

Georgia Henley and A. Joseph McMullen (eds), *Gerald of Wales: New Perspectives on a Medieval Writer and Critic* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2018). 336pp. 5 colour plates, 3 halftones, £29.00 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-786-83164-4

This collection of essays provides a sympathetic and contextual reassessment of the work of the prolific twelfth-century writer now generally known as Gerald of Wales. The editors argue that Gerald can only be properly understood by moving beyond his most famous ethnographic works on Wales and Ireland and looking at his wider corpus. The volume thus seeks to provide its ‘new perspectives’ in large part by paying closer attention to his less familiar works, while also examining the sources he used to inform his writings and the ways that these writings were, in turn, copied, modified and translated. It is successful in its effort to shed new light on this well-known author and provided this reader (who has been teaching university students about Gerald’s Irish works, the *Expugnatio hibernica* and the *Topographia hibernica* for nearly a decade) with a wealth of new insights about and different ways of looking at him and at the texts he produced.

The effectiveness of the collection arises from the fact that the authors never lose sight of its central aims, and many of them consult the same later and lesser known Giraldian texts — particularly the *Gemma ecclesiastica*, *De principis instructione* (an edition and translation of which, by Robert Bartlett, was published by OUP in 2018), and the *Speculum duorum*. Indeed, there are moments when the chapters speak so well to one another that one forgets this is an edited collection and not a monograph. The sympathetic approach of the authors towards their subject further binds this volume together. Joshua Byron Smith vindicates Gerald from the charge of plagiarizing the work of his contemporary and fellow canon of Hereford Cathedral, Walter Map. Simon Meecham-Jones defends Gerald from accusations of inconsistency and argues that historians have not understood the complexity of his writing or his use of

an ironic voice. But the most important way in which this volume is sympathetic to Gerald is in its commitment to understanding him and his work in a rounded and contextual way, and with proper attention paid to his motivations and concerns — ‘on his own terms’, as the editors put it. This book is not the first to provide broader and sophisticated readings of Gerald: Robert Bartlett’s indispensable editions, monographs and articles, especially, have been instrumental in advancing the historiography in this direction.

And yet, more work in this vein is needed to liberate Gerald from the rather two-dimensional role to which he has been relegated in much of the historiography of Ireland in particular: the role of self-aggrandizing and xenophobic apologist for the English invasion. Gerald’s position as the most voluble commentator on the invasion, the wide availability of his Irish and Welsh work in translation, and his undeniable skill in providing salacious anecdotes and memorable phrases, have all led to his dismemberment and deployment in studies that make little effort to understand his wider *œuvre*. This is all the more unfortunate given the range and richness of his writing, including history, ethnographic writing, hagiography, autobiography, polemic, advice literature, spanning well over twenty works. Indeed, Bartlett’s contribution to this collection expands this body of work even further, as he argues that the *History of Llanthony Prima* was also written by Gerald. Bartlett’s identification of classical allusions in the *History* that parallel those in other works of Gerald’s is persuasive, as are other textual concordances he outlines. But even more impressive is the way that Bartlett discerns Gerald’s tone, outlook, and style in the *History*. This subtle and hard-won method of linking the text to Gerald is possible only for a scholar who has spent so much time in his company. Bartlett uses his analysis of the *History* in the context of the wider corpus to highlight material that reappears in different forms throughout his work, such as assertions that the Augustinians were the

most suitable monastic recipients for pious donations and that clerics were better suited than monks to high ecclesiastical office.

Catherine Rooney provides a new avenue for information about Gerald by identifying a group of early manuscripts, created in his lifetime, that she argues are associated with one another and most likely with Gerald himself. He may have been involved in directing the layout of these manuscripts and the accompanying maps and illustrations, and perhaps even in drafting them. The manuscripts that Rooney associates with Gerald include the lavishly illustrated copies of his Irish texts that appear in British Library MS Royal 13 B viii and National Library of Ireland MS 700, whose beautiful and familiar illustrations appear in the Penguin edition of the *Topographia hibernica*. Rooney's work allows us to use these illustrations and the layout of these early MSS to shed light on how Gerald may have envisioned the appearance and consumption of his texts.

Several contributors highlight the sophistication of Gerald's writing and the care he took in drafting and revising his work for different audiences. As mentioned above, Meecham-Jones marshals material from several works that Gerald wrote late in his life to argue for the complexity of Gerald's voice and style. He draws in part upon the *Gemma ecclesiastica* — 'an instructive manual on clerical reforms' — which, he argues, was Gerald's proudest achievement. It is appropriate, therefore, that it take a more prominent place in Giraldian studies and no less than four of the authors discuss it here.

Owain Nash also engages with a range of lesser known texts, analyzing material from the collection known as the *Symbolum electorum*, from *De principis instructione* (an advice text in the genre of mirrors for princes), *De rebus a se gestis* (his autobiography), and *Speculum duorum* (a text Gerald wrote attacking his nephew), as well as the Irish and Welsh works, to look at Gerald's use of the climatic and humoral theories prevalent in the twelfth century. These theories provided Gerald with ways of explaining variations in human culture and behaviour, and he deployed

them in his discussions of the French, English and Flemings, as well as the Irish and Welsh. Nash notes the flexibility of Gerald's application of these theories: for example, he rarely applied climatic theory to Ireland and found other explanations for the deficiencies, as he saw them, of Irish people. Although Ireland is temperate, and thus in theory should have been favourable to a balanced and productive society, the people there were, in Gerald's opinion, 'deformed' by their 'bad' diet and 'bad' customs.

Michael Faletra's fascinating essay on Gerald's commentaries on the beavers who lived in the Teifi river in Wales gives further proof of the complexity of his writing. Gerald revised his beaver stories some five times in different versions of his Welsh works to suit changing narrative demands, using a range of sources to build his account. These included classical sources and traditions about beavers, such as their supposed propensity for self-castration, as well as his own observations or those of contemporaries in Wales about the animals' habits. Gerald used beavers metaphorically to represent the Welsh, clerics, or even himself, and their multiple meanings coexisted and changed according to the purpose he wanted them to serve in the narrative. It is only through the use of different versions and revisions of Gerald's texts that Faletra is able to track the shifting ways that he used beavers in his work.

J.A. Jones also highlights the care that Gerald took in crafting his texts and argues that even Gerald's humour was used deliberately, often in the service of his campaign for church reform. Jones asserts that, 'in fact, Gerald's humour was nearly always self-conscious and purposeful. He often felt the need to explain why jokes were funny, as if the laughter should follow from logical deduction rather than instinct. Most of all he treated humour as a weapon'. Thus, as the editors comment, 'in reading Gerald on his own terms [the essays show that] he is a thoroughly self-conscious and careful crafter of argument, deliberate in his use of sources and intended impact. Collectively, the essays in this volume suggest that

Gerald's narrative style was not disordered, careless or mercurial, as has been previously suggested, but rather meticulous and thorough'.

The authors in this volume tell us a great deal about Gerald's style, composition, and the sophistication of his writing, but what can they tell us about his most deeply held concerns and motivations as expressed across his writing life and in his works as a whole? Some of these concerns will be familiar to anyone who has read Gerald's Irish works, like his efforts to bolster the prestige of his family. He did this most famously by recounting their martial successes in Ireland, as noted in Caoimhe Whelan's article, but also, as Huw Pryce shows, through his partisan presentation of Welsh history in the *Descriptio Kambriae*. His descent from Nest, princess of Deheubarth, his maternal grandmother, ensured that he privileged southern Welsh claims, and particularly those of Deheubarth, to the kingship of Wales.

Gerald was also deeply concerned with the advancement of his clerical career, and Pryce highlights his inclusion and extensive revision of lists of bishops of the southwestern Welsh diocese of St David's in his Welsh works. This reveals a new facet of his well-known campaign to advance the metropolitan claims of St David's; his uncle held the bishopric, and Gerald hoped to hold it after him — and as archbishop — but he never succeeded in this ambition. However, St David's was not the only church in whose fortunes Gerald had an interest, as Byron Smith shows in his examination of Gerald's account of the history of Lydbury North. This manor was a valuable holding of Hereford cathedral, although it had no documentation to support its claims to Lydbury, perhaps because of damage done to the cathedral by Gruffydd ap Llywelyn in 1055. Thus, an historical justification was necessary for Hereford's possession of the manor. Both Gerald and Walter Map, who were canons at the cathedral, reached back into the Anglo-Saxon past to provide it. They choose different Anglo-Saxon characters and provided different narratives in their efforts, but did so to the same end; anchoring the right to Lydbury

in a grant to the cathedral that predated the Norman conquest and was imbued with the respectability of antiquity. Similarly, Ben Guy interprets Gerald's attention to hagiographical traditions about Brychan, the fifth-century Welsh king and saint, and his 'saintly progeny', as linked to the fact that he held the archdeaconry of Brecon at one stage. Guy traces the source material Gerald drew upon, which included a hagiographical Latin source for material about Brychan and a Welsh genealogy, arguing that Gerald privileged the authority of Latin texts, as we might expect. And yet he was willing to use the Welsh material, although he added caveats that show he did not trust it entirely. Historians have long recognized the influence that Gerald's clerical posts and ambitions had on his work, along with his efforts to glorify his family, but Pryce, Guy, and Byron Smith demonstrate how these aspects of Gerald's writing project operate in previously unrecognized ways.

Essays in this volume also provide new insights on Gerald's evolving views of kingship in general, and on the Angevin kings specifically. Peter Raleigh argues that Gerald's rather neglected hagiography of Hugh of Lincoln, the *Vita sancti hugonis*, depicts the Angevin kings as 'incorrigibly wrathful and violent, invariably driven by rage and madness to oppress the Church'. This view of the Angevins also shaped his better-known *De principis instructione*, but Raleigh's essay shows how much it underlay his later writings as a whole. Raleigh uses his understanding of the implied context for the *Vita* — Thomas Becket's martyrdom — to inform his analysis, using this understanding of audiences and the way they were likely to receive the *Vita* to vindicate the text from the charge of being a 'disappointingly thin' production, of little import to Gerald or to those who study him. Gerald's attacks on the Angevin kings in the *Vita* show the ways that his thinking evolved and complicate our picture of him as an apologist for the English invasion of Ireland, and particularly for Henry II's overlordship of the island. Again, as a lecturer of Irish history, I was moved by this essay to reassess the descriptions of Henry II and John in the Irish

works (some versions of which Gerald dedicated to Henry II, Richard and John). The germ of his later, virulently anti-Angevin rhetoric can be seen if one revisits the Irish texts in light of Raleigh's essay and examines the extended and rather mixed assessment of Henry II in the *Expugnatio* or the carefully crafted account of Thomas Becket's death (and other references to Becket elsewhere in the text).

We might be tempted to label Gerald's concerns about kingship as 'political', but they are inseparable from — and indeed arose out of — his clerical reform agenda, and the desire to protect the church from predatory kingship. One of the things that this collection demonstrates most forcefully is that the reform movement was what most motivated Gerald, and that it did so throughout his career. Suzanne LaVere is the contributor who addresses Gerald's reform ideas in the most detail, but they are discernable in many of the chapters. LaVere examines Gerald's reforming views in his *Gemma ecclesiastica*, highlighting his support for clerical celibacy and education, and his assertions about the correct behaviour for bishops.

A charge from which Gerald is not cleared in this volume is that of being an inveterate misogynist, like many medieval clerical authors, and as is demonstrated by his comments on how to avoid the temptations offered by beautiful young women. One tactic he advises is picturing attractive women as old (and therefore repulsive), or without their skin, so that their viscera are on show. LaVere comments that, 'as Jacques Dalarun, Constance Berman and others have noted, this sort of declaration of the contemptibility and fragility of women's bodies implies that men's bodies do not suffer from the same defects'. LaVere's discussion of Gerald's construction of a celibate masculine identity for clerics contributes to a growing literature about variant constructions of masculinity in medieval society. Like many of the insights provided by this volume, understanding the centrality of reform in Gerald's writing project overall leads to a subtle but important re-evaluation of his work. To take

one example, the chapter in the *Topographia hibernica* attacking the practice in Ireland of electing bishops from monasteries can be read — and has been read by some Irish readers — as an attack on an Irish peculiarity, but it is probably better understood if seen in the context of his lifelong assertions about the suitability of regular clergy for episcopal office.

The final section in the volume looks mainly at Gerald's 'afterlife' (to use Caoimhe Whelan's pithy term). Georgia Henley traces the translation into Welsh of Gerald's accounts of the exhumation of Arthur and Guinevere at Glastonbury in 1190 or 1191. Interestingly, the material about Arthur, in the *Gemma ecclesiastica* and *De principis instructione*, made its way into Welsh language manuscripts, while the *Descriptio* and *Topographia kambriae* seemingly did not. Henley also analyses Gerald's Arthur story itself in some detail, highlighting, as the other contributors also do, his extensive and very deliberate revision of material and his willingness to engage with Welsh texts and repositories of information (as Guy and Faletra note too).

Similarly, Whelan's article on English translations of Gerald in late medieval Ireland examines the practice of revision and the ways in which particular stories — in this case the wolf/human transformation story from the *Topographia* — were changed in different versions. Her article thus focuses on the use of Gerald's texts by later authors, centuries after they were written; but like Henley and Faletra, she too demonstrates how revealing and rewarding close textual analysis can be. Whelan links relatively subtle changes in the wolf story in successive translations to the political and cultural environment of the English colony in later medieval Ireland. Brendan Kane focuses also upon Gerald's reception and influence in Ireland, and convincingly argues that he had little direct influence on the reform tracts — generated by both the English of Ireland and newer arrivals to the island from England — that were so common in the sixteenth century. Kane makes use of David Heffernan's recent and very welcome edition of some seventy such tracts, finding that Gerald is not



mentioned once. He admits that Gerald's influence may have operated in a more general sense in shaping the intellectual climate in which the tracts were written, but convincingly argues that his influence on Tudor reform ideas has been overstated.

Overall, this collection demonstrates the richness of Gerald's work and how much more there is to say about this fascinating author. The contributors offer new and exciting insights into each of their particular topics, but just as importantly, they employ fruitful approaches that provide a roadmap for further research. This is most of all through examination of Gerald's entire *œuvre*, including not only his many and varied texts but also different revisions of each work. This is particularly important for an author who revised his work so meticulously and so often. New avenues of enquiry are also provided through analyses of the way Gerald produced his texts; the written and oral sources he used (in a variety of languages); the physical layout of the manuscripts; and through revealing case studies like those of Whelan, Faletra, and Henley, in which the revision and transmission of a single story is traced through different versions. I confess I found myself rather chastised, at times, by this volume, when realizing that I have sometimes been unfair to Gerald, but I was happy to be so by a collection so compelling and rewarding as this one.

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