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Lifting the Emerald Veil

Figurations of the Irish 'Other' in Early Colonial Literature

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Abstract: English Version

This study explores the use of ethnic and gendered stereotypes in English and Irish literature during two significant periods of Ireland's early history as a colony: the arrival of the Normans (c. 1169) and the Elizabethan conquest (c. 1534-1603). The thesis examines how British writers used stereotypes to justify the English civilising mission, and to metaphorically express both English and Irish colonisation-related distress. The thesis uses medieval accounts on both sides of the colonial medal to explore general effects of colonialism. English texts demonised Irish inhabitants through tropes of savagery, monstrosity, and sexual deviance as coping mechanism for anxiety on the colonial mission—whereas Irish texts attempted to form a strong national identity as counter-colonial response. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of conquest, identity, and societal change in the Middle Ages and suggests that questioning these medieval figurations of the Irish Other leads to a more accurate portrayal of some foundations of one of Britain's first colonies.

Abstract: Dutch Version

Deze studie onderzoekt het gebruik van etnische en genderstereotypering in Engelse en Ierse literatuur tijdens twee beduidende periodes in de vroege geschiedenis van Ierland als kolonie: de komst van de Normandiërs (ca. 1169) en de Elizabethaanse verovering (ca. 1534-1603). De studie bestudeert hoe Britse schrijvers stereotypen gebruikten als rechtvaardiging voor hun beschavingsmissie en om zowel Engelse als Ierse koloniale onrust metaforisch aan te kaarten. De studie gebruikt middeleeuwse en vroegmoderne teksten van beide kanten van het koloniaal verhaal om de algemene effecten van kolonialisme binnen dit specifiek kader te onderzoeken. Engelse teksten demoniseerden Ierse inwoners vaak via weergaves in termen van barbaarsheid, monsterlijkheid en seksuele afwijking als reactie uit angst voor de slagingskansen van de koloniale missie—terwijl Ierse teksten trachtten een sterke nationale identiteit te vormen als tegenkoloniaal antwoord. Dit onderzoek beoogt bij te dragen tot ons begrip van verovering, identiteit en maatschappelijke verandering in de middeleeuwen. Het suggereert dat het in twijfel trekken van deze middeleeuwse en vroegmoderne voorstellingen van de Ierse "andere" leidt tot een nauwkeuriger beeld van de grondslagen van een van de eerste Britse kolonieën.

Acknowledgments

As I embark on yet another research quest into the realm of the Celtic Other, I wish to extend my gratitude to those who have continuously illuminated this path for me. Thank you to Andrew Bricker and Elisabeth Bekers for their understanding and readiness to help. To my parents and aunt for their ever-lasting support and encouragement. To my friends and peers for their camaraderie and belief. Your unwavering support has been an incredible source of strength, and for that I cannot thank you enough. I am truly fortunate to have such a wonderful support system, and even though words cannot sufficiently express my appreciation: thank you.

Foreword: A Note on Positionality

While designing my research plan for this article, I prioritised the intricate issues of diversity and national identity, particularly considering my own positionality as a Belgian female student. Recognising my status as an outsider to Irish society, I am aware that my perspectives may diverge from those of the native population. However, I view this as an advantage within the realm of potential biases, as it affords me a relatively objective lens to examine thorny topics such as English and Irish nationalism.

Throughout the literary analysis, I have also been attentive to any impact of gender issues. This includes an exploration of the complex interplay between the gendering of communities and historical colonial legacies. As a female student delving into this subject, I acknowledge that my lived experiences as woman provide a certain perspective that is more attuned to recognise and analyse gender biases or roles, their intersection with nationalism, and their significance for colonial power dynamics.

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1. Introduction

The widely held perception of the Irish as white independent citizens overshadows their long history of ethnic and racial discrimination. In fact, the Irish did not truly attain “whiteness” until well into the twentieth century after gaining their independency (Graves 4). Throughout the centuries, English literary and ethnographic discourses have consistently depicted the Irish as an ethno-racial Other in order to legitimise military interventions in the Emerald Isle. As early as 1185, the Cambro-Norman writer Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) penned his prototypical denunciations of Irish savagery in his *Topographia Hibernica* (1136) to advocate for a colonising mission (Kenny 5). Gerald’s early stereotypes, rooted in a premodern colonial narrative, paved the way for a British view on Ireland and its native inhabitants that influenced the relationship between the two nations for centuries. Later authors simply appropriated this twelfth-century rhetoric (Ohlmeyer 30). Thus, when Edmund Spenser and other colonialist authors echoed Gerald’s sentiments in the sixteenth century, they were merely drawing on long-established precedents (Kenny 4). These calls for Ireland’s civilisation were nothing new; yet, what distinguished “the early modern state from its medieval predecessor was its ability to advance an imperial agenda in unprecedented ways” (Ohlmeyer 28). The process of Othering became a valuable tool to imperialist ends. What is more, these negative stereotypes not only affected external views on the Irish, but also actively molded aspects of Irish identity. In response to colonialist narratives, such Irish writers as Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating) strove to reclaim and assert their own identity, particularly from the seventeenth century on. Internalised doubts, altered cultural responses and complex power dynamics are only a few of the numerous ways in which the colonialist discourse manifested itself—creating senses of identity for both the coloniser and the colonised that persisted well into our contemporary society. My project examines how these modern debates around Irish identity and British-Irish politics are intimately tied to a racist rhetoric of Othering, tracing back to medieval Britain and further explored or countered during England’s colonial onset in the sixteenth century.

The question of Ireland’s former status as internal colony (Hechter 9) remains a thorny topic. Kevin Kenny has defined two opposing conceptions of the British-Irish relationship within academic discourse: either Ireland “was never, properly speaking, a British colony, or [at best] semi-colonial” or it was “self-evidently nothing other than a British colony” (2). A key aspect of this deep dispute is Ireland’s geographical position at the metropolitan centre of the later British Empire, while simultaneously being depicted as a nation situated at the edge of Western Europe and society. The label ‘colony’ typically evokes imagery of distant, exotic territories characterised by extreme racial subjugation (cf. Edward Said’s *Orientalism*)—a geographical profile Ireland seemingly lacked. Ireland notably deviated from eighteenth-century colonial stereotypes of “extreme temperatures, exotic produce, curious animals, slavery, and distance from the mother country” (Bartlett 2004:61): the country grew nothing that could not be had in England. However, Ireland’s proximity to both England and continental Europe prompted English colonial endeavours early on in the Middle Ages as defence strategy, since it “constitute[d] in English eyes an all-too-convenient base for foreign enemies and a likely haven for domestic rebels and malcontents” (Bartlett 2004:61). While initially being a partially governed dominion in the twelfth century, Ireland underwent full scale colonisation during the Tudor period, rapidly transforming into one of England’s earliest colonies. This study aligns with the view that Ireland can be classified as a former colony based on six core features of colonialism (Loomba, 2015): military conquest, settlement, political subjugation, economic exploitation, cultural assimilation, and racial discrimination. Especially the latter two are relevant to this study, given their prevalence in our literary corpus.

Although most previous studies on the Irish matter focus on power dynamics after the Act of Union in 1801 (cf. Connolly, 1999; Hooper, 2002; Flannery, 2009;), this study confines its scope to the medieval and early modern periods. Three seminal works that illuminate premodern Irish Othering have been selected: Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* (1136), Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), and Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (1634). The first two texts were chosen to exemplify and explore the dominant narrative propagated by English colonisers, while the latter was selected to provide insights into the emerging rise of the Irish subaltern voice during the early modern period. All texts will be considered through a close literary reading. Before delving into the analyses, we will take a closer look at the theoretical frameworks that are central to this study. Then, Gerald's text is analysed to explore the earliest vilifications of the Irish Other through negative stereotypes and tropes of savagery, monstrosity, or sexual deviance. The study will subsequently turn to Spenser's text to examine how Gerald's derogatory views persisted during the Elizabethan conquest, and transformed into a supposed justification for English invasions. Ultimately, the study shifts its focus to the suppressed Irish voice which found a way to powerfully express itself in the seventeenth century, as evident in Keating's historiographical account of the Irish history and the roots of their Catholic identity.

Overall, the study's goal is to scrutinise how stereotypical views played a pivotal role in shaping identities on both ends. The analyses of the English texts aim to illustrate the strategic utilisation of such rhetorical devices by British writers to shape their own identities and affirm or adopt the white man's burden. In turn, these narratives implicitly shed light on processes of self-imaging and the evolution of a distinct English identity. The close reading of the third text then intends to delve into the implications of the English conquest on the colonised's end. By closely analysing three literary works interlinked by their polemical stance within Ireland's early colonial history, this study highlights how suppressed—especially gendered and othered—bodies, were discursively constructed to either justify discriminatory colonialist policies or offer a counter-colonial voice. While serving as a brief survey of a single motif, i.e. figurations of the Irish Other, this study is not designed to encompass the complexity of the English-Irish relationship but rather to highlight the two colonial voices embedded in these texts, which allude to deeper underlying formations of identity in premodern Europe.

2. Medieval Colonialism, Ethnonationalism and Biopower

Recent developments in the growing fields of postcolonialism and critical race theory within the domain of medieval studies make it possible to delve deeper into premodern colonial dynamics. By applying such academic frameworks as postcolonialism, critical race theory, and biopolitics as analytical lenses, one develops a deep consideration of the dual role the Irish played as both subjects and actors in the creation of medieval ethnic identities within the British Isles. Although such a project might be dogged by accusations of presentism or anachronism, integrating Irish premodernity into broader discussion of identity construction, while acknowledging the fundamentally different socio-political structures, enables us to retrieve a medieval understanding of empire, colonialism, and ethnicity. The current view of Irish racial identity is deeply anachronistic: the assumption that the Irish were considered as white, based on their current classification as such, oversimplifies the discriminatory narrative. It reveals how aspects of ethnicity have not only been racialised but actually normalized throughout history. However, as the processes of othering show, the Irish did not need to have black skin to be racialised and discriminated in English writings.

Both medieval and early modern Ireland exhibited the dynamics of an internal colony (Hechter, 1999). During these periods, Ireland was marked by an amalgam of identities: ranging from the *túatha* [i.e. Irish clans] and the Cambro-Norman invaders in the Middle Ages, to the Gaelic Irish, Old English and New English communities after the Elizabethan conquest. Both contexts led to intense contact between in-coming people and native inhabitants, for which the modern concept of colonialism offers a useful analogy. While historians are careful to equate empire and colony (Davies, 2001; West, 1999), the contact between the English and the Irish inhabitants can be regarded in colonial terms of conquest and oppression—especially from the sixteenth century on. The resulting tensions in Ireland can be understood through such postcolonial concepts as Homi Bhabha's mimicry and hybridity (1990), Edward Said's Orientalism to explore othering (1989, 1994), Franz Fanon's psychological analyses to understand the colonial impact on both English and Irish minds (1952, 1961), Gayatri Spivak's Subalternity (1988) and Aimé Césaire's négritude (1939) to devise a sense of 'celtitude'.

While postcolonial studies of Irish and English literatures have so far focused on structural inequalities and the idea of ethnicity, the biopolitical aspect (i.e., race itself) of these prejudices has received little attention (Lumbley 3). Modern biopolitical assumptions about race only have recently been incorporated into studies of the Middle Ages (cf. Ramey, 2016; Heng, 2018; Kaplan, 2019; Vernon, 2018; Whitaker, 2019), as scholars have long assumed that race is an exclusively modern idea (Stoler, 1997; Heng, 2018). Both critical race theory and biopolitics have been productive in colonial debates. For instance, critical race theorists argue that race is a social construct used to oppress and exploit marginalised people and that, therefore, racism is not an aberration but a normalized feature of society (Bell, 1992). In this case, the ethnic and racial "othering" of the Irish suggests that certain identity traits were racialised during the Middle Ages, and furthermore used against them as suppressive force. Such biopolitical notions as Michel Foucault's power-knowledge paradigm (1980), Giorgio Agamben's state of exception (2008) to understand the power of institutions on everyday life, and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics (2019) to denote the coloniser's power over death, can indeed shed a different light on early colonial Ireland.

The sole question that remains then in our justification of carefully applying a new toolkit of modern concepts on an inherently different time period, is that of how far we may speak of national identities in the premodern world. This requires detailed enquiry into the processes of nation formation (Smith, 1995). For this reason, my project engages with ethnosymbolism, a school of thought within nationalism studies that stresses the role of "myths, symbols, values and traditions in the formation, persistence and change of ethnicity and nationalism" (Özkirimli 143). Ethnosymbolist scholars (e.g. Armstrong, 1982; Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1995) have unearthed connections between the future and the past, and underline the importance of subjective elements in our understanding of nations (Smith, 1995). For them, the emergence of our current nations must be interpreted while taking ethnic forebears into account (Hutchinson, 1982). Of particular relevance in this case is Joep Leerssen's research into imagology (2007) which deconstructs nationality through analysing it as a discursive and social construct rather than an anthropological reality. Imagology interprets national stereotypes as intrinsic properties of ethnicity—so-called ethnotypes—that exist as discursive objects rather than objectively exisiting phenomena. The discursive and social nature of these stereotypes underscore the social construct that is national identity. Or, in short as Paul Gilroy has pointed out: "[Identity] offers far more than an obvious commonsense way of talking about individuality, community, and solidarity and has provided a means to understand the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed" (98).

3. Beyond 'Barbaric' Borders: Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*

Renowned for his works on Ireland and Wales, Gerald de Barri, commonly referred to as Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis in Latin or Gerallt Cymro in Welsh), has been employed by historians, Celticists and linguists alike as "a valuable source of information about the twelfth-century Insular world, including Angevin court life and the Norman conquest of Ireland" (McMullen & Henley 1). His hybrid ethnic identity as son of a Pembrokeshire Marcher aristocrat and south Welsh royalty made him both an insider and outsider in English and Welsh milieux. As such, he cannot be easily categorised as solely English or Welsh—and neither group seemed to fully welcome him. Although his hybrid position made him a perfect gateway for the English Angevin court to understand native Welsh society, it also made him an unsettling threat to royal authority in Wales (cf. Roberts, 1982; Bartlett, 1982). Due to this anxiety surrounding his peculiar status, he was often labelled and ridiculed in the English court as a "traitor", "Sylvester" [woodsman] or "Barathro" [Savage] (Cambrensis 2005:144). However, since he preferred to distance himself from "the society and customs of *pure Wallia*" (McMullen & Henley 4), he was generally also not considered to be a countryman by the Welsh themselves, who were experiencing their own psychological trauma in the wake of Anglo-Norman colonialism (Davies 13; Lumbley 3). Furthermore, through his maternal lineage, Gerald is linked to Gerald of Windsor and princess Nesta of Deheubarth, often nicknamed the Helen of Wales (Johns, 2012; 2016; Maund, 2007) or the "queen-bee of the Welsh hive whence the Norman swarm came to Ireland" (Martin 280). His mixed Cambro-Norman descent and his not-too-distant kinship with some of the first conquerors of Ireland thus make him a compelling author that grants us a view on colonialism in medieval Britain and Ireland.

Although recent scholarship has been devoted to his ethnic hybridity (McMullen & Henley 2; Lumbley 5), his discriminatory views on native populations of inferior clay have yet to be contextualised within their contemporary colonial moment. Gerald's ethnographic writing, often patronized and sanctioned by the English crown, includes biopolitical designs—that is to say, Gerald repeatedly rationalises who should live and who should die, thus exercising what Foucault defined as the "right of death and power of life" (Campbell & Sitze 41), verging on the edge of what Mbembe termed "necropolitics" (2019). Remarkable about this view is the discrepancy between Gerald's ability to understand the dynamics of colonialism from a personal perspective and his advocacy for the conquest of Ireland. Multiple elements played a role in Gerald's perspective on the Irish matter, including personal ambitions and the prevailing socio-political context. The 12th century was marked by significant power dynamics within the British Isles: Anglo-Norman rulers exerted significant influence over the Welsh Marcher lords; an ethnically diverse group of invaders, among which some of Gerald's kin, launched expeditions into Ireland to gradually establish control; and the Church exercised significant power in political affairs (cf. Gillingham, 2000; Davies, 2001). In this context, Gerald's familial ties possibly influenced his support for further consolidation of English power in Ireland. Additionally, his aspirations to attain the Bishopric of St David's (i.e. the highest ecclesiastical office in Wales) and the Anglo-Norman power over the Welsh Marcher lords, might also have compelled him to align with Angevin policies to ensure both personal gain and security (cf. Bartlett, 1982; Roberts, 1982). This included endorsement of the conquest of Ireland—which resulted in a racist account of the country.

Gerald of Wales travelled to Ireland twice, on both occasions among a retinue of conquerors. In 1183 he joined his brother Philip de Barri who aimed to reclaim lands their uncle had captured. Two years later, in 1185, he accompanied Prince John who sought to

assert his lordship over Ireland as declared by the much-converted papal bull *Laudabiliter* by which Pope Adrian IV allegedly sanctioned King Henry II's invasion and sovereignty of Ireland (cf. Gillingham, 2000; Duffy, 2012; Johnston, 2021). Following these journeys, Gerald composed *Topographia Hibernica* (*The Topography of Ireland*, c. 1187), a topographic account that provides "both textual and iconographic descriptions of England's first colonial mission into Ireland" (Knight 55). The text however encompasses a variety of genres beyond the narrow scope of the topography, including etnography, miraculous tales, and history (Knight 55). The high number of surviving manuscript copies[1] marks the *Topographia* as Gerald's most popular work – in fact, Gerald's vivid portrayal in the *Topographia*, alongside St Bernard de Clairvaux's *Life and Death of St. Malachy the Irishman* (c. 11th century), was largely responsible for the lamentable public image of the Irish in medieval Europe (Martin 288). The many surviving copies illustrate the power of texts in a colonial context to shape communities and identities through rhetorical presentations of the Self and the Other – with the *Topographia*'s textual and visual representations of Irish monsters and miracles emphasizing Irish Otherness (cf. Cohen, 2006; Knight, 2001). While justifying the conquest of Ireland through elements that can be considered predecessors to ethnic nationalism (cf. Hutchinson, 1987; Rosenwein, 2006; Cooper & Leyser, 2016) and sentiments of cultural superiority, the figurations offered by Gerald expose these beliefs as constructed fantasies that serve to affirm the coloniser's identity, and simultaneously as coping mechanisms to alleviate guilt over the violence of colonialism (Cohen 41). Gerald's account includes gendered and ethnic stereotypes that depict the coloniser's identity rather than the Irish colonised themselves.

Strikingly, Gerald immediately starts his text with an effeminate personification of Ireland. In his landscape descriptions he uses vocabulary and imagery typically associated with femininity:

> "The land is fruitful and rich in its fertile soil and plentiful harvests. Crops abound in the fields, flocks on the mountains, and wild animals in the woods. […] The island is rich in pastures and meadows, honey and milk, and wine, but not vineyards. […] For the island has not, and never had, vines and their cultivators." (*Topographia* 34-35)

He ascribes feminine attributes such as fertility, abundance, nurture, and purity to Ireland. Furthermore, the explicit absence of vineyards, the virgin-like state of the island to cultivators, and the biblical reference to a promised land flowing with "honey and milk" reinforce the portrayal of the country as an untainted and alluring terra nullius. This type of imagery makes Ireland an appealing option for coloniser's seeking prosperous new territories. What is more: the personification implies a justification of male civilisation brought through violent dominance and colonisation, as the suggestion is made that Ireland is a female, natural entity in alleged need of civilisation by colonisers who predominantly carry masculine features such as authority and control. The association of Ireland with femininity through a highly effeminate personification thus contributes to a broader colonial discourse that undoubtedly served to rationalise the conquest of the island. Although the gendered metaphor does not directly relate to Gerald's Othering of the Irish people, it does raise intriguing questions about cultural views, patriarchal ideologies and gender norms that were prevalent during Gerald's time—in particular, about the intrinsic interdependency of gender and colonial discourse.[2]

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[1] In his biography of Gerald of Wales, Robert Bartlett lists a total of thirty surviving manuscript copies, ranging from the twelfth to the seventeenth century—with half of them dated back to the thirteenth century. See: Bartlett, Robert.

[2] The link between gender, empire and colonial discrimination has been widely discussed within various disciplines including feminist theory, critical race theory and postcolonial studies. See: Banerjee, Sikata; De Beauvoir, Simone; Donaldson, Laura; Enloe, Cynthia; Nagel, Joane; Sharpe, Jenny; Stoler, Ann Laura.

Gerald continuous to promote Ireland as a site of monsters and miracles through multiple tales that showcase hybrid creatures such as the werewolves of Meath (*Topographia* 69), a maned and bearded woman (ibid. 72), and the *semibos vir* [half man, half ox] of Wicklow (ibid. 73). Alongside accounts of bestial intercourse, these descriptions contribute to an overarching textual strategy aimed at asserting that both Ireland and its people are "naturally *contra naturam*" (Knight 60). In a way, Gerald posits that the wonders of Ireland and the moral corruption of the inhabitants stem from the island's geographical liminality. The peripheral position of Ireland within both Europe and the British Isles supposedly contributed to the emergence of a distinct Irish identity, which deviated from Continental norms. In turn, the colonial interactions in this geographical space between different identities fostered the emergence of a cultural liminal space allowing for the development of a hybrid identity. According to Bhabha, cultural liminality is a type of threshold environment, an in-between state that is marked by ambiguity and hybridity: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibilities of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1990:4). However, although cultural liminality does not impose a hierarchy in theory, it does so in practice. Even if there was a cultural liminal space in which the hybrid identity of the Irish emerged as attempt to assimilate or mimic the coloniser, said coloniser would cling to prejudices and labels of superiority to maintain a status quo (cf. Bhabha; Fanon). The colonised will never achieve the coloniser's ideal due to the colonial system's reliance on the hierarchical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised which is based on a degree of conformity to English norms. The case of medieval Ireland, as first of many, illustrates how mimicry is an impossible quest to successful assimilation into an idealised society, that ends in alienation from one's self rather than acceptance (Fanon 42).

Interestingly, this "threshold environment [is] where subjectivity finds itself poised between sameness and alterity" (Thieme 144). This article argues that Gerald's tale of the werewolves of Meath (*Topographia* 69) holds particular significance since it underscores both the 'Otherness' and the 'Sameness' of the Irish. In this chapter, Gerald tells of an unexpected encounter between a journeying Irish priest, his young male companion, and a male werewolf who reveals that he and his female companion are humans in wolf form due to a curse of the abbot Saint Natalis. The male werewolf requests the priest to administer last rites and Communion for the dying she-wolf. The priest complies with last rites but refuses to give Holy Communion to an animal. To prove her humanity, the male werewolf removes the she-wolf's skin, revealing her true human form underneath, thereby convincing the priest to administer Communion. Although the text of the *Topographia* "voyeuristically describes the highly visual event of the female wolf's stripping by the male werewolf" (Knight 69), the text directs the audience's attention to the agency of the male werewolf. Gerald's narrative constructs a fantasy of colonial complacency as the werewolf deliberately seeks out the priest—conforming to the coloniser's desires by willingly embracing 'correct' Christian doctrine and its civilising force (Knight 69). Portrayed as the epitome of an ideal colonial subject, the werewolf accepts and embraces the colonists' civilising endeavour while also propagating their propaganda. This way, the *Topographia* conveys the fantasy that colonisation and civilising efforts are welcomed by the indigenous people, justifying physical and cultural violence as a result of the "fantasy of colonial complicity" (Knight 68).

However, Gerald's considerations of humanity in this tale reveal a racist ethnic bias, as the description of the she-wolf's detachable skin implies that Irish ethnicity is supplementary to a basic human identity. The scene then contributes to a specific colonial fantasy of erasing or tempering distinct expressions of Irish ethnicity. The field of critical race theory is productive in this debate, since these scholars argue that race is not a biological truth, but a social

construct used to oppress and exploit marginalised communities—making racism not an aberration but a normalised feature of society (Delgado & Stefancic 15; Bell 176). According to them, stereotypes are employed to benefit white individuals, increase racial oppression, and maintain a status quo of racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic 78). And while Gerald's ethnic othering of the Irish may seem a form of "white on white" racism, it suggests that other identity traits than epidermal variation were racialised during the Middle Ages (Heng 42). Especially Ruth Frankenberg's work on "whiteness as a racial category that is produced [culturally]" (6) helps us understand Gerald's stance on Irish ethnicity as supplemental and erasable. Dominant white cultures consider whiteness as an unmarked characteristic, "whereas other cultures are specifically marked" (Frankenberg 197). The scene thus exemplifies a solipsistic and racist belief that envisions English and Latin Christian cultures as essential while other cultures are relegated to a secondary status that can be removed like the skin of the female wolf. The removal of barbarism, as represented by the wolf's skin, then reveals a human body—an occurrence that reinforces the colonising mission's goal of erasing undesirable traits to create blank slates upon which colonisers can imprint what they want.

Whereas Gerald's narrative oftentimes implicitly sheds a nuanced light on medieval views of race and ethnicity through Othering the Irish, it also attempts to establish ethnic barriers by explicitly portraying the Irish as "a wild and inhospitable people" (*Topographia* 101) requiring civilisation. In both colonial and critical race debates, it is the third part of the *Topographia* which tackles "the nature, customs and characteristics of the [Irish] people" (ibid. 100) that has sparked the most animosity. To establish fundamental differences between the English and the Irish race, Gerald draws on physiognomic logic by linking the "external appearance of their dress, […] their flowing hair and beards" to an "internal cultivation of the mind […] so barbarous that they cannot be said to have any culture" (ibid. 101-2). He goes on to characterise the Irish as inferior, primitive brutes who "despise work on the land, have little use for the moneymaking of towns, contemn the rights and privileges of citizenship, and desire neither to abandon, nor lose respect for, the life which it has been accustomed to lead in the woods and countryside" (ibid. 102). Way past the border of discrimination, limited praise for their "natural gifts" and "qualities" (ibid. 102) pales into insignificance. No mention is made of Ireland's Golden Age of monasticism or its missionary activities abroad under such mythic figures as Saint Columban or Saint Patrick (cf. Moss et al., 2017; Bitel, 1990). Despite the enduring legacy of Ireland's Golden Age characterised by a flourishing culture well into the twelfth century (cf. Harbison, 1999), Gerald tenaciously clings to the belief that the Irish are a cunning and uncultured people. This perspective serves to justify any civilising missions the English undertake into the Emerald Isle, thus deliberately overlooking the fact that Ireland's rich cultural traditions and deep connection to the original Christianity of the Insular world continue to positively influence Irish society in the age of Anglo-Norman conquest. In short, he pertains the view that "[they] live like beasts" who "have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of pastoral living" (*Topographia* 101), entailing that instead of a self-sufficient and civilized community, they are a people in need of civilisation and colonial domination.

4. "To Devyse Remedy": Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*

In the wake of the Tudor conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth century, contemporary writers and architects of English-Irish policies echoed the worries articulated centuries earlier in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*: Irish culture, especially its language, laws, and customs, was seen as debilitating to English hegemony and demanded eradication (Francis

148; Montaño 294). The discourse on Ireland during the early modern period is "a complex, fraught and heterogenous genre" (Maley *Dialogue* 72), characterised by the debate over whether the integration of the Irish into English metropolitan culture proved itself sufficient, or if the early modern state favoured the eradication of the indigenous culture followed by a complete colonisation of the Emerald Isle (Ohlmeyer 27). Edmund Spenser, in his political pamphlet *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), advocated for the implementation of aggressive imperialism over that of assimilation. He endorsed the dismantling of the existing Gaelic order and the systematic colonisation of Ireland through the influx of English settlers (Ohlmeyer 27). Interestingly, his treatise was published posthumously in 1633, possibly due to a censorship. While there is no direct evidence of the government's active involvement in a censorship of the text, there are indications that Spenser's *View* was "at the very least unappreciated by the Elizabethan establishment" (Van Es 149). Nevertheless, the *View* circulated in manuscript form between its composition in 1596 and its eventual publication (Maley *Chronology* 70). While the work might not have been popular in a conventional sense, its manuscript circulation indicates that it had some degree of influence and support among like-minded souls, specifically fellow English planters in Ireland. Mainly popular in those circles due to its nationalist sentiments, Spenser's *View* then serves as a sixteenth-century textual endeavour to construct English identity within an internal colonial context, by equating national identity with civility—something that cannot be defined without the existence of its antitheses as embodied by an uncivilised, savage Other, in this case, the Irish.

The first published edition of the *View*, that of James Ware in 1633, advertised it as being written 'dialogue-wise' (Maley *Dialogue* 67)—an aspect of the text that has stirred considerable debate among many scholars. [3] In its essence, the *View* depicts a dialogue between two English interlocutors, Eudoxus and Irenius, in light of the latter's recent return from Ireland (*View* 1). Opposing views are interchanged: the first's unfamiliarity with Ireland fuels his curiosity and goodwill towards its people, whereas the latter aims to demonstrate the savage nature of the Irish to convince Eudoxus of the need for a military campaign, widespread colonial practices, and the eradication of Gaelic culture. The dialogue, according to Donald Bruce, is written in "a form implying open-minded discussion" (125), furthermore reinstating "the formally disputational character of the platonic original" (Brady 1986:40) instead of using it pedagogically like contemporaries of Spenser did. However, as Andrew Hadfield has pointed out, there is arguably 'monologism' at work when considering "the form's dominant voice and forcefulness" (235). My analysis of the *View*'s dialogue contends Hadfield's assertion that "Spenser's works participate and reflect on [colonial] enterprise in an active way" (12) by taking both speakers as vocal extensions of Spenser. Whether Irenius truly speaks for Spenser or not, a radical line of thought is pursued, eventually causing Eudoxus to conform to it by the end of the text (Maley *Dialogue* 68).

Nevertheless, Spenser's *View* does remain a dialogue—though not one with, but about and against the Irish Other. Those asserting the *View*'s 'monovocality' miss its core intrigue: its 'polyvocality' that embraces different English interpretations of, and speculations on, what might be the best stance on the Irish matter (Avery 264). Avery's argument aligns with the so-called "poet-planter dichotomy" (Fogarty 76): the dialogue's contradictions stem from Spenser's personal experience as both poet and figure within the British political administration in Ireland (264). His choice of dialogue is then possibly determined by "a fear

[3] Partially in reaction to Patricia Coughlan's complaint that "the textual fact of [the *View*'s] dialogue form has still not been sufficiently attended to" (47), multiple scholars have begun to tackle the text's narrative form in detail. See: Coughlan, Patricia; Breen, John; Fogarty, Anne; Hadfield, Andrew; Maley, Willy; Van Es, Bart.

about the English tendency to 'degenerate' into the Irish" (Gold 105) through assimilation, thus entailing a loss of English identity. It illustrates how the question of self-fashioning and the construction of identity against a colonised Other is crucially linked to the narrative form of the dialogue, "with the colonist having to converse in order to avoid conversion" (Maley *Dialogue* 75; cf. Greenblatt *Fashion*). However, although the planter-poets were in dialogue, "they were talking to [only] themselves" (Maley *Dialogue* 75). Identity formation in the *View* is achieved through a deafening dialogue, which actively excludes the Other—thus leaving a silence, a void, a present absence, and a negative image that cannot be contested by the subject itself. The Irish Other's agency is completely stripped away by denying them their voice in this dialogue, thus actively maintaining what Spivak coined the silence of the subaltern (1988). This way, the absence of the Irish voice sustains the colonial status quo, i.e. the binary opposition between coloniser and colonised that excluded natives from a 'civilised' debate.

However, by advocating for this colonial binary opposition that lacks tangible foundations, Irenius inadvertently undermines his own discourse in favour of English supremacy. As linchpin for his argument, he points to the dominance of Scythian customs in Ireland that cause the incorrigibility of the Irish natives and in turn justifies the use of colonial force (Van Es 138; *View* 37-63). In Elizabethan ideology, the label Scythian denoted "an absolute otherness, a being so sharply inferior to civilised Western man that his very membership of the same species was open to doubt" (Hopkins 2). In short: Scythians were employed in Western discourse as the demonic Other which secured European superiority (Greenblatt *Marvelous* 124-5; Floyd-Wilson 91). Or in Said's words: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate" (1989:3). In a comparable manner, Irenius attempts to construct English identity by defining the genealogical origins of the Irish Other. Though he expends a good deal of energy tracing and assessing possible genealogies of the Irish, it turns out that both the Irish and English settlers were Scythian descendants (Floyd-Wilson 50). Spenser's *View* then "provides a synechdocical glimpse into the cultural origins shared by all northern European nations, including, of course, England" (Shuger 503)—thus conflating the origins of Englishness with Irishness, and in turn rendering Irenius's key argument reduced. Instead, Irenius's considerations shed light on the narrow line between sameness and alterity, elucidating their interdependency as social constructs. If the Same and the Other carry a common ancestry, how does the hierarchy hold?

Seemingly aware of the Scythian paradox, Irenius extends his argument to include a second core element that maintains the boundaries between English civilisation and Irish barbarism: the corruption of English identity by its assimilation with Gaelic culture. Taking centre stage in Irenius's quest to comprehend the decline of the initial Irish Anglo-Normans are Irish women, a particular subset of the Irish population—thus "intersecting marginalities" (Ashcroft 1989). While such earlier writers as Edmund Campion (1571) and Richard Stanihurst (1584) rather represent Irish women as signifiers of sexual barbarism, Spenser perceived women as "a source of danger and contamination powerful enough to jeopardise the colony itself" (McPeake 44). According to Irenius, language is the conduit through which contamination is transmitted, with women mediating as the vessel (*View* 67). He supposes "that the chief cause of bringing in the Irish language […] was specially their fostering, and marrying with the Irish, which are two most dangerous infections" (*View* 67). Fosterage and intermarriage are thus considered as detrimental points of contact with the Other since these communicate Irish language and by extension customs that have "the potential to remake the colonisers in an Irish image" (McPeake 54). Spenser, rather misogynistically, objectifies the

female body to an abstracted sign of ethnic identity and mere vessel of political intentions.[4] The metaphor illustrates how the coloniser's fear of assimilation is the actual source of disruption rather than the female body. It is a coping mechanism for the anxiety which occurred due to difficulties in the regularisation of a colonial presence: the emergence of an inverted sense of the coloniser's Self as Other, as "embattled minority needing to defend their position and borders of their identity" (McPeake 54). The body of the Other then, as underscored in *A View* through the intersection of gender and ethnicity, served as "critical site both for maintaining colonial alterity and enacting colonial governance" (Rao & Pierce 161). By blaming the body of the Irish woman as root of evil in his dialogue, Spenser attempts to self-soothe his anxiety as coloniser, re-establish English superiority and justify his warning of assimilation into a hybrid identity.

As Feerick argues, hybrid communities imply that "racial identity is malleable and alterable rather than that which we have inherited today which, as Bhabha suggests, seeks in effect to attach a fixed essence to a group for the purpose of conquest and domination" (1990:86). Although scholars have long assumed that race is an exclusively modern idea as based on biological discrimination and epidermal differentiation, the notion as the social construct it is started to acquire some of its current impact in Spenser's time (Waller 18). Similar to Gerald's tale of werewolves in Meath (*Topographia* 69), Spenser's *View* exemplifies what Graves terms "the fallacy of race and racism" (2): in the absence of a biological basis for the separation of human beings into races, racism becomes an ideology that provides a moral justification for maintaining a hierarchical society that deprives certain groups of their rights and privileges (ibid. 2). Racism is then a discourse and practice of inferiorising ethnic groups through the continuous establishment of cultural differences that are in themselves variable. As Bhabha theorised, these cultural differences are not sources of conflict, but rather effects of discriminatory practices: that way, the production of cultured differentiation becomes a sign of authority and socio-political power over a marginalised minority (114; qtd. Wolf).

Interestingly, Irenius's metaphorical language use is highly illustrative of the English coloniser's powerful position within the Anglo-Irish relationship. He repeatedly conceives the Irish matter in terms of "soil management" (Schwyzer 21) and through "surgical rhetoric" (Scholz 135). The *View*'s verbal imagery is oftentimes sourced from the lexicon of weed control, encompassing terms like "cutting off" (9) and "root[ing] out" (18)—while other times, a medical framework is used to configure the Irish Other as a "diseased patient" (2) at the mercy of a "desperate physician" (2) who can administer harsh remedies like the eradication of Irish culture and confiscation of lands as the "violent [yet efficacious] medicine" (32) for its "malady" (3). When seeking to imagine remedies for "how the Irish earth could cease to be the province of the Irish dead" (Schwyzer 22), Spenser's dialogue turns to two grim vignettes which are presented as Irenius's personal recollections of Irish cannibalism: a mourner's grief-stricken blood-drinking at Murrough O'Brien's execution in 1577 and survival cannibalism during the Munster famine in 1581 (*View* 62 and 104; O'Brien 37; Burley 490). Aligned with other common early modern imagery of cannibalism as "the epitome of transgressed boundaries" (Brown 4) and bearing the contemporary popularity of medicinal cannibalism in mind (cf. Sugg; Himmelman), the political narrative of *A View* presents it as both symptom of Irish barbarism and, paradoxically, as metaphorical cure administered by the English state.

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[4] An interesting framework to consider in this regard is postcolonial feminism. Though some of the discipline's core elements and ideas have influenced this article's stance, it has not been explicitly mentioned. See: Al-Wazedi, Umme. *Postcolonial Feminism.* Caviness, Madeline H. *Feminism, Gender Studies, and Medieval Studies*. Lewis, Reina, & Mills, Sara. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Mishra, Raj Kumar. *Postcolonial Feminism: Looking into Within-to-Beyond-to Difference*.

Nevertheless, when considering them in their textual context, the visualisation of Irish cannibals disrupts convenient paradigms of colonial sympathy: when the Irish resort to eating human flesh of compatriots, it is a form of “survival cannibalism” (Burley 490) due to extreme circumstances caused directly or indirectly by English colonial policies. From a biopolitical approach that evaluates settler colonialism as biopower (Morgensen 53), Irenius’s recollection of the “Mounster famine”[5] (104) immediately calls to mind such theorists as Foucault (1980), Agamben (1998; 2008) and Mbembe (2019) who have actively studied the relations between politics and life—or put in Foucault’s words: the “right of death and power over life” (2013). Irenius’s words about the famine, which was itself a product of “England’s scorched earth policy during the Desmond Rebellions” (Greenblatt 186), paint a haunting picture of the starving residents of Munster as people transferred into “the status of the living dead” (Mbembe 92): “crepinge forth upon their hands”, looking like “anatomies of death”, “crying” and feasting upon corpses of the recent dead alongside the symbolic “shamrockes” (104). Irenius holds the Irish responsible for their plight, by stating that this was a “famine, which they themselves had wrought” (104) because of their resistance to the completion of the Tudor Conquest at the end of the sixteenth century (Hayes-McCoy 115). As Canny summarises, the Munster famine is depicted as a macabre consequence of “resource destruction designed to force those opposing the [Tudor] crown to surrender by imposing famine on the civilian population whose agricultural labour sustained those who remained in arms” (505). Or put in biopolitical terms: the Munster famine was an exercise of English power that used a necropolitical strategy of deliberately undermining local resources to impose famine on the civilian population, which in turn reduced their life quality to that of living corpses.

Through its ambivalence about Ireland’s self-cannibalisation, Spenser’s *View* exemplifies what Michel de Certeau coined “heterologies” (*Heterologies*): a discourse on the Other “built between the body of knowledge that utters a discourse and the mute body that nourishes it” (*Writing* 3). Although the voice of the Irish Subaltern is explicitly excluded from Spenser’s discourse, the horror of the cannibal scenes creates a third space within the text itself in which the Irish figuratively bite back through their omnipresent absence. Both of Irenius’s cannibalistic anecdotes have the effect of bringing the dialogue to a halt by their troublesome content that is furthermore resisting easy incorporation into the rest of the colonial narrative. The “mute bodies” (Certeau *Writing*, 76) of the colonised Irish are thus briefly heard through the silencing power of each anecdote’s stark realism. Though offered as a testament to Irish barbarity, it is rather an instance of the chilling inhumanity of the English coloniser—something that both speakers also see to implicitly grasp as is shown in the discourse’s temporary gaps after each recollection of inhumane scenes caused by colonial distress on the subject’s end. That way, although the voices of the Irish citizens are silenced or excluded, they are subject to incomplete erasure: their plaints are either actively degraded into “cryinge and shriking” (*View* 104) or implicitly promoted to powerful elements of internal resistance to colonial instrumentalisation—thus silently breaking the silence.

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[5] Note: Spenser’s use of Munster’s archaic spelling increases its resemblance to the English word “monster”, in turn highlighting its meaning as borrowing from the French word “monstre” (in Old French phonology similar to “montre”, meaning “to show”; though during Spenser’s time the French already spoke Middle French) and its Latin base “monere” which means “to warn”. See: “monster.” (2023). *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford UP.

5. The Irish Subaltern Writes Back: Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*

Shortly after the first publication of Spenser's *View*, Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (1634; later translated as *A General History of Ireland*) emerged as a powerful anticolonial answer to prevailing British perspectives on Ireland. In a sense, Keating's exploration of the Irish past "write[s] back to the [English] centre" (Ashcroft et al. 6) by giving voice to the subaltern Irish. *Foras Feasa* essentially tells "the partisan story of the origins of the Irish Catholic nation" (Cunningham 144) from the creation of the world until the arrival of the Normans in the twelfth century. Keating builds his narrative through elements he deemed essential to Irish national identity: language, religion and noble ancestry. Written in Irish, the text is structured as "a two-part story echoing the division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments" (Cunningham *Origins*, 145), offering a national history rooted in a Catholic past the Irish nation could proudly claim as its own. Mainly because of its central idea that Ireland was a worthy kingdom with a heroic past, Keating's work proved itself to be highly popular: before its print publication, *Foras Feasa* widely circulated in manuscript form, mainly due to the English restrictions of printing Catholic books in Irish (Gillespie 35; Comyn & Dinneen 6; Peacey 87). Despite the silencing limitations set by English printing policies in Ireland, the widespread popularity of *Foras Feasa* proves that the Irish subaltern was still able to unite and forge their own voice. However, being more than merely an expression of a suppressed voice, its popularity was also due to its "evidence refuting the anti-Irish propaganda of English writers, who liked to portray the Irish as savages in order to justify their conquest and expropriation" (Comyn & Dinneen 6). Indeed, in *Foras Feasa,* Geoffrey Keating not only responds to colonialist writers, but also provides the Irish subaltern with a substantiated anticolonial voice that gains its strength from a Catholic narrative that undermines religious claims used by the English to justify their military incursions into Ireland.

As Bernadette Cunningham argues, "the idea of an Irish Catholic nation was a new construct of the seventeenth century" (*Origins* 145) that needed both historical and social backup. The year 1603 marked a pivotal moment in the history of the British Isles. In the aftermath of the famous Flight of the Earls, the subsequent treaty of Mellifont that concluded the Nine Years War and the coinciding death of Elizabeth I heralding James I's ascension, the diverse cultural groups in early modern Ireland were faced with a political administration that was increasingly hostile to Catholicism (Ranelagh 61-2). Amidst the social changes brought on by the arrival of more settlers, both Gaelic Irish and Old English Catholics resorted to the writing of history to assert their native claim over Ireland. Keating was no different: being an Old English priest (i.e. Irish Catholic of Anglo-Norman descent) educated in France, he was keen to portray Ireland's past as "a shared narrative that Irish Catholics of whatever ethnic hue could call their own" (Cunningham *Annalists*, 105). Not only does this show the Irish scholar's realisation about the need for a national narrative, but it also places Ireland in a longstanding European tradition of writing history for a socio-political cause. Indeed, upon reading the *Foras Feasa*, one is reminded of François Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1547), Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historiae* (1531), or even Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136). In these works, writing history is frequently intertwined with "the formation or re-formation of cultural identities, the legitimation of changed power relationships, or the establishment of hegemony of one group over another" (Cunningham *Annalists*, 98). For good reason, the primary purpose behind *Foras Feasa*'s compilation was to satisfy the political needs of a community in dire

circumstances by simultaneously forging the Irish identity, legitimizing their native claims, and attempting to restore power dynamics within Ireland.

Like his contemporaries, Keating drew on prior historical narratives to establish his own—"though it was more often than not to refute [English colonialist histories on Ireland]" (Brady 197). Indeed, his narrative carefully synthesises all of Ireland's *seanchas* (i.e. "ancient traditions"; cf. Connell 84) including the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*Book of Invasions*), the *Acallam na Senórach* (*Tales of the Elders of Ireland*), and numerous prose tales, genealogies and annals to refute colonialist attempts at establishing historical studies on Ireland (Brady 197). Instead, he offers "an anticolonialist reclamation of Irish historical study for Irish scholars" who were able to read the *seanchas*, unlike the colonialist writers. By deploying his native language, and moreover casting the Irish chronicles as rich material, Keating attacks the colonialist scholarship on Ireland that could not effectively interpret the primary texts and traditions of the country they were dealing with. In the same vein, he argues that any historical studies on the Emerald Isle should be based on Old and Middle Irish documents, rather than on mere translations into English—thus invalidating the credentials of colonialist writers who were unable to access Irish originals (Connell 86).

It has generally been assumed that ideas conveyed in Irish related exclusively to a Gaelic community within Ireland (Canny 91). Many Irish writers in the seventeenth century were Old English Catholics who opted for the Irish language to reach a wider audience within both Catholic communities in Ireland than would have been available had they chosen to write in English. Their target audience was initially what Keating referred to as the *Éireannaigh* (Connell 85; Cunningham *Origins* 145): an amalgamation of the *Gaedhil* [Gaelic] and the *sean Gaedhil* [Old English], as opposed to the *nua Ghaill* [New English] or the *Sasanaigh* [English or foreigners] (Crowley 128). Through using the term *Éireannaigh* to denote a distinct identity, the Irish interestingly excluded those who were not Catholic, did not understand Irish, or did not have genealogical links with Ireland (Cunningham 145-5). In a way, Keating's choice of vernacular served as implicit rebuke to those who were renouncing their native language in favour of that of the colonisers. To draw upon postcolonial theory, Keating's narrative shares themes explored more in depth by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1991) centuries later in light of Africa's colonial past. While one should bear the different circumstances and cultural backgrounds in mind, underlying themes of resistance, reclamation and cultural empowerment of the colonised resonate in both works: language serves as powerful tool for both repression and liberation. Both authors eventually suggest that by using indigenous languages and stories, writers can contribute to the empowerment and assertion of their community—as implicit yet powerful response to political and, in this case more specifically, linguistic imperialism.

However, Keating's *Foras Feasa*, also explicitly countered disparaging remarks on the origins of the Gaelic Irish by British writers—ranging from Gerald of Wales to Edmund Spenser. As we have seen before, Gerald of Wales' *Topographia* created what Thomas Hahn defined "a powerful myth and a critical framework for racial discourse" (8). Gerald established a framework that would shape rhetoric on the Irish throughout the subsequent centuries, i.e. the denigration of the Irish "for their social customs and their practice of Christianity" (Auslander 1168). He depicted the Irish as "wild and inhospitable people [who] live like beasts" (101)—even problematically engaging in sexual intercourse with beasts (*Topographia* 73, 75, 110). Following Gerald's racist narrative, Edmund Spenser's *View* identified three "evils which seem to be most hurtful to the common weale [sic] of that land" (3): Irish laws, customs, and religion. Spenser's proposed remedy, as we explored, is notoriously the eradication of Gaelic culture through colonial force. In these British narratives, claims about Ireland's alleged lack of true religion recurred as means to justify English military incursions. Accordingly, Keating

argues against the British views that Christianity had ever waned in Ireland. His most explicit argument directly contests the assertion that the infamous papal bull *Laudabiliter* granted sovereignty over Ireland to Henry II to "revive the Christian Faith […] as if Christianity had been expell'd, and the People had return'd to a state of Paganism and Idolatry" (*Foras Feasa* 549). Keating challenges this claim by stating that "whoever gave this Account to the Pope was as great an Enemy to Truth, as he was to the Glory of the Irish Nation" (549). To substantiate his counterargument, Keating cites none other than the purposed Father of English History, Bede, and provides evidence of Irish people's resolute commitment to Catholicism through mentioning the numerous Irish abbeys, pilgrimages, and religious councils (*Foras Feasa* 549-60). This passage is among Keating's many efforts of establishing the inherent connection between Irishness and devout Christianity.

Interestingly, there is at least one instance where Keating's timeline diverges from another established source—notably the late-fifteenth-century *Annals of Ulster*—in a way that indicates he intentionally manipulated history to align with his Catholic narrative (Connell 92). Keating's investment to uphold the image of an unbroken Catholic faith required him to grapple with the transitional period of Irish religions—a time when Christianity was taking root while established pagan beliefs persisted. As Sarah Connell notes, Keating places the Connaught king Guaire Aidne mac Colmáin during the reign of Diarmait mac Cearbhaill's, the first High King of Ireland, around 558 (92). In contrast, other sources position Guaire's era nearly a century later, coinciding with the rule of Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine, circa 630 (Connell 92). Diarmait mac Cearbhaill's reign marked a phase in history where Ireland was in a state of neither wholly anticipating Christianity nor fully embodying it, prompting Keating to strategically intervene to harmonise with his vision of a steadfastly Catholic Ireland (Connell 93). Keating's modification particularly impacts two sections: one describing the Battle of Carn Conaill, and the other recounting interactions between Diarmait mac Cearbhaill and Guaire Aidne mac Colmáin in the battle's aftermath. Central to both sections is Guaire's defeat at the hands of Diarmait, followed by their reconciliation through Guaire's display of Christian compassion (Connell 93). By tweaking his source material, Keating constructs a framework to scrutinise interactions between Christian and pagan value systems, leading to the overarching conclusion that once Christianity came to Ireland, the island's piety remained unshaken—thus debunking any religious justifications underlying England's military interventions.

Geoffrey Keating's Catholic and native narrative of Irish national history served as a powerful tool that united the quintessential facets of Irish identity, encompassing language, customs and religion. His narrative bolstered the anti-colonial voice of the subaltern Irish from its earliest stage on. By blending the Irish *seanchas* with the genre of historiography, Keating's approach proved particularly useful for later Irish writers who shared the belief in Ireland as a kingdom rather than a colony. This trend was eventually merely the onset of anticolonial endeavours throughout the subsequent centuries. Irish revivalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (cf. Hyde, 1899; O'Grady, 1878), amidst growing socio-political tensions in the Emerald Isle, found in Ireland's *seanchas* a Celtic version of Irish identity that remarkably resonated with both Protestants and Catholics—thus possibly alluding at the emergence of a certain 'Celtitude' (cf. Césaire's 'negritude', 1939) that gradually found its way from the discriminated margins to the heart of the colonial canon. Ultimately, *Foras Feasa*'s legacy is the testament to its successful representation of Irish history as independent, credible and noble, accordingly shaping anticolonial endeavours that spanned centuries until their culmination into Ireland's status as postcolonial country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literary study has attempted to offer a brief survey of a single motif, i.e. figurations of the Irish in three seminal works within the English-Irish colonial history. I have not comprehensively addressed issues of race in this short paper, because as Lumbley already exclaimed: the "intricacies of medieval race, imperialism, and colonialism are vast" (10). There is undoubtedly a need for further research on racial perceptions, epidermal or otherwise, to understand medieval processes of empire and identity formation differently. I have sought to spotlight the origins of this motif in medieval England, its echoes in sixteenth-century imperialist England, and the subsequent Irish response to the racist narratives underpinning England's claims on Ireland.

Gerald of Wales offered medieval account of Ireland that paved the way for later derogatory narratives on the Irish. While on the one hand using the topographical genre to portray Ireland as an effeminate fertile terra nullius in need of a coloniser, he also uses an ethnographic narrative to establish negative stereotypes of the Irish, linked to notions of savagery and monstrosity. In particular his miraculous description of the werewolves of Meath fed into a twelfth-century construction of Irish Otherness that served to justify the early stages of colonial conquest, while masking deeper racial biases. The male werewolf's compliance with imposed values illustrate the colonial fantasy of indigenous complicity, while the she-wolf's detachable skin reveals Gerald's racist view on ethnicity in which identity markers are deemed supplemental to a basic, white identity conform English norms. The skin of Irish Otherness is removeable according to Gerald: English colonisers could erase or subdue ethnic expressions, in order to create manipulable tabula rasae.

Gerald's narrative resonated until well into the sixteenth century, as was evident in Edmund Spenser's *View*. In the aftermath of the Tudor conquest of Ireland, writers and architects of English-Irish policies were torn between either integrating or eradicating Irish culture in their Irish settlements. The one prevailing in Spenser's text was the rather extreme view advocating for the complete eradication of Gaelic identity. The dialogue form proved essential to Spenser's treatise, actively excluding the Irish voice. Irenius's poses different arguments for English supremacy, including the metaphorical use of Irish women as vessels of contamination and troubling visualisations of Irish cannibalism. In a sense, these different visualisations that served to emphasise the Irish Other's barbarism and danger to the English coloniser form a third space where the absent Irish voice disrupts the colonial dialogue.

This silenced Irish voice was powerfully expressed by Keating in his *Foras Feasa*, which emerged as counter-colonial response to British perspectives on the Irish. Keating constructed a narrative of Irish national identity rooted in native language, religion, and noble ancestry. Written in Irish, Keating strategically used a blend of Irish legends and history to challenge British depictions of Ireland as pagan, emphasizing the enduring Catholic faith of the Irish to debunk religious justifications for English colonisation. His work, similar to Gerald, paved the way for colonial endeavours and identity formation: however, Keating's narrative is marked by a strong anticolonial sentiment that asserts a distinct Irish Catholic identity—feelings and notions that persisted well into Ireland's postcolonial era.

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