

KATHLEEN HUGHES MEMORIAL LECTURES 12

ROBERT BARTLETT

Gerald of Wales and the Ethnographic
Imagination



HUGHES HALL
&
DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hughes Hall was founded in 1885 to take women graduating from the universities and give them a one year training to become teachers. As the first college in Cambridge specifically for graduates it broke new ground. Originally called the Cambridge Training College (CTC) it was re-named in 1948 in honour of its first Principal, Elizabeth Phillips Hughes, who had been one of the early students of Newnham College and became a respected leader in the theory and practice of education.

E. P. Hughes came from Wales and was a proponent of the language and culture of Wales. But, apart from this Welsh heritage, there is no known connection between the College and the scholar now commemorated in this series of lectures.

Hughes Hall became a full college of the university in 2006. It consists currently of around 50 Fellows and some 650 student members, men and women, who study for doctoral or M.Phil. degrees, for the postgraduate diplomas and certificates offered by the University, and, as mature undergraduates, for the BA degree. The academic community of Hughes Hall is now extremely diverse, including students of over 60 nationalities and representing almost all the disciplines of the University. Enquiries about entry as a student are always welcome. Information can be found on the college website at <http://www.hughes.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate-admissions/>

Kathleen Winifred Hughes (1926-77) was the first and only Nora Chadwick Reader in Celtic Studies in the University of Cambridge. Previously (1958-76) she had held the Lectureship in the Early History and Culture of the British Isles which had been created for Nora Chadwick in 1950. She was a Fellow of Newnham College, and Director of Studies in both History and Anglo-Saxon, 1955-77. Her responsibilities in the Department of Anglo-Saxon & Kindred Studies, subsequently the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, were in the fields of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh history of the early and central Middle Ages. Her achievements in respect of Gaelic history have been widely celebrated, notably in the memorial volume *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*, published in 1982.

The Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures both acknowledge her achievements and seek to provide an annual forum for advancing the subject. Each year's lecture will be published as a pamphlet by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic on behalf of Hughes Hall.

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PREFACE

In 2000, thanks to an anonymous benefaction, an annual lecture was established at Hughes Hall in memory of Dr Kathleen Hughes, 1926-1977. A Fellow of Newnham College, Kathleen Hughes was the first Nora Chadwick Reader in Celtic Studies in the Department of Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic (ASNaC).

Over the years the lectures have embraced a wide range of topics in the early history and culture of the British Isles, reflecting the wide scholarly interests of Kathleen Hughes. Each lecture has been published, both on the College's website (<http://www.hughes.cam.ac.uk/>) and as a printed pamphlet, to coincide with the following year's lecture. They are listed on the back cover of this booklet. Hughes Hall is grateful to the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic for acting as hard-copy publisher. Copies are available from ASNaC

The College is pleased to host the annual lecture and hopes that this academic initiative will make a significant scholarly contribution in the research areas in which Kathleen Hughes was a distinguished scholar.

Sarah Squire
President
Hughes Hall

GERALD OF WALES AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

This lecture brings me to familiar territory, since I wrote my doctoral dissertation on Gerald of Wales (also known as Giraldus Cambrensis) in Oxford in the 1970s, where my studies were guided and inspired by the late Sir Richard Southern, who has imprinted his vision of this period very deeply on the world of scholars. My first encounter with Gerald, however, was while I was an undergraduate at Cambridge, when a fellow student a few years older and studying the esoteric Cambridge degree Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Old Norse, came into my room excitedly, with a copy of the translation of Gerald's *Topography of Ireland* in his hand. 'Listen to this', he said, and proceeded to read out the opening sentences:

Ireland, the largest island beyond Britain, 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. The view from this side is rather clear; that from the other, over such a distance, is more vague.¹

This caused us much hilarity. Did this crazy medieval author really think the distance between Ireland and Britain was greater than that between Britain and Ireland?

For some years thereafter, Gerald had a place in my mind as a prime exhibit of what would nowadays be called the 'alterity' of the medieval period, the 'Otherness' of its mental processes, perhaps to be put alongside angelology, heliocentrism and trial by ordeal. Then the day came when I read Gerald's original Latin:

Ireland is situated one short day's sail beyond Wales. But between Ulster and Galloway the sea is only half as wide. From both sides the headlands of each country can be seen in good weather, here (*hinc*, 'in the latter case') more distinctly, there (*illinc*, 'in the former case') more vaguely, on account of the distance.²

The 'here' refers to the space between Galloway and Ulster, the 'there' to the space between Wales and Ireland and there is, of course, nothing

¹ Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis), *History and Topography of Ireland*, tr. John J. O'Meara (Penguin Classics, 1982), p. 33 (the translation was originally published in 1951).

² Gerald, *Topographia hibernica* 1. 1, ed. James F. Dimock (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 5, Rolls Series, 1867), pp. 1–204, at p. 22. All translations of Gerald are my own.

ridiculous in the assertion that the distance between Ireland and Wales is greater than the distance between Ireland and Galloway and that consequently you can see one country from the other more distinctly in the latter case than in the former. Gerald's apparent Otherness stems, in this instance, from a simple mistranslation.³

This is a salutary tale, warning us not only, of course, against reliance upon translations, but also on a too great readiness to attribute strangeness to our medieval subjects. Of course we should not try to turn all people everywhere into versions of ourselves and we should recognize that radically different ways of thinking or living may have existed amongst long-dead people (as indeed they do amongst living people), but we should also be aware that often 'their common thoughts about common things', to borrow Maitland's phrase,⁴ were not dissimilar from ours.

We know more by far about the life of Gerald of Wales than about most figures of his time, because he was his own most enthusiastic chronicler, even producing a work that can be called an autobiography.⁵ He came from the Anglo-Norman knightly class which had established itself by conquest in south Wales from the late eleventh century. His brothers and cousins were important fighters and conquerors but he himself was early destined for the life of Latin letters. His boyhood drilling in grammar included a harsh lesson in the comparative and superlative: his teachers had him repeat 'stupid, stupider, stupidest' until he learned the pattern.⁶ Soaring away from this grim pedagogy, he came to Paris certainly by 1165. Gerald was there, 'applying himself vigorously to liberal studies', as he says, on the night of 21–22 August 1165 when the future Philip Augustus, King of France, was born.⁷

³ The same mistranslation undermines the idea that 'Gerald seems to be suggesting that the British view of the Irish is quite clear, while the reverse is less so': Asa Simon Mittman, 'The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the 'Marvels of the West'', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 97–112, at p. 98.

⁴ Frederic W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), p. 520.

⁵ Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis*, ed. J. S. Brewer (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 1, Rolls Series, 1861), pp. 3–122; this work, plus extracts from other of Gerald's books, is translated as *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales* by H. E. Butler (London, 1937; reissued, with guide to further reading by John Gillingham, Woodbridge, 2005); on Gerald, see Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982, reprinted, with supplementary bibliography, as *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages*, Stroud, 2006).

⁶ Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis* 1. 2, p. 23.

⁷ *liberalibus animi studiis vehementer applicaret*: Gerald, *De principis instructione* 3. 25, ed. George F. Warner (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* 8, Rolls Series, 1891), pp. 292–3.

His grounding in letters and learning and his influential family connections brought him ecclesiastical preferment. He became archdeacon of Brecon around 1175 and embarked on vigorous reforming activity, which, naturally, made him both friends and enemies. After further advanced study in Paris, where he taught as well as studied, he was eventually recruited by Henry II as one of his court clerks. Court service, which Gerald entered at the age of 38 or so, seems to have unleashed his pen. From the late 1180s until his death in 1223 a stream of works followed (ten volumes in modern editions).

Writers of Gerald's time and location, north-western Europe in the late twelfth century, had a strong concept of their place in the world. Alexander Nequam saw the Paris of his own day as the culmination of a millennial process of transference of knowledge from East to West – *translatio studii*, 'the transfer of learning', meaning that leadership in the world of scholarship and learning had passed from the ancient Middle East and Egypt, via ancient Greece and Rome, to contemporary western Europe. Gerald, like other writers of his time, believed that this westward transmission involved not only learning but also political and military dominance. Military might and literary distinction went together. Just as in the Greece of Alexander or the Rome of the Caesars, he wrote, so in contemporary France the study of war and the study of wisdom flourished side by side.⁸ The great French poet Chrétien de Troyes, writing at exactly this time, agreed: 'Our books teach us,' he wrote, 'that Greece first had the highest reputation for knighthood (*chevalerie*) and learning (*clergie*) and then knighthood and the highest learning came to Rome. Now they have come to France. God grant that they long remain there ...'⁹

So Gerald believed, like others of his day, that he was in the historic centre of the learned and literary world. His own large corpus is an important part of the literary output of that world, that intellectual and literary efflorescence sometimes called the 'Twelfth-century Renaissance'. He himself presents a self-image as a 'man of letters': 'love of letters moved me from boyhood', he proclaimed,¹⁰ while late in life he repeatedly stressed the way that literary work can provide a posthumous reputation: 'care for posterity drove me to choose the pursuit of writing and, since this present life is transitory and fleeting, it is

⁸ *De principis instructione* 3. 12, p. 259.

⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, lines 28–34, ed. Alexandre Micha (Paris, 1957), p. 2.

¹⁰ *me litterarum a puericia traxit amor*: Gerald, *Expugnatio hibernica*, introitus in recitacionem, ed. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin, 1978), p. 8.

pleasing to live in the future at least in memory and to be celebrated with the honour of praise and enduring titles of fame.’¹¹

In the judgment of posterity, the most popular of Gerald’s works, for both medieval and modern readers, were the four that he composed in the late 1180s and early 1190s dealing with Ireland and Wales.¹² All have an element that can be called ethnographic, in that one important focus is a people, a *gens*, the native Welsh and the native Irish respectively, and an attempt is made to delineate their customs and way of life in some detail. Gerald’s picture of the Irish has never won him many friends amongst the Irish, but his portrayal of the Welsh is more even-handed – he did have a Welsh grandmother. Famously, he ended his book *Description of Wales* with chapters describing not only how the Welsh may be conquered but also how they may resist and rebel,¹³ a dialectical tour-de-force typical of scholastically trained thinkers.

The two works which contain the most ethnographic material are the *Topography of Ireland* and the *Description of Wales*. The former, Gerald’s first book, has a tripartite structure. Book One contains a physical description of Ireland and accounts of Irish fauna, Book Two relates the natural marvels and miracles of Ireland, and Book Three addresses the nature and customs of the Irish and their history. The work was an immediate success. Robert de Beaufeu, canon of Salisbury, was a great admirer of the book, Gerald tells us, and said that, if the twenty best clerks in England had spent the same time on such a work as Gerald, they would have been pleased to have produced a book as good.¹⁴ And Robert de Beaufeu was a man of sound judgment – he was the author of a poem

¹¹ *me quidem scribendi studium eligere posteritatis cura coegit. Et quia momentanea et fluxa est praesens haec vita, juvat saltem in futuro memoria vivere, et perpetuis famae titulis laudis honore celebrari*: Gerald, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, praefatio prima, ed. James F. Dimock (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 6, Rolls Series, 1868), pp. 1–152, at p. 7.

¹² (In order of composition) Gerald, *Topographia hibernica, Expugnatio hibernica, Itinerarium Kambriae, Descriptio Kambriae* (ed. James F. Dimock (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 6, Rolls Series, 1868), pp. 153–227); on the manuscripts see, Catherine Rooney, ‘The Manuscripts of the Works of Gerald of Wales’ (Ph. D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2005).

¹³ Gerald, *Descriptio Kambriae* 2. 8–10, pp. 218–27.

¹⁴ Gerald was fond of this anecdote: *Invectiones* 4. 10, ed. W. S. Davies (*Cymmrodor* 30, 1920), p. 92; *De jure et statu Menevensis ecclesiae* 7, ed. J. S. Brewer (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 3, 1863), pp. 99–373, at pp. 335–6; *Epistola ad capitulum Herefordense de libris a se scriptis*, ed. J. S. Brewer (*Giraldi Cambrenis Opera* 1, 1861), pp. 409–19, at pp. 413–14.

in praise of beer.¹⁵ Later in the Middle Ages, Gerald's *Topography* even won a word of praise from so demanding a literary critic as Petrarch.¹⁶ More unusual in a formal sense is the *Description of Wales*. This is a short ethnographic monograph, a genre that had not before been attempted in the medieval West. It is a vivid and forceful picture of native Welsh society. According to the *Description of Wales*, the Welsh are bold, outspoken, hospitable, musical, mendacious, thieving, quick to fight, quick to run away, quick to fight again. They are a pastoral people, living off the meat and milk of their flocks, with a little oats, and a warlike people, with the whole population trained in arms. One of the most damaging things about the Welsh, according to Gerald, was their refusal to acknowledge the rule of one king.

It is hard to provide a convincing intellectual pedigree for this work. The major works of classical ethnography had not been transmitted to the Latin West. Herodotus was unknown, while a solitary manuscript of Tacitus' *Germania* slumbered in a German monastic library.¹⁷ It is arguable whether such a thing as a tradition of ethnographic writing can be identified in the early medieval West.

It would certainly be possible to try to track down some of the models and stimuli within the medieval West that lay behind Gerald's ethnographic work, but rather than do that, I would like to do something different, to attempt to sketch out some other pre-modern traditions of ethnographic writing, with the hope of locating Gerald's writing and thinking in a context wider than that of the Latin West.

If we turn from the early medieval West, with its very thin ethnographic tradition, to the Muslim world, we find a quite different situation. From as early as the ninth century, Muslim reports of other peoples survive, showing an interest in geography and ethnography that was to be a characteristic feature of Muslim learned culture. The most famous medieval example is Ibn Battutah, who travelled as far as China in one direction and Timbuctoo in the other in the first half of the fourteenth century,¹⁸ but there was a long tradition of Arabic travel narrative before him.

¹⁵ Robert de Beaufeu, *De commendatione cervisie*, ed. E. Braunholtz, 'Die Streitgedichte Peters von Blois und Roberts von Beaufeu über den Wert des Weines und Bieres', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 47 (1927), pp. 30–8.

¹⁶ *libellus De mirabilibus Hybernie, a Giraldo quodam aulico Henrici secundi regis Anglorum, licet tenui rerum filo, non rudi tamen verborum arte contextus*: Petrarch, *Familiarum rerum libri* 3. 1. 7, ed. Ugo Dotti, *Le Familiari, libro terzo* (Rome, 1994), p. 6.

¹⁷ L. D. Reynolds, ed., *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 410–11.

¹⁸ Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham (4 vols., Hakluyt Soc., 2nd series, 110, 117, 141, 178, 1958–94).

Dating from the year 851 of the Christian era, the *Account of China and India* composed by an anonymous Arabic author provides a perfect example.¹⁹ It blends observations about sea- and land-routes and about the products of the various countries, with classic ethnographic material: clothing, diet, funerary customs, and so forth. There is a vivid description of trial by ordeal among the Indians, a note of the use of cowrie shells as money by the Maldivian islanders and a particularly full and convincing picture of the Chinese: ‘the Chinese are big and good-looking. Their colour is pure white with a hint of red. No people have hair as black as the Chinese.’ The *Account* describes the city-based administration of China, the role of eunuchs as financial administrators, the huge salaried army employed for border-defence, the widespread literacy, the government monopoly of salt and tea. All in all, the impression that China made on this Muslim observer is of a heavily-governed but orderly society.

The Muslims were not particularly interested in Europe beyond Byzantium, but there are some accounts of the cold northern lands. Ibn Fadlan, for instance, writing in the 920s, gives the earliest detailed account of Viking funeral practices.²⁰ Later in the tenth century Ibrahim ibn Ya‘qub, an Arabic-speaking Jew, travelled in eastern Europe and left a series of shrewd observations on the peoples and places he encountered.²¹ As a traveller, he is naturally concerned with such practicalities as distances and the price of grain, and he has a keen eye for economic realities: he describes the international traders who come to Prague, the manufacture in that city of saddles, bridles and shields, and the way the Bohemians use pieces of cloth as small currency. Ibrahim’s account of the Slavic fortresses, often built in marshy spots with ditches

¹⁹ *Ahbar as-Sin wa l-Hind: relation de la Chine et de l’Inde rédigée en 851*, ed. Jean Sauvaget (Paris, 1948); see André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11e siècle 2: Géographie arabe et représentation du monde: la terre et l’étranger* (Paris, 1975), chapter 3, ‘L’Extrême Orient’.

²⁰ *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, tr. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London, 2012), pp. 1–58; curiously enough, his account was the basis for a novel by Michael Crichton, which was then made into a Hollywood film with Antonio Banderas as Ibn Fadhlān: Michael Crichton, *Eaters of the Dead* (London and New York, 1976); *The Thirteenth Warrior* (1999), dir. John McTiernan.

²¹ *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, tr. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London, 2012), pp. 162–8. See Peter Engels, ‘Der Reisebericht des Ibrahim ibn Ya‘qub (961/966)’, in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends*, ed. Anton von Euw and Peter Schreiner (2 vols., Cologne, 1991) 1, pp. 413–22; Petr Charvát and Jiri Prosecky, eds., *Ibrahim ibn Ya‘qub at-Turtushi: Christianity, Islam and Judaism meet in East-Central Europe c. 800–1300 AD* (Prague, 1996).

and earth banks reinforced with posts, approached by wooden causeways, has been fully confirmed by archaeology. He can distinguish the Slavs from the Prussians, who speak a quite different language, and notes that some of the Baltic trading cities recognise no king and are ruled collectively by the elders. Once in a while he makes an overt comparison: dowries among the Slavs are very high, and negotiations over dowries are ‘like those of the Berbers’. We might be less impressed by his account of the Amazons, female separatist warriors living in a ‘city of women’ to the west of the Rus, except that he has a very good informant: ‘Otto, the king of the Romans, told me about it’. In a passage curiously reminiscent of Gerald on the Welsh, Ibrahim writes, that the Slavs ‘are brave and aggressive. If it were not for their disunity, and the fact that they are widely dispersed and divided into many tribes, no nation could stand against them.’

The Chinese were not only objects of ethnographic observation but were themselves acute ethnographers. The period of Gerald’s literary activity, from the 1180s to c. 1220, coincides very closely with the reign of Jayavarman VII of Cambodia (1181–1219), the king who brought the complex at Angkor to its greatest extent, and, while we have no ethnographic accounts of the civilization of Angkor exactly contemporary with Gerald and Jayavarman, we do possess one from later in the thirteenth century, from the acute Chinese observer Zhou Dagan (Chou Ta-Kuan), who wrote an account of his journeys in Cambodia in 1296–7, describing the customs and countryside in some detail.²²

Like Ibrahim ibn Ya’qub among the Slavs, Zhou Dagan has an eye for what products are available and what not: he notices the absence of soy sauce, for example. Diet, sexual practices, hair and clothing are all worth a comment. ‘From the king down,’ he writes, ‘the men and women all wear their hair wound up in a knot, and go naked to the waist, wrapped only in a cloth.’²³ Natural objects of attention are practices different from Zhou’s own. For example, he notices the Khmer method of disposing of the dead – generally exposure to scavenging birds and beasts, but with a growing fashion for cremation. It strikes him that they write from left to right, not top to bottom, that there is a free market in salt (in contrast to the state monopoly in China) and that women urinate standing up (exactly the same point Gerald made about the Irish in his *Topography*).²⁴

²² Zhou Dagan, *A Record of Cambodia*, tr. Peter Harris (Chiang Mai, 2007). There is a succinct summary in Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor* (London, 2001), pp. 134–8.

²³ Zhou Dagan, *A Record*, p. 50.

²⁴ Gerald, *Topographia hibernica* 3. 26, p. 172.

But apart from these detached observations, what emerges most strongly from Zhou's account is Angkor as a tropical palace society, with a king hedged about by ritual and surrounded by a huge harem; a hierarchy imprinted by a code of display, with styles and numbers of parasols and sedan-chairs marking ranks and grades; and a complex network of local officials. This account of palace regimes could apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other palace societies where central places, encrusted in minute rituals, served to distribute wealth and rank among the elite. The prototype of such societies is Minoan Crete and it is worth noting that it was here, in Crete, that Western writing began, in the form of inventories of palace wealth.

So Zhou Dagan paints Angkor as a 'palace society' just as Gerald depicts native Wales as a 'pastoral society'. I am sure that an expert could pick out omissions, simplifications and imported assumptions in the former account just as has been done in the case of the latter. Huw Pryce, for example, although recognizing the great value of Gerald's work for understanding twelfth-century south Wales, comments, quite reasonably, 'the contrast between the Welsh and other peoples implicit in the (*Description of Wales*) is overdrawn'.²⁵ Perhaps Gerald's picture of the native Welsh is overdrawn, but overdrawn only in the way that a Weberian 'ideal type' can be said to be overdrawn, by isolating and emphasizing certain features in order to create a strong, memorable and intellectually useful image.

Zhou Dagan was writing about Cambodia at exactly the same time (and I do mean the same *year*) that Marco Polo was dictating his impressions of all that he had seen in China and other parts of Asia, and indeed the most substantial and engrossing ethnographic texts produced by medieval Europeans in the period after Gerald were the descriptions of Asia, by merchants like Marco Polo and by missionaries and envoys, notably the Franciscans such as William of Rubruck and John of Piano Carpini, in that curious century or so of openness between Europe and Asia that followed the great Mongol conquests. If one looks at these pre-modern ethnographic writers as a whole, taking in Gerald, the Europeans in Asia and the Muslim and Chinese reporters, then despite the different cultures they came from, and the different purposes for which they travelled – envoy, merchant, missionary – a few common features emerge.

First, all of these ethnographic writers were travellers, and they often have as common themes the practicalities of travel – problems with mounts, translators, prices, food – although a distinction can be drawn

²⁵ Huw Pryce, 'In Search of a Medieval Society: Deheubarth in the Writings of Gerald of Wales', *Welsh History Review* 13 (1986–7), pp. 265–81, at p. 272.

between ethnography that is largely a by-product of travelogue and ethnography that attempts a panoramic synoptic view of a people. Gerald, author of both the *Journey through Wales* and the *Description of Wales*, ambitiously undertook both genres. Then, of course, there is the simple fact that travellers notice things that contrast with the world they know. Gerald points out the relative absence of towns and trade among the Welsh, the ninth-century Muslim account of China and India notes that neither the Chinese nor the Indians slit the throats of the animals they slaughter (i.e. the meat was not halal) and Zhou Dagan explicitly states that the Cambodians, unlike the Chinese, do not use human excrement as a fertilizer and suggests that Chinese visitors should avoid the subject.²⁶ Particularly noticeable are divergences of sexual behaviour, for understandable reasons. This awareness of differences is perfectly comprehensible, although, of course, as mentioned, it may lead the observers to over-emphasise them. Another thing that is striking is what a common repertoire of customs the observers isolate: diet, hair and dress, funerary customs, methods of warfare – what one might call the Herodotean menu.

To classify writing such as Gerald's as ethnographic is not entirely uncontroversial. It might be objected that this is an inappropriate, perhaps anachronistic, label. Might it not be best to reserve the adjective for the discourse of professional anthropology, which obviously did not exist in Gerald's time? Certainly, ethnography was not an academic discipline in the Middle Ages, in the way that law or theology were. The status of ethnography in the pre-modern period was just like that of history – it was non-academic. But to be learned and to be academic are not the same things. There clearly was, if not a tradition, then a recurrent inclination, for learned men who encountered peoples of different social customs to set those out in discursive analytical prose.

In the case of Gerald, one can argue for the ethnographic nature of his works from the way they were regarded by medieval readers and writers. There are several late medieval manuscripts which contain both one or more of Gerald's Irish works and one or more of the accounts of the Mongols which were produced by Franciscan envoys in the mid-thirteenth century. The compilers and readers of these manuscripts obviously saw a natural connection between Gerald's observations on the Irish and these Franciscan accounts of the customs of a distant Asian people.²⁷

²⁶ Zhou Dagan, *A Record*, pp. 67–8.

²⁷ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 66, containing the text of William of Rubruck, was part of the same manuscript as Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 1. 27, which has Gerald's Welsh and Irish works; London, BL, MS Royal 13 A XIV contains Gerald's Irish works as well as the account of John of Piano Carpini;

One important distinction between these pre-modern ethnographers is that some were describing societies which, although alien, were of comparable levels of literacy, commercialization and urbanization to their own, while others looked down on the societies they encountered as on a lower level of civilization. The Muslims in India or China found much strange but did not conceptualize the local societies as savage or primitive. Latin Christians might sometimes need a lesson in this. One of the shocks that faced the friars who visited the Mongol empire in the mid-thirteenth century was that the Mongols clearly thought that they themselves were superior – ‘they consider themselves lords of the world’ wrote one bewildered Franciscan envoy.²⁸

Gerald’s position regarding the Welsh and Irish, particularly the Irish, is much more like that of later European colonialists. He believes that he comes from a superior society and that the Irish are backward (in a quite literal, social evolutionary, sense) and barbaric. ‘This people is a wild people ...,’ he wrote, ‘a people that has not gone beyond the first way of living ...’ The Irish had stuck to their woods and pastures while elsewhere ‘the order of humankind proceeded from the woods to the fields and from the fields to towns and gatherings of citizens.’²⁹

Here the politics of the situation is crucial. The Angevin period saw a number of firsts: England’s first canonized saint, England’s first pogroms, England’s first female writers, England’s first university. To these we can add England’s first colony. In the winter of 1171–2 Henry II took an army to Ireland, received the submission of most of the important Irish kings, granted out Leinster and Meath as fiefs to two of his barons and established royal garrisons in Dublin, Waterford and Wexford.³⁰ Dublin Castle remained the centre of English rule in Ireland from the Angevin period until 1922.

Of course, English or Anglo-Norman expansionism had been taking place in Wales for a hundred years before Henry II sailed across the Irish Sea, but there the political consequences were different: there was no institutional dependency on England. We might reasonably talk of ‘colonial Wales’ in a loose sense, but it was not ‘a colony’ in a stricter sense.

London, BL, MS Royal 14 C XIII contains Gerald, *Expugnatio hibernica*, William of Rubruck, Odoric of Pordenone and other travel material.

²⁸ Reputant enim se dominos mundi: William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium* 9, ed. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana I: Itinera et Relationes fratrum minorum saec. XIII et XIV* (Quaracchi, 1929), pp. 164–332, at p. 189.

²⁹ Gerald, *Topographia hibernica* 3. 10, p. 151.

³⁰ The scholarly literature is very large. One of the most penetrating analyses is Marie-Thérèse Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1989).

By contrast, in Ireland after 1171 there was a political unit, the Lordship of Ireland, permanently subject to another political unit, the Kingdom of England, and from the late twelfth century the king of England was also Lord of Ireland (in 1541 the title was changed to King of Ireland). English laws and English institutions were introduced as part of a conscious policy. As the government of King John's son, Henry III, put it, 'the laws of our land of Ireland and of England are and should be identical.'³¹ The royal Justiciar of Ireland was a genuine viceroy, as later variations of the title such as King's Lieutenant and Lord Deputy make clear. The nature of Angevin expansion in Ireland was apparent to the courtier Gervase of Tilbury. Henry II, he wrote, was 'the first to drive out the foul Irish tribes and divide up the land into knights' fees to be possessed by the English'.³² Medieval Europe had very few colonies in the strict sense, but Ireland was certainly an example.³³

It is no surprise that scholars interested in a postcolonialist perspective on the Middle Ages should have turned their attention to Gerald.³⁴ Gerald first went to Ireland in 1183 with his brother Philip, who had been granted a fief in the south-west of Ireland and whose descendants, the Anglo-Irish Barrymores, held it down to 1823, when the last earl of Barrymore died of apoplexy in Paris.³⁵ Gerald returned to Ireland in 1185 in the retinue of John, the king's teenage son, who had been granted the country in order to stop him being 'John Lackland', his contemporary nickname (only three kings of England have ever been to Ireland and John is one of them). Gerald is thus deeply enmeshed in the story of England's first colony.

³¹ *Rotuli litterarum clausarum in turri Londinensi asservati (1204–27)*, ed. T. D. Hardy (2 vols., London, 1833–44) 1, p. 497.

³² Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia* 2. 10, ed. S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford Medieval Texts, 2002), p. 308.

³³ This is a disputed point. See, for example, the discussion of the issue in Brendan Smith, *Colonisation and Conquest in Medieval Ireland: The English in Louth, 1170–1330* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 1–9.

³⁴ Notably Jeffrey Cohen, 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlines: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Cohen (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 85–104. See also Rhonda Knight, 'Procreative Sodomy: Textuality and the Construction of Ethnicities in Gerald of Wales's *Descriptio Kambriae*', *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (2002), pp. 47–77; eadem, 'Werewolves, Monsters and Miracles: Representing Colonial Fantasies in Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*', *Studies in Iconography* 22 (2001), pp. 55–86. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds., *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2005) has nothing on Gerald but its focus is primarily on vernacular literature.

³⁵ *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom*, ed. G. E. C[okayne] (rev. ed., 12 vols., London, 1910–59) 1, pp. 435–47.

One might of course ask why postcolonial theory is relevant here, since Gerald was involved in the early days of colonialism not its aftermath, but the ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ should not be taken too literally. The editor of *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, published in 2001, makes this explicit:

Just as postmodernism no longer signifies that which historically follows modernism in some binary of opposition, but is instead something that always-already existed alongside (and perhaps before) the modern, the postcolonial could be said to originate ‘from the very first moment of colonial contact’, as a ‘discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being’.³⁶

It is easy to laugh at this, with its idea of the postmodern being before the modern, but it is of course true that the essence of postcolonial theory is not to do with being *after* colonialism; it is to do with reappropriation of the discourse that colonialists have claimed and with questioning the centrality of the centres that colonialists assert. *Provincializing Europe*, the title of a postcolonialist study by Dipesh Chakrabarty, expresses this aim very well.³⁷

I would like to take an example to illustrate the fortunes of Gerald’s colonialist discourse. One of the more notorious passages in his *Topography of Ireland* is the description of an inauguration ceremony in Tir Connail in north-west Ulster.³⁸ According to his account, after all the people have assembled, the king-designate copulates with a white mare, which is then killed and made into an enormous horse stew. The king then bathes in this, eating the meat and handing it around to his followers. ‘And so,’ concludes Gerald, ‘by this rite, but not rightly (*rite non recte*), his kingship and dominion is confirmed.’

The *Topography of Ireland* was Gerald’s most successful work, even being available in an abridged Provençal version in the fourteenth century, but of course it faced the same limitations that applied to every literary work in a manuscript culture. The appearance of the *Topography of Ireland* in print for the first time in 1602³⁹ ensured a wider dissemination of what Gerald had written on the Irish and consequently, and unsurprisingly, a hostile reaction on the part of Irish writers, especially since publication of Gerald’s decisively pro-colonial picture in that year coincided with the great crisis of Gaelic Ireland at the beginning

³⁶ Cohen, *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, p. 3.

³⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000).

³⁸ Gerald, *Topographia hibernica* 3. 25, p. 169.

³⁹ In William Camden, ed., *Anglica, Hibernica, Normannica, Cambrica, a veteribus scripta* (Frankfurt, 1602).

of the seventeenth century – the Nine Years' War, the Flight of the Earls and the ever deeper etching of the colonial conflict as confessional conflict. Of the three major counterblasts to Gerald's *Topography* written at this time, two were by Jesuits and one by an Irish exile in Spain.⁴⁰ The longest, and the only one to appear in print during the seventeenth century, was the *Cambrensis Eversus* ('Gerald Refuted') of the exiled Irish Jesuit John Lynch. Lynch regarded the *Topography of Ireland* as 'that poisoned spring whence all other writers, who hate Ireland, imbibe their envenomed calumnies'.⁴¹ All three Irish writers discuss Gerald's account of the inauguration rite, contesting its accuracy in indignant tones: one asks 'were you in your senses and of sound mind when you wrote these things, Cambrensis?'⁴² This could certainly be classified as 'a discourse of oppositionality', to use the postcolonialist phrase.

Since Gerald never visited Tír Conaill and knew little, if any, Irish, he must have had what anthropologists call (or used to call) 'native informants'. And what sort of informants could they have been, who told him such a tale of a king copulating with a horse? They might, of course, have been endowed with a good sense of humour and seen him coming, in a word, subversive Irishmen, taking the Mickey. They might, however, have been not subversive but collusive Irishmen, telling him what they knew he wanted to hear. Postcolonial studies posit both kinds of informant. Dimock, the nineteenth-century editor of the *Topography of Ireland*, imagined the former, picturing Gerald as 'imposed on by his informants', since he was 'exactly the man that a joker would fix upon as fair and first-rate game', while it was by the latter that the Jesuit John Lynch explained the story: Gerald, he writes, 'must have greedily and foolishly gathered up the silly stories of persons anxious to worm themselves into his favour'.⁴³

So far the situation is quite clear: an outrageous colonialist calumny encounters outraged nationalist criticism. What is truly curious is the change of opinion about this inauguration rite that has taken place in modern times. Crucial for this change was the influence of a new notion: the Indo-European. Starting from a great scientific discovery of the late eighteenth century, the recognition that most of the European

⁴⁰ Stephen White, *Apologia pro Hibernia adversus Cambri calumnias*, ed. Matthew Kelly (Dublin, 1849); Philip O'Sullivan Beare, *Zoilomastix, Selections*, ed. Thomas J. O'Donnell (Dublin, 1960); John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus* (St Omer?, 1662), ed. and tr. Matthew Kelly (3 vols., Dublin, 1848–51).

⁴¹ Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus* 1, p. 97 (Kelly's translation).

⁴² *Sensatus et mentis compos ista scripsisti, O Camber?: White, Apologia* 8, ed. Kelly, p. 97, n. §.

⁴³ Gerald, *Topographia hibernica*, p. lxxvii; Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus* 1, p. 131 (Kelly's translation).

languages are linguistically related to those of Iran and India, there arose a huge edifice of scholarship based not simply on this linguistic fact but on a lost world that was posited behind it – the world of the Indo-Europeans. A society was imagined, not just a language, with its own rituals, myths, social structures and so on. The mental world of the nineteenth century is very strange and alien in comparison with that of the twelfth, and the part played by this imaginary, ancestral, magical world of the Indo-Europeans in the nineteenth century is a good example of that strangeness.

Scholars under this spell were willing not only to stress the way that the early Irish laws and legends opened a window onto that distant world – the school of thought famously represented by the title of Kenneth Jackson's lecture *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*⁴⁴ – but also to put the Irish evidence alongside early evidence from other Indo-European societies to create synthetic images of a long-gone ritual world. Gerald's account of the inauguration of the kings of Tír Conaill was fed into the Indo-Europeanist grinder. Franz Rolf Schröder, writing in 1927, described the custom as 'echt-indogermanisch' (the Germans of his day preferred 'Indo-Germanic' to 'Indo-European').⁴⁵ He adduced a similar ritual from Vedic India, the *asvamedha*, which involved a queen copulating – really or symbolically, it is not clear – with a stallion. Schröder also made the remarkable aside that the fact that the Irish ceremony involves a king copulating with a mare while the Indian one has a queen copulating with a stallion is 'ohne Belang', 'of no consequence' – one imagines that participants would disagree. The parallel was developed further by those who followed Dumézil's idea that the original Indo-European society was marked by a tripartite social order, divided functionally into priests, warriors and workers. In an article published in 1979, with the somewhat unrevealing title 'Aspects of Equine Functionality', the Indo-Europeanist Jaan Puhvel, building on Schröder's earlier remarks, asserted 'The nature of this mating is clearly discernible in Celtic traditions and involves a representative of the second or warrior function with the transfunctional goddess figure.'⁴⁶ This point is reiterated, in bare text-book prose, in *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*, publication date 2006.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Kenneth Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge, 1964).

⁴⁵ Franz Rolf Schröder, 'Ein altirischer Krönungsritus und das indogermanische Rossopfer', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 16 (1927), pp. 310–12.

⁴⁶ Jaan Puhvel, 'Aspects of Equine Functionality', in *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. Jaan Puhvel (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 159–72, at p. 165.

⁴⁷ Ed. J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams, p. 437.

Even the most patriotic of modern Irish scholars now agree that Gerald is unlikely to have made up this story.⁴⁸ But the point is not really that he heard it from someone, but that he chose to include it in his account of Ireland. It fits well with his general characterization of the Irish as barbarous and his stress on the fact that they are pastoralists, still stuck in the early pastoral stage of development (one imagines he might have had interesting conversations with Indo-Europeanists of the present). Being in the pastoral stage explains why bestiality is ‘a vice with which that people are especially afflicted’.⁴⁹

Four manuscripts of the *Topography of Ireland* have illustrations, illustrations which are so closely related in their iconography that they must have a common original.⁵⁰ One of the scenes illustrated is this royal inauguration – at least, the killing of the mare and the king bathing in horse stew are shown. Other illustrated passages also emphasise the savage state of the Irish: the two Connaughtmen in their coracle, dressed only in animal skins, who, the text says, had never seen bread or cheese or heard of Christ; the Irishmen hitting each other over the head with axes.⁵¹ The provenance of some of these illustrated manuscripts is known: the two that date to Gerald’s own lifetime were, by the end of the Middle Ages, in St Augustine’s, Canterbury, and Hereford Cathedral, while a copy was produced at Bury St Edmunds around 1320. They were thus providing English monks and cathedral clergy of the later Middle Ages with graphic images of the bestial barbarism of the Irish.

But, after writing the four Irish and Welsh works of 1187–94, Gerald produced no other books of this nature, although he revised and

⁴⁸ ‘It is now generally agreed that so many parallels to this account can be found in the ritual of other Indo-European peoples that it is out of the question to accuse Giraldus of fabrication’: Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), p. 22; cf. Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2001), pp. 17–18; D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (London, 1970), p. 11 with n. 21; see also Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100–1600* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 25, 182–93.

⁴⁹ *quo vitio praecipue gens ista laborat*: Gerald, *Topographia hibernica* 2. 21, p. 108.

⁵⁰ London, BL, MS Royal 13 B. VIII, produced c. 1200; the manuscript was at St Augustine’s, Canterbury, by the fifteenth century; Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 700, also produced c. 1200; it belonged to the vicars choral of Hereford Cathedral by the fifteenth century; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 720, produced c. 1260, probably a copy of NLI 700; it was in Durham by the early seventeenth century; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 1. 27, produced at Bury St Edmunds c. 1320, a copy of the Royal manuscript. See Robert Bartlett, ‘Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages’, in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, eds. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, et al. (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 132–56, at pp. 148–56.

⁵¹ Corresponding to text at *Topographia hibernica* 3. 26 and 3. 21, pp. 170–1, 165–6, respectively.

expanded the four works. This change of intellectual focus coincided with a change in his career, for although he continued in royal service after the death of Henry II in 1189 and was receiving payment from the Exchequer throughout the 1190s, he seems to have retired from court around 1194, in some disgruntlement, to the private life of a scholar.

Looking back on his time at court, he made his views quite clear:

The court is the mother of care ... it is moved by the pomp of material things and by lust, stirred by fleeting temporal things ... full of worldly tumults, full of lies, full of wickedness ... I was enticed to that image of death and likeness of hell by the flattering words of princes and by promises that were empty rather than truthful ...⁵²

He was not alone as a critic of the court.⁵³ Although there were those who placed a very positive valuation on ‘courtesy’ and ‘courtliness’, there were other views on the court: ‘The court loves, hears and honours only fleeting nonsense, every courtier hates the learned arts, hates the arts that serve virtue but loves the servants of the flesh.’⁵⁴ This ‘demonisation of the court’⁵⁵ could produce highly charged rhetoric: ‘Whatever is done in courts is virtually lethal to hopes of salvation, ambitious, flattering, false, detracting, deceitful, envious, cruel and irreligious, and in general inspired by the pursuit of worldly things and the hunt for vainglory.’⁵⁶ Or, put most pithily, ‘The life of the court is death to the soul.’⁵⁷

These – and there are plenty of other statements like them – are the voices of clerics at court unhappy with their way of life, or perhaps their level of promotion. There is, in fact, an interesting group of Angevin court literary figures who remained archdeacons, never attaining the ultimate prize of a bishopric. Gerald is the most plangent of them, but there are others, like Peter of Blois and Walter Map, both of whom wrote animated criticism of the court in which they sought to make their way. The most detailed study of this curial ‘autocriticism’, as he terms it, is by Egbert Türk, and his book contains a preface by André Vernet, the French scholar of books and libraries, who observes

⁵² Gerald, *De principis instructione*, praefatio prima, p. lvii.

⁵³ See especially Egbert Türk, *Nugae curialium: le règne d’Henri II Plantagenêt (1145–1189) et l’éthique politique* (Geneva, 1977).

⁵⁴ John of Salisbury, *Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*, lines 1467–9, ed. Jan Van Laarhoven, *Entheticus maior et minor* (3 vols., Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 17, Leiden, 1987) 1, p. 201 (PL 199, col. 996).

⁵⁵ La satanisation de la cour: Laurence Harf-Lancner, ‘L’Enfer de la cour: la cour d’Henri II Plantagenet et la Mesnie Hellequin’, in *L’Etat et les aristocraties (France, Angleterre, Ecosse) XIIIe–XVIIe siècle*, ed. Philippe Contamine (Paris, 1989), pp. 27–50, at p. 33.

⁵⁶ Peter of Blois, *Epistolae* 139, PL 207, col. 415.

⁵⁷ *vita curialis, mors est animae*: Peter of Blois, *Epistolae* 14, PL 207, col. 43.

The whole of literature is full of the reproaches of misunderstood clerks and disappointed men of letters. It is not that others have not suffered checks, but they have been the only ones to possess the means of expressing their resentment in a durable manner.⁵⁸

Gerald is a model of the misunderstood clerk – misunderstood, at least, in his own opinion – and the disappointed man of letters. Ever since he had played on the beach near his family castle of Manorbier in Pembrokeshire, building not sand castles but sand churches, his father had had quite clear ambitions for him – ‘my bishop’ he called him.⁵⁹

Walther von der Vogelweide, one of the most famous German poet-knights of this period, has a poem in which he expresses his joy at eventually obtaining the fief he had longed for and that finally provided some security and status. ‘I have my fief, all the world, I have my fief!’ it begins.⁶⁰ The insecurities of patronage hunters were common to the lay and the clerical worlds. Gerald was never able to write a corresponding poem, ‘I have my bishopric, all the world, I have my bishopric!’ And this even though he had entered royal service and, at least according to his own views, served well. Of the 63 men appointed to English bishoprics in the reigns of the Angevin kings, 29 had served as royal clerks, that is, 46 per cent.⁶¹ Gerald might thus think he had substantially increased his chances of promotion by entering royal service and feel frustrated at the outcome. Gerald was quite clear what he wanted – a fat English bishopric. In order to attain it, he had, according to his own account, turned down leaner Irish bishoprics. Eventually, he had to settle for an attempt on the Welsh see of St Davids, but in vain.

In Powicke’s memorable phrase, ‘Gerald lived every day an existence of dramatic egotism’.⁶² Both the drama and the egotism were driven to a higher pitch by the long dispute over the diocese of St Davids that occupied Gerald as a litigant from 1198–1203 and as a disgruntled memorialist for the rest of his life. This litigation centred on Gerald’s

⁵⁸ La littérature universelle est remplie des récriminations de clercs méconnus et de gens de lettres déçus, non que d’autres n’aient pas subi d’échecs, mais parce qu’ils ont été les seuls à posséder le moyen d’exprimer de manière durable leurs rancoeurs ...: A. Vernet, in the preface to Türk, *Nugae curialium*, p. IX.

⁵⁹ *eumque ludendo et applaudendo suum episcopum vocare consuevit*: Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis* 1. 1, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Ich hân mîn lêhen, al diu werlt, ich hân mîn lêhen! Walther von der Vogelweide, *Gedichte. Teil 1: Der Spruchdichter*, ed. Silvia Ranawake (Tübingen, 1997), p. 39 (10, XII).

⁶¹ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225* (Oxford, 2000), p. 397.

⁶² F. M. Powicke, ‘Gerald of Wales’, in *The Christian Life in the Middle Ages and other essays* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 107–29, at p. 114.

attempt to become not just bishop, but archbishop of St Davids, and brought him into confrontation with both the archbishop of Canterbury and king John, in whose household Gerald had earlier served. Despite repeated appeals to the pope, Innocent III, who, Gerald says, lent a sympathetic ear, eventually he lost his case and his chance to be a bishop. The frustration of Gerald's ambition to be a bishop reinforced his move away from his earlier ethnographic interests and towards writing of a different kind, much of it personal polemic.

Gerald had many talents and one of the greatest of them was his talent for enmity. He showed this continuously and loquaciously throughout the dispute over St Davids, but also had the stomach for complaints of a more modest kind, as exhibited in his relations with his young nephew, a subject to which I will now briefly turn. In 1203 Gerald surrendered his claim to the see of St Davids and resigned his position as archdeacon of Brecon. As part of this settlement, the archdeaconry was then conferred on his nephew and namesake. According to Gerald, however, he himself was granted the administration of his nephew's archdeaconry. Given the personalities involved, this was clearly a recipe for disaster, and so it turned out.

The disputes between Gerald senior, on the one hand, and Gerald junior and his tutor, William de Capella, on the other, form the subject of the *Speculum duorum*, the 'Mirror of Two Men', one of Gerald's most sustained personal diatribes.⁶³ No father could be more disappointed with his son than Gerald with his nephew. He had been 'an undisciplined child and an unbroken colt, who did not study letters, nor learn Latin or even French';⁶⁴ he showed insufficient respect for his uncle, not standing in his presence, nor responding properly to rebukes and reproaches.⁶⁵ The word *nepos*, 'nephew', Gerald senior writes more than once, is truly derived from the Latin *nepa*, 'scorpion'.⁶⁶ Gerald junior is compared unfavourably with his model brother. How indeed could Gerald's own blood have produced such a worthless specimen? The answer, obviously, lies in the boy's mother, one of the notorious Baskervilles. No hound is mentioned, but Gerald does dub the family 'the devil's brood (*diabolicum genus*)'.⁶⁷

The original manuscript of the *Speculum duorum* survives, now in the Vatican library.⁶⁸ The volume is about nine inches by six (23 by 16.5

⁶³ Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis), *Speculum Duorum*, ed. Yves Lefèvre, R. B. C. Huygens and Michael Richter (Cardiff, 1974).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126, for standing.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 12, 118.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁸ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. lat. 470.

cm.) and also contains the unique copy of another work of Gerald's with the significant title *Invectives*. The *Speculum duorum* takes up 54 folios and consists of an original text, written out by one scribe in double columns, but also a mass of additions, some of them in the margins, many of them on inserted pieces of parchment. Some of the additions themselves contain additions. It is the kind of mess that is called 'a working copy' and reveals a compositional process that the modern computerized word processor renders invisible. We can thus see Gerald revising his own work.

The nature of the text and the additions to it may be made clear by one example. Folio 68v is concerned mainly with the nephew's tutor, William de Capella, 'our betrayer' as Gerald terms him. Gerald accuses him of stealing documents, hypocrisy, and even hints at something suspicious about William's relationship with the nephew – he writes of 'a novel bond of love, of a sort, cemented with strong pitch'. The manuscript shows that Gerald was then stirred to insert a new sheet of parchment, with the addition of the story of a confrontation he had had with William and the nephew in Lincoln, where he was then living, which wanders off into a digression on the Welsh tendency to perjury. Another added piece of parchment describes a campaign of gossip and slander that William de Capella waged against Gerald. The margins of this inserted leaf are filled with quotations from the Bible and the classics about false friends.

The manuscript of the *Speculum duorum* summons up a picture of a loquacious and disgruntled old man, who prided himself on his learning and his literacy, enmeshed with a disappointing younger generation, a man whose pen could never resist the insertion of one more charge, one more damning maxim.

But not to end on a sad note, let us conclude with a more cheerful moment in Gerald's life and one that is intimately connected with both the history of ethnographic literature and the birth of the university, that is, the public reading he gave in Oxford of his *Topography of Ireland*. Never one to be shy about his own achievements, Gerald describes the scene himself. It begins with his return from Ireland to Wales in the spring of 1186.

At that time Gerald acquired a great reputation and celebrity in Ireland. He then returned to Wales, where he devoted all his mental energies to finishing his *Topography of Ireland*. In the course of time he completed and corrected it and, desiring not to hide his light but to place it on a candelabra, he decided to recite his work to a great audience at Oxford, where the body of clerks was the strongest and most outstanding in England. And since the book is in three parts, the recitation lasted three days.

On the first day he summoned all the poor people of the town and gave them hospitality, on the next day all the teachers of the various faculties and the more well-known students, on the third day the remaining students, along with the knights who lived in the town and many burgesses. This was a lavish and noble deed and nothing like it had been done in England either in the present time or in the past.⁶⁹

How he distinguished ‘the more well-known students’ from the others is not made clear.

Oxford was in fact a fitting location for this first recorded display of colonialist ethnography, because, over the centuries, it has had an important role both in training British colonialists and in developing the western ethnographic tradition. It is the home of the Pitt-Rivers museum, one of the most remarkable ethnographic collections to be found anywhere, not only a museum of artefacts and ritual objects, but also a monument to the great pioneer of Victorian archaeology and anthropology, Augustus Pitt-Rivers. Pitt-Rivers held that cultures evolved in a way parallel to Darwinian evolution (a position Gerald would have found completely comprehensible and sympathetic), and he grouped his finds typologically, to illustrate various trans-cultural themes (‘body ornamentation’, ‘funeral customs’, etc.). This is indeed how they are displayed in the Museum to this day, many still in their Victorian display cabinets. I can see Gerald of Wales browsing with interest in that great ethnographic miscellany. He might especially have enjoyed the case of exhibits labelled ‘Treatment of Dead Enemies’.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *De rebus a se gestis* 1. 16, pp. 72–3; he also mentions the occasion in his *Invectiones* 4. 10, p. 92; *De jure et statu Menevensis ecclesiae* 7, p. 335; and *Epistola ... de libris*, p. 413. The date of reading is not quite certain. Gerald says that he returned from Ireland in late April or May 1186 and then ‘completed and corrected the work’. He then describes the reading in Oxford, before going on to the assumption of the cross by Henry II and Philip Augustus in January 1188 (*De rebus a se gestis* 2. 16–17, pp. 72–3). If this order corresponds to the order of events, then the reading must have taken place in the second half of 1187. It has been argued, however, that the reading was of the second edition of the *Topography*, not the first, and that, despite the order of the account in the *De rebus a se gestis*, it must have taken place in 1188–9, after Gerald’s preaching tour in Wales of March and April 1188 and before the death of Henry II in July 1189: Lewis Thorpe, ‘Gerald of Wales: A Public Reading in Oxford in 1188 or 1189’, *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), pp. 455–8.

⁷⁰ Special thanks are due to Sarah Squire, President of Hughes Hall, and the staff and students of ASNAC, especially Rosalind Love, for their warm welcome and generous hospitality on the occasion of the lecture.

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