

## **The Associative Branches of the Irish Barnacle: Gerald of Wales and the Natural World**

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### *Abstract*

*The barnacle and the barnacle goose, both already active objects of the medieval imagination, have been debated by scholars such as Rhona Beare, Karl Steel, and Edward Heron-Allen. However, the driving force of these discussions has been the mythology and history of the barnacle goose. This paper explores the discursivity of the barnacle in the travelogue text Topographia Hibernica of Gerald of Wales within the framework of Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory. Gerald revisits the topic with numerous human and social associations such as applications of St. Augustine of Hippo's categories of 'wonder', ongoing considerations of ecclesiastical reform, and a glimpse into the practice of medieval scientific deduction. This paper argues that each of these associative branches collide, allowing a natural feature to instruct a cultural moment within the context of Norman invasion that is ultimately revealing of Gerald's world, as well as of his perspective within it. The echoes of this passage further branch out over the subsequent decades and centuries in the variations of the manuscript copies and translations. The social construction is itself a relative data point reached through the multitude of associations that start at the barnacle. The expansiveness of reactions and interpretations of the passage reveal as much about these subsequent periods and peoples as it does about its natural subject matter and it is therein, by the twists of these associations, that the natural world exposes the human world. In conclusion, by recontextualizing the ongoing discussion of Gerald's barnacle passage, this paper evaluates the ways in which human associations tie together to form a relative historical moment grounded in a feature of the natural Irish environment.*

In his *Topographia Hibernica (History and Topography of Ireland)*, the twelfth-century archdeacon Gerald of Wales writes, “There are many birds here that are called barnacles, which nature, acting against her own laws, produces in a wonderful way.”<sup>1</sup> This bird is the barnacle goose that so attracted the medieval imagination, as is evidenced by its inclusion in bestiaries and histories of Ireland.<sup>2</sup> This particular species of goose actually mates closer to the Arctic Circle, and therefore beyond the known world for the medieval Irish. This fact led to the curious deduction that the goose spawns from barnacles as a form of asexual reproductive process. Consequently, this barnacle goose is not an actual, existing creature. Rather, it is a production of associations that can be traced through the use of Actor-Network Theory. This theory, as delineated by Bruno Latour and John Law, permits the examination of the stable arrays of connections that construct a networked object. In this case, the barnacle goose is a network comprised of such associations as scientific deduction, colonial interrelations, and perceptions of wonder. The focal point that stabilizes this construction is the barnacle itself. Gerald’s *Topographia*, like his *Itinerarium Kambriae (Journey Through Wales)*, takes as its subject matter the natural features of Ireland along with miracles and wonders while also interrogating the barbarity of the Irish people through a colonializing lens. Although the barnacle was not necessarily exceptional in his writing, it provides an interesting case study of Gerald’s narrative approach to examining features of the environment as exemplifying moments of wonder as well as allegorical spaces through which one can read political attitudes. The barnacle goose is a particularly compelling figure in Gerald’s work because of its endurance in medieval thought for centuries afterwards, featuring in bestiaries and histories alike. To examine this figure’s temporal shift and the ways in which the network of associations are malleable to that shift, I consider the progression of recensions of the *Topographia* and its influence on subsequent works.

Gerald’s text was first completed in 1187; four recensions and nearly forty copies of these various versions are known still to exist.<sup>3</sup> Gerald was writing in Latin towards the end of a

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<sup>1</sup> [Giraldus Cambrensis, \*The History and Topography of Ireland\*](#). Ed and trans. John J. O’Meara. (New York, 1982), 41.

<sup>2</sup> [Edward Heron-Allen, \*Barnacles in Nature and in Myth\*](#) (London, 1928). See Heron-Allen’s text for a full bibliographic history of the barnacle in medieval and early modern texts.

<sup>3</sup> For a full discussion of the extant manuscripts and their contemporary reception, see Sumithra David’s dissertation “[Looking East and West: The Reception and Dissemination of the \*Topographia Hibernica\* and the \*Itinerarium Ad\*](#)

prolific period of burgeoning discourse known as the Twelfth Century Renaissance. As is evident from the name by which we know him, Gerald was a Cambro-Norman archdeacon from Wales. This hybrid identity impacted the ways in which he engaged with the world around him, leading Gerald alternately to advocate for and denigrate Welshmen when writing for an Anglo-Norman audience. To that end, Gerald negotiated the line between the ecclesiastical and political powers in England, writing a wealth of texts, which he variously dedicated to powerful figures in court and church alike.<sup>4</sup> The primary goal in these prefatory dedications was an appointment to the bishopric of St. David's, which he never actually attained despite a lifetime of effort. This bishopric was located in Wales and, at least according to Gerald, at one time an archbishopric. The autobiographical material available combined with Gerald's descriptions in his Welsh texts indicate that he sought not only to become bishop of St. David's, but also to return that see to its glory as an archbishopric outside the jurisdiction of Canterbury.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that Gerald's Irish and Welsh texts were further calculated to elicit favorable attitudes benefitting his ambitions. This paper will examine in particular Gerald's *Topographia Hibernica*, one of two texts pertaining to Ireland (for which he also wrote parallel Welsh texts).<sup>6</sup> Both sets of texts adopt a colonializing lens through which the subject, Irish and Welsh people respectively, are viewed as Other. This task is the orientalizing of the Other, as established by Edward Said.<sup>7</sup> For the present argument, it is critical to consider the ways in which Gerald utilizes foreign travel and the alien Other to reinforce the centralized sense of self for the Anglo-Norman audience. This sense of the Oriental

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[Partes Orientales in England \[1185-C.1500\]](#)" pp. 63-137. See also Catherine Rooney's dissertation, "[The Manuscripts of the Works of Gerald of Wales](#)".

<sup>4</sup> The long list of recipients includes the Pope, to whom Gerald made his protracted four year case for an appointment to the bishopric of St. David's. [Giraldus Cambrensis, \*The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales\*](#). Ed and trans, Lewis Thorpe. (New York, 1978), 18-22.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald's ambitions for St. David's are evident from the strong language used in Book II, Chapter I of the *Itinerarium Cambriae*. He describes the relationship between St. David's and Canterbury as one of "subjugation" (164). "Until recent times the see of St. David's was in no way subject to Canterbury." (164) Additionally, a contract preserved in the Canterbury Chapter Archives (Reg. A, f. 73v) details an agreement between Gerald and the Archbishop forbidding him from ever again appealing for the St. David's see.

<sup>6</sup> The Welsh texts are the *Itinerarium Cambriae* and the *Descriptio Cambriae*. These texts may not have been intended as parallels, but the structures are similar.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, [Orientalism](#). 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, 1994). See especially Said's chapter "Orientalist Structures and Restructures" (111-197).

as fragmented and alien periphery was crafted through a Christian moralizing lens to reveal the Welsh as redeemable and the Irish as hopelessly barbaric.<sup>8</sup>

The barnacle goose in the *Topographia* is a focal point for marginalization constructed of several threads of associations that function as a network, crystallizing as an image of conquest. Using Actor-Network Theory (hereafter, “ANT”) as a theoretical frame, we can think about this focal point as an object of agency instructing marginalization in a recursive manner. It is the network of associations from the various participants – Gerald, the Normans, the Irish, ecclesiastical authorities, the barnacle, and the goose – that allows for the mythic rendering of the creature known as the barnacle goose. Certain preconceived notions about ecclesiastical rules, the monstrosity of the Irish, and an informed understanding of miracles are projected onto the barnacle, and by association the goose, which are then reaffirmed by the barnacle as object. Gerald utilizes those ideas to fetishize the act of eating the goose on fasting days and then shifts to a didactic mode in his analysis of the Irish. This myth of the goose spawning from barnacles became so prevalent that Pope Innocent III actively had to ban the consumption of barnacle geese on fasting days, a point which I will return to later in this essay.<sup>9</sup> Ecclesiastical intervention is another colonial act that transpires in Ireland, and is one in which Gerald is greatly interested.

Given the number of extant copies and the number of subsequent works that reference them, it is evident that the controversial *Topographia* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* (*The Conquest of Ireland*) maintained their own popularity for subsequent generations. However, that popularity appears to be due to the *Topographia*'s collection of beasts and wonders rather than Gerald's own political goals. In addition to the numerous Latin copies, these texts have even appeared in vernacular languages such as English, Irish, and French. We know from Richard Stannihurst's *De Rebus*

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<sup>8</sup> My master's thesis establishes the argument that Gerald took a two-pronged approach to describing the Welsh for his Anglo-Norman audience. In that essay, I contend that Gerald presents the Welsh as a sinful, but redeemable people (through ecclesiastical reform and political colonization) by contrasting them with the Irish, whom Gerald depicts as sinful and ultimately more barbaric. See [“The Subversive Power of St. David's: Gerald of Wales and the Dominion of Canterbury, a Postcolonial Approach”](#) (Sarah J. Sprouse, George Mason University, 2012). See also Michael A. Faletra's chapter pertaining to Gerald's hybridity: Michael A. Faletra, [“Crooked Greeks: Hybridity, History, and Gerald of Wales.”](#) *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*. (New York, 2014), 135-172.

<sup>9</sup> Edwin Ray Lankester, [Diversions of a Naturalist](#). (New York, 1915), 119.

in *Hibernia Gestis* that Gerald's *Topographia* was still in circulation and a common source for Irish history as late as the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Despite some variation within the passage, there is present in each of the recensions a section pertaining to the barnacle goose. What is evident in all of the versions of this passage is that there is more at work in Gerald's discussion of the barnacle than mere observation. His exclamations of wonder (such as his awe at the productions of nature)<sup>11</sup> work in conjunction with an overlay of xenophobic admonishment of the Irish for their barbarous consumption of the goose on fasting days; these tangled sentiments flourish throughout the *Topographia*. The barnacle is itself a site of conquest both metaphorical and literal in nature through its relationship with the goose as perceived by Gerald, the Irish, and others. Gerald invokes a recursive dialogue with the barnacle, which we can think of within the theoretical framework established by Latour as associations amongst actors and actants that ultimately complicate conceptions of agency. These various associations of wonder, criticisms of consumption, and conflation of the barnacle and goose inform a composite reading of a textual moment of Anglo-Norman conquest.

T.H. White and Robert Bartlett agree that Gerald's *Topographia* contains the first record of a barnacle goose, though Bartlett suspects that Gerald was not the first source of this idea.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Rhona Beare points to references of similar creatures in Anglo-Saxon literature, such as the tenth riddle in the Exeter Book, which describes a "bird with its beak imprisoned in a log floating at sea."<sup>13</sup> This suggests that the barnacle goose has already undergone some mythic rendering. However, Gerald may perhaps be the first to record the idea in Latin, thus cultivating the description of the barnacle goose that subsequently ends up in bestiaries and other histories of Ireland. Rendering the creature into Latin discourse reifies its existence for an academic or ecclesiastical audience in ways that a vernacular text could not in the twelfth century.

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Stannihurst, [Great Deeds In Ireland: Richard Stannihurst's De Rebus In Hibernia Gestis](#). Ed, Barry, John. (New York, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> "At least consider the evidence of nature. She daily produces and brings forth new creatures without the co-operation of any male or female for our instruction and in confirmation of the Faith." (O'Meara trans. 42)

<sup>12</sup> T.H. White, [The Book of Beasts, Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century](#). (New York, 1954), 238. Robert Bartlett, [Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages](#). 2nd ed. (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2006), 115.

<sup>13</sup> Rhona Beare. "Gerald of Wales on the Barnacle Goose." *Notes and Queries* 4 (1997): 459-460.

Before examining the associations that comprise this artificial reification of the barnacle goose, it is important to first consider the codicological history of the *Topographia* in order to understand the ways in which Gerald's barnacle goose passage has been disseminated. A full outline of that history is provided in the notes to this essay. There are approximately five known versions of the *Topographia*. Gerald had a habit of often revising his work, adding and removing observations and allusions, recontextualizing his analysis of historical events, and changing the prefaces for new dedications. It is evident from the prefatory dedications that the changes from version to version are primarily for persuasive purposes. These versions are the first version produced in 1187 and four recensions, which Sumithra David labeled under the observation of Robert Bartlett as Recensions A, B, C, and D.<sup>14</sup> Six versions of the barnacle chapter were reviewed in preparation for this paper.<sup>15</sup> See Appendix A for transcriptions of each of the reviewed versions.

The barnacle as a central object of associations must be defined in order to delineate the conflation of ideas that reify the barnacle goose. In his essay "Objects and Spaces," John Law defines an object as "an effect of stable arrays or networks of relations."<sup>16</sup> ANT has been implemented as a strategy in literary criticism, particularly in relation to the recent trends of materialism, for examining these networks of relations as a composite social moment. Law states

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<sup>14</sup> David, "Looking East", 63.

<sup>15</sup> Each of these versions is available to the common discourse of Gerald of Wales scholarship, representing at least the first version, Recension A, and Recension D, though the exemplar for certain versions remains unclear. These included versions are from John O'Meara's translation, which is taken from Cambridge University Library MS Mm. 5.30, Thomas Forester's translation, which appears to be from a copy of Recension D, my own transcription of Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 700, which is a copy of Recension D, T.H. White's translation, the source of which is unknown, Edward Heron-Allen's translation which is derived from Richard Stannihurst's *De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis*, and James F. Dimock's transcription, which derives from London, British Library, MS Harley 3724 and Cambridge, Peterhouse, MS 1.8.1, both of which are copies from Recension A. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the *Topographia* in this paper are taken from O'Meara's translation. NLI MS 700 is widely popular for its marginal illustrations, though it has proven to be a poor copy due to the many scribal errors. It is one of only two known copies that are fully illustrated. The illustrations of the two copies are so similar that scholars such as Amelia Lynn Borrego Sargent have suggested that Gerald may have supervised the work. See pp. 25-26 of Sargent's dissertation "[Visions and Revisions: Gerald of Wales, Authorship, and the Construction of Political, Religious, and Legal Geographies in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Britain](#)." (U of California, Berkeley, 2014). While the manuscript source for White's translation is unknown, we can infer that it must be derived from Recension B, C, or D because it contains the following sentence that is not contained in the first version or Recension A, "But these men are curiously drawn into error." (268). Much of the literary analysis conducted by scholars has been done with either O'Meara's or Forester's translations, though history scholars and those literary scholars with a Latin background tend to work with Dimock's transcription. [Giraldus Cambrensis, \*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera\*](#). ed. Dimock, James F. (1964). [Giraldus Cambrensis, \*The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, Containing: The Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland\*](#). trans. Thomas Forester, eds. Richard Colt Hoare & Thomas Wright, (London, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> John Law, "Objects and Spaces" [Theory, Culture & Society](#). 19:5/6 (2002): 91-105.

that the theory is “inspired by a post-structuralist version of semiotics.”<sup>17</sup> Like a circuit, ANT requires the construction to remain unbroken in a given moment in order to examine all associations that establish such a composite moment. Further, Bruno Latour argues that “Network is a concept, not a thing out there. It is a tool to help describe something, not what is being described.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, ANT provides the conceptual frame for thinking about these associations that give meaning to the barnacle, but the network is not itself tangible. ANT comprises both human and non-human actors, allowing even objects to participate in a locus of meaning. Kellie Robertson’s work on lapidaries is particularly demonstrative of the role an object can play in the assemblage of a network. On rock agency, Robertson writes:

In a medieval world where rocks were not merely passive objects of the human gaze, but active participants in shaping the mental reality of percipients, rocks have the capacity to organize the humans who look at them, based on what they see, rather than being simply subject to human desire.<sup>19</sup>

Rocks in this context are not passive in the human gaze, but actors in their own right that organize perceptions of the perceiver. Robertson suggests the act is not uni-directional, but rather comprised of a recursive mode informed by the Aristotelian principles of motion and rest. Conversely, Robert Stanton recently made the argument, based on a review of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, that animals have been ordered through the gaze of humans.<sup>20</sup> So, rather than the object organizing humans, the naming of animals occurred in reverse – by their usefulness to man. For example, Isidore wrote that “beasts of burden” derive their names from “the fact that they assist our labor and burdens”.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, recursive associations are made through classifications. This organizational scheme is particularly instructive when examining the barnacle goose in the *Topographia* because perceptions similarly guide actions, thus dividing the barbaric (Irish) from the civil (Gerald [and the Normans]).

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<sup>17</sup> Law, “Objects and Spaces”, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Bruno Latour, [\*Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory\*](#). (New York, 2005), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Kellie Robertson. "Exemplary Rocks." [\*Animal, Vegetable, Mineral\*](#). ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, (Washington, DC, 2012), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Stanton gave the paper “Natural Naming: Isidore of Seville’s Biopolitical Order” at the Knowing Nature in the Medieval and Early Modern World conference at the University of Maryland on October 25, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Michael J. Curley, trans. [\*Physiologus\*](#). (Chicago, 2009), XII.4-8.

Critical to thinking through these associations, and the ways in which they inform the human gaze, is Latour's theoretical work with ANT. In his discussion of object agency as part of the Third Source of Uncertainty, Latour writes that "there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence."<sup>22</sup> An object need not be human to exert meaning in context, such as the agential role performed in classifying and organizing the human gaze. Responding to Latour's apparatus, Jane Bennett writes, "An actant is neither an object nor a subject but an "intervener," akin to the Deleuzian 'quasi-causal operator'."<sup>23</sup> In other words, an object or creature such as the barnacle may function as an intervener transmitting or causing meaning. Bennett's book *Vibrant Matter* is particularly concerned with objects and the agency imbued in them, leaving the definition of 'object' ambiguous enough that the barnacle can be considered as a creature existing apart from the goose, as an actant. Reading through this theoretical lens, the barnacle becomes more clearly a locus of meaning for the twelfth century observer. While not actually the progenitor of the goose, and in fact having nothing to do with the goose, Gerald as observer records the association, thus constructing a concept of a barnacle goose that is the product of this network of associations. Tracing the strands of thought that have led to this construction illuminates the ways in which the barnacle goose in Gerald's text is a product of the colonial imagination because of the ways in which the network is comprised of the Anglo-Norman observation of the Irish consumption of the goose.

This concept of the barnacle goose grew to such popularity that during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Pope had to ban the consumption of the barnacle goose on fasting days.<sup>24</sup> That ecclesiastical ban also suggests that by this time the mythologizing of the barnacle goose had expanded beyond the boundaries of Ireland and Britain. Eating the barnacle goose had of course been accepted practice to that point, given that one could consume fish, not meat, on such days. If the goose spawned from the barnacle and then dropped into the water, as Gerald thought he had observed, then the conclusion could be made that the creature was of the sea.<sup>25</sup> Frederick II dismissed the connection between the barnacle and the goose in his *De Arte Venandi cum*

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<sup>22</sup> Latour, [Reassembling the Social](#), 72.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Bennett, [Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology Of Things](#). (Durham, 2010), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Lankester, *Diversions*, 119.

<sup>25</sup> For more details on the "fishiness" of the barnacle goose, see Karl Steel's blog entry "[Gerald of Wales, Part 2: Flesh in the Topographia Hibernica](#)", (*In the Middle*, 2014. Web.)

*Avibus* as early as the 1240s; yet as we know from Richard Stannihurst in the sixteenth century, this mythologizing of the barnacle goose had not been completely removed from the cultural consciousness.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, it appears in bestiaries that postdate the *Topographia*, such as that of Vincent de Beauvais in the early thirteenth century and Bertius's seventeenth century *Description of Ireland*.<sup>27</sup> This leads to the question as to why this idea of the barnacle goose had such a hold on the medieval imagination. Was it perhaps simply an ecclesiastical rationalization to assuage guilt for eating poultry on a fasting day? If Gerald's constructed figure of the barnacle goose held such weight in subsequent decades and centuries, including the connected dietary concerns, perhaps the associations that comprise that composite network also continued to have an influence.

Of course, conquest and ecclesiastical appetite are not the only meanings that resonate from these connections. Bearing in mind Sara Ritchey's warning about the dangers of anachronistic ecocritical approaches to twelfth-century conceptions of 'Nature'<sup>28</sup>, one can still treat individual natural phenomena in the context of ecclesiastical engagement. Gerald imbued the barnacle with spiritual meaning by expressing immanent divinity in Nature through metaphor. In her article, Ritchey ultimately concludes, "Perhaps we can say that what was discovered in the twelfth century was not nature alone, but a new method of articulating God's being in the phenomenal world".<sup>29</sup> This directly fits Gerald's application of spirituality in the barnacle passage: "[Nature] daily produces and brings forth new creatures without the co-operation of any male or female for our instruction and in confirmation of the Faith."<sup>30</sup> Amongst the many associations that form the composite network of the barnacle goose, the barnacle itself functions as the site from which Gerald draws a description of the miraculous through examination of marvels. This reading of the barnacle follows the twelfth-century trend of Aristotelian revival. In his *Parts of Animals*,

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<sup>26</sup> See page 37 of Sumithra David's dissertation for a discussion of the continued anti-Irish sentiments potentially initiated in both the *Topographia* and the *Expugnatio*, as well as the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century backlashes against such attitudes.

<sup>27</sup> Heron-Allen, *Barnacles*, 47. Beare, Rhona. "Gerald of Wales", 460. See also Heron-Allen's full history of references to the barnacle goose in literature (10-108).

<sup>28</sup> Sara Ritchey, "[Rethinking The Twelfth-Century Discovery Of Nature.](#)" *Journal Of Medieval & Early Modern Studies* 39.2 (2009): 225-255. See page 226 of Ritchey's article for a discussion of the dangers of anachronism in the ecocritical approach.

<sup>29</sup> Ritchey, "Rethinking", 248.

<sup>30</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

Aristotle noted that when studying nature, one must “speak about soul more than the matter, inasmuch as it is more that the matter is nature because of soul than the reverse.”<sup>31</sup> Aristotle compares the issue to wood being furniture. The point is that the soul contains potentiality. While Aristotle took a scientific approach, Gerald and many others in the twelfth century shifted focus to a metaphor of natural phenomena. Rather than directly ascribing a soul to the barnacle, Gerald makes connections in this passage that facilitate the barnacle as a vehicle for discussing the miraculous. The barnacle is also a site of conquest by the goose in order to perform the intended meaning inherent in the construction of a barnacle goose. In this way, the barnacle is metaphorized in the text beyond the Aristotelian approach.

Thinking briefly about Gerald’s readership beyond his own lifetime, it is worthwhile to note the kinds of texts that are generally collected with the bestiary materials in manuscripts. Considering these materials that postdate Gerald’s own work can illustrate the ways in which the barnacle goose as a composite shifts over time without rupturing the associations that comprise it. Law’s discussion of the object in terms of topology is particularly relevant here: he states, “a shape is said to hold its form while it is being squeezed, bent, or stretched out – but only so long as it is not also broken or torn.”<sup>32</sup> In the context of the barnacle goose, this means that the object that is comprised of these various associations can be altered over time, but those earlier associations must not break down and must be maintained in some form. Bestiaries compiled after the production of the *Topographia* often include Gerald’s passage pertaining to the barnacle goose, or some approximation of it. For example, the bestiary of Pierre le Picard in the thirteenth century attributes the passage to the *Physiologus*, but clearly takes Gerald’s work as his inspiration.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the *Physiologus* does not actually contain a barnacle goose passage. Bestiaries are usually combined with other texts when put together in a manuscript. Baxter’s research demonstrates that bestiaries are most commonly combined with “virtue and vice” texts, sermons, hagiographies, and miracles.<sup>34</sup> If we can assume some coherence to the ways in which manuscripts are compiled, then this lends credence to the assumption that bestiaries were not

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<sup>31</sup>Aristotle, *Aristotle: On The Parts Of Animals : [I - IV]*, trans. James G Lennox (Oxford, 2004), 641a.

<sup>32</sup> Law, “Objects and Spaces”, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Heron-Allen, *Barnacles*, 13-14.

<sup>34</sup> Ron Baxter, "[Learning from Nature: Lessons in Virtue and Vice in the Physiologus and Bestiaries.](#)" *Virtue & Vice*. (Princeton, N.J, 2000), 39.

intended as scientific texts, but rather as moralizing allegories. Further, this notion of virtue and vice as an organizational scheme suggests that the barnacle goose does indeed hold its stable, composed network of the associations and the meanings derived from them, including the wondrous and the barbarity of the Irish.

Knowing what Gerald would have likely known about the classifications of miracles makes it easier to analyze the connections made between the barnacle goose and the miraculous. Augustine of Hippo, the fourth-century theologian and philosopher, classified the division of types of miracles.<sup>35</sup> The logic that led to these divisions is as follows: the first miracle was God's creation of the world; the second was the resurrection of Christ. If the creation of the world is a miracle, then all subsequent natural events within that world are also miraculous by virtue of being a part of the initial miracle. As man developed and matured, he grew accustomed to the daily miracle of life and therefore needed something more startling and awe-inspiring to reinvigorate his reverence for God's powers. If nature is mundane, then these new, provoking miracles must be contrary to nature. Gerald describes this phenomenon in the *Topographia*: "For human nature is so made that only what is unusual and infrequent excites wonder or is regarded as of value."<sup>36</sup> Gerald posits the example of the rising and setting sun, which he describes as beautiful and "worthy of wonder," but also a phenomenon of the every day.<sup>37</sup> "When, however, an eclipse of the sun takes place, everyone is amazed – because it happens rarely."<sup>38</sup> These new miracles often manifest in the presence of saints or the relics of saints. Therefore, Augustine stated that there were three levels of wonder<sup>39</sup>:

1. wonder provoked by the acts of God that are visible daily and discerned by the wise men as signs of God's goodness;
2. wonder provoked in the ignorant; and

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<sup>35</sup> Benedicta Ward, [\*Miracles and the Medieval Mind : Theory, Record, and Event, 1000-1215\*](#). (Philadelphia, 1982), 3-5.

<sup>36</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Ward, *Miracles*, 4.

3. wonder provoked by the genuine miracles, unusual manifestations of the power of God, not *contra naturam*, but *praeter naturam* or *supra naturam*.

Anselm of Canterbury built upon this foundation laid by Augustine of Hippo in his *De Conceptu Virginali*. Anselm identified the categories produced by Augustine and further narrowed them by considering the differences in God causing marvels and miracles within nature intentionally and the incidental occurrence of voluntary miracles of saints and men or even certain spiritual creatures. The newly defined categories set by Anselm are *mirabilis*, the miraculous (of God alone), and *voluntarius*, the voluntary (by the will of a creature according to the power of God).<sup>40</sup>

The renewed interest in Aristotle during the twelfth century further narrowed the medieval criteria for *mirabilia*, which impacts possible contemporary readings of the barnacle goose. Aristotle's scientific work suggested the analysis of secondary causes for events previously considered miraculous. Writers such as Adelard of Bath utilized this analysis to explain away many natural phenomena such as thunder in his text *Quaestiones Naturalis*. Benedicta Ward writes that Adelard was "convinced that recourse to miracle as an explanation was a last resort."<sup>41</sup> However, if we hold Augustine of Hippo's qualifying standards for *mirabilia*, then Gerald is disseminating ideas about spirituality in his observation of the barnacle. The barnacle itself is not necessarily miraculous by Adelard's standards, but Gerald uses it as a point of metaphor for discerning a didactic form of wonder in the environment. In other words, the barnacle and the goose separately are not particularly miraculous, but Gerald derives meaning from them as the constructed barnacle goose through the perception of asexual reproduction and the associations that connect to inform the moment of conquering the Irish.

This practice of deriving a holistic sense of the spiritual world through a natural object, which could be almost talismanic in its usage, was not uncommon in the twelfth century. Pertaining to her analysis of "trees of incarnation" imagery, Ritchey points out that "people made spiritual meaning out of their spiritual surroundings by choosing to make metaphor through them, to pray through them, and thereby to live not alienated from divinity".<sup>42</sup> Gerald derived Augustinian

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<sup>40</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, "De Conceptu Virginali," [\*Complete Philosophical Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury\*](#). Trans. Jasper Hopkins & Herbert Richardson. (Minneapolis, 2000), 444.

<sup>41</sup> Ward, *Miracles*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ritchey, "Rethinking", 247.

wonder from the “mysterious and remarkable generation” of the barnacle goose.<sup>43</sup> This act, *supra naturam*, could be made to reveal an analogous connection to Adam, the “first parent,” who was “really flesh, although not born of flesh.”<sup>44</sup> This line, which does not appear in either the first version or Recension A of the *Topographia*, is particularly important because of the earlier line it parallels: “regarding [the barnacle geese] as not being flesh, since they were not both of flesh.”<sup>45</sup> This earlier line is present in the first version of the text, though its parallel is absent. It is not until a later version of the text that Gerald seeks out this association between the barnacle goose and Adam. Making this connection layers the already ambiguous Irish act of consumption by emphasizing the purity of the constructed creature, which adds to the general anxiety of the act while also further incriminating those who partake in eating it. Recension D further posits a connection to bees: “The procreation of bees from the honeycomb, by some mysterious inspiration of breath of life, appears to be a fact of the same kind.”<sup>46</sup> The metaphor is situated to derive spiritual meaning from a perceived asexual reproductive process, which for Gerald is deemed wondrous or evocative of wonder. Gerald makes mention of the bees to emphasize through analogy the miraculous quality of the barnacle’s generation, which further emphasizes the anxiety of the Irish consumption of the creature. That anxiety situates the Irish as foreign and distinctly marginal in their barbarity.

Beyond these associations of wonder, the barnacle also facilitates Gerald’s fetishizing of the act of consumption as sin. In referencing a passage about the ibis, an “unclean bird,” from the *Physiologus*, Ron Baxter writes that the alternative to heeding virtue is to “stay on the shores of the waters of understanding and eat the fetid corpses washed up on the shore”.<sup>47</sup> The *Physiologus* states: “These are the works of the flesh, which are uncleanness, adultery, fornication, immodesty, lechery, idolatry, drunkenness, greed, and ambition.”<sup>48</sup> It is here that the *Physiologus*

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<sup>43</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Forester trans., 36.

<sup>45</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Forester trans., 36. This is the only copy of the barnacle passage reviewed that contains a reference to bees, despite the fact that it is not the only copy of Recension D. This is perhaps attributable to scribal error in the NLI MS 700, as mentioned above.

<sup>47</sup> Baxter, “Learning from Nature”, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Curley, *Physiologus*, XVII.

conflates cannibalism with other such perceived “works of the flesh”.<sup>49</sup> Texts such as the *Physiologus* are the early predecessors of bestiaries and natural histories such as Gerald’s works and so it is useful to examine these earlier interpretations for possible echoes of intentions that reappear in later works. Gerald observed the barnacle as producing the goose *supra naturam*, in direct contrast to his observation of the Irish as being produced “contrary to [Nature’s] ordinary laws”.<sup>50</sup> The Irish are a sinful people “that [are] adulterous, incestuous, unlawfully conceived and born, outside the law, and shamefully abusing nature herself”.<sup>51</sup> The nature of the sin seems capable of being conflated by Gerald, or rather one sin suggests a tumult of others. His textual presentation holds ideological influence for his readership that would fuel the continued marginalization of the Irish for centuries beyond his own death. Gerald observed the same things as those around him and applied that level of scientific reasoning available to him to conclude that not only were the Irish sinful, but the barnacle had indeed spawned the goose. That scientific reasoning was based in access to such authors as Aristotle, Isidore of Seville, Pliny the Elder, and Virgil, as well as his own observational skills. It is evident from allusions in his texts that Gerald was well-read and educated.<sup>52</sup> Citing Virgil, Gerald writes, “Happy indeed is he who is able to know the causes of things.”<sup>53</sup> However, his religious instruction situates his understanding of sin and he calls upon that knowledge in opposing the Irish act of eating fowl on a fasting day. This connection is one of the several associations that facilitate his construction of the barnacle goose.

Karl Steel points to language as being problematic in Gerald’s perspective on this issue. If one writing in Latin cannot distinguish in vocabulary the difference between the flesh of a human and ‘meat’, then the problem is further complicated. Steel writes, “To my knowledge, there’s no separate Latin word -- or English, for that matter -- meaning just “fish meat,” nor, in Latin, a

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<sup>49</sup> Curley, *Physiologus*, XVII.

<sup>50</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 118.

<sup>51</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 118.

<sup>52</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis. [\*Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland\*](#). Trans., Scott, A. B. & F. X. Martin. (Dublin, 1978), 5. Gerald was educated at the university in Paris and even tried his hand at a *Cosmographia* (Bartlett 112). He acknowledges Jerome, Gregory, Augustine, and Isidore of Seville in his *Expugnatio Hibernica* as essential reading, especially “the eleventh book of the *Etymologies* of Isidore concerning portents, also the twelfth concerning animals, and the sixteenth, which deals with precious stones and their powers.” (*Expugnatio* 5)

<sup>53</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 63.

word that differentiates “flesh” from “meat”: for Gerald, as for other writers, *caro* is *caro*, whether he’s talking about fish, or cows, or humans”.<sup>54</sup> White makes the off-handed comment in his Appendix that “Giraldus, like St Jerome, was fond of the theory that the Irish were cannibals”.<sup>55</sup> To that extent, we might infer that the goose as conqueror of the barnacle informs a reading of cannibalism, particularly in the context of the connection Gerald makes between the barnacle goose and Adam. In this way, consumption seems to function as a perversion of Eucharistic appetite. Aside from brief references to the Irish drinking each other’s blood and at one time gnawing on the dead face of a combatant, Gerald never directly alludes to the Irish as cannibals, though he does often point to the vices and sins of the Irish. As the *Physiologus* suggests, vices such as this can perhaps be conflated with other “works of the flesh.”<sup>56</sup> That conflation of vices, in connection with other perceived moments of monstrosity in the Irish texts, heightens this association Gerald makes between the barbarous Irish and the barnacle goose.

Curiously, Gerald does not describe the Irish act of eating the barnacle goose as a sin in the first version of the *Topographia*.<sup>57</sup> He simply states that these religious men eat them “without sin”.<sup>58</sup> However, in Recension D, Gerald changes his mind and writes, “But these men are curiously drawn into error. For, if any one had eaten part of the thigh of our first parent, which was really flesh, although not born of flesh, I should think him not guiltless of having eaten flesh.”<sup>59</sup> Further, thanks to Dimock’s transcription, we know that this change was not made until at least Recension B.<sup>60</sup> These calculated shifts from recension to recension complicate the network of associations because Gerald is clearly adding this new association of cannibalism in the later recensions. This new association retroactively participates in the collection of associations that portray a moment of Anglo-Norman conquest in Ireland by further insisting on the barbarity of a

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<sup>54</sup> Karl Steel, "Gerald of Wales, Part 2: Flesh in the *Topographia Hibernica*". In the Middle, 2014. Web. 4/12/2014.

<sup>55</sup> White, *The Book of Beasts*, 268.

<sup>56</sup> Curley, *Physiologus*, XVII.

<sup>57</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42. This holds true for at least the copy of that first version available for use in this paper.

<sup>58</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Forester trans., 36.

<sup>60</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 48: Recension A states: “Unde et in quibusdam Hiberniae partibus, avibus istis, tanquam non carneis quia de carne non natis, episcopi et viri religiosi jejuniorum tempore sine delectu vesci solent.” There is no subsequent passage about the Irishmen being led into error as with Recension D.

native people. However, this additionally lays the groundwork for ecclesiastical subjugation of the Irish church to Canterbury by suggesting the need for reform.

This passage does connote cannibalism through the parallel of unusual generation of flesh. Gerald refers here to Adam, the “first parent” who is still a man despite not being born in the usual way. This entire passage is absent from the first version and Recension A, which tracks with Gerald’s shift in focus over time from a secular to an ecclesiastical audience. This shift additionally fits with Rome’s changing attitude towards Ireland. Pope Adrian IV approved Henry II’s invasion of Ireland “on the grounds apparently, despite the evidence to the contrary, that Ireland was incapable of reforming herself.”<sup>61</sup> Gerald suggests in his *Expugnatio* that Ireland was destined to be conquered by the English and writes that “both the church and the realm of Ireland are indebted to our glorious king [Henry II] for the boon of peace and the growth of religion” because “evil practices of many kinds had arisen” before his arrival in Ireland.<sup>62</sup> Connecting this ecclesiastical condemnation of the Irish back to the barnacle passage, it is evident that Gerald descends into further scrutiny of the Irish as he seeks the ecclesiastical audience.<sup>63</sup> The benefits of aligning himself with such an audience include heightening his own perceived piety and leading role in reform, which ties into Gerald’s ambitions for the bishopric at St. David’s. In Edward Said’s terms, Gerald sets a stage for his ecclesiastical audience, authorizing a perspective of the Irish.<sup>64</sup> The connection to condemnation was made simply because the goose was perceived to have come from a barnacle on a tree rather than a nest of eggs. The geese are “in no corner of the world [...] seen either to pair, or build nests”.<sup>65</sup> The unusual generation gives the barnacle itself an agential role in discrimination against the Irish because of the connections made by the observer in perceiving that fictional development of the barnacle goose. In this way, the barnacle forces the connections to be made simply by existing in the right place at the right time and thus bears agency in the way Gerald construes such discrimination against the Irish.

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<sup>61</sup> J. A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*. (New York, 1970), 34.

<sup>62</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis. *Expugnatio Hibernica*, 101.

<sup>63</sup> Gerald states in the *Itinerarium Cambriae* that even the Pope had a copy of his *Topographia*, though it is unclear which version since no dedications to the Pope exist. He gave copies to several ecclesiastical authority figures, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Lincoln.

<sup>64</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Forester trans., 36.

Ultimately, we can view the goose as colonizing the barnacle because it takes meaning from the barnacle itself as a creature. The barnacle lacks individual identity even as it instructs observed meaning; or perhaps it is the goose that instructs such meaning. Either way, there is an association between the two; the barnacle's cilia were perceived as feathers and thus the goose is observed as inhabiting shared space. That association constructs a locus of meaning for the astute observer. More specifically, these associations produce the fictitious creature, which continues to captivate the medieval imagination up through the sixteenth century. All of these associations are interrelated in that these multiple readings of the barnacle goose inform one another. Latour ruminates on Emile Durkheim's discussion of symbols and social sentiments, which allows him to arrive at the following, highly applicable meaning of a *mediator* as that which "transform[s], translate[s], distort[s], and modif[ies] the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry."<sup>66</sup> This definition of mediator relates to the working definition of an actant in Latourian terms. The barnacle as actant mediates associations of meaning that ultimately intersect with one another. To that end, Mary Louise Gill and James G. Lennox write that "Aristotle defined nature as opposed to art by saying that a natural object possesses an inner principle of motion and rest".<sup>67</sup> In other words, Aristotle wrote that the body, active or inert, contained an immaterial spirit that flows as air or water flows that thus animates by providing essential elements.<sup>68</sup> Readings of wonder, scientific observation, and conquest converge and inform one another in such a way as to complicate the associations mediated by the barnacle. Yet, it is the goose that ultimately conquers the barnacle through imposed meaning for the observer. The locus of meaning is relational; in other words, the Irish would not partake of the goose on fasting days if the perceived being were not intertwined with barnacles on a tree by a body of water. The significance of each individually is arbitrary; but together with outer narratives of secular and ecclesiastical conquest, in the barnacle goose the Irish see fish and Gerald sees a natural wonder that instructs ecclesiastical reform in Ireland.

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<sup>66</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Lennox, *Aristotle*, 98.

<sup>68</sup> Lennox, *Aristotle*, 640.a.

Gerald emphasizes that we must “consider the evidence of nature”<sup>69</sup> and then derives from that observation, which is distorted by the goose imposing meaning on the barnacle, a means of ostracizing specifically Jews, but perhaps more generally inhabitants of Ireland not conforming to continental ecclesiastical practices. Gerald writes, “Pause, unhappy Jew! Pause – even if it be late. [...] But the fourth generation, in which alone is salvation, that is from a woman without the co-operation of man, you cannot, in your obstinate will abide – and to your own destruction.”<sup>70</sup> Gerald takes from his observation of an asexual reproductive process a didactic moment of self-perceived superiority and then shifts into his Augustinian discussion of wonder. Though Gerald uses the term “Jew,” this rebuke immediately follows his discussion of the Irish clergy, suggesting that his vitriol is directed at the ecclesiastical men of Ireland. Gerald’s loudest complaint against the clergy of Ireland concerns their lack of interest in the duties of pastoral care.<sup>71</sup> Aside from the fact that Gerald is, particularly in the later recensions, constructing the Irish as barbarous, he does also have a genuine interest in morality and ecclesiastical reform. When the Irish are led astray, Gerald targets the neglect of the clergy as primarily to blame for the perceived barbarism. Prior to the Gregorian reforms in the early twelfth century, the Irish diocesan system was primarily a network of monasteries and it would seem that the desire for removed, quiet contemplation was still present when Gerald reached Ireland.<sup>72</sup> This suggests that Gerald’s vitriol is particularly directed at the passive nature of the clergy, but it is further stirred by the allusion to cannibalism perceived in the act of eating barnacle geese. Gerald is incensed at the way in which he claims the Irish raise their young: “For apart from the nourishment with which they are sustained by their hard parents from dying altogether, they are for the most part abandoned to nature.”<sup>73</sup> The Irish, according to Gerald, are predisposed to be wild because of the way they are raised, and therefore need the additional guidance and care of the clergy. Given the connections between Irish barbarism and the neglect of the clergy, another of the associations to be made in the case of the barnacle goose is this concern for pastoral care.

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<sup>69</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>70</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 42.

<sup>71</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 112-3.

<sup>72</sup> Watt, *The Church*, 14-15.

<sup>73</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topography*, 100.

The evidence provided here demonstrates the shift in Gerald's purpose over time, which can be charted from version to version of the *Topographia*.<sup>74</sup> This shift, a progression from simply evoking wonder to a means of targeting the Irish clergy, is readily obvious from Recension A to D because of the insertion of the line "But these men are curiously drawn into error. For, if any one had eaten part of the thigh of our first parent, which was really flesh, although not born of flesh, I should think him not guiltless of having eaten flesh."<sup>75</sup> Gerald tracks these ideological shifts in his autobiographical records as corresponding to the necessity of amplifying the barbarity of the Irish not only in the eyes of political leaders, but particularly for his ecclesiastical readership. This shift heightens the association between the Irish, the barnacle, and the goose by using the barnacle as a means of discussing the ways in which the Irish have been led astray. When comparing the two fringe native groups – the Irish and the Welsh – it was important to contrast the pair such that the Welsh are cast in a morally redeemable light despite Gerald's encouragement of their subjugation to the English crown. Gerald articulates in *Itinerarium* his desire for the ecclesiastical independence of Wales, a cause necessitating piety and the capability of moral redemption through reform.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, the Irish must play the role of the obligatory irredeemable Other. Of course, the associations of wonder are not lost in this shift, but are instead complicated by additional associations of conquest. In fact, this persecution of the Irish clergy serves to elevate the wondrous nature of the barnacle through drawing the comparison to Adam. When these associations are all examined together, the syntactic network established in the construction of the barnacle goose reveals that temporal moment in which Gerald composed his text.

In concluding this essay, it is perhaps instructive to look at what the Aberdeen Bestiary composer had to say about perceptions of figures in nature: "In painting this picture I intend to improve the minds of ordinary people, in such a way that their soul will at least perceive physically things which it has difficulty in grasping mentally; that what they have difficulty comprehending with

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<sup>74</sup> Since there were no copies of Recensions B or C accessible for study, the analysis of movement from the barnacle simply evoking wonder and an object eligible for consumption "without sin" to targeting the Irish clergy as hopelessly Other is incomplete.

<sup>75</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Forester trans., 36.

<sup>76</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Journey*, 160-169.

their ears, they will perceive with their eyes.”<sup>77</sup> Gerald utilizes the barnacle goose in the same didactic manner, though he is instructing secular and ecclesiastical authorities of the barbarism of the Irish, which thus justifies Henry II’s conquest of Ireland. Regardless of his own belief, Gerald suggests that the conquest was foretold and virtuous in the “five-fold right” he lays out in his *Expugnatio* for Henry II, a careful justification that includes a fabricated history of the Irish paying tribute to the mythical Arthur.<sup>78</sup> The mythologizing through medieval observation of such creatures as the barnacle goose further lends itself not to the study of Nature so much as the discernment of divinity through the illustrative study of individual creatures and objects. Of course, Gerald took this a step further by observing not just the associations between the barnacle and the goose, but also taking into account the Irish observation of the same creatures. As Latour states, “Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled.”<sup>79</sup> That disentangling of the network presented as the barnacle goose leads one through the manifold associations examined in this paper. In the end, the barnacle goose is not a real, tangible creature, but rather a construction of those threads in which such actors as the barnacle, the goose, the Irish, the Normans, and Gerald all assert agencies in this network. The assumptions and associations made by each of these actors fit together like an electric circuit, and so long as none of the individual associations is broken this network produces a constructed moment of conquest that is still intelligible for audiences centuries later. These observations in conjunction with one another ultimately construct in the text meanings of conquest, sin, and wonder.

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<sup>77</sup> Aberdeen, [Aberdeen University Library, MS 24 fol. 25v.](#)

<sup>78</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis. *Expugnatio Hibernica*, 149.

<sup>79</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 43.

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### **Appendix A**

O'Meara, John. Trans. – taken from Manuscript M. (Mm. 5.30, University Library, Cambridge) – (From Version I) ca. 1187 MS. (See: O'Meara, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 52 C 4, 1949) – Trans. pp. 41-42. (See Sargent, p. 14)

Caption 11 – *Barnacles that are born of the fir-tree and their nature*

There are many birds here that are called barnacles, which nature, acting against her own laws, produces in a wonderful way. They are like marsh geese, but smaller. At first they appear as excrescences on fir-logs carried down upon the waters. Then they hang by their beaks from what seems like sea-weed clinging to the log, while their bodies, to allow for their more unimpeded development, are enclosed in shells. And so in the course of time, having put on a stout covering of feathers, they either slip into the water, or take themselves in flight to the freedom of the air. They take their food and nourishment from the juice of wood and water during their mysterious and remarkable generation. I myself have seen many times and with my own eyes more than a thousand of these small bird-like creatures hanging from a single log upon the sea-shore. They were in their shells and already formed. No eggs are laid as is usual as a result of mating. No bird ever sits upon eggs to hatch them and in no corner of the land will you see them breeding or building nests. Accordingly in some parts of Ireland bishops and religious men eat them without sin during a fasting time, regarding them as not being flesh, since they were not born of flesh.

Pause, unhappy Jew! Pause – even if it be late. You hesitate to deny the first generation of man, from the slime of the earth without the co-operation of either man or woman; or the second, from man without the co-operation of woman – this, because of your veneration for the Law. The third only, that achieved by the co-operation of man and woman, because it is usual, you, with your hard neck, approve of and affirm. But the fourth generation, in which alone is salvation, that

is from a woman without the co-operation of man, you cannot, in your obstinate will, abide – and to your own destruction. Blush! wretch. Blush! At least consider the evidence of nature. She daily produces and brings forth new creatures without the co-operation of any male or female for our instruction and in confirmation of the Faith. The first generation was from slime; and this last from wood. The first indeed, because it happened only once through the operation of the Lord of nature, will ever seem worthy of all awe. But the last, though not less remarkable, provokes less wonder, because nature, who imitates, often produces it. For human nature is so made that only what is unusual and infrequent excites wonder or is regarded as of value. We make no wonder of the rising and the setting of the sun which we see every day; and yet there is nothing in the universe more beautiful or more worthy of wonder. When, however, an eclipse of the sun takes place, everyone is amazed – because it happens rarely.

Forester, Thomas trans., revised & edited by Thomas Wright (In parentheses Publications – Medieval Latin Series – Cambridge, Ontario, 2000 – originally Bohn's Antiquarian Library. New York: AMS Press, 1863 [Rpt. 1968]) – From Recension D, date ca. 1207-1209 (see Sargent, p. 15, 31) – specific MS unknown (NLI MS 700 is also Recension D)

Caption XI.: Of barnacles, which grow from fir timber, and their nature.

There are likewise here many birds called barnacles, which nature produces in a wonderful manner, out of her ordinary course. They resemble the marsh-geese, but are smaller. Being at first gummy excrescences from pine-beams floating on the waters, and then enclosed in shells to secure their free growth, they hang by their beaks, like seaweeds attached to the timber. Being in process of time well covered with feathers, they either fall into the water or take their flight in the free air, their nourishment and growth being supplied, while they are bred in this very unaccountable and curious manner, from the juices of the wood in the sea-water. I have often seen with my own eyes more than a thousand minute embryos of birds of this species on the seashore, hanging from one piece of timber, covered with shells, and already formed. No eggs are laid by these birds after copulation, as is the case with birds in general; the hen never sits on eggs in order to hatch them; in no corner of the world are they seen either to pair, or build nests. Hence, in some parts of Ireland, bishops and men of religion make no scruple of eating these birds on fasting days, as not being flesh, because they are not born of flesh. But these men are curiously drawn into error. For, if any one had eaten part of the thigh of our first parent, which was really flesh, although not born of flesh, I should think him not guiltless of having eaten flesh. Repent, O unhappy Jew, recollect, though late, that man was first generated from clay without being procreated by male and female; nor will your veneration for the law allow you to deny that. In the second place, woman was generated of man, without the intervention of the other sex.

The third mode of generation only by male and female, as it is the ordinary one, obstinate as you are, you admit and approve. But the fourth, from which alone came salvation, namely, birth from a woman, without union with a man, you utterly reject with perverse obstinacy, to your own perdition. Blush, O wretched man, blush! At least, recur to nature, which, in confirmation of the faith for our best teaching, continually produces and gives birth to new animals, without union of male and female. The first creature was begotten of clay; this last is engendered of wood. The one, proceeding from God of nature for once only, was a stupendous miracle; the other, though not less admirable, is less to be wondered at, because imitative nature often performs it. But human nature is so constituted, that it holds nothing to be precious and admirable but what is uncommon and of rare occurrence. The rising and setting of the sun, than which there is nothing in the world more beautiful, nothing more fit to excite our wonder, we pass by without any admiration, because they are daily presented to our eyes; while an eclipse of the sun fills the whole world with astonishment, because it rarely occurs. The procreation of bees from the honeycomb, by some mysterious inspiration of breath of life, appears to be a fact of the same kind [as the origin of barnacles].

Caption XVII. Dublin. National Library of Ireland MS 700 (f. [11] r & v). (Recension D – transcription – my own, with Dimock’s edition for reference.) c. 1200-1209. (See Sargent, pp. 29-30)

(De bernacis ex abiete  
nascentib[us] earumq[ue] natura. XVII)  
Sunt [et] aves hie multe [quae] birnace  
vocant[ur]. quas mirum in mod[um]  
cc (?) nat[ur]am : nat[ur]a p[ro]ducit. Aucis quid[em]  
palustrib[us] similes. s[ed] minores. Ex lig-  
nis namq[ue] abietinis p[er] equora devo-  
lutis p[ri]mo q[ua]si gummi nascunt[ur]. De-  
hinc tanq[ua]m ab alga ligno cohæren-  
te. conchilib[us] testis ad liberiore[m] for-  
mat[i]o[n]em incluse: p[er] rostra depende[n]t.  
[e]t sic quousq[ue] p[ro]cessu temporis f[ir]ma[m]  
plumarum vestit[ur]am indute. ut  
in aquas decidunt. p[er] i[n] aeris lib[er]tate[m]  
se volatu tr[an]sferunt ex succo ligneo  
marino q[ue] occulta nimis admira[n]-  
daq[ue] seminii r[ati]one alim[e]nta simul i[n]-  
crem[e]ntaq[ue] suscipiunt. (V)idi m[ul]t-  
totiens oculis meis plusq[ua]m mille  
minuta hui[us]modi a[v]ium corp[us]c[ula].

i[n] litore maris ab uno ligno dependen-  
 tia. testis inclusa: [e]t iam forma-  
 ta. (N)on ex harum coitu ova gig-  
 nuntur ut assolet. n[on] avis in earu[m]  
 p[ro]creat[i]one umq[ua]m ovis incubat I[n]  
 nullis t[er]ra[rum] anglis. ut libidini va-  
 care ut nidificare videntur. ([U])n-  
 de [e]t i[n] quib[us]dam hyb[er]ne p[ar]tib[us] avi- {here ends f. [11] r}

{here begins f. [11] v}  
 b[us] istis tamq[ua]m n[on] carneis. q[ua] de carne  
 n[on] natis epi[scopi] [e]t viri religiosi ieiunior[um]  
 tempore. s[i]n[e] delectu vesci solent. S[ed]  
 hu quidem scrupulose movent[ur] ad  
 delictum. Siquis [e]n[im] ex primi pin (?)\* p[ar]en-  
 tis carnei quidem licet de carne n[on]  
 nati femore comedisset: eu[m] a car-  
 nium esu n[on] immunem arbitr[ar]er  
 (R)espici[s]ce infelix iudee Respi[s]ce  
 ut sero. p[ri]mam hominis g[e]n[er]at[i]o[n]em  
 ex limo sine mare [e]t femina. Secu[n]-  
 damq[ue] ex mare s[i]n[e] femina ob leg[is]  
 venerat[i]onem diffiteri n[on] audes. Ter-  
 tiam solam ex mare s\_\_\_\_\_` [e]t femina.  
 q[ui]a usual[is] [est] dura cervice approbas  
 [e]t affirmas. Quarta[m] v[er]o i[n] q[ua] sola  
 salus [est] ex femina s\_\_\_\_\_` s[i]n[e] mare ob-  
 stinata malitia i[n] p[ro]p[ri]am p[er]nicie[m]  
 detestaris. (E)rubesce miser erube[s]-  
 ce. [e]t saltem ad nat[ur]am recurre. q[uae]  
 ad argum[en]ta fid[e]i. ad instruct[i]one[m]  
 n[ost]ram. nova condie a[n]i[m]alia s[i]n[e] o[mn]i  
 mare ut femina p[ro]creat [e]t p[ro]duit.  
 (P)rima [er]g[o] generatio ex limo. [e]t  
 hec [←-haec?] ultima ex ligno. Illa quidem  
 q[ua]m a domino nature nec t[antu]m semel.  
 i[de]o semp[er] obstupenda p[ro]cessit. Istam  
 v[er]o n[on] min[us] admirabilem min[us] t[ame]n  
 admirandam q[ui]a s{a}epe. imitat[ri]x n[a]{tura?}  
 ministrat. Sic [e]n[im]. [com]po[s]ita [est] huma-  
 na nat[ur]a. ut {nihil?} p[rae]ter inusitatu[m]  
 [e]t raro {contin?} gens. [e]t p[ra]osium{??} ducat  
 ut admirand[um]. (S)olis ortum [e]t  
 occasum quo nihil in mundo p[ul]-  
 c{h}rius. nihil stupore digni[us]. q[ua] q[ui]oti-  
 die videm[us] s[i]n[e] om[n]i admirat[i]one

p[rae]timus. Eclipsim v[er]o sol[is] q[u]i[a] rar[o]  
accidit. totus orb[is] obstupescit. (A)d  
idem [e]t[iam] facere videtur flatu solo. [e]t oc-  
culta q[uan]dam inspiratione. citra om[n]em  
mixturam apum ex fa[vo] p[ro]creat[i]o.

\*It looks like this word was crossed out.  
'Dimock lists these as 'scilicet'

T.H. White trans. for reference in his translation of a bestiary (pp. 267-268). MS & Version Unknown. White uses *Topographia Hibernica* for the sake of dating the bestiary he is studying (238). He seems to date the *Topographia* to some time around 1186, though he does not offer the reason for this date. (Version unknown, but it must be a translation of at least Recension B.)

There are likewise here many birds called barnacles which nature produces in a wonderful manner, out of her ordinary course. They resemble the marsh-geese, but are smaller. Being at first gummy excrescences from pine-beams floating on the waters, and then enclosed in shells to secure their free growth, they hang by their beaks, like seaweeds attached to timber. Being in process of time well covered with feathers, they either fall into the water or take their flight in the free air, their nourishment and growth being supplied, while they are bred in this very unaccountable and curious manner, from the juices of the wood in the sea-water. I have often seen with my own eyes more than a thousand minute embryos of birds of this species on the seashore, hanging from one piece of timber, covered with shells, and already formed. No eggs are laid by these birds after copulation, as is the case with birds in general; the hen never sits on eggs in order to hatch them; in no corner of the world are they seen either to pair or build nests. Hence, in some parts of Ireland, bishops and men of religion make no scruple of eating these birds on fasting days, as not being flesh, because they are not born of flesh. But these men are curiously drawn into error. For, if anyone had eaten part of the thigh of our first parent, which was really flesh, although not born of flesh, I should think him not guiltless of having eaten flesh.

Heron-Allen, Edward. *Barnacles in Nature and in Myth*. Heron-Allen derives his transcription and translation from an appendix to *Richardi Stanihursti Dublinensis de Rebus in Hibernia gestis, libri quatuor*, Antwerp (Plantin), 1584, p. 230, cap. viii.

-Sylvester Giraldus Cambrensis, 'Topographia Hiberniae', in *Anglica, Normannica, Hibernica, Cambrica, a veteris scripta*, Frankofurti, 1603, p. 706 (under Henry II, 1154-89). Cap. xv, 'De bernacis ex abiete nascentibus, earumque natura'.

-Version & MS unknown.

Sunt et aves hic multae, quae bernacae vocantur, quas mirum in modum contra naturam natura producit. Aucis quidam palustribus similes, sed minores. Ex lignis namque abiegnis per aequora devolutis, primo quasi gummi nascuntur. Dehinc tanquam ab alga ligno cohaerente conchylibus testis ad liberiolem formationem inclusae per rostra dependent. Et sic quo usque processu temporis firmam plumarum vestituram indutae, vel in aquas decidunt, vel in aeris libertatem volatu se transferunt, ex succo ligneo marinoque suscipiunt. Vidi multoties oculis meis plus quam mille minuta hujusmodi avium corpuscula, in litore maris, ab uno ligneo dependentia, testis inclusa et jam formata. Non ex harum coitu (ut in avibus assolet) ova gignuntur, nec avis in earum procreatione unquam ovis incubat: in nullis terrarum angulis vel libidini vacare vel nidificare videntur. Unde et in quibusdam Hiberniae partibus, avibus istis tanquam non carnis quia de carne non natis episcopi et viri religiosi jejuniorum tempore sine dilectu vesci solent. Sed hi quidem scrupulose moventur ad delictum. Si quis enim ex primiparentis carni quidem, licet de carne non nati, femore comedisset, eum a carnium esu non immunem arbitrarer.... Erubescere, miser, erubescere, et saltem ad naturam recurre.

Heron-Allen's translation (pp. 11-12):

There are in this place many birds which are called Bernacae: Nature produces them against Nature in the most extraordinary way. They are like marsh geese but somewhat smaller. They are produced from fir timber tossed along the sea, and are at first like gum. Afterwards they hang down by their beaks as if they were a seaweed attached to the timber, and are surrounded by shells in order to grow more freely. Having thus in process of time been clothed with a strong coat of feathers, they either fall into the water or fly freely away into the air. They derive their food and growth from the sap of the wood or from the sea, by a secret and most wonderful process of alimentation. I have frequently seen, with my own eyes, more than a thousand of these small bodies of birds, hanging down on the sea-shore from one piece of timber, enclosed in their shells, and already formed. They do not breed and lay eggs like other birds, nor do they hatch any eggs, nor do they seem to build nests in any corner of the earth. Hence Bishops and religious men (*viri religiosi*) in some parts of Ireland do not scruple to dine off these birds at the time of fasting, because they are not flesh nor born of flesh.

But in so doing they are led into sin. For if anyone were to eat of the leg of our first parent (Adam) although he was not born of flesh, that person could not be adjudged innocent of eating meat.

Be wise at length, wretched Jew, be wise even though late.... Blush, wretch, blush, and at least turn to Nature! she is an argument for the faith, and for our conviction procreates and produces every day animals without either male or female.

Dimock, James F. transcription. (Recension A – derived from London British Library MS Harley 3724 and Cambridge Peterhouse MS 1.8.1)

[Cap. XV]

*De bernacis ex abiete nascentibus; earumque natura.*

Sunt et aves hic multæ, quæ bernacæ vocantur; quas mirum in modum, contra naturam, natura producit; aucis quidem plaustribus similes, sed minores. Ex lignis namque abietinis, per æquora devolutis, primo quasi gummi nascuntur. Dehinc tanquam ab alga ligno cohærente, conchilibus testis ad liberiolem formationem inclusæ, per rostra dependent; et sic quousque processu temporis, firmam plumarum vestituram indutæ, vel in aquas decidunt, vel in aeris libertatem volatu se transferunt. Ex succo ligneo marinoque, occulta nimis admirandaque semini ratione, alimenta simul incrementaque suscipiunt.

Vidi multoties oculis meis plusquam mille minuta hujusmodi avium corpuscula, in litore maris ab uno ligno dependentia, testis inclusa, et jam formata.

Non ex harum coitu, ut assolet, ova gignuntur; non avis in earum procreatione unquam ovis incubat; in nullis terrarum angulis vel libidini vacare, vel nidificare videntur.

Unde et in quibusdam Hiberniæ partibus, avibus istis, tanquam non carneis quia de carne non natis, episcopi et viri religiosi jejuniorum tempore sine delectu vesci solent.

Resipisce, infelix Judæe, resipisce vel sero. Primam hominis generationem ex limo sine mare et femina, secundamque ex mare sine femina, ob legis venerationem diffiteri non audes. Tertiam solam, ex mare scilicet et femina, quia usualis est, dura cervice approbas et affirmas. Quartam vero, in qua sola salus est, ex femina scilicet sine mare, obstinata malitia in propriam perniciem detestaris.

Erubescere, miser, erubescere; et saltem ad naturam recurre. Quæ ad argumenta fidei, ad instructionem nostram, nova quotidie animalia sine omni mare vel femina procreant et producit.

Prima ergo generatio ex limo; et hæc ultima ex ligno. Illa quidem quoniam a Domino naturæ tantum semel, ideo semper obstupenda processit. Istam vero, non minus admirabilem, minus tamen admirandam quia sæpe, imitatrix natura ministrat. Sic enim composita est humana natura, ut nihil præter inusitatum, et raro contingens, vel pretiosum ducat vel admirandum.

Solis ortum et occasum, quo nihil in mundo pulchrius, nihil stupore dignius, quia quotidie videmus, sine omni admiratione præterimus. Eclipsim vero solis, quia raro accidit, totus orbis obstupescit.

Ad idem etiam facere videtur, flatu solo et occulta quadam inspiratione, citra omnem mixturam, apum ex cera procreatio.

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