idem*, *Expugnatio*, pp 228–9.

critical of Scott's translations. Indeed, the process of translation is complex and often involves a negotiation between meaning and literalness in the pursuit of producing a 'faithful' translation, as Umberto Eco put it.²²⁶

Conclusion

John Brannigan made the point that European representations of the New World and 'English and Anglo-Norman representations of the native Irish' both reflected 'the fears and desires of their cultures'.²²⁷ However, Brannigan's comparison, which is reasonable to an extent, neglects the fact that the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England also wrote positively, ambiguously and/or indifferently about Ireland and its people. Contemporary writers ranging from Gervase of Canterbury and Gerald of Wales to William of Canterbury and William of Newburgh wrote about the conquest of Ireland, in particular Henry II's expedition to Ireland. These writers' accounts of the conquest are far more nuanced than much of the contemporary material one may read about Ireland. Even Gerald of Wales had lamented the shedding of mutual Christian blood in Ireland. These accounts suggest to us that contemporaries were not of the view that Ireland should simply be conquered by any means necessary. It also confirms to us that although these writers considered the Irish to be barbarians that did not entitle the English to slaughter them without a second thought.

Indeed, while the Irish were perceived to have strayed from the righteous path, they were not beyond saving. Aspects of their character and customs were worthy of high praise. Irish saints continued to be used as shining examples of piety for Christian peoples across Ireland and Britain. While Irish vices were many, they retained some degree of self-discipline and self-mastery in their musical practices, which confirmed that they were at least a people capable of superior cultural output.

The barbarian Irish trope was one that many writers in early Plantagenet England employed in their works in order to justify the endeavours of a self-serving and power-hungry English monarchy, aristocracy and church. However, as writers such as John Gillingham and Robert Bartlett have pointed out, the supremacist outlooks of writers did reflect the very real differences between the societies of

²²⁶ See Umberto Eco's thought-provoking essays in *Mouse or rat?: translation as negotiation* (London, 2004).

²²⁷ Brannigan, "A particular vice of that people", p. 129.

Ireland and England at the time. Vernacular writers also wrote about a primitive and troublesome Irish people; however, we do not see a comparable term used to encapsulate the notion of barbarism in these works. While writers such as William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales casually – and all too frequently in Gerald’s case it must be said – used the term ‘barbarian’ in their works to describe the Irish, others, such as Roger of Howden and Ralph of Diceto, not only never used the term but they refrained from the superfluous critiques offered by their aforementioned coevals when they did have something of substance to write about Ireland, its people or affairs. It is interesting that all four writers were not confined to the cloisters of monastic orders and enjoyed the liberty of ecclesiastics seeing the world and doing God’s work within it.²²⁸

While these four writers wrote about political and administrative matters, the manner in which they described such things reflected their unique authorial selves. Based on their authorial voices and personalities, one gets the impression that Gerald of Wales and William of Newburgh, and Roger of Howden and Ralph of Diceto could be placed in two separate camps when it comes to how they executed their craft. The colourful writing styles of Gerald and Newburgh contrast with the generally matter-of-fact reportage of Howden and Diceto. Whatever the reasons for it, Howden and Diceto show that the term *barbarus* did not have to be used as a rule when writing about Ireland. Indeed, while contemporary writers are renowned for the anti-Irish material that flowed out from their quills, they could also write more positive, ambiguous and indifferent material too.

²²⁸ William of Newburgh was of course an Augustinian canon.

Chapter 4

An ‘English’ view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England?

‘Being born in a stable does not make a man a horse’.¹

Introduction

The quotation above, which was wryly attributed to Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852), the first duke of Wellington, by the politician, barrister and champion of Catholic emancipation Daniel O’Connell (1775–1847), is often used to illustrate the complexity of identity – in the duke’s case, his Anglo-Irish identity – in Ireland.² It illustrates the fact that while Wellesley was born in Ireland it did not mean that he perceived himself to be *de facto* Irish as a result of his birthplace. Moreover, it also serves to highlight the general difficulties associated with how identity is conceptualised and understood, especially the issue of avowed versus ascribed identities. *Avowed* identities – those that we commit to ourselves – and *ascribed* identities – those demographics, characteristics and roles ascribed to us by others – can often be poles apart. It is appropriate to extend this distinction, historically speaking, and bring it into the equation when examining the identities of writers in early Plantagenet England and the related issues of group representation and self-identification. For instance, one’s birthplace was an important indicator for identity, and not only for individual’s constructing their own sense of self but also for people seeking to ascribe identities to other individuals.

¹ O’Connell is quoted as saying ‘The poor old Duke [Wellesley]! what [sic] shall I say of him, [sic] To be sure he was born in Ireland, but being born in a stable does not make a man a horse’. For the quotation, see Henry Shaw (ed.), *Shaw’s authenticated report of the Irish state trials, 1844* (Dublin, 1844), p. 93.

² The Wellesley family traced their origins in Ireland to ‘old English’ stock and were part of the landed Protestant elite, see Peter Gray, ‘Wellesley (Wesley), Arthur’, *DIB*.

Writing about William of Poitiers, Orderic Vitalis stated that he was a Norman by birth (*genere Normannus*), implying that there were other means of ethnic identification than one's birthplace.³ What is more, there are notable problematic cases of medieval writers' national consciousness, which can help us to realise that people did not always fit comfortably into expected social groupings. In the context of early Plantagenet England, some writers were explicit in outlining their origins – Gerald of Wales being a case in point – while others left us without an iota of information regarding their backgrounds and life experiences. Gerald was born in Manorbier Castle in Wales; however, much like the duke of Wellington, it did not mean that he readily identified with the native inhabitants of the land from which he sprang. Arguably it was rather Gerald's familial identity that was closest to his heart, as it undoubtedly was for many contemporaries given the precariousness of medieval life and the associated necessity to depend on one's nearest and dearest, especially when fate and fortune were often determined by one's descent.

For those who virtually never left their cloisters, membership of a religious order was likely a defining aspect of their identity and proffered kinship of a different and more spiritual kind. As Robert Bartlett asserted with regard to medieval thinking, 'Kin solidarities were central in shaping patterns of property, power, and violence'.⁴ The interests of one's family, especially one's progeny, in terms of sustenance and survival were paramount. Gerald of Wales emphasises this point in his *Expugnatio* when he quotes *verbatim* a speech allegedly given by his uncle fitz Stephen, noting that 'It is not ... greed for monetary rewards or the "blind craving for gold" that has brought us to these parts [i.e. Ireland], but a gift of lands and cities in perpetuity to us and our children'.⁵ What is more, both peasant and prince alike shared these concerns. It is important, therefore, to iterate that one's place of birth is not always a reliable indicator of the primacy of national or ethnic consciousness in the medieval mind.

Given such identity conundrums, can we truly talk about a quintessentially 'English' identity expressed within surviving sources and, by extension, an 'English' view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England? Was it primarily a writer's sense of nationality or ethnicity that motivated him to write about Ireland or something else?

³ Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 258–9.

⁴ Robert Bartlett, 'Medieval and modern concepts of race and ethnicity', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31:1 (2001), p. 44.

⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 48–9.

If so, then what elements would make such a view characteristically and uniquely English? Moreover, in terms of the contemporary writers, to which ones can we reasonably ascribe such an identity? Is it appropriate to ascribe terms such as ‘English’, ‘Welsh’ or ‘Norman’ – not to mention compounds such as ‘Cambro-Norman’ – to writers about whom we often know very little? For some scholars, the English view of Ireland has been perceived as static and immutable, *semper idem*. For others, the grand narratives that are often embedded in notions of historical national and/or ethnic identities are merely constructions that reflect an illusory past. This final chapter of the thesis examines the difficulties associated with defining a contemporary ‘English’ view of Ireland as reflected by the histories and chronicles of early Plantagenet England. Thus, the intention is to show the inherently problematic nature of writing about so-called ‘English’ views of Ireland and its people during the period, certainly during the early decades of English Ireland.

While discussing the ‘fathers of neurology’, the renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks lamented the superficiality and futility of trying to sum them up in mere words, asserting that ‘There is a tendency to reduce complex figures to stereotypes, to disallow the fullness, and often the rich contradictoriness, of their thought’.⁶ Similarly, in their explorations of the past, historians inevitably must make assessments of the characteristics and dispositions of complex and multifaceted individuals and groups. This is a difficult, but necessary, task, and one which helps to add narrative thrust to histories, as well as helping us to relate, in some way, to the people and contexts of the past. However, there is a tendency to extract all sorts of problematic meaning from the social and political roles that are ascribed to historical figures. Indeed, terms such as ‘ecclesiastic’ or ‘courtier’ or even ‘diplomat’ often inadequately convey the individuality of contemporaries. Furthermore, these roles and their associated responsibilities aside, the same can equally be said of the problematic interpretations one may succumb to when national identities are ascribed to medieval men and women. For instance, when we refer to Roger of Howden as an *English* chronicler, what influence does the ethnonym ‘English’ have on how we perceive Howden and indeed interpret his life and work?

With regard to the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England, their respective personalities and identities – as well as the authorial voices, topics of interest and choices of language in which to compose their works – are often

⁶ Oliver Sacks, *The man who mistook his wife for a hat* (London, 2011), p. 247.

predicated upon their roles as ecclesiastics. Undoubtedly, the trappings of an ecclesiastic influenced how these men lived and wrote. However, one cannot assume that the religious life had the same bearing on their respective life journeys. Indeed, Gerald saw his own work as an ecclesiastic as preeminent and that of a cleric at the coalface compared to those who chose what he considered the easy life, namely enclosed monks: ‘Monks are with respect to clerics what a flock is with respect to its shepherds. ... The monk is like a grain of wheat remaining alone. But the cleric is like a grain that germinates and brings a big yield into the granary of the Lord’.⁷ Despite the lack of biographical information related to contemporary writers, we must still exploit the evidence, however meagre, that is in front of us, especially when documentary, artefactual and/or archaeological material insufficiently elucidates their life course. However, even when we do have material conducive to making evaluations of historical personalities, one must question the extent to which the authorial representation of the self – or the *authorial self* as it might be called – adequately reflects the self as expressed outside of manuscript folia.⁸ For instance, if an author describes the Irish, Scots or Welsh as barbarian, might there be a possibility that they are simply paying lip service to the views of patrons, influential figures in the church or others whose attitudes influenced how contemporaries wrote about the world and the people in it? If some writers were merely writing to produce a work that met the expectations of its intended audience, can we truly say that the attitudes towards the Irish in contemporary works reflected the author’s personal view?

By examining the responses of contemporary writers and others to the events of their day one can gain a greater sense of the relationship between their view of the world and the contexts of early Plantagenet rule. For of all the centuries in the Middle Ages, the long twelfth is perhaps the most important for the study of foreign views of Ireland. Indeed, the century marked the beginning of a great swell of unprecedented interest in Ireland and its affairs: political, ecclesiastical, socio-cultural, and economic. Those who wrote about Ireland are not only important for what they tell us about how medieval Ireland was perceived in England, but they also

⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 176.

⁸ Tom Dunne raises some interesting questions about the historian’s interpretative methods with specific attention drawn to literary sources and notions of the writer as a witness of the past, see ‘A polemical introduction: literature, literary theory and the historian’, in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness: literature as historical evidence* (Cork, 1987), pp 1–9.

help us to understand how these writers saw themselves in an ever-changing medieval world.

Writers and their origins

At the time of the invasion of Ireland, England had, just over one hundred years before, experienced its own invasion by a foreign people, the Normans.⁹ The Norman conquest of England changed the social, legal, cultural, economic and political fabrics of the British Isles, with John Gillingham and Ralph A. Griffiths asserting that ‘Probably no other conquest in European history has had such disastrous consequences for the defeated’.¹⁰ Regardless of whether or not one agrees with Gillingham and Griffiths’s somewhat hyperbolic assertion, the Norman invasion certainly changed the course of relations between the peoples of Britain and Ireland going forward.¹¹

There is no doubting that the scholarship on this period has suffered at the hands of the fraught relations between Ireland and Britain in later centuries, especially as the binary opposition between Ireland and England seemingly holds a teleological certainty in the wider historical consciousness. However, one would do well to remember that England itself, like Ireland, suffered from conquest and colonisation, leading to inter-cultural encounters between the coloniser and the colonised resulting in the creation of complex identities.¹² Referring to the complexities of English socio-cultural realities following the Norman invasion of 1066, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes, ‘In the wake of conquest as well as of less martial kinds of cultural encounter, fusions of difference inevitably arise’.¹³ Socio-cultural

⁹ Of course, England experienced an earlier conquest by the Danes, which is often relegated to the depths of historical memory in both the wider historical consciousness and even the historiography despite the fact that the latter conquest arguably would never have occurred without the former. For some excellent comparative studies of the Danish and Norman conquests of England, see Laura Ashe and Emily Joan Ward (eds), *Conquests in eleventh-century England: 1016, 1066* (Woodbridge, 2020); for the conquest of 1016 and its inferior position compared to 1066, see Charles Insley, ‘Why 1016 matters; or, the politics of memory and identity in Cnut’s kingdom’, in *ibid.*, pp 3–22.

¹⁰ John Gillingham and Ralph A. Griffiths, *Medieval England, a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2000), p. 2.

¹¹ See Frame, *The political development of the British Isles*, esp. chapters 1 and 2; Davies, *Domination and conquest*, pp 66–87; *idem*, *The first English empire*, chapters 1 and 6; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings*, esp. chapter 2.1; Hudson, *Irish Sea studies*, chapter 7; Gillingham, *The Angevin empire*, 2nd ed. (London, 2001), chapter 3.

¹² M.T. Clanchy, *England and its rulers 1066–1272: foreign lordship and national identity* (London, 1983), esp. pp 241–62; Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: ethnic hostility, assimilation and identity 1066–c. 1220* (Oxford, 2003).

¹³ Cohen, *Hybridity, identity, and monstrosity*, p. 1.

differences are ubiquitous in human societies and always have been. So, too, are fusions of socio-cultural expression.

When one examines how historians and chroniclers viewed Ireland, it is vital to realise their views were not necessarily representative of a homogeneous ‘English’ society, especially when the identities of people in post-invasion England were multifaceted as a result of centuries of conquest and settlement across the island of Britain and elsewhere. Members of the Norman forces that invaded England were themselves of mixed ancestry and allegiances. Indeed, many of the inhabitants of eleventh-century Normandy had Scandinavian or mixed Scandinavian and Frankish blood coursing through their veins.¹⁴ The mixed ancestry of many Normans resulted from the practice of Scandinavian men (likely Danish) settling down with, or marrying, Frankish women who would raise their children in French; these same children ‘were brought up to accept the prevailing manners and customs of France, even though they would not forget their Scandinavian origin and pass on Scandinavian folklore to future generations’.¹⁵ Thus, many of the Normans who were involved in the conquest of England and subsequently settled there could trace their ancestry to distant lands such as Denmark as a result of inter-ethnic interactions in previous centuries. In turn, these same people would mingle to varying degrees with the peoples of Britain in the late eleventh century resulting in multi-ethnic individuals and communities. And as these individuals and communities who were alien to one another met, there is no doubting that each wondered about the origins and customs of the other.

While the Plantagenets were successful in so far as they obtained monarchical rule over the English, by the time of the English incursion in Ireland in the late 1160s the re-emergence of a sense of English national identity had occurred, although newly introduced French cultural expressions and customs supplemented or replaced pre-existing Anglo-Saxon ones.¹⁶ Lay and ecclesiastical rulers of England had begun

¹⁴ For studies of the early history of Normandy and its inhabitants as well as the Scandinavian settlement of Normandy, see Lucien Musset, ‘Naissance de la Normandie (ve–xie siècles)’, in Michel de Boüard (ed.), *Histoire de la Normandie* (Toulouse, 1970), pp 96–129; David Bates, *Normandy before 1066* (London, 1982), for Scandinavian settlement esp. pp 16–19.

¹⁵ Elisabeth van Houts, *The Normans in Europe* (Manchester, 2000), p. 18. See also idem, ‘Intermarriage in eleventh-century England’, in David Crouch and Kathleen Thompson (eds), *Normandy and its neighbours, 900–1250: essays for David Bates* (Turnhout, 2011), pp 237–70.

¹⁶ Most interesting among them was the secular code of values that sought to limit the brutality of conflict, especially amongst men of respected birth, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 209–32 [published originally as John Gillingham, ‘1066 and the introduction of chivalry into England’, in George Garnett and John Hudson (eds), *Law and government in medieval England*

to regard themselves increasingly as English.¹⁷ The term ‘Anglo-French’ is perhaps most apt to describe this new sense of cultural refinement and superiority despite the fact that contemporaries never used such a term. Richard Southern drew attention to the four decades spanning the period 1090–1130 noting that the cultural and political upheaval brought about by the Norman Conquest precipitated the communities of England’s well-established and wealthy monasteries to take up their quills in defence of their old ways of life, thus firmly asserting the glory days of the pre-Conquest, Anglo-Saxon past.¹⁸ Latin works such as Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vernacular records like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and native royal law-codes returned to a state of legitimacy and socio-political acceptance by the late eleventh century.¹⁹ It is impossible to pinpoint a specific event or moment at which this reemergence of Englishness erupted. Indeed, to assume that identity formation emerges from a life-altering moment is to ignore the more common reality of a much more gradual process. With that said, aspects of identity can of course be pinpointed to a momentous occasion in the life course such as the granting of citizenship, for example. The point being made here is that it is difficult, if not at times impossible, to elucidate the moment an individual becomes aware, if ever, of an aspect of his or her identity. This is especially true when examining historical events involving multiple participants of varying means, status, gender, nationality and ethnicity.

While Southern’s suggestion is indeed plausible, the reasons why the ruling Plantagenet *élite* adopted English customs and allowed the colonised culture to re-emerge as the dominant one go unaddressed. It is hard to believe, however, that ‘the upper levels of society in England and Normandy were completely assimilated, indeed merged into one community’, as John Le Patourel has suggested, during

and Normandy. *Essays in honour of Sir James Holt* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 31–55]. See also R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their myth* (London, 1976); Cassandra Potts, ‘*Atque unum ex diversis gentibus populum effecit*: historical traditions and the Norman identity’, in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *ANS XVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1995* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp 139–52. For French influences on pre-invasion Ireland, see H.G. Richardson, ‘Gervase of Canterbury’, *History*, 46:157 (1961), p. 102.

¹⁷ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 123–44 [published originally as John Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon and the twelfth-century revival of the English nation’, in Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray (eds), *Concepts of national identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995), pp 75–101].

¹⁸ Southern, ‘Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing’, pp 243–63. See also James Campbell, ‘Some twelfth-century views of the Anglo-Saxon past’, in James Campbell (ed.), *Essays in Anglo-Saxon history* (London, 1986), pp 209–29.

¹⁹ R.M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, revised edition (Woodbridge, 2003) p. 3. William of Malmesbury explicitly mentions the chronicle ‘written in the mother tongue’ that ‘rescued from oblivion’ the times and events that succeeded Bede’s history, see William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 14–15.

Henry I's reign.²⁰ Cultural differences, not least in language and customs, surely created some amount of tension amongst English and Norman aristocrats no matter whether they shared some forms of socio-cultural expression or status. What is more, there was immense competition for means and status in feudal society as 'Feudal lineages by their very nature begat young Cains. They also fathered disrespectful sons'.²¹ William the Conqueror's and Henry II's complex familial relations being cases in point. Rivalry was a reality of feudal life and the mixture of personal and familial interests and feelings created tensions – that often turned violent – within the feudal family.²² If in-fighting amongst kin was not enough, dealing with immigrant nobles seeking to make a go of the English adventure for themselves no doubt made matters worse for many English landholders. Thus, the notion that the medieval men and women – English, Norman or otherwise – who lived in early Plantagenet England had 'completely assimilated' and 'merged into one community' suggests a deliberate and intentional decision to integrate with each other. However, there is an alternative possibility here: that these people simply accepted their social differences, co-existed and got on with their lives.

During the first half of the twelfth century, monks such as William of Malmesbury began retelling the history of England influenced by antecedent works from the distant past. More so, however, they were inspired to write by the immense socio-cultural, political and economic changes brought about by the Norman invasion and thus sought to merge a Norman present with an English past. To this end, during a visit to Malmesbury, Queen Matilda had requested that an account of the connections between the English royal family and the onetime bishop of Sherborne and abbot of Malmesbury St Aldhelm be written. The bookish and historically sensitive William of Malmesbury did not need much convincing. Matilda's request lay the seedbed for what was to become his *Gesta regum Anglorum*. In England, much had changed. And more was to come. Malmesbury realised this more than anyone. Thus, following in the footsteps of Bede, whom Malmesbury described as having unique learning and modesty, a new Latin history was to be written for a new England.²³ For Malmesbury, the arrival of the Normans

²⁰ John Le Patourel, *The Norman empire* (London, 1976), p. 201. Judith Green challenged Le Patourel's view, see Judith A. Green, 'Unity and disunity in the Anglo-Norman state', *Historical Research*, 62:148 (1989), pp 115–34.

²¹ Le Goff, *Medieval civilisation*, p. 281.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Michael Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 36–40.

rang the death knell for what was then a barbaric English society despite its Christianity and ushered in a more civilised one underpinned by the unrivalled military skill and polished manners of the French.²⁴ As Malmesbury tells us himself, he had ‘the blood of two races’ (*utriusque gentis sanguinem traho*) – Norman and English.²⁵ This is all we know for certain about his origins.²⁶

Indubitably swayed by his mixed ancestry, William of Malmesbury saw merit in establishing a history of what was, in reality, a multi-ethnic line of kings of England from the age of Bede to his own times. The *Gesta* was a history of England that was able to ‘do justice to English as well as Norman’ alike.²⁷ In the prologue, Malmesbury tells us that he was moved to write ‘by love of my country and in part encouraged by influential friends’.²⁸ It was this deep appreciation for his *patria*, England, that resulted in William seeing the Normans as affecting improvements for the wider benefit of English society.²⁹ However, the civilising process had supposedly begun long before 1066; indeed, Malmesbury saw it starting in the sixth century during the reign of King Ethelberht (r. 560–616) who had married the daughter of the king of the Franks (*rex Francorum*).³⁰ In Malmesbury’s view this connection with the French nobility instigated social change in England as ‘a nation hitherto barbarous and now united in one way of life daily “unlearned in its woodland wildness” and turned to more civilised ways’.³¹ In retrospect, the progression to civilisation, as Malmesbury saw the invasion and subsequent conquest of England, was a palatable interpretation of events.³² If Malmesbury had fought for the English

²⁴ See John Gillingham, ‘Civilising the English? The English histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume’, *Historical Research*, 74:183 (2001), pp 17–43.

²⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 424–5.

²⁶ Despite the lack of information, what we do know for certain about Malmesbury can still help us to assess his *Gesta regum Anglorum*, see Michael Winterbottom, ‘The *Gesta regum* of William of Malmesbury’, *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 5 (1995), pp 158–73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 14–15. Version Tt (Troyes 294 bis, s. XII) of the *Gesta* specifies ‘Queen Matilda and the brothers of our church’, *ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁹ In many ways, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* countered William of Malmesbury’s view that the civilisation of England was a process put in motion by the French. Throughout the *Historia*, Geoffrey lauds the elements of civilisation brought into effect in Britain by the Britons and Romans, including the building of infrastructure such as roads, the development of agricultural practice and the issuing of laws, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 30. According to Geoffrey, no sooner had they arrived than Brutus’s followers in Britain ‘began to cultivate the fields’, Geoffrey of Monmouth, *HRB*, p. 72. For a summary discussion of Geoffrey’s accounts of the Britons and Romans ruling as good rulers should, see Gransden, *Historical writing in England*, pp 206–8.

³⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 28–9.

³¹ *Ibid.* Quote is from Virgil, see *ibid.*, n.3.

³² The justification(s) for one Christian people to attack and conquer another was a topic addressed by many writers in early Plantagenet England. The Norman invasion of England and, later, the English invasion of Ireland presented writers with moral dilemmas to figure out not only for themselves but, more importantly, for their intended audiences. Despite their more civilised customs, the Normans

against the Normans at Hastings or was of ‘pure’ English blood, he may not have seen the Normanisation of English society in such a positive and indeed grateful light. Regarding the battle of Hastings, he wrote that it was ‘a day of disaster for our sweet country’. It is telling that Malmesbury’s focus here was his country, England, and not the English people, whoever they were, specifically. While Malmesbury was interested in the past experiences of the inhabitants of England, it may be argued that the country itself – the land, the place, the territory – was perhaps just as important or perhaps even more important as shared customs and legal status for self-identification.

Using Geoffrey Gaimar’s French vernacular rhyming history of England, *L’estoire des Engleis*, as evidence, John Gillingham has suggested that ‘French-speakers living in England could see the Anglo-Saxon past as their past’ while ‘the overwhelming majority of the landowners of England knew they were English, French speaking, of mixed ancestry – as William of Malmesbury was – (usually French on their father’s side and proud of their forefathers’ achievements), but English even so’.³³ However, what exactly made these landowners self-identify as English goes unsaid. Gaimar’s *ODNB* biographer defines him as an ‘Anglo-Norman poet and historian’ and follows up immediately by noting that he ‘is of unknown origins, and nothing is known of his background except that he enjoyed the patronage of Constance, wife of Ralph fitz Gilbert who held lands in Lincolnshire and Hampshire, while Robert, earl of Gloucester (d. 1147), Walter Espec (d. 1153), and Walter, archdeacon of Oxford (d. 1181), are mentioned as having provided him with access to his source books, which, he specifies, were in English and French as well as Latin’.³⁴ Other than the fact Gaimar accessed English-language books and decided to write a history of England and not France, there is little more to assert Gaimar’s ascribed Anglo-Norman identity. He could easily have had the English material partially or entirely translated for him rather than having the linguistic skills required to read the English sources himself. In fact, this seems likely to have been the case

were not exempt from writers’ criticisms. Orderic Vitalis criticised both English and Norman alike for their actions at the battle of Hastings, stating with reference to the Psalms that Norman feet ‘were swift to shed blood’, Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp 178–9. See also Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 339–42.

³³ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 6 [originally published as John Gillingham, ‘The beginnings of English imperialism’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 5:4 (1992), pp 392–409].

³⁴ Ian Short, ‘Gaimar, Geffrei (fl. 1136–1137), Anglo-Norman poet and historian’, *ODNB*. Interestingly, Espec borrowed Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* from Robert of Gloucester – one of Monmouth’s patrons – to lend to Ralph fitz Gilbert who, in turn, lent it to his wife Constance, see Gransden, *Historical writing in England*, pp 189–90, 208–9.

given the frequent number of mistranslations of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* that appear in his work, which led Gaimar's Rolls Series translator, Charles Trice Martin, to conclude that he was evidently not an Englishman but a Norman.³⁵

Having considered the early writers of post-invasion England, it is appropriate, at this point, to turn to those writers upon whom this thesis focuses. It is perhaps most sensible to start with Gerald of Wales given that it is so easy to describe his origins thanks to the abundance of extant information on him, most of which is autobiographical in nature.³⁶ Gerald had mixed Norman and Welsh ancestry thanks to his patrilineal connections to the Normans involved in the conquest of England and his matrilineal connections to the princes of Wales.³⁷ In contrast to the plethora of information we have on Gerald, the origins and life experiences of many contemporary writers are still debated while some remain virtually unknown. Ralph of Diceto's toponymic byname – peculiar to himself – may provide some clue to his origins or at the very least a place which held some import for his identity. The exact origins of his byname have been debated; however, the prolific Rolls Series editor William Stubbs declared it to be 'an artificial name' that was representative of the Latin name of a place which had no proper Latin name of its own.³⁸ Stubbs argued that he may have been connected with Dissai or Dissé in Maine, thus making him a Frenchman. Others have noted that he may be a Norfolk man and connected with the town of Diss which is close to the border with Suffolk, hence why he is also referred to in some modern scholarly works as Ralph of Diss.³⁹ At present, consensus lies with the Norfolk connection. Other than this piece of information, we have no idea of Diceto's parentage or nationality. We do not know where – or when for that matter – the 'civil service historian' Roger of Howden was born; however, we do know that he succeeded his father, Robert, as parson of Howden, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, in or before 1174.⁴⁰ Stubbs has suggested that Roger was either born in

³⁵ Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles*, ii, p. x.

³⁶ Gerald wrote a lot about his ancestry. *De rebus* contains some of the most interesting content, pp 35, 83.

³⁷ See Seán Duffy, 'Gerald of Windsor and the origins of the Geraldines', in Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy (eds), *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland: the making of a myth* (Dublin, 2016), pp 21–52.

³⁸ For Stubbs's full assessment of Ralph's byname see Ralph of Diceto, i, pp ix–xx.

³⁹ See, for instance, Dauvit Broun, 'Britain and the beginning of Scotland', *Journal of the British Academy*, 3 (2015), pp 107–37. Broun asserts 'The identification of *Diceto* as Diss is shown by his appearance in charters while archdeacon 'of London' as *Radulfo de Disci* (BL Harley Charter 52. G. 20), *Rad' de Disei* (BL Lansdowne Charter 679), and *Rad' de Disci* (BL Harley Charter 52. G. 25), *ibid.*, p. 117, n.66. While it is plausible that the construction *de Disci* derives from Diss, *de Disei* seems equally plausible to have been derived from Dissai or Dissé in Maine, as Stubbs argued.

⁴⁰ David Corner, 'Howden [Hoveden], Roger of (d. 1201/2), chronicler', *ODNB*.

Howden or a member of a family with connections to the place and had thus derived their name from it.⁴¹ He may have been the brother of William of Howden, a chaplain of the bishop of Durham Hugh de Puiset, and therefore seems to have longstanding family connections in the wapentake of Howdenshire and in nearby Durham.⁴²

So little is known about the origins of Ralph of Coggeshall that neither his *ODNB* biographer David Corner, *Rolls Series* editor Joseph Stevenson, nor Antonia Gransden in her magisterial *Historical writing in England* bother to mention the fact and skirt the subjects of his origins entirely.⁴³ We do, however, know that he was abbot of the small Cistercian abbey of Coggeshall in Essex from 1207–18 when he resigned due to ill health but other biographical details are unknown. Given the influence on his chronicle of romance literature and the chivalric code he may have had French connections, but this is mere conjecture. The Cistercians in England engaged in frequent communication with the order's houses on the European continent including Cîteaux, and so it is possible that connections in that regard may have influenced the style employed in the Coggeshall chronicle rather than Ralph's possible French identity. Indeed, Ralph of Coggeshall had extensive connections to continental sources, which is indicated in the content of his *Chronicon* including the details regarding King Richard's death which he obtained from Milo, abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Le Pin and the king's almoner, and the material on the Publicani sect of Catharist heretics which was reported to him by Gervase of Tilbury who was connected as a clerk to the household of the archbishop of Rheims, Guillaume de Champagne.⁴⁴

With regard to the Benedictine chronicler Gervase of Canterbury 'All that is known, or that can with any distinct probability be conjectured, about the life of Gervase may be comprised in a few lines', so stated William Stubbs.⁴⁵ One could replace Gervase's name with most of the other writers concerned here and Stubbs's statement would still hold true. Based on the material in his chronicle, Gervase seems to be unusually interested in the affairs of Kent, which has led some to suggest he was of Kentish extraction. In addition, Gervase mentions a brother Thomas (*mi frater*

⁴¹ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, i, pp xiii–xiv.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. xiv, n.2.

⁴³ David Corner, 'Coggeshall, Ralph of (fl. 1207–1226), historian and abbot of Coggeshall', *ODNB*; Gransden, *Historical writing in England*, pp 322–32; Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon*, pp ix–xxv.

⁴⁴ Gransden, *Historical writing in England*, p. 324.

⁴⁵ Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical works*, i, p. xi.

Thomas) who he described as *cuidam fratri meo nominis sui*.⁴⁶ Stubbs reckoned that their shared brotherhood was both ‘natural [i.e. they were biologically brothers] and spiritual’ and conjectured that he may have been the Thomas of Maidstone mentioned by William of Canterbury in his early miracle accounts of Thomas Becket.⁴⁷ Thus, Gervase may, too, have been a native of Maidstone. However, Stubbs recognised that his suggestion was only a guess and that Gervase’s Thomas was younger and described only as a clerk while William’s was a *commanachus* and a person of authority with Thomas the martyr.⁴⁸ When Gervase was professed by Thomas Becket in Christ church, Canterbury, in February 1163, the priory received two mancuses worth of land, which suggests that, whoever Gervase’s family were, they were at least of some means. While the lack of biographical information on Gervase, as well as his contemporaries, is certainly frustrating and hampers how his life and works are contextualised and interpreted, Geoffrey Martin was unconcerned, stating that ‘Whatever his [i.e. Gervase’s] origins, the monastery and its history became his principal concern’.⁴⁹ The same may be said about some of the other writers concerned here.

In her *ODNB* entry on the theologian and chronicler Ralph Niger, Anne Duggan states that his origins are unknown. In contrast, Robert Anstruther, Niger’s editor in the Caxton Society Series, tells us that he was born in Bury St Edmund’s in Suffolk based on the assertion of the English antiquary and one-time bishop of St Asaph, Thomas Tanner (1674–1735).⁵⁰ G.B. Flahiff has suggested that Niger’s association with Bury may rest on the presence of his works in its medieval monastic library.⁵¹ Based on sparse information in his *Historia*, William of Newburgh seems to have been born close to the Gipse Race north-west of Bridlington in East Yorkshire. Beyond this paltry detail, we know nothing more concrete about Newburgh’s origins. However, H.E. Salter offered an unexpected summary of Newburgh’s life based on a cartulary of Osney abbey and evidence from Newburgh’s own work. According to Salter, William of Newburgh was born likely in Bridlington

⁴⁶ Ibid., i, pp 89 and 231.

⁴⁷ Ibid., i, p. xi.

⁴⁸ Ibid., i, pp xi–xii, n.2.

⁴⁹ G.H. Martin, ‘Canterbury, Gervase of (b. c. 1145, d. in or after 1210), Benedictine monk, chronicler, and topographer’, *ODNB*.

⁵⁰ Ralph Niger, *Chronica*, p. xii. Anstruther provides no reference for Tanner, but the information was likely drawn from Thomas Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica: sive, de scriptoribus, qui in Anglia, Scotia, et Hibernia ad saeculi XVII initium floruerunt* (London, 1748), p. 548.

⁵¹ G.B. Flahiff, ‘Ralph Niger: An introduction to his life and works’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 2 (1940), p. 104.

in 1135/6 and was the son of Elyas de Meisnilhermer. Sometime between the ages of twenty-five and thirty Newburgh married a wealthy heiress named Emma de Peri with whom he had a family whose patronymic was fitz Ellis; he left Emma in 1182/3 and entered Newburgh priory wherein he wrote his history fifteen years later.⁵² Salter's creative sketch of William of Newburgh's life has received little recognition from historians. Richard Howlett argued that there may be some credence to the argument suggesting that William of Newburgh may have been the Cistercian monk of Rusheford named William who wrote a history dedicated to St Ailred of Rievaulx according to Vossius.⁵³ However, Howlett was disinclined to state anything more assured than that there may have been a 'grain of truth' to the idea that both men were one and the same.⁵⁴ This was despite that fact that Thomas Duffus Hardy had earlier outright rejected the notion that they were the same person, asserting that it was 'erroneous, and that it was William of Newbury [sic] who wrote the History of England'.⁵⁵ Leland, Bale and others were convinced that 'Parvus' or 'Pettit' was William's family name.⁵⁶ 'Pettit' or 'Petit' was a name that had travelled to England from France, and so William may have had French ancestors.⁵⁷ However, based on what Newburgh tells us about himself in the prologue to both the *Historia* and his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* it possible that this name was in fact a sobriquet as he mentions his smallness (*meae parvitati*) and refers to himself as '*Willelmus cognomine Parvus*'.⁵⁸

What is known for certain about Roger of Wendover is that he was a monk of St Albans and onetime prior of Belvoir, in Leicestershire, who may have had some association with Wendover in Buckinghamshire given his name, which was denominated as *Roger Wendovre de Wendovre* in a manuscript copy of the *Flores*

⁵² H.E. Salter, 'William of Newburgh', *EHR*, 22:87 (1907), pp 510–14.

⁵³ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, i, p. xix.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Thomas Duffus Hardy, *Descriptive catalogue of materials relating to the history of Great Britain and Ireland, to the end of the reign of Henry VII*, Vol. ii. From A.D. 1066 to A.D. 1200 (3 vols, London, 1865), ii, p. 227.

⁵⁶ Joseph Stevenson, *The church historians of England. Vol. iv. Part ii. Containing the history of William of Newburgh: the chronicles of Robert De Monte. Translated From the original Latin, with prefaces and notes* (5 vols, London, 1856), iv, p. vii.

⁵⁷ 'Petit' and 'Pettit', as well as the less common surname 'Petty', may also be found in Ireland. The Petits were early settlers in Meath, Edward MacLysaght, *The surnames of Ireland*, 6th ed. (Newbridge, 1985), p. 244.

⁵⁸ When William refers to his smallness or puniness, it may have been more so as a means to express modesty, in a similar vein to the humility *topos*, rather than him describing his physical stature, William of Newburgh, *History*, i, pp 36–7. See *Song of songs* in J.C. Gorman (ed.), *Specilegium Friburgense* (Fribourg, 1960), vi, pp 71, 364.

that was once held in the Cottonian Library.⁵⁹ Nothing is known about his education or when he entered the monastery of St Albans. There is a possibility that he was related to Richard of Wendover (d. 1252), a clerical physician of Pope Gregory IX.⁶⁰ If we turn to Wendover's successor as the primary historian of St Albans, Matthew Paris, little, too, is known about his background. His *ODNB* biographers, Simon Lloyd and Rebecca Reader, felt that the very few details he reveals about his own life and circumstances are 'disappointing as well as ironical, considering his compulsive concern to collect and record information relating to the events and affairs of his own time'.⁶¹ That Paris provides such paltry information about himself is certainly disappointing for the historian. However, given the fact that most medieval writers refrained from sharing personal information let alone their life stories, it is neither ironic nor surprising that Paris shared such little personal information. In many ways he was adhering to general practice in removing himself from his work. However, to give the impression that he wished to remove himself entirely would be misleading.⁶² We do know, for certain, however, that Matthew Paris was a member of the St Albans community from his youth – he tells us he was admitted on 21 January 1217⁶³ – and, despite his patronymic, he may have never visited Paris.⁶⁴ There are no mentions of him in surviving administrative records, royal or ecclesiastical. As Björn Weiler points out, while we cannot figure out much about Matthew Paris the person, we can draw out plenty more about the persona of Matthew Paris the writer.⁶⁵ Indeed, this holds true for many of the writers concerned here about whom we often know very few facts. In the absence of biographical information, the historian can

⁵⁹ This copy of Wendover's *Flores* was destroyed in a fire at Ashburnham House in 1731, see *Rogeri de Wendover chronica; sive, flores historiarum*, ed. Henry O. Coxe (London, 1841), p. v.

⁶⁰ Matthew Paris mentions a Richard of Wendover (*Magister Ricardus de Wendovre ... phisicus praelectus*) who bequeathed to St Albans an ivory cross containing relics that were given to him by Pope Gregory, see *Chronica*, v, p. 299. Given that Matthew Paris was a coeval and knew both Roger of Wendover and Richard of Wendover, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that they were related. However, there is also the possibility that Roger and Richard may have simply been associated with the same place.

⁶¹ Simon Lloyd and Rebecca Reader, 'Paris, Matthew (c. 1200–1259), historian, Benedictine monk, and polymath', *ODNB*.

⁶² Paris shared his personality in a more unique and indeed personal way through his drawings, especially his self-portraits: the first, Paris prostrating at the feet of the Virgin and Child; the second, Paris on his deathbed, literally speaking. For the self-portrait, see BL, Royal MS 14 C.vii, fol. 6r; for the author on his deathbed, see BL, Royal MS 14 C.vii, fol. 218v. Both are accessible online here: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_14_c_vii, accessed 03 June 2022.

⁶³ Matthew Paris, *Historia*, iii, p. ix

⁶⁴ For a discussion of Matthew Paris's patronymic 'Parisiensis', and sometimes 'de Parisius', see Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Björn Weiler, 'Historical writing in medieval Britain: the case of Matthew Paris', in Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner and Elizabeth M. Tyler (eds), *Medieval historical writing: Britain and Ireland, 500–1500* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 320.

explore alternative avenues for evidence of writers' sense of identity. In particular, examining contemporary authors' use of language can be illuminating, shedding light on their ethnic and/or national affinities at the very least.

The devil's in the demonym ...

English or Anglo-Norman? Welsh or Cambro-Norman? What about the oft-forgotten Flemish? When it comes to referring to the participants involved in the conquest of Ireland in the high medieval period, demonyms have, unsurprisingly, divided scholars. The widespread usage of both single and compound terms to describe the motley crew that arrived at Ireland's shores from 1167 onwards reflects a clear lack of consensus due to the complexities and ambiguities of medieval identity as well as those associated with the so-called "invasion" and subsequent conquest of the island. Identifying the conquistadores who arrived in Ireland is not an easy task. When addressing them as a group, how does one decide on the appropriate ethnonym or demonym to describe those men-at-arms who were present given that there were so many nationalities represented, from the French Pettits to the Flemish Prendergasts, the latter long resident in South Wales. Today, usage varies; however, the once oft-used term 'Norman' in the Irish context – its widespread usage Art Cosgrove put down to analogy with the Norman conquest of England – is all but extinct.⁶⁶ A brief

⁶⁶ Art Cosgrove, 'The writing of Irish medieval history', *IHS*, 27 (1990), p. 105. Goddard Henry Orpen had favoured the term 'Norman' to describe those who led the conquest: 'The leaders, however, other than Maurice de Prendergast, were Normans, though they had the blood of Welsh princes in their veins', *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 53. A.J. Otway-Ruthven, too, used the term 'Norman' as well as the unusual 'Norman-Irish' rather than 'Anglo-Irish', which is now the more commonly used adjective to describe those things with common or shared characteristics from both communities, see Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, chapter 3 'The Structure of Norman-Irish Society' and chapter 5 'The Government of the Norman-Irish State'. Interestingly, Edmund Curtis, roughly a coeval of Orpen and Otway-Ruthven, used 'Anglo-Norman', see Edmund Curtis, 'Gael and Norman in Irish history', *The Irish Review (Dublin)*, 1:9 (1911), pp 422–29. The rarely encountered term, in a non-linguistic sense, 'Hiberno-English' was used by some, see Nicholas Canny, 'Reviewed work(s): studies in Irish history: presented to R. Dudley Edwards by Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney', *IHS*, 22:86 (1980), p. 179. The term is more regularly used in reference to the dialect of English spoken in Ireland, see, for example, A.J. Bliss, 'Languages in contact: some problems of Hiberno-English', *PRIA*, 72C (1972), pp 63–82. 'Hiberno-Norman' has been used to describe the language spoken predominantly by settlers in post-invasion Ireland as well as, interestingly, those living in Ireland, see Evelyn Mullally, 'Hiberno-Norman literature and its public', in John Bradley (ed.), *Settlement and society in medieval Ireland: studies presented to Frances Xavier Martin o.s.a.* (Kilkenny, 1988), pp 327–43; see also the title of R. Dudley Edwards's book, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors; the destruction of Hiberno-Norman civilization* (London, 1977). In her fairly recent and certainly useful survey of foreign attitudes towards Ireland, Aileen M. O'Leary uses the term 'Norman' throughout to describe the views of late-twelfth-century incomers to Ireland as well as those who remained in England; however, a brief deviation occurs when assessing twelfth-century views whereby 'Cambro- and Anglo-Norman perceptions of Ireland' are mentioned without explanation and thereafter the term 'Norman' returns, O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 41. John Gillingham has written a

survey of the terms used by some relevant historians in the field reveals that John Gillingham prefers the term ‘English’ as do Seán Duffy, Nicholas Vincent and Michael Staunton, while Rees Davies, Marie Therese Flanagan, Robin Frame, and Robert Bartlett have generally used ‘Anglo-Norman’ to describe the soldiers and settlers during the early decades of English Ireland.⁶⁷ Some have utilised both ‘English’ and ‘Anglo-Norman’ depending on the context; for instance, the settlers and conquerors being referred to as ‘Anglo-Norman’ while laws or the crown in England being referred to as ‘English’. Seán Duffy notes that the whole conundrum is the creation of more recent writers as terms such as ‘Anglo-Norman or Cambro-Norman, or, for that matter, Anglo-French or Anglo-Continental ... are modern concoctions, convenient shorthands, which serve to emphasize the undoubted fact that those who began to settle in Ireland at this point were not of any one national or ethnic origin, but included people whose backgrounds lay scattered throughout Britain, northern France and the Low Countries’.⁶⁸

As the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood once wrote, ‘Context is all’. This is undoubtedly true for historians describing the waves of soldiers and settlers in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in Ireland. In many ways, much like those chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England, having a sense of one’s audience is important when exploring such terms’ usage. How much context, nuance, and detail are required to get one’s point across with regard to the events that occurred in late twelfth-century Ireland? If ‘English’ is used as opposed to ‘Anglo-Norman’ what effect will that have on a given audience? Does it matter what we call them? Absolutely. As Robin Frame noted:

‘In so far as the term ‘Norman’ helped historians to set medieval Ireland in the European context of its own time, and to achieve distance from crude

useful survey of the usage of the term ‘Norman’ to describe the English invaders of Ireland and identified the Dublin-born antiquarian Edward Ledwich (1739–1823) as being the first writer to refer to the invaders as ‘Norman’, see ‘Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland’, in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and identity in the middle ages: essays in memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp 90–7; see also, Gillingham, ‘The English invasion of Ireland’, pp 30–8. For the usage of the term ‘Welsh’ to describe the conquerors see Seán Duffy, ‘The Welsh conquest of Ireland’, in Emer Purcell *et al.* (eds), *Clerics, kings and Vikings: essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), pp 103–14.

⁶⁷ For examples, see, respectively, Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*; Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*; Vincent, ‘Angevin Ireland’; Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*; Davies, *Domination and conquest*, esp. chapter 2 ‘Aristocratic domination’; Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*; Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, esp. chapter 1 ‘Invasion, 1169–1185’; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings*, esp. pp 85–90.

⁶⁸ Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 58–9.

English imperialist or Irish nationalist interpretations of the past, it may have served a useful purpose. As a description of contemporary realities, however, it is profoundly misleading'.⁶⁹

It is vital, therefore, that the historical realities are addressed, critically examined and communicated. In reality, as Frame has noted, the distinctions between Norman and English were far from clear cut on the ground.

Writing in the twelfth-century guide to the English exchequer known as *Dialogus de scaccario*, which takes the form of a dialogue between a student and teacher, the royal treasurer and onetime bishop of London, Richard fitz Nigel (c. 1130–1198) posed an interesting question from the student, 'Shouldn't the clandestine killing of either an Englishman or a Norman be considered murder?', to which the teacher replied:

'It wasn't so at first, as you have heard, but now, with the English and the Normans living side by side and intermarrying, the two nations are so mixed that today one can scarcely distinguish who is English and who is Norman—among free persons, that is, for it is different with those unfree persons who are called villeins, of course, who are not able to change their condition without permission'.⁷⁰

Although fitz Nigel may have been attempting to assert the socio-cultural cohesiveness of high society in England, and aside from the obvious detail that such social mingling supposedly affected free persons only, fitz Nigel's opinion suggests that concern lay more so on identifying others rather than how individuals identified themselves. As Robert Bartlett has written:

'Nationality is not a matter of objective classification at all. It is a matter of identification, a human judgement doubtless based on many explicit and implicit material and psychological distinctions, but not reducible to any of them. ... Self-identification exists in a close relationship with identification by others and identification of others'.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Robin Frame, 'Normans', in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 390.

⁷⁰ Richard fitz Nigel, *Dialogus de scaccario: the dialogue of the exchequer*, ed. and trans. Emilie Amt (Oxford, 2007), pp 80–3.

⁷¹ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 17.

Almost without exception, contemporaries did not use hybrid terms to describe the invasion or the people involved.⁷² In the *Topographia*, Gerald of Wales referred simply to ‘the arrival of the English’ (*adventus Anglorum*).⁷³ Perhaps Edmund Curtis defined the conquerors and settlers best when he referred to them as ‘the Norman-Welsh-Flemish-English invaders’.⁷⁴ Whatever the nationality of those who arrived in Ireland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, by the fourteenth century their descendants, as well as those recently settled there, increasingly regarded themselves as ‘the English of Ireland’ or ‘the English born in Ireland’.⁷⁵ However, as Robin Frame speculated, this was undoubtedly the public-facing expression of their Englishness as ‘on the public stage one was English or nothing’.⁷⁶ However, in more private surroundings – or ‘in their unbuttoned moments’, as Frame wryly put it – these same people may have reflected fondly of their attachment to Ireland. Perhaps Frame’s most salient point regarding the increased levels of Englishness expressed by those living in the colony in Ireland was to challenge the notion that ‘the English of Ireland were neatly distinguishable from the English of England, or that they formed a community with a steady self-awareness and consistent attitudes. Like all such constructs, the settler identity has a

⁷² The seemingly hybrid term *Normanangli* appears in the *Chronicle of Hyde*, see *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, ed. Edward Edwards (London, 1886), pp 284–321. John Gillingham has noted that the term appears ‘no less than 23 times in the 36 pages of printed text of the anonymous fragmentary narrative known as the Hyde Chronicle’, see Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 142. Rather than being a term used to indicate cultural assimilation, David Bates has asserted that it specifically referred to ‘the coming together of two peoples under one ruler rather than a territorial unit or a cross-Channel realm’, see David Bates, ‘Normandy and England after 1066’, *EHR*, 104 (1989), p. 879.

⁷³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 66.

⁷⁴ Curtis, ‘Gael and Norman in Irish history’, p. 423.

⁷⁵ Robin Frame, “‘Les Engleys néés en Irlande’: The English political identity in medieval Ireland”, *TRHS*, 3 (1993), pp 83–103. The distinction between Irish and English was not always obvious as members of both communities adopted customs of the other, see Freya Verstraten ‘The Anglicisation of the Gaelic Irish nobility, c. 1169–c. 1366’, PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, 2008. For the reverse phenomenon, see Sparky Booker, *Cultural exchange and identity in late medieval Ireland: the English and the Irish of the four obedient shires* (Cambridge, 2018), chapter 2, for Irish adopting English customs see esp. pp 89–96. The Irish dwelling in the four shires of the English colony in Ireland were legally required to engage in a process of Anglicisation. For instance, the Irish parliament enacted a statute in 1465 encouraging Irish residents to ‘take unto himself an English surname of a town, as Sutton, Chester, Trim, Skreen, Cork, Kinsale; or a colour, as White, Black, Brown; or an art, as Smith or Carpenter; or office, as Cook, Butler; and that he and his issue use that name’, *ibid.*, p. 47 n.10. Thus, as time went on, it was not always obvious who was English or Irish based on names alone. Orpen made a similar point with regard to the early arrivals from England and Wales, ‘The names [of the early settlers in Ireland] are, for the most part, apparently Norman or English, with only an occasional Welsh name, but with, in Wexford especially, a fair sprinkling of what seem to be Flemish names. Names, however, are not always conclusive of origin. Surnames taken from placenames in South Wales may not all have belonged to Normans. Thus the descendants of Godebert the Fleming took the name of de la Roche from the rock-castle near Haverford’, *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 53. For the wider impact of the invasion on the names used by Irish families, see Freya Verstraten, ‘Naming practices among the Irish secular nobility in the high Middle Ages’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 32 (2006), pp 43–53.

⁷⁶ Frame, “‘Les Engleys néés en Irlande’”, p. 98.

way of evaporating once exposed to the deeds of real people in specific situations'.⁷⁷ Frame's particularly acute observation makes it seem all the more problematic that terms such as 'Anglo-Norman' or 'English' have been used to describe chroniclers and historians despite the fact that little to nothing may be known about their origins let alone how they explicitly perceived themselves. However, writers' use of pronouns as well as demonyms can provide some insight into how authors viewed themselves in early Plantagenet England or at the very least their socio-political affinities.

Demonyms are regularly used to identify and thereby define a person. The problem is that demonyms 'readily enter as predicates into identity statements' with associated semantic baggage that is often unconscious.⁷⁸ No doubt this statement holds true when one considers the usage of terms such as 'English' or 'Irish' in the historiography. When it comes to identification, it is important to be cognizant of the distinction between *demonyms* (words that refer to inhabitants and/or natives of a particular place) and *ethnonyms* (words that refer to ethnic groups). There is a distinction – sometimes quite subtle – between these. For example, the term 'German' may be used to describe the ethnic majority in Germany or refer to the country's inhabitants – native or otherwise. Thus, some words can be used as both an ethnonym and a demonym depending on the context. However, are modern conceptions of ethnonyms and demonyms applicable to medieval societies? And can they help us to think more critically about how contemporaries conceived of their own identities? If we think of the terms used to describe the allies of the king of Leinster – 'Anglo-Norman', 'English' etc. – many scholars would be hard-pressed if asked whether their label of choice functioned as an ethnonym or demonym. The function of such terms is key here, however. So, too, is the tendency to interpret the course of Irish history as being a clear-cut binary between the coloniser and the colonised – in effect, one group versus another. Such national-ethnic binaries do not lend themselves to considerations of variance within the participating social groups in question.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 101. For the concept of the 'middle nation' in medieval Ireland, see James Lydon, 'Nation and race in medieval Ireland', in Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray (eds), *Concepts of national identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995), pp 103–24; James Muldoon, *Identity on the medieval Irish frontier: degenerate Englishmen, wild Irishmen, middle nations* (Gainesville, FL, 2003).

⁷⁸ Michael Roberts, 'The semantics of demonyms in English', in Zhengdao Ye (ed.) *The semantics of nouns* (Oxford, 2017), p. 217.

Thus, does utilising a *single* ethnonym or demonym reflect best practice when it is clear that delineating English from Norman identities was not always clear cut? Not to mention here the fact that such terms are not naturally suggestive of the involvement of the Welsh and Flemish soldiers who largely comprised the early groups that invaded Ireland.⁷⁹ If, however, a single term is used to label those who came to Ireland in the latter quarter of the twelfth century, should it function as a demonym rather than an ethnonym? If so, the term ‘English’, for example, would refer to the inhabitants of England, that is the general population, rather than those who were ethnically English, whatever that meant. Susan Reynolds has suggested that ‘Because kings were seen as the type of supreme ruler and kingdoms as the type of polity, the most complete sort of ‘people’ comprised the inhabitants of a whole kingdom’.⁸⁰ Even if such a level of nuance was acknowledged in the use of the term ‘English’, it still does not include all ethnic groups involved in the conquest, most obviously the Welsh who lived in Wales.

Perhaps, then, the focus should be redirected from ethnic group involvement to the institutional forces that spearheaded the invasion and conquest of Ireland? If this were to be done, however, an obvious complication would be the fact that the invasion and conquest of Ireland was as complex train of events that involved many participants and stakeholders whose involvement increased and/or reduced in intensity over time. Who really was the primary driver of the invasion and subsequent conquest of Ireland? The king of England? The king’s vassals in Ireland? What about the deposed king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada, who arguably kickstarted it all? Certainly, it is a topic open for debate. The multiple players involved complicates how chroniclers and historians – and scholars still today – write about the invaders. There was, it seems, recognition from contemporaries that there were many stakeholders involved. As John Gillingham has noted, if one looks at the charter evidence then ‘any idea that the ‘*adventus*’ was purely an English phenomenon disappears at once’ as charters issued by Strongbow addressed to ‘his

⁷⁹ Gerald of Wales noted that the first aggressors to arrive in Ireland were men from the diocese of St Davids and those of his race, who were then followed by the men of Llandaff: ‘*An primis eiusdem aggressoribus, Menevensis scilicet diocesis, nostrique generis viris; an secundis, Landavensis scilicet diocesis, viris generosis revera magis quam animosis, a primis quidem invitatis, et tamquam exemplo successuum suorum ad similia provocatis*’, Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, p. 262. See also Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 153. Cf. *La geste*, p. 82, l. 1157, where Maurice fitz Gerald is said to have landed at Wexford ‘with a fine force and a large retinue’ (*Od gent bele e grant meiné*), with, interestingly, no indication of their ethnic or national composition.

⁸⁰ Susan Reynolds, ‘Medieval *origines gentium* and the community of the realm’, *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 68:224 (1983), p. 390.

men French, English and Irish' and Raymond le Gros addressed to 'French, English, Flemings, Welsh and Irish' attest to more nuanced contemporary outlooks on the participants.⁸¹ However, these were documents written with important legal concerns in mind, so the details are integral to the terms of the charter and the persons they concern. It may be reasonably suggested, then, that it was simply not in the interests of historians and chroniclers to add the same level of detail and nuance to their works for their focus was predominantly on English affairs and interests.

Nationality and ethnicity were, and continue to be, important aspects of individual identity. Undoubtedly for some contemporaries, a sense of patriotism fuelled their motivation and strengthened their resolve in their military activities in Ireland. But it is important to assert that while notions of nationhood were a core aspect of how people perceived themselves and others in the Middle Ages, it is facile to think that these were the primary motivational drivers for *all* those involved in the conquest of Ireland. Indeed, 'we must be on our guard. The Anglo-Normans did not set out self-consciously on a conquest of 'Wales' or 'Ireland' as such ... ; they were not informed by national ambitions or national animus; few of them could have guessed at, or cared about, what they might – or might not – achieve'.⁸² It is likely that most of the soldiery in Ireland were not fighting out of an innate desire to extirpate the Irish and their way of life; rather, they were moved by a great many possible motives. No doubt the glory and renown that potentially accompany a successful soldier's life was one possible reason. Obligations to one's lord arising from landholding or other contractual arrangements could have been another. Whatever the reasons, which could be singular or manifold, simple material gain reflected a common economic necessity for most military men.⁸³ Gerald of Wales provides evidence of such quotidian necessity in his *Expugnatio*. When Richard de

⁸¹ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 153. See also Davies, *Domination and conquest*, p. 3 n.6. For the significance of such address clauses, see Richard Sharpe, 'Peoples and languages in eleventh- and twelfth-century Britain and Ireland: reading the charter evidence', in Dauvit Broun (ed.), *The reality behind charter diplomacy in Anglo-Norman Britain* (Glasgow, 2011), pp 1–119. It is noteworthy that the Irish are always last in the sequence.

⁸² Davies, *Domination and conquest*, p. 3. Although Davies denies it, there is of course the possibility that some of the participants of the conquest were moved by 'national ambitions or national animus'. The sometimes-critical attitudes of contemporary writers towards the Irish are sufficient enough to prove this. Although, the general point that Davies seems to be making is that such motivations were not held by the majority, which was likely to be true.

⁸³ Michael Prestwich, *Armies and warfare in the Middle Ages: the English experience* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp 84–113; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings*, pp 261–9.

Clare ran out of money to pay his troops during campaigning in Ireland in 1173, mutiny was threatened, so Gerald tells us.⁸⁴

What is more, the Normans (*Normanni*) that formed part of John's troops were allegedly particularly prompt in claiming their pay and accepting gifts.⁸⁵ In reality, some men simply saw their military activities in Ireland as an adventure of sorts or simply a means to an end. Some decided to abandon their duties for revelry within the supposedly peaceful confines of the cities of the seacoast while the so-called 'marches' (*marchie*) were left to ruin, resulting in towns and castles in the middle of the country being effectively abandoned.⁸⁶ However, even worse than the dereliction of duties was the defection of duties. Roger of Howden noted that a considerable portion of John's army, including cavalrymen and infantrymen, deserted to the Irish when they were unpaid.⁸⁷ Clearly these were men uninspired by the intangible rewards of glory and honour *pro patria*. On the contrary, their loyalties were with those who had the crosses and crosslets in their purses. Moreover, despite the charges of treachery and depravity levelled at the Irish by some contemporary writers, the actions of these mercenaries challenge such narratives, showing that relations between Irish and the multinational invading forces could be more fluid on the ground.⁸⁸ The accounts of Gerald of Wales and Roger of Howden confirm that the contemporary attitudes of paid military men towards the Irish and their way of life were perhaps indifferent or at very least ambiguous. There is the possibility, too, that the Irish were seen as more than simply a last-resort employer when English chips were down. They may have been found to be a more favourable option for mercenaries operating in a foreign land where the natives offered more security than the invading forces. Interestingly, contemporary Latin writers do not disclose the backgrounds of those branded as defectors of the lords in Ireland, although they seem to be hired hands rather than household troops or those with feudal obligations.⁸⁹ In

⁸⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 134–5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 244–5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 240–1.

⁸⁷ Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, i, p. 339. Cf. Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ii, pp 304–5.

⁸⁸ Mercenaries aside, the defection of Maurice de Prendergast and 200 followers to assist Domnall Mac Gilla Pátraic against Mac Murchada and his allies is conveniently – for Gerald but not for us – not mentioned in the *Expugnatio*, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, p. 295 n.39. Mac Gilla Pátraic is a particularly interesting figure as he fought against the invaders as well as alongside them in later times after he had submitted to Henry II during his visit to Ireland in 1171–2, *ibid.* For an account of de Prendergast assisting the king of Osraige, see *La geste*, pp 105–8, ll. 2031–152.

⁸⁹ In early Plantagenet England, mercenaries in all shapes and sizes, and from various parts of Britain, France and elsewhere, offered their services to the kings of England in their military campaigns, thus highlighting the relatively open attitude, in terms of national and ethnic identities, to hiring military men. Henry I hired many poverty-stricken Breton mercenaries to fight in his wars: for instance, see

general, however, it remains difficult to gauge the attitudes of the motley crew of foreign troops in Ireland towards the Irish, especially as the delineations between types of military recruits – levied, household and mercenary – were not always obvious.⁹⁰

The evidence that suggests the adoption, or at the very least indifferent acceptance, of French customs in post-invasion England and the mingling of natives and settlers meant that even those who expressed predominantly French customs still saw themselves as English, according to John Gillingham. Gillingham's point is an important one as it highlights that a clearly complex construct of social, cultural, political and economic markers and expressions form into a reductive unit (i.e., a single identity, for example, English or Norman) in the mind of the individual, whether that be a person self-identifying with an identity or someone else identifying them with one. However, Gillingham's assertion fails to acknowledge the possibility of more hybrid senses of identity, conscious or unconscious, that are expressed depending on circumstance. What is more, what did it mean to the average medieval person to be English or Norman, and to what extent did it matter? As Robert Bartlett has pointed out, 'People label themselves, and are labelled, by many different things at different times for different purposes. It is not always necessary or desirable to have a group or identity of primary allegiance'.⁹¹ Indeed, identity is a fluid and situational construct.⁹²

If, for comparative purposes, we turn briefly to Irish sources to see how they perceived and referred to the invaders, something interesting emerges. The annals of Inisfallen, perhaps the only fully verifiable contemporaneous Irish-language witness to the events of the late twelfth century, consistently refer to 'the foreigners' or 'grey foreigners'.⁹³ As John Gillingham points out, this usage, which continues right

William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 728–9. His son, Henry II, used the services of Brabanters (also known as *Bragmanni*) in the rebellion of 1173–4 while the rebels had employed hired help from Flanders, see William of Newburgh, *History*, ii, pp 120–1. See also Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings*, pp 266–9.

⁹⁰ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin kings*, p. 268.

⁹¹ Bartlett, 'Medieval and modern concepts of race and ethnicity', p. 54.

⁹² Frederik Barth, 'Introduction', in Frederik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference* (Boston, MA, 1969), pp 9–38.

⁹³ *AI*, s.a. 1170, 1171, 1172, 1173, 1174. They are also referred to as the 'oversea men' and 'oversea fleet', s.a. 1170. The term 'Saxon' is mentioned at the beginning of the *AI*, s.a. 434 [cf. *AU* 434], in reference to a foray or invasion of sorts in Ireland, a second is mentioned later, s.a. 471 [cf. *AU* 471]. Interestingly, the annals also explain that the term 'English' means 'Saxon': '*Quies Ósuailt regis Anglicorum i. Anglicus Sax interpre(tatur)*', s.a. 644. As shown in the example before, some of these annals were also written in Latin.

through the thirteenth-century entries and beyond, ‘doesn’t help us to discover where the foreigners were thought to come from’.⁹⁴ While this is true, the annals’ use of the term ‘foreigner’ potentially tells us something far more remarkable: that contemporary Irish annalists, certainly those involved in composing the Inisfallen annals, were uninterested in who these people were or where they came from specifically – for the intuitive marker of their identity was, ultimately, their foreignness: a classic example of us-and-them thinking that is comparable, as a basic process underlying intergroup perception, to those chroniclers and historians who stereotyped the Irish in their works.⁹⁵ A counter point may be that the annalists genuinely did not know where they had come from; however, while this may be believable for the early entries it cannot explain why these terms were used consistently in annals compiled over the course of the century following. It is worth noting that the annals also generally use the term ‘foreigner’ to describe the Norse in Ireland.⁹⁶ Interestingly, the annals of Tigernach, Ulster and Loch Cé also generally use the term ‘foreigner’ to describe both the Norse and English in Ireland.⁹⁷ Worthy of particular mention here is an entry for 1167 in the Annals of Tigernach that states ‘Diarmaid Mac Murchada came into Ireland, and an army of Foreigners [*Gall*] and Saxons [*Saxanach*] and knights with him’, suggesting that the term ‘foreigners’ was not at all in reference to the English.⁹⁸ It is unclear, however, if *Gall* was in reference to the Normans or Welsh or Flemish or, indeed, a catch-all term for some or all of these groups.⁹⁹ The reasons behind the annalist’s decision to distinguish between the *Gall* and the *Saxanach* are unclear. Perhaps the annalist was simply less familiar with

⁹⁴ Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 152.

⁹⁵ See John T. Jost and David L. Hamilton, ‘Stereotypes in our culture’, in John F. Dovidio, Peter Glick, and Laurie A. Rudman (eds), *On the nature of prejudice, fifty years after Allport* (Malden, MA, 2005), pp 208–14.

⁹⁶ *AI*, s.a. 848, 916, 922, 927, 930, 947, 964, 967, 969, 972, 977, 980, 984, 989. It is worth noting that there are few references in the Inisfallen annals to the ‘Irish’ as a collective group, rather terms such as ‘Munstermen’ (s.a. 447, 573, 714, 721) and references to kingships such as ‘Laigin’ are used (s.a. 459–482) which is indicative of localised identities and conflicts rather than national ones. The term ‘Irish’ is used frequently in the early fourteenth century to describe the people of the island in their opposition to the English (s.a. 1311, 1315, 1316) and in reference to the ‘Irish church’ (s.a. 1317).

⁹⁷ For mentions of the Norse and English respectively, see *AT*, 17 (1896), pp 338–43, 18 (1897), p. 277; *AU*, s.a. 979, 1170; *ALC*, s.a. 1014, 1170. The common usage of the term ‘foreigner’ further suggests that these annals relied on the same earlier source for the pre-912 material, namely the hypothesised collection known as the *Chronicle of Ireland*. After entries dated 911, the year following which annals such as the *AI* and *AU* contain original material, the term ‘foreigner’ is generally retained.

⁹⁸ *AT*, 18 (1897), p. 274.

⁹⁹ Marie Therese Flanagan has asserted that the Irish annalists perceived the incomers as ‘*Saxain*, as *Sassanaig*, or English’ and further notes that the term *Frainc* is used to describe Norman activity exclusively outside of Ireland while no term is used to refer to the Normans as distinct from the French generally speaking, see Marie Therese Flanagan, ‘The Normans in Ireland’, in *Irish history in the classroom: research, resources and realisation: seminar held at Cultra Manor, Holywood, Co. Down from 18th to 21st September, 1986* (Bangor, 1987), pp 23–32.

these foreigners than he was with the Saxons, or he had no desire to record their origins for posterity, perhaps because he felt that they were unworthy of recollection.

Aside from the issue of demonyms and ethnonyms treated here, another related terminological matter that typically goes unaddressed in historical studies of the period is the choice of nouns used to describe those military men who ventured to Ireland from 1167 onwards. Conquerors. Invaders. Settlers. Soldiers. Adventurers. The list goes on. Some could claim to fit the bill of one or all of these statuses. Whether there is consensus on the terms used to describe those people who landed on Ireland's shores in the late twelfth century or not, what we can state with some degree of certainty is that contemporary historians and chroniclers were entrusted with the task of recording the deeds of these men for their contemporaries as well as for posterity. How future generations remembered these men and events is an entirely different matter.¹⁰⁰

Affinities: natio, gens, familia

If we consider, then, the identities expressed by contemporary chroniclers and historians, a whole host of problems arise. The problem is that writers' origins are often unknown or at least very little information is known regarding their potential nationalities and ethnicities. Despite the lack of evidence, claims regarding contemporary writers' identities are still made as historians often cannot help but attribute a nationality and/or an ethnicity to historical individuals and, in turn, as driving forces behind their motivations and actions. Rather than referring to contemporary historians and chroniclers as being 'English' historians and chroniclers, would it be more accurate to refer to them as historians and chroniclers of England, in much the same way that the present-day consensus is to refer to Giraldus Cambrensis as Gerald of Wales in English rather than Gerald the Welshman deriving from the Welsh Gerallt Cymro? Of course, this is not without its faults as evidently there were writers who, despite us lacking biographical information, clearly identified themselves as English.

Writers did not always need to be explicit in airing their affinities, the task could be achieved more subtly with regard to expressions of self-identification and affirmation. While never explicitly stating that he was an Englishman, Matthew Paris

¹⁰⁰ See Cosgrove, 'The writing of Irish medieval history', pp 97–111.

provides linguistic clues to one of his group affinities in his use of the possessive adjective *noster*.¹⁰¹ For instance, when Paris provides an account of Henry III's campaign in Poitou in 1242, he refers to the English troops as 'our Englishmen' (*nostri Anglici*).¹⁰² Later, he describes 'our tired Englishmen' (*fatigati Anglici nostri*).¹⁰³ In his *vita* of St Edmund, Paris displays quite a striking affinity for the English *natio*, in particular English clergy and royalty, in his account of the baptism of Henry III's son Edward Longshanks.¹⁰⁴ Paris was less than pleased that the papal legate, Otto, a mere deacon from a foreign nation (*natione alienigena*) and of inferior morals and inadequate theological knowledge, baptised the child prince.¹⁰⁵ Worse still, the baptism occurred while Edmund of Abingdon, the archbishop of Canterbury, was present, which made Paris resent Otto's involvement all the more given that the archbishop was the primate of all England, of the native nation (*natione indigenam*), moral and of clear sanctity, a teacher of much knowledge and a celebrated lecturer.¹⁰⁶ The dichotomy between both men is clear; in fact, they are diametrically opposed on all points mentioned by Paris, with the archbishop viewed as the superior on all fronts, including in *natio*. It is perhaps unsurprising for an ecclesiastic to compare his colleagues in terms of their position in the church hierarchy, theological knowledge, morality and sanctity but more surprising that Otto's *natio* is a focal point for examination. Otto was no cultist or Caursine, he was a papal legate. Yet, if his inferior religious attributes were not enough, his foreignness was nothing short of an insult to the baptism of the royal heir, or so Paris felt, especially when a native archbishop was present. Clearly, Paris felt strongly about the representation of national or ethnic identity during such rituals. Hands-on involvement by blow-ins such as Otto was neither appreciated nor welcomed by Paris, that much is clear.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Individuals can hold multiple affinities with social groups e.g. familial, national, ethnic, religious etc. What is more, people can hold a bond with more than one of these types of groups, for instance someone of mixed parentage can have close ties to both parents' social groups.

¹⁰² Matthew Paris, *Chronica*, iv, p. 210.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that Henry III's devotion to Anglo-Saxon saints, in particular the canonised kings of England, resulted in the naming of his son Edward after his patron saint, Edward the Confessor, which is suggestive of the continuance of Anglo-Saxon influence not only in memory but also in practice.

¹⁰⁵ Wilfrid Wallace, *Life of St Edmund from original sources* (London, 1893), p. 569. Wallace had attributed this *vita* to a monk named Eustace. However, Matthew Paris's claim on its authorship is now beyond doubt, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp 162–5.

¹⁰⁶ Wallace, *Life of St Edmund*, p. 569. It is unclear to what nationality Paris was referring when he uses the term *natione indigenam*. Interestingly, Vaughan translated *natione indigenam* as 'an Englishman', see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁷ Otto had been dispatched to England following Henry's written request for a papal legate. However, he drew scorn as a result of his unenviable position as a papal tax collector in 1240, which influenced Paris's account of his legation, see Carpenter, *Henry III*, pp 197–200. Paris was evidently

Earlier in his *vita*, Paris recounted how when Edmund initially refused the archbishopric of Canterbury, he was threatened that the king's counsel would procure an unworthy foreigner, an intruder, in his place.¹⁰⁸ Matthew Paris, while inexplicit in declaring himself to be English, evidently identified with some sense of Englishness. Not only that, but Paris was hostile to foreigners who challenged or influenced English interests, especially those affecting the native church.

J.A. Giles, in his translation of the *Historia Anglorum*, seemed to think that Paris's scholarly diligence was grounded in a 'laudable patriotism' and that the 'pains which he took ... to improve it [i.e. his *Historia*] in every way and to gather fresh stores from every available source' could be ascribed to this ardour for his homeland.¹⁰⁹ Unlike those monks who dedicated their energies to producing theological works, Paris confined his attention wholly to writing a 'history of his own country'.¹¹⁰ Clearly, there is more than a tinge of English nationalist fervour in Giles's analysis. Comparatively speaking, one can similarly state that Gerald of Wales showed equal dedication to his *Topographia*, which he reviewed and improved long after the completion of the text, producing several recensions and version. However, to suggest that Gerald's dedication to writing and rewriting the *Topographia* was rooted in patriotism would be beyond the realms of reason. Undoubtedly, Gerald's and Paris's motivations for writing in the first instance differ substantially. Yet, to suggest that the impetus for Paris's rigour owed its existence to a sense of patriotism brushes his deep appreciation of the scholarly pursuit of history and getting it 'right' under the rug. Of course, Paris was concerned about English ecclesiastical and secular affairs; from what we know with some certainty, it was where he lived and wrote most if not all of his life. What is more, he produced one of the earliest surviving maps of Britain. However, to suggest that he was entirely inspired to work *pro patria*, ignores the fact that he was the resident historiographer at St Albans, a role established by Abbot Simon in the late twelfth century. As St Albans's premier historian, he was the continuator of what was essentially a

concerned for his interests and those of his brethren at St Alban's, one of the most influential religious houses in contemporary England. Paris's comment that the king 'appeared to worship his [i.e. Otto's] very footsteps' belies his concerns for Otto's involvement in English ecclesiastical and secular affairs, and is perhaps tinged with jealousy, Matthew Paris, *Chronica*, iii, p. 412.

¹⁰⁸ 'Nisi tu consentiens ibidem sine mora instituaris, procurabit regis consilium ut ibi aliquis alienigena tali prorsus ac tanto indignus honore ubi tot Deus sanctos ordinavit, intrusus subrogabitur', Wallace, *Life of St Edmund*, p. 554.

¹⁰⁹ Giles, *Matthew Paris's English history*, i, p. v.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

compiled history he inherited from his predecessor Roger of Wendover who had himself drawn on substantial material from other writers, including Ralph of Diceto and Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (c. 1173) as well as potentially a compilation that was already in circulation in St Albans, to write the earlier part of the *Flores historiarum*.¹¹¹ In short, Paris was entrusted with a predestined job to do, and it was one that he undertook with much gusto and creative spirit.

A question worth asking is whether Paris could have had a 'characteristically English' outlook despite not being ethnically English? Of course he could. This is one of the great problems with ascribing general attitudes to ethnic groups. Attitudes can be shared across national and ethnic divides; one only needs to consider the examples (set out in the first chapter of this dissertation) of medieval writers lauding the Irish or indeed lambasting them. Given the noted influence of Norman customs on English society following the conquest, would Vaughan not have been better off referring to Paris's outlook as 'characteristically Norman'? Given the complexities of contemporary identity, it seems impossible to find a term that caters for all sides of the argument. Rather than assuredly pigeonholing writers to certain identities, certainly with regard to those authors who did not explicitly identify themselves as English, perhaps we are better positioned to explore possible group affinities as expressed in the sources. Thus, an individual could have an affinity with the English or indeed identify with their points of view without being ethnically English himself.

Despite the lack of personal information we have on William of Newburgh, in the prologue of the *Historia* he provides an insight into his sense of identity when he states that the Venerable Bede composed a 'history of our race, that is the English' (*Historiam gentis nostrae, id est Anglorum, venerabilis presbyter et monachus Beda conscripsit*).¹¹² Newburgh continues by briefly commenting on Bede's material on the Britons, which offered him a segue to then attack Geoffrey of Monmouth for 'his wanton and shameless lying virtually throughout his book'.¹¹³ More importantly, however, it is in Newburgh's own commentary on the history of the Britons, that he expresses the view that although the Britons were the first inhabitants, the island of Britain belongs to the English (*etiam Britonum qui nostrae insulae primi incolae*).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ For a discussion regarding the extant versions of the works of Wendover and Paris and the possible existence of a compilation that Wendover inherited, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp 24–34.

¹¹² William of Newburgh, *History*, pp 28–9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 30–1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

William of Newburgh was not unusual in this regard; in fact, he was merely one of many writers in twelfth-century England who asserted English dominance on the island of Britain.¹¹⁵ Throughout the *Historia*, William is forthright in asserting the supremacy of the English in comparison with supposedly barbarian peoples such as the Scots.¹¹⁶ However, more than merely writing a history of England out of nationalist pride, historical writing was an opportunity for Newburgh to dissect meaning from the mundane, to inject historical events with religious meaning or, as Michael Staunton put it, hold ‘up a mirror to the morals of society’.¹¹⁷ It was Newburgh’s staunch religious conservatism and strict moral standards that led him to write his didactic history of England. As John Gillingham has written, Newburgh’s ‘intensely moral outlook meant that he judged and criticized people in the light of what he believed to be God’s providence’.¹¹⁸

In contrast, Ralph of Diceto and Ralph of Coggeshall never refer to group nouns, such as ‘English’ or ‘Norman’, self-referentially, which, as we have seen, has added to the difficulty of trying to place their origins. Nor do they use pronouns like Matthew Paris does to indicate his national and/or ethnic affinities. Exploring the national identities of the writers examined herein is a messy business, not least because of the paucity of detail that these writers offered up about their personal lives. Even the identities of writers whose lives have been presented to us in great detail are difficult to comprehend. Robert Bartlett made this issue the starting point for his biography of Gerald of Wales, dedicating the opening chapter – entitled “‘Gerald of Wales’ or “‘Gerald the Welshman’?” – to Gerald’s Welsh background as he presented it himself in his Irish and Welsh works and how scholars have

¹¹⁵ Geoffrey of Monmouth ‘did more than anything else to make men conscious of the term Britain’, see Denys Hay, *Europe: the emergence of an idea*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh, 1968), p. 131 [originally published as Denys Hay, ‘The use of the term “Great Britain” in the Middle Ages’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 81 (1958), pp 55–66]. For a useful study of medieval and early modern writers’ usage of the terms ‘Britain’, ‘Great Britain’ and ‘England’, as well as possible reasons for how and why these authors used them interchangeably, see Alan MacColl, ‘The meaning of “Britain” in medieval and early modern England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45:2 (2006), pp 248–69. See also Rees Davies’s inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Medieval History at Oxford which was published as *The matter of Britain and the matter of England: an inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 29 February 1996* (Oxford, 1996); idem, *The first English empire*, pp 31–53.

¹¹⁶ Newburgh refers to the Scots as a barbarian people on several occasions, although the king of the Scots David and his descendants, especially Malcolm, were much lauded by him, see William of Newburgh, *History*, i, pp 101–3, 106–11.

¹¹⁷ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 83.

¹¹⁸ John Gillingham, ‘William of Newburgh and Emperor Henry VI’, in Walter Koch, Alois Schmid and Wilhelm Volkert (eds), *Auxilia historica: festschrift für Peter Acht zum 90 geburtstag, kommission für Bayerische landesgeschichte* (Munich, 2001), pp 55–6.

interpreted the complex interplay between the national, ethnic and familial allegiances in his life.¹¹⁹ Given the struggles with his own sense of nationhood, Gerald of Wales was evidently more settled and focused on his familial connections to the Geraldines than his nationality or ethnicity. However, when circumstances necessitated it, he was forthright in declaring his national affinities. For instance, in the *Topographia* he refers to *noster Anglorum populus* while in *De Invectionibus* it is *genti nostre Britannice*.¹²⁰ It is noteworthy that Gerald's sense of affinity changed as he got older and his career progressed, or stagnated depending on how one looks at it. It is worth noting the complex relationship between national, ethnic and familial allegiances in Gerald's life because if scholars can struggle dealing with these aspects of human life in the case of a historical figure about whom we know so much, how then can one be so assured when writing about Gerald's fellow writers about whom we know so little?

An obvious but often overlooked aspect of contemporary works are their titles, which can potentially tell us something about the outlook of the writers that wrote them (assuming, which is by no means always the case, that the title was of their choosing). Most titles do exactly what they suggest: they provide, in usually chronological order, events as they occurred primarily but not always exclusively in England during the reign of some king or kings – Stephen, Henrys I, II or III, Richard, John etc. Roger of Howden's *Gesta* and William of Newburgh's *Historia* can be placed in this box. Roger of Wendover's *Flores* was more creative in its title than those aforementioned, but its general themes were similar: English ecclesiastical and secular affairs were the dishes of the day. Despite its name, Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum* mainly focused on events related to the history of the Cistercian order at large, as well as material of direct and indirect interest to Coggeshall abbey. His focus on the Cistercians meant that he did not confine his

¹¹⁹ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 16–29.

¹²⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, p. 183. Interestingly, Gerald directly refers to his identification with the Welsh in contrast to the English going so far as to assert their incomparability: *In nos et gentem nostram erebis invectionibus coram uobis impudenter inuehitur, ridens et deridens, seque bonis et honestis ridendum prebens. Sed qua fronte genti nostre Britannice gentem Anglicanam preferre ausus est uel et conferre, puta nationum omnium, que sub coelo sunt*, W.S. Davies (ed.), 'Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Invectionibus*', *Y Cymmrodor*, 30 (1920), p. 93. In the same chapter of *De Invectionibus*, Gerald states '*In terra sua Normannorum serui sunt Anglici et serui uillissimi*'. This is noteworthy and may further support the notion that it was difficult to separate Norman and English from each another. Gerald never uses the term 'Norman' self-referentially and only uses it on two occasions in his *Expugnatio*, see Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 236–7, 244–5, in both instances apparently to mean recent arrivals from Normandy.

geographical scope.¹²¹ Hence, the title *Chronicon Anglicanum* is, to a degree, a misnomer as it is far from being a chronicle that is generally focused on English national affairs. That, however, is part of its beauty as it tells us something about Ralph's own attitude towards English affairs: that local interests, indeed those of his monastic community, preceded those of national significance. English affairs were happening on a local level not just regionally, nationally or internationally. Ralph of Coggeshall's chronicle asserts this point well.

The titles of Gerald of Wales's works on Ireland present issues of their own. In the case of the *Expugnatio* there is a reasonable argument to be made as to whether it is more appropriate to call it the *Vaticinalis Historia* – a 'Prophetic history' – and to what effect this would have on how Gerald's motivations and intentions are understood in the wider historiography. In addition, although it perhaps goes without saying, the title of Gerald's first book on Ireland, *Topographia Hibernica*, is undoubtedly a misnomer unless *Topographia* is to be read both literally and figuratively as referring to the lay of the land broadly construed. Moreover, as the secondary literature shows, Gerald can be understood quite well as a 'colonial' or 'colonialist' writer.¹²² Indeed, his stereotyping of the Irish is undoubtedly the most carefully stylised and constructed to be found contemporary works. As Staunton notes, 'These stereotypes are seen to reflect and entrench a new attitude by the English, sometimes termed imperialist. This "imperialist" attitude not only set a significant precedent for later colonial adventures but served to reinforce English identity by accentuating a distinction between the English and their Celtic neighbours'.¹²³ However, many of the other writers examined here do not fit this frame so effectively. Gerald was intimately connected to the colonial mission in Ireland due to his family involvement on the ground in the invasion and subsequent conquest. The same cannot be said – certainly not without a high degree of speculation – about the other authors examined here. Indeed, the extent of colonialist propaganda that runs throughout the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* is unparalleled in these other works. Thus, although Gerald's material on Ireland and the Irish is readily compared with that of contemporaries such as William of Newburgh and Roger of

¹²¹ In his entry for 1195 alone Coggeshall writes about events in Austria, southern Italy, Sicily, and Spain, see Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 109.

¹²² Davies, *Domination and conquest*, pp 8–10; Rambo, *Colonial Ireland in medieval English literature*, pp 35–40, 130 n.35; Carroll, *Circe's cup*, pp 11, 14–16; Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, pp 10–11, 147–8; Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, pp 29–30, 62, 163; O'Leary, 'The heretic and the Hibernophobe', p. 2; Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, pp 342–3.

¹²³ Staunton, *The historians of Angevin England*, p. 342–3.

Howden, their intellectual pursuits, projects and products were very different to those of Gerald.

The very fact that Gerald of Wales wrote two entire books on Ireland means that we are not comparing like with like when we measure Gerald's depictions and perceptions of Ireland and its people against William of Canterbury's or Ralph of Diceto's or even Matthew Paris's. Even the chronological structure of the histories and chronicles of the period affects the extent to which one can compare these with Gerald's works on Ireland, which avail of a more flexible arrangement. In analysing contemporary depictions of the Irish, it might be more useful to consider writers based on a model that distinguishes writers' motivations and objectives as either colonialist or reformist. That, however, is not to suggest that religious reformists were not at all wedded to colonialism as a means to enact reform. Indeed, Gerald of Wales was a staunch reformer, but he can reasonably be described as a colonialist writer. However, that is more than likely the result of his family being directly involved in the conquest of Ireland. Thus, he had skin in the colonial game in Ireland. If one considers Roger of Howden and Ralph of Diceto, for instance, who were both critical of aspects of Irish life such as marriage customs and internecine warfare between Irish clans, one finds writers who cannot reasonably be described as colonialist. Indeed, although Ralph of Diceto argued that Henry went to Ireland to provide the public order and authority that were lacking there, there is no sense that Diceto wanted Ireland to be settled by men from the early Plantagenet realms and the Irish eradicated.¹²⁴ Henry and his men were bringing more civilised customs to the Irish. Moreover, Diceto notes that the Irish (*Hibernienses*) understood that the king's intentions were to establish and preserve peace in Ireland.¹²⁵ As a result of ongoing warfare between the Irish, they transferred their powers and rights to Henry so that peace might be made in Ireland.¹²⁶ The overriding sense here is that Henry was improving the state of affairs in Ireland. The desire for the colonial exploitation of Irish resources that one finds in Gerald's *Topographia*, for example, are nowhere to be found in Ralph of Diceto's accounts of the conquest of Ireland.

While Gerald's objectives were to write about Ireland's topography, nature, miracles, history and the customs of its people in his *Topographia* and about the

¹²⁴ Ralph of Diceto, i, pp 350–1.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

conquest of the island in the *Expugnatio*, the other writers concerned here set their minds to altogether different aims. Ralph of Diceto's works – *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, *Ymagines historiarum* and *Opuscula* – indicate that his framework, subjects of interest and outlook extended beyond English historical, political and royal concerns. While Ireland and its inhabitants figured in his universal history, they were of minor interest in the larger scheme of things. Indeed, Diceto's *Abbreviationes* was altogether wider in temporal scope than most contemporary works, extending back to the pre-Christian era. He was not solely at the behest of the king of England or any other patron for that matter, although he was intimately connected to the royal court. Of course, some historical English affairs up to 1147 were included in the *Abbreviationes*, but they were, crucially, part of a wider history of the world. Diceto's attempt to recount the history of the world through a brief series of annals represents, in J.F.A. Mason's estimation, 'the most ambitious attempt at a world history made until then by an Englishman'.¹²⁷ In comparison, Matthew Paris had also compiled a fairly expansive, universal, contemporary work in the *Chronica majora*, although its wide reach did not hide its rather obvious Anglocentric outlook.

William of Newburgh's history focused almost exclusively on English affairs aside from a description of Frederick Barbarossa's deeds in Lombardy, which was included as it provided the historical background to the emperor's interference in the papal schism of 1157, an event that was relevant to the interests of the English church.¹²⁸ In addition, the first four books of the *Historia* record significant events that occurred in the Holy Land; for instance, the struggle for Egypt in the 1160s.¹²⁹ While not directly related to England, this chapter allowed William to tackle the subject of warfare between Christians and Muslims. Beyond these examples, there is very little material that is not relevant to England's secular and ecclesiastical affairs in Newburgh's history. Utilising these examples from various contemporary works, the point being made here is that the titles of chronicles and histories can provide some insight into how authors conceived not only of their task at hand but how they understood affairs on local, national and international levels. Indeed, clearly, their interests and motivations were not always rooted in national or ethnic interests but rather more local or indeed universal ones. Moreover, when seeking to compare

¹²⁷ J.F.A. Mason, 'Diceto, Ralph de', *ODNB*.

¹²⁸ William of Newburgh, *History*, ii, pp 35–7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, pp 93–8.

depictions of and attitudes towards Ireland and the Irish, one must not lose sight of the sources themselves: What were authors' intentions when writing their works? How comparable are these sources not just in terms of content but also in terms of scope and structure?

As we have seen, while the origins of many contemporary writers remain unknown, it has not stopped historians describing them as 'English' with abandon. Often times, expressions of affinity with English interests, both ecclesiastical and secular, are used as evidence to argue for a writer's sense of Englishness. Unfortunately, however, rather than citing historians' and chroniclers' seeming affinities as deduced from the attitudes and opinions expressed in their works, they are often automatically ascribed an English identity *de facto*. Ásta Sveinsdóttir writes that 'different features of ourselves are socially salient in different contexts, but also ... we sometimes are acutely aware of how others see us and place us', and that 'The salient features set the constraints on what roles they [i.e. an individual] can have in the context, and the roles they have constrain their actions as well as enable some actions'.¹³⁰ It is important not to forget here the medieval distinction between *gens* and *natio*. Although the medieval scholar and cleric Isidore of Seville defined a *gens* as 'a multitude sprung from one principle' (*multitudo ab uno principio orta*), suggesting the notion of one being related to a single and unified collective, it is an ideal and a principle that likely did not affect those living outside the learned classes.¹³¹ After all, in general, how many medieval men and women were likely to have heard of Isidore of Seville, let alone his etymologies?

More than *natio*, the social nucleus for most medieval people was the family. Indeed, 'the individual belonged first and foremost to his family'.¹³² A sense of collectiveness and lineage was especially important to the lordly class that relied on such feelings to conserve a common patrimony. The multi-cultural and multi-ethnic elements of twelfth-century English society necessitated that those writers protect their status and interests, as well as those of their nearest and dearest, whether that be their religious communities, families or patrons. The complex, and often combinative, identities which existed in early Plantagenet England, as a result of the Norman conquest, are reflected in the ethnic backgrounds of some of the writers in

¹³⁰ Ásta Sveinsdóttir, *Categories we live by: the construction of sex, gender, race, and other social categories* (Oxford, 2018), pp 114, 118.

¹³¹ Isidore of Seville, *The etymologies*, p. 192.

¹³² Le Goff, *Medieval civilisation*, p. 280.

this period. The Benedictine monks and historians Orderic Vitalis (1075–c. 1142) and William of Malmesbury (b. c. 1090, d. in or after 1142) were notably of mixed parentage. Orderic was the son of Odelerius of Orléans (c. 1034–110.), who was a Norman priest and clerk, and of an English mother, while William had the blood of two races, English and Norman.¹³³

However, the most interesting example for studying the effects mixed ancestry could have on the personal and professional lives of an individual has to be Gerald of Wales. For all his foibles and fickleness, one thing can be said of Gerald of Wales with certainty: he was a man who was deeply invested in his family and, generally, immensely loyal to its members. Gerald's feelings for his family are best illustrated by the classic line from the *Expugnatio*: 'O family! O race! Indeed it is doubly noble; deriving their courage from the Trojans and their skill from the French'.¹³⁴ Thanks to her many marital and extra-marital liaisons, Gerald's grandmother Nest had five children by her husband Gerald of Windsor (Gerald's grandfather), as well as a bastard son by Henry I, another by Stephen of Cardigan, and at least one other illegitimate son by another man rumoured to have been Flemish.¹³⁵ As a result of their well-established connections to the royal circles of England and Wales, Nest's varied progeny found themselves among the leaders of Ireland's conquest: the Geraldines, the FitzHenrys, the FitzStephens, the Carews, the Barrys and the Cogans.¹³⁶

However, Gerald of Wales's Cambro-Norman ancestry affected him greatly and often caused patent irony and hypocrisy in his works when they are compared over the span of his lengthy career. Gerald was often internally conflicted when it came to processing the political and cultural realities of his day, and he often exemplified the popular idiom of eating one's cake and having it too, as Michelle P. Brown put it so aptly: 'He was in turn a denigrator and champion of the Celtic peoples from whom he claimed part-ancestry, a sycophant and critic of kings and courts, an espouser of the militaristic feudal ideals of the Marcher knights of Wales (from whose ranks he sprang), and a reforming idealistic cleric intent upon the unity

¹³³ Van Houts, 'Orderic and his father, Odelerius', pp 17–36; Orderic Vitalis, *HE*, ii, pp xiii–xiv, 262 n.4, iii, pp 6–8, 148, 150; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, i, pp 424–5.

¹³⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio*, pp 156–7. Gerald notes his alleged Trojan ancestry, but in less colour, earlier in the *Expugnatio*, pp 48–9. Cf. Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio*, pp 178–9.

¹³⁵ For the Flemish origins of the illegitimate child's father, see Huw Pryce, 'Giraldus and the Geraldines', in Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy (eds), *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland: the making of a myth* (Dublin, 2016), pp 53–68.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

of Christendom and the independence of the Welsh Church'.¹³⁷ Gerald's dichotomic Cambro-Norman identity is well represented by both pro-Norman and pro-Welsh tales in the *Descriptio*. While Gerald did have an intense sense of pride about where he came from, going so far as to describe Manorbier as 'the pleasantest spot in Wales', he did not readily identify with the Welsh people, although that is not to say that he totally despised the Welsh and their way of life.¹³⁸

Gerald was all too aware of his ancestral connections to the Dinefwr princes of Wales. His first cousin once removed was the most powerful Welsh ruler in Gerald's day, Rhys ap Gruffydd, the king of Deheubarth, with whom Gerald was well acquainted having dined in his convivial company on many occasions including at the bishop of Hereford's residence and having also enjoyed his hospitality at Llandovery. Gerald was all-too-happy to lean on his kinsmen in Wales when in need, borrowing money from a Welsh prince of Glamorgan when he found himself cash-strapped in France. Some of Gerald's prejudice towards the Welsh was likely born out of his cosmopolitan experiences in places like Paris, London and Rome as well as personal disappointment in those in whose midst he was born and reared for some years.¹³⁹

As a member of the Marcher community in Wales, Gerald had a clear sense of racial superiority over the native Welsh; however, this attitude would be tempered in his later years amidst the prejudice that met his own familial connections to the land of his birth, especially in the context of his pursuit of the see of St David's. From the extreme of having recommended, in his *Itinerarium*, that Wales be turned into a game reserve due to its untameable natives, Gerald became both a champion and chastiser of the Welsh people, castigating their vices while lauding their virtues in the *Descriptio* in which his conflicted view of his homeland, as well as its Welsh and Norman inhabitants, is most apparent. The final chapters of the *Descriptio* so clearly reflect Gerald's obscure feelings towards Wales and its people. The penultimate chapters outline how Wales could be conquered by the Normans while

¹³⁷ Michelle P. Brown, 'Marvels of the west: Giraldus Cambrensis and the role of the author in the development of the marginal illustration', in A.S.G. Edwards (ed.), *English manuscript studies 1100–1700* (London, 2002), p. 34.

¹³⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium*, pp 92–3.

¹³⁹ Michael Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis, the growth of the Welsh nation* (Aberystwyth, 1976), p. 81. As testy relationships with his nephew Gerald and former friend William de Montibus show, Gerald of Wales was unafraid of taking friend and foe alike to task when they disappointed or insulted him. Gerald's merciless attack on his enemies, especially Archbishop Hubert Walter, makes for delicious reading, see *De invectionibus*.

the final chapter – which was shorter – offers up advice on how the Welsh should resist the Normans!¹⁴⁰ Gerald's ambivalence towards the Welsh in his writings was necessary if he was to garner the respect and recognition of powerful figures such as Henry II and his sons. Indeed, the Welsh were perceived to be inferior compared to the more civilised English, thus if Gerald wanted to be on equal footing with the aristocrats of the English court, then he would have to keep his Welsh connections at arm's length. Despite his best efforts, his Welsh ancestry would forever be a hindrance on his ambitions.

Gerald's motivations for writing a more balanced account of the native Welsh way of life are difficult to pin down. Placating stakeholders, like most candidates for high-profile public-facing roles do, may have been one reason, as Gerald undoubtedly wanted to garner local Welsh support for his nomination to the bishopric of St David's. Gerald was, in many ways, a politician in cleric's clothing. He was well attuned to pandering to patrons – the many panegyric prefaces he wrote in dedication to the kings and princes of England make that plain.¹⁴¹ However, he was also capable – and unashamedly so – of abandoning his public allegiances when his ambitions necessitated such action or when he felt ignored, criticised or disappointed by former allies. He was, as previously mentioned, well attuned to the Welsh blood, however diluted it was, that ran in his veins. No matter how internally conflicted he was, Gerald had a deep-rooted urge to keep the embers of the Welsh past lit for posterity.¹⁴² However, his identification with and sympathy for the Welsh people would not last long after his failure to acquire the see of St David's. Following the settlement of Wales in 1203, Gerald dusted his hands of both Welsh and English alike and, in his later years, he turned his attentions and energies to praising the just and generous Capetians.¹⁴³ However, to brush Gerald's ever-changing attitudes off as reflecting a capriciousness or disloyalty forgets the hardship of medieval life. 'Forging extensive groupings of kinship was an important way of

¹⁴⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio*, pp 218–27.

¹⁴¹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia*, pp 20–1 [to Henry II]; idem, *Expugnatio*, pp 20–5 [to Richard, count of Poitou], 261–5 [to King John].

¹⁴² Gerald's inclusion of the old man of Pencadarn's prophesy regarding the destiny of the Welsh is suggestive of such ancestral feeling: 'this nation [the Welsh] ... can never be totally subdued through the wrath of man, unless the wrath of God shall occur. Nor do I think that any other nation than this of Wales, or any other language, whatever may hereafter come to pass, shall on the day of severe examination before the Supreme Judge, answer for this corner of the earth', see Richter's translation, *The growth of the Welsh nation*, p. 74; Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio*, p. 227.

¹⁴³ For analysis, see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp 79–86. See also 'Gerald's poem welcoming Prince Louis, 1216', ibid., 'Appendix II', pp 181–3; *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, i, pp 374–7.

ensuring support networks in an environment where famine, disease, and hunger were always a potentiality that had to be guarded and protected against'.¹⁴⁴ Gerald's mixed ancestry was a double-edged sword: it granted him more support networks through which he could sustain himself – think of his reliance on his Welsh relations for money when times were tough – but it also undermined his merits and status as a cleric in English society.¹⁴⁵

Towards the end of his life, Gerald was disillusioned with many aspects of earthly existence, and he became increasingly self-absorbed, writing a memoir or biography of sorts and a fierce invective against his enemies, *De invectionibus*. It is clear, however, that Gerald still thought highly of his family connections to his Cambro-Norman kin as descended from his grandmother Nest, whom he eulogised in his *De rebus* detailing their many possessions and achievements.¹⁴⁶ However, one still has the sense that Gerald never felt quite at home in neither England nor Wales. Indeed, if it were not for the military successes of 'the sons of Nest', Gerald may not have so frequently mentioned them in his works. As Michael Richter summed it up: 'He [Gerald] stood between two nations at a turning point in his life, and he did not know where he belonged. ... The only *nation* which he ever belonged to was the class of scholars, the *natio* in the medieval academic sense'.¹⁴⁷ Even more than a Geraldine or a scholar, Gerald was, perhaps first and foremost, a man of God. It was his clerical inclinations that excited his intellectual endeavours.

There are issues with ascribing English identity to many of the medieval writers concerned here, that much is clear. However, perhaps the primary issue is in the notion that there was one type of English identity in the period. On the contrary, rather than assuming that contemporaries shared the very same characteristics, customs and outlooks – whatever they might be – perhaps local and regional forms of Englishness were more important for individuals in early Plantagenet England. In her recent study of regional identities in medieval England, Emily Dolmans convincingly argues that English national identity may not have been the focus of writers, rather Englishness in a plural sense was more important. Dolmans focusses on intercultural encounters in post-invasion England whereby English identity 'perpetually negotiates

¹⁴⁴ Miriam Müller, 'Conflict, strife, and cooperation: aspects of the late medieval family and household', in Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller and Sarah Rees Jones (eds), *Love, marriage, and family ties in the later Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003), p. 311.

¹⁴⁵ For Gerald's own views on the subject, see Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, pp lviii–ix.

¹⁴⁶ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus*, pp 58–60.

¹⁴⁷ Richter, *The growth of the Welsh nation*, p. 78.

complex cultural influences, and is continually in the process of being reimagined and remade'.¹⁴⁸ Dolmans offers an intriguing conclusion to her study:

'Englishness is multivalent, with different meanings, nuances, and identity strategies that depend on context, location, or ideology. We are instead left with a multitude of Englands, none more or less English than the others. ... These varied identities are defined by cultural contact, but not necessarily in an oppositional sense; rather, they are intercultural, operating in constant dialogue with other identities and are perpetually in the process of being created, adapted, and performed. ... By reading from the edges, looking both inwards toward England and outwards from England, the multivalent geographic identities housed within England and beyond its borders can come more fully into view'.¹⁴⁹

In particular, the idea that a defining feature of Englishness was its ties to the physical, spatial limits of England is an interesting one. Frederik Barth asserted that it is 'the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses'.¹⁵⁰ Barth's view of the importance of place and space here is certainly applicable to the subject of identity in early Plantagenet England. Moreover, it supports the earlier point made in this chapter about using 'English' as a demonym rather than a hard-and-fast ethnonym to define a person and thereby affect how we view and understand that person – or in our case a medieval writer – and their motivations and actions. If we take the case of the English in Ireland a few centuries later, the notion that they had become Irish – or less English – to the English in England, may also be sufficient evidence of such thinking regarding locative ethnicity.

Conclusion

While the historians and chroniclers examined herein wrote about the English past to varying lengths and degrees in order to record events for the sake of posterity as well as perhaps to construct a sense of continuity between the past and present, the paucity

¹⁴⁸ Emily Dolmans, *Writing regional identities in medieval England: from the 'Gesta Herwardi' to 'Richard Coeur de Lyon'* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 189–90.

¹⁵⁰ Frederick Barth, 'Introduction', p. 15.

of information that we have on the social, national and ethnic backgrounds of these writers adds an intriguing dimension to the study of contemporary notions of Englishness imbued in contemporary works. Ralph of Diceto and Matthew Paris, both writing from different contexts but both intimately connected with the great and the good of their times, provide little to no detail concerning their origins and lives, which is quite interesting given the astonishing amount of detail and material contained within their works and the great lengths to which both writers evidently went to ensure their works were topical and well-informed. The twelfth century marked a changing tide in how histories and chronicles were to be written going forward. The works of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon lay the foundations for a new approach to writing about the past and reporting contemporary events in a way that was increasingly outward looking.

Examining the views of writers in early Plantagenet England forces one to cast the mirror back at oneself as a historian and challenge the basic pillars of definition which decades – and in some cases centuries – of historiography have built upon. One of the assumptions about the invasion and subsequent conquest of Ireland is that a generalised ‘English’ view of Ireland existed in the period. However, this ‘view’ is rarely questioned in the historiography. There are certainly writers who perceived the Irish as an uncivilised people yet to be touched by the civilising influences of the French, which had changed how politics, economy and society functioned in England following its own invasion and settlement by the Normans. William of Malmesbury was one of the first writers to have adopted such a view. Later writers, not least William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales, took the mantle, to a large extent, from Malmesbury in this regard. While the negative depictions expressed in their works are theirs (as well as being influenced in part by antecedent writers, peers, patrons and others) to what extent can one reasonably extend their views and say that they are representative of *the* ‘English’ view of Ireland? Perhaps theirs was *an* English view; one that existed among many other possible views. Indeed, if other, more ambiguous, positive or indifferent attitudes are considered, the kind to be found in the works of Roger of Howden, Ralph of Diceto and Ralph of Coggeshall as well as vernacular sources, how does this affect how people in early Plantagenet England perceived Ireland and its inhabitants?

First and foremost, the identities of the writers themselves is of some import; however, as has been discussed above, we are rarely sure of contemporary writers’

origins, so identifying historians and chroniclers as ‘English’, ‘Norman’ or otherwise is often merely an exercise in conjecture. Can we ascertain an essentially *English* view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England? Ultimately, the answer is no. The reality is that no matter how much one tries to elucidate a generalised perception of Ireland, its people and its affairs from the extant works of writers in early Plantagenet England, the attitudes of the majority of English society are an implicit omission. When examining the sources, we must accept the fact that they are representative of what Rees Davies referred to as the Great Tradition of the literate and articulate few and not of the Little Tradition of the unrecorded majority.¹⁵¹ While humans are the mainstay of historical works, the historiography of humankind has, in general, been written from the perspective of the literate *élite*. As such, it goes without saying that the view of the world, as well as the people, places and events that occurred therein, is not usually representative of the poor, the downtrodden, or indeed those who were bereft of the opportunity for self-advancement. The works of chroniclers and historians in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England are guilty of such omission.

Gerald and his fellow writers were members of a class above. Their social roles as ecclesiastics allowed for the possibility of climbing the ladder of power and influence, with many of them regularly rubbing shoulders with august individuals, from popes to princes. The connections that historians and chroniclers such as Ralph of Diceto, Roger of Howden, Matthew Paris and Gerald of Wales had with the royal court make this point plain. They were far from being representatives of the majority. Despite this, we can nonetheless establish, with at least some degree of certainty, a spectrum of views that is representative of the varied class of ecclesiastics that chose to write about Ireland. While it is extremely difficult to ascertain the view of the unrecorded majority, one can imagine that some degree of the view from the ground is imbued in the works of the aforementioned contemporary writers given the multiplicity of views that are represented, ranging from outright contempt to admiration to indifference.

Our evidence is, at its core, coloured by the thought-world of religious men who were members of a literate *élite* far removed from the quotidian realities of the medieval English peasantry. Thus, a question worth asking is: Were the illiterate majority thus completely bereft of literary expression and representation? While this is undoubtedly a difficult question to answer, one can say with certainty that the

¹⁵¹ Davies, ‘Presidential address: I. Identities’, p. 3.

illiterate majority in early Plantagenet England transcended social, political and economic divides. Hence, it is more sensible, perhaps, to ascribe the attitudes and perceptions expressed in contemporary chronicles and histories not to an ethnic or national group but rather to what we might refer to as a ‘literate mentality’.¹⁵² We must rely on the extant written record for an insight into contemporary attitudes towards Ireland and its people puts one at an immediate disadvantage. This is not to undermine charters and histories as sources but rather recognises the inherent biases of such works. As the record sources mentioned above show, greater nuance could be written into charters, for instance, when it was necessary.

A point that is rarely considered in the historiography is that people’s attitudes change over time. This can be seen most evidently in Gerald’s public expression of his national and ethnic affinities which changed throughout the course of his career. Therefore, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the views of other writers may have changed – for better or worse – over the course of their lives too. In certain scenarios, Howden, Coggeshall and Diceto may have called the Irish barbarians, even though none of them wrote as such in their works. What is more, the nature of contemporary chronicle and history writing was not conducive to the inclusion of such attitudinal developments, given the chronological and/or thematic structure, such that revisions and additions were difficult to undertake unless they took the form of addenda or corrigenda in margins and above text or entirely new manuscripts. With no disrespect intended to medieval Ireland or its people, in the eyes of contemporary writers in England there was no necessity for such remedial effort. What is more, we must also consider the possibility that the attitudes expressed in histories and chronicles were penned as they were in order to satisfy patrons and peers, and not necessarily to express the deeply held beliefs of the authors themselves. Sadly, the historian must sometimes be satisfied with asking questions rather than finding answers. As the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly once wrote for James Lydon, summarising the plight and privilege of the historian:

‘I live and write in doubt

loving the heartbeat of this passionate art

¹⁵² This term is inspired by Michael Clanchy who noted that the shift from memory to written record was a cultural one that took place ‘in the imaginations and assumptions of numerous individuals [literate]. The unquantifiable sum total of these varied experiences – or rather, of those that are recorded in some form – constitutes what may be described as the medieval ‘literate mentality’, see Clanchy, *From memory to written record*, pp 188–9.

still wondering what the years have done and said'.¹⁵³

Although the writers here wrote from within and about England, it did not necessarily mean that their thought worlds and outlooks were directed by their national or ethnic affinities. Indeed, it is clear that for many of these writers, especially Ralph of Coggeshall, Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Wendover and his protégé Matthew Paris, their first loyalties lay with their religious communities and identities.

Every writer is born out of a multitude of histories – personal, familial, local, national and global – interconnected in their own nuanced and complex ways. The historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England were no different. Between their histories there is ebb and flow; connect and disconnect; enlightenment and ignorance. The histories we write cannot – and perhaps should not – be separated from who we are as people and all our biases, contradictions and idiosyncrasies. The identities of the writers concerned here are left to us to construct and reimagine as there is so little information available to elucidate their characters and sense of identity outside of their authorial self. Indeed, identity, one of the great preoccupations of historical studies, is a fickle friend and trusty foe. The study of national identity is an interesting, but messy, area of historical inquiry. In his series of lectures on the peoples of Britain and Ireland, the inimitable Welsh historian and then president of the Royal Historical Society Rees Davies referred to the notion of a people as 'utterly elusive and fatally wishy-washy'.¹⁵⁴ But there is also the delicate reality of ethnic and national identities and their 'curiously simultaneous solidity and insubstantiality' as Anthony D. Smith put it.¹⁵⁵ National identities carry an inherent fluidity in terms of their conception and expression, as well as more tangible elements that engage with the minds and hearts of their adoptees. It is this inherent juxtaposition that continues to cause us problems.

¹⁵³ Brendan Kennelly, 'Who will solve it? (for J.F. Lydon)', in T.B. Barry, Robin Frame and Katharine Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland: essays presented to J.F. Lydon* (London and Rio Grande, 1995), p. x.

¹⁵⁴ Davies, 'Presidential address. I. Identities', p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford, 1986), p. 2.

Conclusion

For those men who arrived in Ireland in the late twelfth century, Ireland was a foreign country; they did things differently there. Its social organisation, particularly in terms of its lack of centralised governance, made it peculiar compared to the forms of government established in France and England. Yet while Ireland was different in many ways, it is hard to believe Nicholas Vincent's analogy that these conquerors 'found themselves time-travellers to an Iron Age'.¹ As has been the case across the history of mankind, if needs must, alliances and accommodations – political or otherwise – were often formed. By the mid-thirteenth century, English and Irish were, in certain parts of Ireland, living cheek by jowl. For many, economic imperatives necessitated that both natives and newcomers came together and assimilated to varying degrees across the island. In addition, cultural and political assimilation could be instigated by an Irish chieftain's fealty to an English lord leading to an uncomfortable calm between *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* or perhaps by daily realities such as economic opportunity or the Irish social customs of fosterage and gossiprid,² or indeed intermarriage, which was often key – and sometimes a last resort – to brokering peace in local disputes. Over the course of the first hundred or so years of English Ireland, Irish and English had come to know each other better than they had ever done before. Contact between the lordship of Ireland and early Plantagenet England was regular, with news and rumours being key exports between the two. However, the perceptions and depictions of Ireland and the Irish did not always reflect the reality on the ground.

¹ Vincent, 'Angevin Ireland', p. 205.

² For a comparative study of child fostering in Northwest Europe, see Peter Parkes, 'Celtic fosterage: adoptive kinship and clientage in Northwest Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48:2 (2006), pp 359–95; for studies of the Irish case, see E.J. Gwynn, 'Fosterage', in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics* (13 vols, Edinburgh, 1913), vi, pp 104–9; F. Fitzsimons, 'Fosterage and gossiprid in late medieval Ireland: some evidence', in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Liz FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland c.1250–c.1650: Land, lordship & settlement* (Dublin, 2001), pp 138–49; Lahney Preston-Matto, 'Saints and fosterage in medieval Ireland: a sanctified social practice', *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies*, 5 (2011), pp 62–78.

What were historians' and chroniclers' attitudes towards Ireland, its people and its affairs in early Plantagenet England? How 'original' were their points of view? Who or what influenced and motivated their views and perceptions? How representative are their views of wider society in early Plantagenet England? One cannot underestimate the importance of Latin histories and chronicles in justifying the conquest of Ireland in the high medieval period and, indeed, beyond. These works directly influenced English views of Ireland for centuries, and one might be so bold as to argue even up to the present day. The perceived authority of the writers explored in chapter 1 – from Strabo to William of Malmesbury – and their subsequent impact can be seen explicitly in the works of later writers. The same was true of twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers and their influence on writers in the late medieval and early modern periods.

For instance, in the early fourteenth century, the Benedictine monk and chronicler Ranulf Higden acknowledged his indebtedness to Gerald of Wales stating, '*Giraldus Cambrensis, qui descripsit Topographiam Hiberniae, Itinerarium Walliae et Vitam Regis Henrici Secundi sub triplici distincione*'.³ While in the early sixteenth century, the Italian cleric Polydore Vergil (c. 1470–1555) would draw upon Gerald's *Topographia* in order to pen his highly popular *Anglica historia*, which was supposedly commissioned by Henry VII to justify Tudor endeavours to the scholars of Europe.⁴ Later that same century, the 'great' deeds of the English conquest in Ireland as outlined by Richard Stanihurst would not have been so great without the work of Gerald.⁵ Indeed, without him, Stanihurst's history of Ireland would perhaps never have been written. Of course, the popularity of Gerald's Irish works in Britain and on the European continent was and continues to be exceptional; indeed, most contemporary writers cannot claim to have reached such heights in their own time let alone today. However, it must be noted that the influence of historical works on the masses is incredibly difficult to discern. Whether it was the twelfth century or

³ *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis: together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century Vol I* (London, 1865), p. 24.

⁴ Denys Hay, *Polydore Vergil: renaissance historian and man of letters* (Oxford, 1952), p. 9, cited in Eric Haywood, 'Humanism's priorities and empire's prerogatives: Polydore Vergil's description of Ireland', *PRIA*, 109C (2009), p. 195.

⁵ It is worth noting that Stanihurst's *De rebus in Hibernia gestis* was met with great anger on the continent, not only from exiled Irish but also their allies in Portugal, where it was banned and burned on the orders of the inquisition, and in Spain where it was often deemed '*prohibido*', see *Great deeds in Ireland*, pp 45–72.

seventeenth century, such works were within the purview of a literate class consisting primarily of well-educated and wealthy individuals.

Clearly contemporary audiences were more interested in myths and wonders than the seemingly more mundane genre of history. Indeed, the most popular work to have been written in early Plantagenet England was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, of which at least forty-eight copies survive from the twelfth century alone.⁶ No doubt that some of the more reserved writers of the twelfth century would have ascribed such interest in pseudo-historical works as exhibiting Juvenal's opinion that the masses are too easily distracted by *panem et circenses*.⁷ The immense popularity of Geoffrey's work, confirmed by the number of extant copies, suggests that the histories and chronicles of which this dissertation has treated likely did not exercise extensive influence on wider society. However, there is one exception: Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*. Indeed, this work, which cleverly blends tales of the weird and wonderful with historical material – veracious or not – presents the perfect storm: a work that draws on the intrigue of readers in preternatural phenomenon while offering seemingly reliable and more tangible historical information. Thus, Ireland and all of its associated parts – its people, places and indeed its past – were malleable constructs open to reinvention and alteration by chronicler and conquistador alike.

As well as being a popular work, Gerald's *Topographia* – and indeed the *Expugnatio* – is unusual in another respect too: it was a book solely focused on Ireland, and therefore unlike any other contemporary work that dealt with Irish affairs. Thus, when one compares Gerald's Irish works with William of Newburgh's *Historia*, Roger of Howden's *Gesta* or Roger of Wendover's *Flores* one should be mindful that while they might share some similarities, they also differ in crucial respects. These writers' ambitions were not shared with Gerald, who, as is well known, had personal ties to the colonial enterprise in Ireland and, as a result, staunchly defended his family's endeavours on the island. No doubt, other writers concerned here were reform-minded like Gerald; for instance, both Newburgh and Diceto recognised the destruction caused by internecine warfare in Ireland and felt that the king of England could install a more peaceful means of government in the country. However, while writers could and certainly did hold critical views of Irish

⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae*, ed. Acton Griscom (London, 1929), pp. 550–84.

⁷ Juvenal, *Satire* 10.77–81.

life, some – such as William of Canterbury – saw the shedding of fellow Christian blood, no matter their alleged barbarity, as being *sine causa*.

Based on evidence from Gerald of Wales's *oeuvre*, it would seem that he, contrary to the sometimes-reductive characterisations of Gerald as an out-and-out Hibernophobe, expressed some favourable (or ambiguous) views of Ireland, specifically with regard to the climate and the musical prowess of the Irish people. This is not to say that Gerald was a supporter of the Irish way of life nor an attempt to rehabilitate his reputation *per se* with regard to Ireland; rather, the intention is to offer a critical and holistic examination of Gerald's view of Ireland and not simply the spicy, well-worn chapters of his Irish works. Gerald was certainly unique amongst his peers when it came to writing about Ireland. However, the most important question when it comes to Gerald's view of Ireland is whether his is the rule or the exception. Gerald was evidently a self-conscious man. He is characterised in the historiography as not only a self-conscious writer but also one exuding a hubris fit, equally, to incite the scorn or the delight of potential readers. However, Gerald's frequent self-praise smacks of such overexertion that it seems to belie an underlying insecurity about his place in the world as 'a child of a frontier society at the edge of feudal Europe', as Robert Bartlett put it. Moreover, the literary undercurrents present in Gerald's works on Ireland suggest to us that he had more than the simple act of recounting historical and roughly contemporaneous events in mind. Ever the textual tinkerer, Gerald as a matter of practice revised his works throughout his life. Keagen Brewer has suggested that Gerald's constant revisions were a response to contemporary criticism, so Gerald's traditional characterisation as a seemingly assured personality seeking to denigrate the Irish with abandon may not be so accurate.

Sadly, in historical studies we too often forget the individuality of the writer – their individual desires, motivations, and their foibles – conscious or unconscious in design. The views of the Latin historians and chroniclers presented here were born out of an admixture of contexts: political, economic, social and cultural. Moreover, the internal struggles of self are not irrelevant here. On the contrary, they are perhaps especially relevant when one thinks of the internal conflict writers such as Gerald of Wales experienced as the child of mixed Welsh and Norman ancestry. Indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that when writers such as Gerald wrote about the Irish they were implicitly writing about their internalised conflicts with regard to their self-

conception. The writers concerned here, while they are often conveniently lumped together as being representative of the cadre of English writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, their desires, actions, and motivations reflected innumerable elements of their complex identities that cannot be fully understood. Moreover, their works mirror aspects of their respective self but not necessarily the sum of their parts.

It is easy to superficially categorise the medieval writers examined herein as ecclesiastics, historians, chroniclers, or literati etc. However, these men were far more than these convenient social groupings. Their lives and, by extension, their works were influenced by the complex and often intangible interplay between mental – cognitive processes such as perception and imagination – and environmental – external influencers such as society, culture, politics and economics – phenomena. Their writings on Ireland and the wider subjects of their attention were borne out of their respective individual minds as they negotiated the ebb and flow of their rearing and education, their status by birth and by social advancement, their professional roles and responsibilities to their communities both ecclesiastic and lay, and the intellectual pursuits that drove them to record for posterity the past and present as they interpreted them. In attempting to pin down a general view of Ireland in early Plantagenet England, we are inevitably forced to construct some sort of narrative through rigorous historical examination; to balance the landscapes of fiction and fact. The act of interpreting history, as Declan Kiberd remarked, is ‘an imprisonment and an exclusion, an act of aggression against the multiplicity of life’.⁸ Indeed, the very ambition of this thesis is, in many ways, an affront to the multiplicity of medieval life. However, this is what the writing (and making) of history is all about: the stories that we create from the materials of the past, no matter how insignificant they might be.

The works of historians and chroniclers during this formative period in the shared history of Ireland and Britain remind us of their influence on the construction of identities and the future developments of international relations. Indeed, in our attempts to make sense of the human experience – both past and present – we would do well to remember Rees Davies’s warning that ‘it is at our peril that we forget that history is also the first of the humanities’. Histories and chronicles have played a leading role in the Anglo-Irish relationship that has developed over the centuries

⁸ Declan Kiberd, ‘The search for a usable past’, programme for Brian Friel’s *Making History* at the Guildhall, Derry, Field Day (1988), p. 3.

following the arrival of a mixed band of soldiery at Bannow Island in May 1169. The religious reform, military might, and commercial control that the Normans brought to bear in Britain forever changed the social, cultural, political and economic landscapes of the Hiberno-British archipelago. Tracing how Ireland was perceived and portrayed in early Plantagenet England presents us, at its source, with much of the trappings of power and control and indeed the expansionism and consolidation of the same in the lands ruled by the early Plantagenet kings. The imperialist project of the Plantagenet kings encouraged those who would benefit in political and economic terms to view the native peoples that they conquered as primitive and ignoble, for what else could justify their domination given that the Irish, as well as the Welsh and Scots, were fellow Christians?

In reality, most people, including those with an education, living in early Plantagenet England likely knew nothing of major substance about Ireland other than potentially a speculative and sensational assortment of details that emerged from an amalgam of well-worn classical *topoi* and a smattering of genuine factual information disseminated and acquired through commercial, ecclesiastical, political and intellectual interactions between the peoples of Ireland, Britain and the European continent. The contemporary sources proffer a contemporary view that is far more heterogeneous than has traditionally been portrayed in the historiography. While it is undoubtedly true that many historians and chroniclers in early Plantagenet England depicted Ireland as a backward and primitive place inhabited by a treacherous and disorderly people who lacked the spirituality and agricultural knowhow to place them amongst the more civilised peoples of the world, it was also a place of miraculous happenstance, wonderful phenomena, a mild climate that encouraged a natural bounty of flora and fauna that made Ireland a veritable Land of Milk and Honey. The dichotomy of native and newcomer is one that exists throughout the historiography of medieval Europe and ignores, in crude terms, the realities of medieval warfare, politics, and economics, as well as the greatest hindrance to studies of any social group in the past: the sheer multiplicity of life experiences across any given society. This multiplicity of life has presented itself in a myriad of ways in the works concerned here, whether through the superficially comparable social castes, levels of education, ecclesiastical roles, and *lingua franca* that contemporary historians and chroniclers lived with and by or the more nuanced realities of their day-to-day lives of which we often know very little about.

The viewpoint of the writers concerned here is as important as what they described in their works. Indeed, the chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England were complex characters who emerged from an admixture of backgrounds, personal experiences and ambitions. The extant material on Ireland emerged from a complex hodgepodge of motivations; while some historians and chroniclers wrote to educate their clerical brothers, to memorialise the history of their monasteries for posterity or to record contemporary political events for the sake of the historical record, others sought material gains in reputation and wealth, and others to entertain and enthrall audiences with accounts of the weird and wonderful – the *Topographia* being a fitting example. Of course, contemporary writers could be motivated by a combination of the above and should not be assumed to have been fixed in their intentions and ambitions. Indeed, one's motivations for action can develop over time and no doubt the historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England were no different. For them Ireland, its people and indeed its affairs were putty in the hands of a generally erudite, creative and perceptive coterie of ecclesiastics working with blank canvasses framed by long-standing traditions, some of which dated to classical and early medieval times. They wrote to impress their patrons, their fellow religious and, no doubt, themselves with the fruits of their intellectual curiosity. While one can justifiably critique the quality, creativity and originality of contemporary works, one cannot diminish their intellectual pursuits and efforts, which were nothing short of genre-defining.

The twelfth century was, in John Gillingham's words, 'the crucially formative century' for the attitudinal tidal change in the history of English attitudes towards Ireland.⁹ Can we see a qualitative development in what was being written about Ireland during the first century of English Ireland? Having surveyed the Irish-related content in histories and chronicles in early Plantagenet England and the many attitudes expressed and portrayals painted, a changing tide can clearly be discerned across the first century of English conquest on Irish soil. By the mid-thirteenth century, there had been, without doubt, an increase in mentions and accounts of Ireland, its people and affairs in contemporary chronicles. It is difficult to assert, however, that there was a sea change in attitudes towards the Irish just because contemporaries were increasingly interested in Ireland. The first hundred or so years of piecemeal English rule in Ireland had occurred at the same time that significant

⁹ Gillingham, 'The English invasion of Ireland', p. 24.

developments in literacy did. By the end of the thirteenth century, writs, charters, chronicles and histories had all become familiar literary modes for serf and scholar alike. However, illiteracy was still a common reality for the majority in early Plantagenet England, so it is impossible to know with any degree of certainty how influential contemporary chronicles and histories were on the illiterate majority's attitudes towards and perceptions of their Irish neighbours. In all likelihood, however, it was unlikely that they were very influential. One must remember that contemporary works, especially chronicles, were not usually read in their entirety, from beginning to end; rather, readers would dip into chapters or chronicle entries as dictated by their own interests. Ralph of Diceto confirmed as much when he included thematic and subject symbols in his works. Gerald of Wales had detailed contents sections in both the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio*. Thus, whatever is written about Ireland in any given contemporary work may not have been read at all by its individual readers. Even in Gerald's Irish works, a reader may have been particularly interested in the natural descriptions of the first *distinctio* while having no interest in the ethnographic material of the third. This, of course, could have been the other way round, with a reader being specifically interested in the accounts of Irish customs. Either way, it is difficult to gauge how audiences engaged with Gerald's works. What we can say with some degree of certainty is that the *Topographia Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* were popular works in their own times.

As a body of writers, the historians and chroniclers of early Plantagenet England produced what is in effect a hodgepodge of material on Ireland and its inhabitants, ranging from origin myths to commercial exchange, natural wonders to sexual mores, the deeds of Irish saints to contemporary political events. Moreover, contemporary commentators held a multiplicity of views when it came to writing about Ireland, with some rehashing well-worn classical *topoi* that painted Ireland as an otherworldly place on the edge of the known world while others made significant departures in topical scope, breaking new ground in the process. Analysis of the sources reveals a series of dichotomies generated by the contemporary context of early Plantagenet colonialism: civilised and barbarian; organised and unruly; the worldly and otherworldly. Furthermore, individual writers possessed nuanced attitudes and opinions that ranged from contempt for aspects of Irish life to admiration to something in between. Indeed, one cannot and should not assume that contemporary attitudes towards the Irish were wholly negative and passively

received; on the contrary, contemporary commentators who expressed anti-Irish views actively chose to adopt them while others chose not to. The chroniclers and historians of early Plantagenet England were learned and, evidently, intelligent men. It is reasonable to suggest, then, that they were conscious of their opinions and ability to articulate and understand how and why things happened in their worlds and people acted or reacted to the events of their day. However, they were also men conscious of their place in a literary tradition that was many, many centuries old. The fact of the matter was that contemporaries often did not know where to start when it came to writing about Ireland and therefore had to rely on antecedent works from which they would excerpt material that they would include verbatim or paraphrase. Occasionally excerpted material from multiple sources would be amalgamated, such as in the case of Ralph of Diceto's descriptions of Ireland in the *Abbreviationes* and *Ymagines*. Other times, old material was modified or combined with new, original material. Thus, ascribing anti-Irish views to contemporary writers does not always accurately reflect their own attitudes towards Ireland.

While questions remain, one thing is certain: that Ireland, its affairs and indeed its people featured at all in contemporary works reflected interests in, concerns for and fascinations with the island. Was there anti-Irish material in contemporary works? Yes. Did every writer express an anti-Irish attitude? No. Moreover, just because ecclesiastics thought that aspects of Irish life were backward did not mean that they were Hibernophobes who despised the Irish and wished for them to be eradicated. The attitudes expressed within the Latin chronicles and histories of early Plantagenet England should not be too-readily accepted as being indicative of the view of a homogenous 'English' society but rather as the views of a variety of political and intellectual figures – kings, lords and churchmen – who were self-serving and self-interested, and wanted part of the action and, more so perhaps, the profits of the colonial adventure in Ireland. Added to these, too, were historians and chroniclers who were of undoubtedly decent moral character and sought nothing more than to keep the embers of the past lit for future generations eager to understand the past for the sake of their present and, perhaps, their future.

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‘Generally speaking, the ordinary man should be content with the terrible secret that men are men—which is another way of saying that they are brothers. He had better think of Caesar as a man and not as a Roman, for he will probably think of a Roman as a statue and not as a man. He had better think of Coeur-de-Lion as a man and not as a Crusader, or he will think of him as a stage Crusader. For every man knows the inmost core of every other man. It is the trappings and externals erected for an age and a fashion that are forgotten and unknown. It is all the curtains that are curtained, all the masks that are masked, all the disguises that are now disguised in dust and featureless decay. But though we cannot reach the outside of history, we all start from the inside. Some day, if I ransack whole libraries, I may know the outermost aspects of King Stephen, and almost see him in his habit as he lived; but the inmost I know already. The symbols are mouldered and the manner of the oath forgotten; the secret society may even be dissolved; but we all know the secret’.

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